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Upsetting the Double Movement? Elite Schisms and Bolsonaro's Brazil in the Context of Global Authoritarian Capitalism

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Abstract: The brazen political antics and mystifying logics accompanying the contemporary rise of authoritarianism have garnered much interest in academic and popular media. A key question is how to make sense of a politics that seems nonsensical? Using the example of Brazilian governance under Bolsonaro, we combine and build on elite studies, authoritarian neoliberalism, and the double movement literature to address this question. We argue for the conceptualisation of an "elite schism" where a "new elite" is emerging to obfuscate an increasingly co-constitutive and mutually destructive double movement. In defiance of well-established elite etiquette, many of these "new elites" demolish socioecological protections with reckless abandon. We then show how this development upsets double movement dynamics to argue that the contemporary authoritarian trend is part of a broader reshuffling of social relations as market expansion pushes societies closer to socioecological collapse. We conclude by highlighting potential opportunities for resistance.

Résumé: As descaradas artimanhas políticas e a lógica mistificadora que acompanham a atual ascensão do autoritarismo têm despertado muito interesse na mídia e na academia. Uma questão fundamental que se coloca é: como dar sentido a uma política que parece sem sentido? A partir do exemplo da governança brasileira no período Bolsonaro, combinamos estudos de elite, elaborações sobre o neoliberalismo autoritário e a literatura de duplo movimento para abordar essa questão. Defendemos a conceituação de um "clivagem de elite" em que uma "nova elite" está surgindo para ofuscar um

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movimento duplo cada vez mais co-constitutivo e mutuamente destrutivo. Desafiando a etiqueta bem estabelecida da elite, muitas dessas "novas elites" destroem as proteções socioecológicas através de um abandono temerário. Em seguida, mostramos como esse desenvolvimento perturba a dinâmica do duplo movimento para argumentar que a tendência autoritária contemporânea faz parte de uma reformulação mais ampla das relações sociais, à medida que a expansão do mercado empurra as sociedades na direção do colapso socioecológico. Concluímos destacando as possíveis oportunidades de resistência.

Keywords: double movement, populist authoritarian neoliberalism, new elite, Brazil, Bolsonaro

Introduction

The astonishingly short 45-day stint of Liz Truss as UK prime minister in 2022 was marked by an unusual dynamic of a rebuke from the IMF for a "mini-budget" that slashed tax rates for the wealthy and abolished a plan to increase corporate taxes (Bruce et al. 2022). This was followed by US Republicans stumbling through four candidates before selecting a new House Speaker after Kevin McCarthy's ouster in "a remarkable three-week-long deadlock that … left Congress leaderless and paralyzed" (Broadwater et al. 2023). Meanwhile, former populist TV pundit Javier "El Loco" Milei swiftly followed his arrival as Argentinian premier with an "emergency" decree authorising social austerity and the slashing of environmental regulations and workers' rights (Nugent 2023).

This emerging era of "wildly disruptive narcissist[s]" (Reich 2022) has been noted by political commentators and scientists alike. Equally notable is the reprimand from others in the billionaire class who, according to journalist Anand Giridharadas (2019), are reeling at the slow degradation of the carefully crafted image of billionaires as benevolent and deserving arbiters of society. Likewise, political scientists theorise ruling classes as being "no longer coherent or collective or competent" (Davis 2021:18). Nonetheless, many of these elites seem to generally follow the script of the "authoritarian fix" (Bruff 2014), facilitating state restructuring to remove legal protections for the environment, labour, and human rights. As Bruff and Tansel (2019:234) argue, contemporary authoritarian neoliberals accomplish these through a steady focus on "the market" as justification, while shrinking public participation in governance, centralising executive state powers, and mobilising "state apparatuses for the repression of oppositional social forces".

In countries as disparate as the US (Cozzolino 2018), Hungary (Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton 2020), Mongolia (Myadar and Jackson 2020), the Philippines (Dressler 2021), China (Duckett 2020), Turkey (Adaman and Akbulut 2021), and many more, scholars note an alarming trend towards populist authoritarianism. In Brazil, the emergence of far-right populist Bolsonaro in 2018 came as a distinct shock to the established neoliberal elite, as support for their traditional political home, the Brazilian Social Democratic Party (PSDB), crumbled amidst new authoritarian populist antics. Unlike the conventional right, Bolsonaro has thrived

specifically on *in*coherence, disparately mobilising conservative morality, anti-corruption, a "firm hand" against crime, and social austerity and environmental rollbacks to build a shifting coalition of support that functioned primarily through sensationalist rhetoric delivered via social media (Cesarino 2020).

Bolsonaro had a longstanding though unremarkable political career. Yet elites in both the mainstream and fringe of the establishment offered their support as his campaign snowballed into prominence. Edir Macedo, billionaire founder and bishop of the vast Universal Evangelical Church, and owner of Brazil's third largest TV network, offered convenient nationwide coverage in Bolsonaro's favour, while retail and hydroelectric magnate Luciano Hang demanded widespread regulatory rollbacks (Greenwald 2018). Above all, the backbone of Bolsonaro's elite constituency were those supportive of ending pesticide regulations, Indigenous land rights, and environmental legislation—like landowner Tereza Cristina or Minister of Education Abraham Weintraub, known for his racial slurs and dismissal of Indigenous Peoples' existence.

Fast forward to 2022: Bolsonaro became the first Brazilian president in history to fail to get re-elected. Despite this, elections for the federal senate and house of deputies showed that this new elite group's political power remained intact. Bolsonaro's most insidious ministers were all elected to the legislative houses. Damares Alaves, the former human rights minister who had proudly worked to impede the legal abortion of a 10-year-old rape survivor, was the most voted senator of the Federal District. Ricardo Salles, Bolsonaro's environment minister who urged the government to let cattle loose in the forest while the public was distracted by the COVID-19 pandemic, was elected Federal Deputy of São Paulo by a landslide. Bolsonaro's Liberal Party elected the largest number of deputies in 2022, and Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva won the presidency by a narrow margin of 50.9% of the runoff vote compared with 49.1% for the incumbent (Ellsworth and Paraguassu 2022). As with Trump's 2020 defeat, Bolsonaro's was followed by supporters storming government buildings in an effort to disrupt the handover of power.

