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Title: Political violence and mobilisation in Brazil's Amazonian region during Bolsonaro's government (2019-2022)

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Abstract

In recent years, Brazil has experienced rising violence against activists and increasing deforestation levels in the Amazon. The processes leading to those events are not new. However, various discourses and events have intensified and underpinned extractive interests during Bolsonaro's government. Hence, this article analyses the relationship between the State and activists in the Brazilian Amazon region between 2019-2022. It focuses on three regional paradigmatic case studies: (i) the ongoing gold miners (*garimpeiros*) invasion of the Yanomami territory, (ii) the arrest of four environmentalists accused of setting fire to the forest in 2019, and (iii) the murder of the journalist Dominic Phillips and the indigenist Bruno Pereira in 2022. The case studies utilise publicly available data from reports, interviews, press releases and newspaper articles. Our main objective is to provide an overview of the characteristics of an increasingly antagonistic relationship between activists and the State. Drawing on those cases, the article builds on mobilisation theories, particularly Political Process Theories. Our central argument is that there are evident differences in the forms of repression activists face during far-right governments. This context shapes activism distinctively in the Amazonian region because violence routinely challenges social and environmental justice activism. Moreover, the current violence points to broader social questions and struggles between activists and agents of repression.

Keywords: Far-right; State; Violence; Mobilisation; Brazilian Amazon.

1: Introduction

In June 2022, Brazil was spotlighted after the brutal murders of Brazilian Indigenist Bruno Pereira and British journalist Dominic Phillips. Violence against activists is long known amongst Brazilian

socio-environmental activists fighting for justice. Between 1985 and 2021, Brazil registered 296 victims in 56 rural massacres¹ (Comissão Pastoral da Terra, or CPT, 2022). A report by Front Line Defenders (2022) registered the killings of 27 human rights and environmental defenders in Brazil in 2021. That represents a sharp increase in comparison to 2020 (69%) and places Brazil as the “third deadliest country for land defenders after Colombia (138 killed) and Mexico (42 killed)” (Brown, 2022). Much of this rural violence is linked to disputes over land and extracting resources, such as gold and timber.

This intensification of violence, which occurred during the presidential mandate of Bolsonaro (2019-2022) in Brazil, is marked by the government’s far-right ideology. The term ‘far-right government’ here is defined in the same way Carvalho *et al.* (2021) explain extreme right-wing governments, as those that (at least rhetorically) claim to be founded on religious or traditional ideas and encourage no governmental intervention in the market. Despite acknowledging Brazil’s colonial heritage and continuing extractive practices through violent means in recent decades, Bolsonaro’s administration should be contextualised within a group of leaders with minimal adherence to the formal and informal regulations intrinsic to democracies (Tanscheit, 2023). The far-right implemented an agenda that includes practices of violence and land appropriation in the Amazon region. The recurrent tension between the formal and informal regulations of liberal democracies is exemplified by the distinctive *modus operandi* of pushing forward the boundaries of colonial extractivism through various forms of violence.

The observed rural violence, land disputes and extractivism do not occur without Indigenous and other forms of social mobilisation. These mobilisations have local particularities that the colonial processes tried to homogenise (Kroger, 2020). There are mobilisations against the dismantling of regulations carried out by the Brazilian Legislative power (Araújo, 2020), mobilisations to maintain transnational networks for the protection of the Indigenous peoples (Chase, 2019), as well as actions within institutionalised spaces, and autonomous mobilising (Barreto, 2020). Those examples show how the defence of territories, the environment, local ways of life, and knowledge are shared characteristics of the Indigenous mobilisation in the Amazon.

The Amazon has historically been considered a frontier to be colonised by developmental projects. Since the 1950s, a series of “national integration” projects have sought to insert the region into capitalist exploitation dynamics under the pretext that they are still “empty spaces” (Domingues and Sauer, 2021). The actions of the State are articulated with extractive practices of national and international capital that seek to appropriate its still vast natural wealth (Menezes and Barbosa, 2021). In that context, the local population and Indigenous peoples have their lives constantly affected by violent processes of dispossession. Those processes include many forms of violence: direct, institutional, cultural, symbolic, and structural. The latter refers to a comprehensive combination of the regular or normalised patterns of operation, rules and governance of social life (Carvalho *et al.*, 2021). In that sense, alliances between anti-leftist groups, neoliberal interests and *authoritarian nostalgia* fuel contemporary forms of exploitation and violence in the region. In this context, multinational and national corporations working in partnership with paramilitaries have significantly worsened the conditions for local activists.