As recent events at the time of writing have shown, such brazen coup attempts do not preclude leaders like Trump from winning future elections. Taken together with the imminent arrival of the likes of Elon Musk in the halls of state power, it's clear that "wildly disruptive narcissist" elites are far from retreating. Moreover, regardless of future elections, a crucial consideration is that far right authoritarians have "mainstreamed" far-right neoliberal agendas (Brown et al. 2023), manifested not only through the removal of socioecological protections (i.e. those that safeguard the health of society and the environment it depends on, including bodily autonomy and ownership of one's own labour), but also by fortifying these removals against future attempts to restore them (Bruff and Tansel 2019; Deutsch 2021). Thus, even when losing elections, populist authoritarians still play a critical role in the political landscape and hold substantial capacity to influence governmental affairs.

A crucial question, then, is how do we make sense of this maelstrom that is uprooting global liberal democracy? Using Brazil under Bolsonaro as an example, we argue that this movement toward populist authoritarianism can be

understood as the materialisation of an "elite schism" that is reshuffling social and class relations under capitalism. We first review literature on emerging "new elites" in the contemporary turn towards populist authoritarianism. We then connect these trends with literature that builds on Karl Polanyi's work to theorise his "double movement" as both co-constitutive *and* mutually destructive. As this incompatibility becomes increasingly undeniable, we suggest that the elite schism follows this "elephant in the room", with "new elites" increasingly abandoning any pretence that socioecological protections are compatible with unlimited capitalist growth. Populist authoritarianism can then be conceptualised as an unsettling of the dynamics surrounding the double movement as "conventional" elites scramble to maintain the socioecological protections that support and legitimise capitalism. Finally, we demonstrate how this played out in Brazil and offer our insights on what this means vis-à-vis the double movement. In doing so, we provide greater clarity on the role of elites in progressive countermovements, as well as on the operationalisation of the state within the double movement. We conclude by exploring how these new understandings may illuminate new opportunities for resistance.

The New Elite, Authoritarian Neoliberalism, and "Double Movement" Dynamics

As global capitalism struggles to maintain legitimacy after yet another crisis, a new type of elite is emerging. For Wedel (2017:154), new "influence elites" transcend traditional "power elites" in that they "are identified by *how they operate*, rather than where they come from, the capital they have amassed, or the official position they occupy at a given time". Such elites, he contends, arise from an unstable "institutional ecosystem" where power structures are more scattered and fluid and governance more fragmented and unpredictable. Likewise, Davis and Williams (2017:12) note that "modern elites do not so much have a status as a mission, which is to find security and stability as well as invisibility, amid precariousness in liquid times". To navigate this instability, successful new elites must therefore be skilled at grasping whatever propels them to power at any given moment. Such a *modus operandi* has understandably caused some discord (Davis 2021; Giridharadas 2019) as new elites' actions often ignite public scandal. Take for example Elon Musk's chaotic Twitter takeover, prompting some of its exiting staff to light-project insults on the company's headquarters, including "bankruptcy baby", "apartheid profiteer", "space Karen", and "mediocre manchild" (Lincoln 2022).

Until recently, elites could largely maintain the façade that their societal positioning was based on merit, superior knowledge, and skills that benefit all of society. Their legitimacy was rarely questioned, save for a few leftists and critical theorists (Davis 2021). Today, however, "influence elites" are shattering traditional elites' careful crafting of themselves as society's benefactors (Giridharadas 2019). Relentlessly pursuing self-interest, new elites become "reckless opportunists" where "[t]heir failings are not only damaging the wider public, economy and society, they are undermining the very foundations of elite rule"

(Davis 2021:2). While movements against "the 1%" have become commonplace, many "reckless opportunists" have turned this angst into political opportunity, garnering popular support by promising to displace "the elite" and their (usually racialised) co-conspirators while somehow sidestepping their own elite status (Davis and Williams 2017; McCarthy 2019; Mudde 2019). Progressive protections of racialised and other minorities become rebranded as special treatment, particularly in supposedly "post-racial" societies where colour-blind racial ideology serves to erase the experiences of racialised others and mask structural inequality (Carrillo 2021; Doane 2017; Mitchell 2022). As a result, immigrants and refugees are stripped of their rights, Indigenous Peoples targeted for their refusal to allow extraction on their lands, and regulation and social supports for marginalised populations stripped away.

Such leaders' tactic of claiming to speak for the "common man" and against "the elite", and then withdrawing from international agreements once elected, has led to debate about whether the populist authoritarian turn catalysed by "new elites" is a new form of neoliberalism or a wholesale departure from capitalism (Bell and Christoph 2020; Cozzolino 2018; Kiely 2020). Many scholars now identify authoritarian neoliberalism as the driving force behind the populist trend across disparate countries. Building on Bruff's (2014) conceptualisation of the "authoritarian fix", scholars point to newly elected leaders' restructuring of state institutions to remove democratic mechanisms for restricting capital flows. Beyond those listed in the Introduction above, the expanding list includes Brazil (Deutsch 2021; Saad-Filho and Boffo 2021), the UK (Bruff 2014), Croatia and Poland (Stubbs and Lendvai-Bainton 2020), Russia (Belyakov 2019), India (Sinha 2021), and many more. Some scholars argue that this restructuring is obfuscated precisely by antics that appear nonsensical and random (Deutsch 2021; Pulido et al. 2019). Others show that apparent randomness is actually strategic, inspired by historical forms of populism that are re-inaugurated for the digital era (Cesarino 2020). Additionally, Coates and Sandroni (2023) zoom in on the post-truth element in contemporary (Brazilian) politics to argue that casting doubt on verifiable truths is a convenient way to obscure evidence of the inherent contradictions between extraction and environmental conservation in a capitalist system. Contemporary *populist* authoritarianism thus merely conceals the neoliberal objective of removing restrictions to capital, while simultaneously fixing the legitimacy problem that threatens to upend capitalist realism. Meanwhile, environmental and human rights crises expand and multiply.

For scholars aiming to understand the dynamics between capitalism and societal and environmental disintegration, Karl Polanyi provides a useful framework. This is grounded in his argument that, with the advent of the self-regulating market, the economy "stood apart from the rest of society, more especially from the political and governmental system" (Polanyi 1957:68) and thus became "disembedded" from social relations for the first time in history. He develops this argument through the idea of "fictitious commodities". If commodities are defined as things created for the purpose of selling them on the market, he argues, then land, labour, and money do not fit this definition, with none created specifically for sale. Moreover, land cannot be separated from its local relations and contexts,

and labour "is only another name for a human activity which goes with life itself" and cannot "be detached from the rest of life" (Polanyi 2001:75). The liberalisation of markets, i.e. subjecting especially land and labour solely to the whims of the market, thus threatens to disembed, along with the economy, the very thing that makes humans human (labour) and the things that sustain them (land/nature) and surely results in "the demolition of society" (Polanyi 2001:76). Although Polanyi does not use the term "socioecological" in his writings, his reference to "land" as "the natural surroundings in which … [human society] exists" (Polanyi 2001:75), makes it clear that "nature" is synonymous to "land" and therefore constitutes part of his analysis of "social destruction" (Polanyi 2001:81).

Polanyi thus theorises the history of capitalism as a sort of tug-of-war, where periods of expansion of a disembedded economy necessarily accelerate the disembeddedness of the foundations of society, and society responds by attempting to re-embed the economy to temper the resultant socioecological effects. The "movement" of market liberalisation is thus met with the "countermovement" of society in a perpetual "double movement". It is within this theorisation that he situates the rise of fascism in the 1930s. As the conflict between workers' rights (represented by the political system) and free enterprise (represented by the economic system) came to a head, he argues:

> Eventually, the moment would come when both the economic and the political systems were threatened by complete paralysis. Fear would grip the people, and leadership would be thrust upon those who offered an easy way out at whatever ultimate price. The time was ripe for the fascist solution. (Polanyi 2001:244)

While innumerable scholars have embraced Polanyi's double movement thesis and employed it to understand similar phenomena in myriad spatial and temporal contexts, they remain divided on whether Polanyi believed such conflict was ultimately resolvable. This has resulted in two analytically distinct interpretations. In the "soft" interpretation, capitalism is seen as reconcilable with a healthy society if it is kept in check by the countermovement, which serves to stabilise the disembedding tendencies of market liberalisation (Dale 2010; Goodwin 2018). The double movement here represents a built-in regulatory system. In the "hard" reading, the double movement represents an irreconcilable contradiction that can only be overcome through the end of capitalism. Some followers of this "hard" reading view the countermovement as inherently revolutionary, offering a potential route for deliverance from capitalism, while others muddy the waters by challenging the dualistic interpretation of a discrete market liberalism movement on the one side versus a discrete socioecological protection countermovement on the other (Goodwin 2018; Zayed 2022).

Elaborating on the importance of dispensing with such a dualistic interpretation, Carton (2014) highlights Polanyi's argument that self-protection in a market society hurts that society in another way. Since market logic has become deeply embedded in social institutions, restricting market expansion (and therefore threatening economic collapse) necessarily harms a society dependent on the market for sustenance. Here, the countermovement becomes blurred across a

"self-balancing system" where the two "sides" of the double movement are "coconstituted and thus interdependent" (Carton 2014:1004).

Similarly, although she indicates that the countermovement is discrete from market liberalisation, Fraser (2014, 2017, 2022) argues that removing socioecological protections to ease market restrictions harms the economy in another way. She highlights the non-economic conditions necessary for market expansion (e.g. an endless supply of cheap labour and unfettered access to raw nature) to reveal capitalism's dependency on the very things protected *from* its expansion *for* its expansion and to argue that capitalism is essentially cannibalising itself and society along with it. The market, then, relies on the countermovement to save it from itself. While Fraser focuses on (unpaid) reproductive labour, endless provisions from nonhuman nature, and stable currencies as non-economic conditions necessary for market expansion in her earlier work (e.g. Fraser 2014, 2017), she later expands these to include expropriated wealth from subjugated (racialised) peoples and the public power necessary to supply the market with essential non-economic inputs and to restore its legitimacy in times of crisis (Fraser 2022). And although she criticises Polanyi's apparent lack of attention to the role of domination in maintaining these background conditions, he would seem to agree at least on the last point. In an eerily familiar observation, he writes of the inter-war period leading up to WWII: "The stubbornness with which economic liberals, for a critical decade, had … supported authoritarian interventionism, merely resulted in a decisive weakening of the democratic forces which might otherwise have averted the fascist catastrophe" (Polanyi 2001:242). Combining Carton's analysis with Fraser's, it seems clear that the "movements" encompassed in the double movement are both historically co-constitutive *and* mutually destructive.

Finally, Goodwin (2018:1225, 1285) suggests that the double movement occurs on "a spectrum running from self-regulation at one extreme to the absence of the market at the other" and proposes "reading the double movement as a plurality of movements rather than a single process that moves uniformly toward or against the market". We suggest that combining this conceptualisation with the vital insights of Carton and Fraser helps to clarify the current state of affairs. That is, with mutual destruction coming to a head, the pathological relationship between market liberalisation and market society can no longer be denied. Yet responses to this reality suggest some discord among today's elites, with most established elites clinging to socioecological protections that ensure the survival of capitalism, while new elites deploy decidedly different tactics. While both sides of this "elite schism" continue to deny or obfuscate the contradictions between commodification and socioecological protections, "reckless opportunists" do so without regard for established elite etiquette, exposing cracks in the elite façade.

Two areas that remain underexplored in the Polanyian literature include the role of elites in progressive countermovements and how the state is operationalised in double movement dynamics (Goodwin 2018). For Polanyi, it seems that the "movement" was represented by "the (independently organised) economic system", while the "countermovement" was brought to bear through "the political system" (e.g. see Polanyi 2001:244) often represented by a nebulous state acting

in the interests of society (Markantonatou and Dale 2019). Meanwhile, because he stood apart from many Marxists in identifying "fictitious commodification" as the major source of tension in capitalist societies, the issue of class remained only superficially explored in Polanyi's analysis (Goodwin 2018). Polanyi (2001:151, 154) elaborates on "the broad range of the vital social interests affected by the expanding market mechanism" and the myriad ways in which "economic liberals themselves advocated restrictions on the freedom of contract and on laissez-faire in a number of well-defined cases of great theoretical and practical importance". Yet he never seems to tease out the constitution of such "economic liberals" with respect to class. Understanding the new elite as part of a plurality of movements that makes up the extreme end of market liberalisation allows for a clearer analysis of the role of elites in double movement dynamics. With such an understanding of elite involvement in progressive countermovements, the question of the dynamic composition of Polanyian movements with respect to class can be brought into clearer focus.

Next, we turn toward understanding the extreme end of the spectrum that seeks deliverance from socioecological protections, increasingly so through the destruction of liberal democracy. To do this, we explore the case of Brazil under Bolsonaro, situating our empirical data within the emergence of a new elite seemingly intent on emancipating itself from socioecological protections. We then explain the tactics of shifting alliances and overall double movement dynamics in Brazil, with particular attention paid to the ways the state was operationalised.

Changing Double Movement Dynamics in Brazil

Bolsonaro's presidency was marked by conspicuous attempts to bring "fictitious commodities" to market. Indeed, in the rare moments when he seemed to move towards decommodification, such efforts were often politically motivated and superficial. For example, while he advanced (minimal) social support after months of denials during the COVID-19 pandemic, pundits speculate that this slight movement towards decommodification was aimed at shoring up support amidst plummeting approval ratings (Ortega and Orsini 2020). In fact, much of this support took the form of fuel and agricultural subsidies and industry incentives.

At the same time, although Bolsonaro advanced commodification of all three "fictitious commodities" (land, labour, and money), the following sections focus on nature ("land") and Indigenous rights for several reasons. First, unlike the rise of environmentalism as an issue of privileged classes in many Global North countries, environmental conflicts in Brazil have always been intertwined with human and labour rights, connecting minorities' lands with small-scale (often forest-based) extractive livelihoods (Hochstetler and Keck 2007; Zhouri and Oliveira 2012). Second, Indigenous rights largely revolve around (communal) land claims. As Goodwin (2018:1286) notes, "communal land impedes accumulation by preventing the full incorporation of land and labour into the market". Removing such claims thus releases both land *and* labour for commodification, rendering Indigenous rights a proxy for both land and labour protections. Third, as others have noted, environmental concerns represent a central contemporary focus

compared to the era of Polanyi's analysis (Goodwin 2022; Sandbrook 2022). As a country with extensive lands of global importance and highly contested land rights, Brazil's extractive frontiers are a crucial piece of the contemporary Polanyian puzzle. Indeed, we show that it was Brazilian elites who foregrounded environmental protection as a major issue under the Bolsonaro administration, rather than the "usual suspects" of environmental scientists, activists, and their government allies.

Concerning the third "fictitious commodity" (money), Bolsonaro was limited in his ability to directly increase its commodification due to the independence of Brazil's Central Bank. His actions instead focused on indirect commodification mechanisms intertwined with land and labour protections. For example, his privatisation of state-owned companies like Eletrobras and Petrobras, widespread deregulation, and reduced government spending (e.g. through pension reform) all contributed to strengthening the role of financial assets in the economy, while simultaneously removing socioecological protections (ASCEMA 2020).

While Brazil's recent history presents contextual nuance, we nonetheless believe the case offers clarity on the global turn toward populist authoritarian neoliberalism. We follow Dawes and Lenormand (2020:ix–x) in advocating analyses of neoliberal capitalism that accommodate "a fluid and variegated appreciation of contextual difference while maintaining a structural approach that recognizes the ways in which local differences … are shaped by wider processes". We thus focus on shifts in Brazil's political-geographical landscape under populist authoritarian neoliberalism to understand such wider processes.

The data presented in the following sections came from a combination of interviews with 35 socioecological experts in government agencies, academia, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) (first author), longstanding observation and analysis of Brazilian politics and environmental governance (third author), direct involvement with environmental NGOs and federal environmental policy (fourth author), participant observation, and casual conversations, as well as from a review of secondary sources—particularly popular news media, which were used for clarification of facts and events referred to by interviewees (all authors).

Elite Schisms

As a "marginal right-wing politician without effective links to any major party and without a formally organized political base" (Evans 2020:683), Jair Bolsonaro was not initially a favoured presidential candidate of Brazil's financial elite. In fact, it was his distancing from established political power that propelled him to popularity so quickly, and such elites found that they "lacked the power to install their ideal 'democratic centrist' candidate" (Evans 2020:684). Although "the resurgence of economic liberalism did not follow … [their] preferred script" (Evans 2020:675), Bolsonaro was widely supported by *Ruralistas*[1] (aka "Big Ag") for his attacks on environmental and Indigenous rights protections that restricted their access to land and growth (Singer 2023). Yet *Ruralistas* are much less unified than one might expect, and several interviewees noted conflicts among them. Notably, *Ruralistas* split along the protectionist question with members seeking

either to leverage benefits from unrestricted extraction or to maintain legitimacy in a global market demanding sustainable practices.

Several scholars have established that Bolsonaro and his agribusiness supporters have a clear agenda of removing barriers to capital accumulation (Acselrad et al. 2021; Coates and Sandroni 2023; Saad-Filho and Boffo 2021). One of Bolsonaro's original proposals was to merge the Ministry of Environment (MMA) with the Ministry of Agriculture (MAPA), effectively placing regulation under the purview of business, but not all his supporters were on board. Although Bolsonaro backed away in response to their reprimand, actions following his election signalled his seriousness about emancipating Big Ag from protectionist restrictions altogether. After his inauguration, he completely overhauled Brazilian environmental governance to "skeletonise" administrative bodies (Deutsch 2021). Eliminating two departments in the MMA, he then attempted to move many of its remaining responsibilities to MAPA (Escobar 2019a; Observatório do Clima 2020). What remained un-dismantled in the MMA was handed over to his new pro-agribusiness Environment Minister, Ricardo Salles, who promptly demoted dissenting senior staff in the Chico Mendes Institute for Biodiversity Conservation (ICMBio), the government body for research and guidance on environmental regulations, and Brazil's Institute of Environment and Natural Resources (IBAMA), the department that enforces them (Audi and Martins 2019; Deutsch 2021). Funding for both institutes was blocked and Salles attempted to take control of funding agreements with NGOs (Gonzales 2019). The Amazon Fund was frozen by major funders due to Bolsonaro's refusal to use funds for their stated purpose (Deutsch 2021). Civic spaces were dissolved or incapacitated, shutting civil society out (Coletta and Faria 2019). Academic funding was also cut, especially for disciplines supporting socioecological protections, like critical social sciences (Escobar 2019b; Redden 2019).

As a result of the wholesale attack on socioecological protection, sustainability-compliant businesses struggled to stay competitive. As a Brazilian National NGO (BNNGO) coordinator explained:

> There was a few parts of the sector that benefit from this approach on sustainability, and if you have strong change in the legislation, then even for them competition would not be fruitful, because if everybody can be legal with worse legislation, how can they benefit from what they had invested? (BNNGO coordinator #1, 24 July 2019)

But retaining their competitive edge was just the tip of the iceberg. Bolsonaro continued with his destructive approach, easing regulations on dozens of restricted pesticides (Grigori 2019) and provoking illegal deforestation and accelerated burn-clearing in ecologically important biomes (Observatório do Clima 2020). Clashing with the Norwegian and German governments over his dissolution of the Amazon Fund committee (Observatório do Clima 2020) and with President Macron over Amazon fires (Ungarino 2019), his antagonism signalled he had no intention of mediating the socioecological effects of market expansion. Global reaction to Bolsonaro's anti-environmental agenda was swift and indiscriminate; boycotts of Brazilian products, regardless of companies'

sustainability commitments, were set in motion (Branford 2019; Viscidi 2019). As one interviewee explained, "What's happening is that … a considerable part of the agribusiness community is noticing that some decisions made by the current government are threatening the capacity of marketing their products" (BNNGO researcher #1, 9 October 2019). This deepened the rift between sustainable and conventional companies, prompting several public confrontations by compliance-friendly sectors of agribusiness to distance themselves from Bolsonaro and his Big Ag supporters. As an effect of this internal division in Brazilian elites, environmental governance came to the forefront of the public political debate.

Underpinning this debate, anti-environmentalist discourse enabled violent practices on the ground and authoritarian practices in federal policy, bolstering the expansion of neoliberal, neoextractivist enterprises at the expense of both environment and human rights (Acselrad et al. 2021). Fake scientists such as Evaristo Miranda created false controversies to facilitate setbacks in socioecological regulations. Feigning a scientific study, Miranda (2010) argued that all land in Brazil was designated for environmental protections or Indigenous rights and that protections should be pushed back to allow agricultural expansion. Miranda's report was scrutinised by three academic institutions that showed how he had cooked the data (Drummond 2014). By fabricating dissent in well-established consensus around socioecological issues, Bolsonaro's administration created new pathways for overcoming protection (Rajão et al. 2020). The Brazilian Agribusiness Association President, Marcelo Brito, self-identifying as an "agro-environmentalist", welcomed Bolsonaro's agenda of placing environmental/rights protections back on the chopping block. At the same time, he worried publicly about negative global headlines and exports duly suffering (Coates and Sandroni 2023).

Consistent with the thesis of a co-constitutive and mutually destructive double movement, it is clear that the public justification for continued frontier expansion must be continually remade in the face of socioecological decline. Longstanding notions of an abundant Eldorado underpinned policies for economic and infrastructural development in Amazonia and the Cerrado for decades. Yet policies were always implemented in tandem with contradictory notions of nature conservation (Freitas 2020), protection of minority populations, and more recently "sustainable soy" (Baletti 2014) or Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) (Gebara and Agrawal 2017). Migrant, landless populations bought into the promise that those regions would deliver them from arduous labour on others' plantations in established *latifundia*. Yet, as Ioris and Ioris (2020) show, agribusiness expansion almost universally reproduced such land monopolies in the Amazon, with ever fewer, wealthier landowners accompanied by increasing poverty, vulnerability, and restricted public rights, spaces, and opportunities for the rest.

At the same time, under the left, progressive neoliberalism of the Workers' Party (PT) (2003–2016), such expansions were authorised under the name of funding social policies and cash transfers to largely urban populations, whom had fled rural inequity (or were descended from such) (Pahnke 2018). Thus, as the incompatibility of socioecological protections and market expansion became more difficult to ignore, a growing "extractive imperative" (Arsel et al. 2016) ensured that

anti-extractivist positions could be crafted as anti-poor. For the left, such welfare redistributions operated in the ongoing *absence* of land redistribution. For agribusiness and mining elites, however, the extractive imperative enabled them to "sell" agribusiness expansion as something to which there is no alternative, and, for Bolsonaro and Salles, as something inherently good for the *nation*. With the frontier caught between "abundance" and marginality, critics of new elites' prescriptions for Brazil's national future were deemed not worthy of nationhood. Thus, unlike their double movement predecessors, these new elites have abandoned any pretence that socioecological protections and market expansion can co-exist, instead promoting their complete removal, by force and without any need for consent (Deutsch 2021).

Fraser (2017:38) argues that a movement that seeks to surmount domination by embracing the market "may help dissolve the solidary ethical basis of social protection". Likewise, we argue that this new elite seeking deliverance from socioecological protection is disintegrating solidarities among market proponents. Indeed, Polanyi (2001:248) noted of the pre-Second World War period that "fascism was a revolutionary tendency directed as much against conservatism as against the competing revolutionary force of socialism". We now turn to changes in the political landscape in Brazil to demonstrate how the new elite catalysed the reshuffling of status quo alliances among pro-protectionist elites, MMA employees, NGOs, and academia, and the effects these had on public engagements.

Schism Infusion

With the MMA's restructuring, the elite schism transfused into the government institution providing the majority of environmental protections. Senior employees were demoted, often sent to posts in sparsely populated areas, and then replaced by pro-agribusiness and ex-military personnel. Remaining lower-level employees were left out of formal communication channels used by new staff. The transference of responsibilities to MAPA also meant they lost access to mechanisms for performing their jobs. For example, the Rural Environmental Registry (CAR) was set to be a major conservation mechanism before it was moved under the purview of Valdir Colatto, a proponent of hunting legalisation. One ICMBio employee lamented that "we were looking forward to working with the CAR system and trying to implement it into our modelling [but] … It's just off the table now" (ICMBio employee #1, 4 October 2019).

A (certainly intended) consequence of MMA restructuring was that socioecological protectionists found themselves outsiders of a ministry supposed to ensure environmental protections. A BNNGO division head described their "outsider" experience, as their public campaigns in the past "would be something much more aligned with the environmental ministry, and, of course, that's not what's happening. Right now, … [the MMA] are on the other side of the table most of the time" (BNNGO division head #1, 11 October 2019).

Prior to Bolsonaro's government, ICMBio received much of its funding from NGOs, and a senior ICMBio researcher added that NGO contributions went way beyond finances:

> How much information the NGOs are gathering and the services they're providing for the government that is then turned into public policies … this is crucial besides the money they are bringing from outside. It's not good just for the environment, but the money improves the local economy, national economy, and society. (ICMBio researcher #1, 20 March 2019)

In a later interview a national NGO (NNGO) director confirmed that they "subsidised" public policy by providing data to governmental agencies (NNGO director #2, 12 April 2019).

This severing of relations among environmental agency employees and NGOs was reinforced by fear tactics, with public employees afraid to reach out to partners and be accused of corruption. Previously established partnerships with academics were silenced, as the results of studies on climate change and conservation, and scientific consultancy reports, were censored by (ex)military personnel. IBAMA suffered from numerous setbacks, from minister Salles' de-concession of agents' cars to the actual expulsion of 21 of the 27 regional superintendents—including the most active and dedicated ones (ASCEMA 2020).

Aside from funding and data flows, Bolsonaro's government targeted civic participation, obscuring restructuring strategies and making opposition coordination nearly impossible. For example, an ICMBio employee explained how the National Council for the Environment (CONAMA) used to:

> be divided into subcommittees that talked about separate themes. There would be a subcommittee that talked about biodiversity. There would be another about environmental impacts. That structure completely went out the window now. The only ones who have voice are the federal government. You don't have nearly as many people from civil society to bring the checks. (ICMBio employee #1, 24 July 2019)

The loss of these spaces did more than shut out civic participation in governance. It also affected science–policy–society collaborations. As a BNNGO coordinator noted, civil councils and committees were spaces where people were "always working together, putting people together. This was completely closed" (BNNGO coordinator #1, 5 October 2019).

Ripple Effects

With the power to maintain protections that benefited them seized by the anti-protectionist elite, the pro-protectionist elite realigned in an effort to claw back power. This realignment was visible in new relations that corporations and private philanthropists initiated with dissenting government employees—still in the MMA only due to tenure or a perceived lack of power to influence governance—and with NGOs following Bolsonaro's election.

Several government interviewees commented that *Ruralistas*' divisions significantly changed their interactions with the agribusiness community. As one BNNGO researcher explained:

> [certain agriculturists] are expressing their concerns with environment, which is something very new for us … At the same time, there are some old-fashioned agriculturalists who are still saying conservation, for instance, is something opposite to agriculture … There's another group, which is very important, which said, "Let's talk about the environment. Let's see the importance to conserve." (BNNGO researcher #1, 9 October 2019)

Noting that "in other times, we couldn't even stand talking to [*Ruralistas*]", a senior ICMBio researcher was adamant about cultivating relationships with big farmers professing:

> a very good mentality towards sustainability, conservation and biodiversity … to increase the people we have on our side … Those guys have access to congressmen and senators. We don't have that. We have the technical base and the strategic plans. We know ethically what we need to do, but on our level, we don't "talk to power". (ICMBio researcher, 19 March 2019)

This sentiment seemed quite common among government employees who felt that allying with sustainable agribusiness was "the best way to move on" (Demoted ICMBio employee #1, 24 July 2019) in that political climate.

Several NGO employees also noted a new corporate interest in environmental issues. A BNNGO division head explained that "[t]here were a lot of companies … saying, 'We don't want our name connected to deforestation or fires in the Amazon, what can we do?'" (BNNGO division head #1, 11 October 2019). After being approached by various private sector actors, the same interviewee had the sense that "they're, in general, really sensitive to environmental issues in Brazil" (ibid.). Another NGO employee described how agribusinesses approached them for assistance: "There are … landowners and farmers that are doing everything right … [but] now, the whole world is watching so they're starting to feel some problems" (BNNGO programme manager #1, 16 October 2019). In an earlier interview with the BNNGO division head quoted above, they described further this new reliance on NGOs for legitimacy, with companies:

> looking for NGOs to make sure they have some type of voluntary certification standard that will grant them access to markets, and differentiation in prices … Before we would expect the government to have some kind of regimentations or other things to benefit companies with more sustainability standards. And now it's not happening. In a way, the whole context is making us closer to companies. (BNNGO division head #1, 12 July 2019)

Notably, the interviewee is careful to point out that such approaches are not uniform: "Some of the companies actually don't want to talk to NGOs; they will never talk to us. And [others] change" (ibid.).

Also of note, much new funding to Brazilian NGOs came not only from companies, but from private donors, some of whom remained anonymous. Another NGO employee described the shift in their interactions with the private sector:

> It was always very hard for us to have support from the private sector. Normally … they invest in social responsibility when it is connected to their territory and their investments. So most opportunities … with the private sector are connected to … [investments] in more specific areas. It's hard for them to support projects with nothing to do with their main business. (BNNGO coordinator #1, 24 July 2019)

They explain how this all changed with Bolsonaro's administration:

> For example, we had one private donor which made a personal donation to a few organisations, with the focus of strengthening [their] capacity, their security within the situation, and to improve the national money inside these organisations' budgets … They didn't want to announce their names, they don't want to disseminate that information, but they did these gestures, which was something completely new to us, completely connected to the … political outcome. (ibid.)

This desire to maintain anonymity seems curious in the context of philanthrocapitalism, which relies on publicity to legitimise capitalism while simultaneously obscuring its effects (Igoe et al. 2010; Raddon 2008; Vogel 2006), particularly in nature conservation (Holmes 2012). Such secrecy suggests that donors are guarding their identities from the new elite, who may perceive support for socioecological protections as a threat precisely to the goal of deliverance from them.

Another NGO employee described the new form of private funding arising from the political situation:

> we have also these new actors in the field of aid … private organisations acting as donors in the international level, but also in the national level. And I think this is new … We were not used to … this new panorama of private organisations … to seeing foundations that belong to one person or one family, working with social responsibility, things like that … You had projects from companies like Petrobras … But not from private foundations … I think this is very common in the US … the Gates Foundation for example. We didn't have them in Brazil. (NNGO director #3, 16 July 2019)

This new development of contact and support by companies and private donors led to some of the NGOs changing their tactics. A BNNGO division head explained how they went "through some connections, even internationally, to talk to some of the companies. So, this is also a way we are working now, directly with the private sector to try to influence them and say, 'Look, this is a bad idea'" (BNNGO division head #1, 11 October 2019).

However, not all socioecological NGOs had access to such new funding. Smaller NGOs and institutions that were less visible and less accessible by companies and private donors struggled to find alternatives, prompting more visible NGOs to take on another new role in the socioecological governance-scape, as a BNNGO conservation analyst described:

> The funds that come from private donors help our friends, because if we as … [a big institution are] facing all these problems, imagine the small institutions that need

> these grants and opportunities, they don't have all the resources we have. We need to keep going to bring money from other sources and keep these people working. (BNNGO conservation analyst #1, 14 October 2019)

Socioecological experts in academia also found new avenues of support after Bolsonaro targeted them as "cultural Marxists" through funding cuts while attempting to discredit and silence them. The National Council for Scientific and Technological Research (CNPq) and federal universities suffered severe cuts, and the little resources that arrived went to industry and technology disciplines. In October 2021, Bolsonaro cut nearly 90% of the budget to science and technology, resulting in zero new scholarships in social sciences from 2020 to 2022 (Felice 2021). As a researcher explained: "We have a variety of situations, projects, and individuals funded by companies, government … there has been this shift from expecting financial support from government to success in getting support from … [large corporations]" (Researcher #1, 8 April 2019).

The impacts of the elite schism extended beyond reshuffling funding alliances, however, as pro-socioecological actors suddenly found themselves excluded from institutional support. Many interviewees discussed adopting new strategies/roles within the political landscape. For example, one BNNGO division head explained that "we are revising our strategy all the time to have almost a double check, 'Okay, so in this scenario, in this context, does it still make sense or not? Are there new things we need?'" (BNNGO division head #1, 11 October 2019). And while some relations between NGOs and technical government staff remained unchanged, the same interviewee added that this was "as long as we don't make a lot of noise" (ibid.).

MMA employees also found themselves having to restrategise. Beyond cutting off funding, Bolsonaro's administration severely restricted employees' external communications and threatened those that defied such authority. According to several MMA interviewees, the administration initially required all external communications to go through the minister. Along with the closure of civic spaces (see above), this effectively shut off direct communication lines between pro-environment employees and the public. As a result, dissenting employees came to rely on NGOs' new role as disseminators of information. The BNNGO division head cited above explained in an earlier interview, weeks after Bolsonaro took office, that "people from the environmental ministry, the technical team, wrote to us, giving a warning, 'We are worried. We don't know what's happening. Help us here. Make sure you talk to the press'" (BNNGO division head #1, 12 July 2019).

A few months later, the situation remained unchanged, but the strategy seemed more developed:

> So, what happens is that sometimes [MMA] technical staff [observe] something that's happening, that they are really afraid [to share publicly] because there's stronger eyes on them … So, they pass [the information] to [us] and other NGOs. Then we try to act to solve it, or sometimes we pass it through the media and they [publish it]. (BNNGO division head #1, 11 October 2019)

In fact, one ICMBio employee, while noting that "Brazilian homegrown NGOs" were restricted in their ability to "step up", declared that their team had become "dependent on WWF, Greenpeace, CI, TNC" to get information to the broader public (ICMBio employee #1, 4 October 2019).

Although BNNGOs had fewer restrictions on public communications than government employees under Bolsonaro, they still lost access to government-supported communications via closure of civic spaces. This meant they had to reestablish public communications normally provided by these spaces. As another BNNGO programme manager explained, "we don't have space anymore to talk. All the efforts now is through the community convincing people there is importance. We have to share this so people … say, 'We have an environmental problem here. Let's talk about that'" (BNNGO programme manager #1, 16 October 2019).

Finally, several NGO employees were focusing on the judicial system to support socioecological protections. One BNNGO conservation analyst explained how the Supreme Court supported implementation of the Rural Environmental Registry (CAR) regardless of attempts to postpone it: "The CAR was postponed, I think three or four times. It goes back '17, '18, '19, so now the Supreme Court said, no, it's not possible to postpone it anymore" (BNNGO conservation analyst #1, 14 October 2019). Another BNNGO employee summed up their organisation's new strategy, which included working with other NGOs: "that's how we are working, collectively, through the judiciary, through the private sector. We are not actually relying on moves from the Executive. The other option would be, we're still touching on it, to work through state [governments]" (BNNGO division head #1, 11 October 2019).

Thus, along with the shift in funding alliances driven by the pro-protectionist private sector, the elite schism reshuffled Brazil's governance landscape as pro-protectionist NGO and government employees were forced to reassess strategies and reshape communication with each other and the broader public.

Towards Resistance

Although Polanyi's framework is employed by many scholars to understand contemporary double movement dynamics, Goodwin (2018:1272) echoes others when he notes that "its analytical and explanatory power is diminished by its failure to show how social pressure translates into political change". While our analysis offers important theoretical contributions to the former, we also see implications for the latter.

Eighty years after Polanyi's analysis, it is clear that capitalism shows remarkable adaptability in times of self-induced crisis (Büscher 2021; Harvey 2006; Klein 2007; Zuboff 2019). Carton (2020:87), noting similarities with Harvey's spatiotemporal fixes, suggests the double movement could be read as a prescient theorisation of how capital outpaces its own demise, as countermovements "merely serve to displace the problem in space, in time, or indeed towards the use of other resources". He therefore suggests distinguishing between such counter-balancing movements and those that promise to emancipate society from the market.

Fraser similarly argues that there is a "third movement" consisting of those seeking emancipation. However, for her, the market is a vehicle through which domination is perpetuated or overcome and emancipation is sought through freedom from *domination*, rather than from the market *per se*. Her "hard" reading of Polanyi's countermovement as a "counter-project to neo-liberalism" (Fraser 2017:30) guides her analysis, arguing that, despite the contemporary crisis mirroring the 1930s, "we lack a double movement in Polanyi's sense" (ibid.). Explaining this apparent absence, she argues that Polanyi's lack of attention to domination meant that he couldn't foresee post-war movements' reactions to oppression by demanding *access* to or *recognition within* the market (e.g. feminism, anti-racism, immigrant rights). Such movements, she suggests, "claimed the freedom of contract not as an end in itself, but rather as a means to emancipation … Championing neither marketization nor social protection, they espoused a third political project, which I call emancipation" (Fraser 2017:37–38).

While Fraser's analysis adds a crucial and often missed dimension to understanding double movement dynamics, we suggest that it could also help explain its persistence, and therefore the persistence of capitalism. Much of her analysis focuses on understanding why movements that seek deliverance from domination tend to be ephemeral and/or fragmented, lacking the power that comes from coordinated efforts. Taking this together with Carton's hint at a third movement that delivers itself from capitalism *writ large*, we follow Goodwin to suggest that Fraser's "third movement" could be conceptualised as a plurality of movements making up the socioecological protectionist end of the double movement spectrum. Thus, while some movements remain part of a co-constitutive counter-balancing countermovement (e.g. paid reproductive labour and marriage equality), others radically seek to break away from the double movement death embrace through the end of capitalism (e.g. Occupy and *indignados*). This helps to explain why "popular opposition fails to coalesce around a solidaristic alternative" (Fraser 2017:30) and has yet to identify capitalism as the frame through which "*all* the oppressions, contradictions, and conflicts of the present conjuncture" could be understood (Fraser 2022:xv).

Importantly, Fraser's (2017:38) observation that "each [of the triple movements] can ally, in principle, with either of the other two against the third" to *overcome* domination suggests that there is also another option: a movement that seeks to *perpetuate* domination by allying with either of the two movements, with its most radical members seeking deliverance from socioecological protection. This helps to explain popular support behind contemporary authoritarian neoliberals. For example, while elite support strengthened over the course of his campaign, the political economic basis of Bolsonaro's rise was predominantly composed of disaffected urban and peri-urban middle-class men. Dissatisfied with established political elites, they were happy to see protections for the environment and "other" populations removed, to secure better protections for themselves (Kessler et al. 2024). Our analysis yields key insights for understanding how to secure such opportunities at the opposite (socioecological protectionist) end of the spectrum. For Fraser (2017:38), third movements may disintegrate solidarities among protectionists who are pro-market and those who are anti, effectively

"clearing a path for marketisation". New elites that comprise the bulk of contemporary populist authoritarian neoliberals are arguably now doing the same among market advocates. As these elites break elite code by revealing the façade that underpins elite legitimacy and that of the political-economic system that enables their authority, an elite schism is developing. While discord among elites is perhaps nothing new, we argue that the ferocity with which it is revealing itself to broader society is an exceptional component of contemporary double movement dynamics. Moreover, by both clarifying and complicating the question of class composition in contemporary Polanyian movements, we hope to open new avenues for research in support of action. In particular, such research could shed light on how support from progressive elites might be harnessed by the radical end of the protectionist spectrum toward emancipation from capitalism.

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Data Availability Statement

Research data are not shared.

Endnote

[1] The political class firmly supportive of agribusiness, large landholdings in the *latifundia* tradition, and reductions on socioecological protections over Indigenous rights, pesticide restrictions, and pollution. *Ruralistas* occupy a large proportion of seats in Brazil's Congress.

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