Focusing on the Brazilian Amazon, this article examines strategies of repression and violence faced by environmental justice activists during Bolsonaro’s far-right government, presenting an analysis of how they affect mobilisation. First, we introduce a theoretical framework widely used to understand mobilisation, that is, Political Process Theories (PPT), explaining the limitations of

¹ Their methodology considered events where three or more people were killed in the same location and within the same timeframe.

this framework in Brazil's context. Second, we outline the methodology used to conduct this study. Third, we use three case studies to illustrate those issues and point to the contemporary nature and recent changes in this context of struggle during a far-right government. The cases are the ongoing gold mining in Indigenous territories, the persecution of activists accused of causing fires in the Amazon in 2019 and the murder of Bruno Araujo Pereira and Dominic Phillips. Finally, we provide an analysis of those situated cases, shedding light on the acceleration of extractivism and violence through legal and institutional changes. In particular, we consider the effects of neoliberal dismantling of public institutions in tandem with the discourses that try to legitimise the exploitation of natural resources and dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

2. Political Process Theory in a context of extractivism and historical violence

Social movement theories, especially Political Process Theories (PPT) (Tilly, 1978), draw attention to the macro-historical context that associates social change with forms of conflict (Alonso, 2009). They focus on the condition of social movements, contrasting the interaction between groups inside and outside political institutions. PPT authors such as McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) claim that social movements emerge when there is a rupture in the political coalition occupying the State, resulting in dissident elites becoming available for alliances with groups outside the institutional political system. The agenda of *contentious politics* considers that institutional and non-institutional actors face a continuum of "confrontational politics", which vary according to degrees of violence and institutionalisation. Opportunities for mobilisation imply low cohesion in the ruling coalition and the reduction of the State's ability to repress, opening space for outsiders (Ibid). According to the target audience, government responses vary from facilitation and tolerance to selective repression (Tilly, 2005). So, PPT emphasises the importance of structural 'political opportunities' (resources, organisations, networks) for collective action.

In the 2000s, PPT gained ground in social movement studies in Latin America (Rodrigues, 2020). Nonetheless, Latin American theorists have drawn attention to the importance of better understanding the role of violence in PPT. Gomes (*forthcoming*) argues that PPT has ignored violence as a central aspect of Latin American societies, in which high levels of inequality combined with various forms of violence shape political opportunities. Countries with high levels of enforced disappearances and murders change the scenario for activists. But the literature on conflict and movements has treated violence strictly as repression or as part of activists' repertoires (Della Porta and Reiter, 1998). These contributions fail to thoroughly consider opportunities as non-neutral and contextual and as part of broader disputes. Understanding the spatial aspects of conflict and the configurations assumed by the actors in the field is essential. Brazilian mobilisations offer interesting insights into these theories on activism by expanding the global North's literature on mobilisation.

PPT has contributed to social action debates based on Global North social movements. However, its discussion misses the theoretical contribution of Latin American social movement scholarship by emphasizing almost exclusively the roles of resources, organisations and networks. Latin America's scholarship contributes to PPT by adding the discussion of political regimes, repression, distinct forms of violence and extractivism observed in the region, which ultimately increases State and parastate oppression and diminishes mobilising spaces for activists. In social movement research, repression has become a synonym for violent state repression (Davenport et al., 2005; Earl, 2003). However, other literature distinguishes repression based on coercion, with the use of force from channelling, as well as indirect and subtle control to impact the types of protest activists choose and the timing of protests (Davenport, 2015; Della Porta & Reiter, 1998). Tarrow (2018) focuses on how cycles of contention follow different trajectories according to opportunities and threats. Violence and opportunities are presented as opposite ends of a

continuum of violent responses in contentious politics. For Tilly (1978), this is explicit since a regime represses or facilitates collective action so that closing opportunities would provoke the escalation of violent repertoires, especially during the downward phase of mobilisation. However, analyses from repressive perspectives underestimate a multidimensional understanding of violence. This includes a permanent feeling of fear and everyday approaches beyond repression in contexts with high rates of homicides, robberies, kidnappings, rape, torture, and forced disappearances.

In analysing opportunities for activism amidst repression, it is crucial to consider the specific challenges that activists face under far-right governments. Earl (2022) builds on her previous typology (Earl, 2003) to argue that repressive actors, whether state officials or paramilitary/private actors, rely on force and coercion to maintain control. In Brazil, the line between State and private actors is often blurred, as private actors may act independently or in coordination with or on behalf of government regimes. Private actors have received insufficient attention in mobilisation literature, with few exceptions (Hasler, Walters, & White, 2020; Walby & Monaghan, 2011; Crosby & Monaghan, 2018). However, recent studies have increasingly focused on the topic, particularly online coercion, where private individuals engage in uncoordinated harassment of social movement activists through social media (Ibid).

The analysis of political violence and mobilisation in the Amazonian region must occur within the context of ongoing extractivism. Extractivism is a model of accumulation, a mode of appropriation of natural resources shaped by the demands of capitalist metropolitan centres. This macro-historical dynamic is a structural element of capitalist economies that exploit some places to provide for others (Acosta, 2009). Moreover, extractivism has close ties with a history of imperialism, racism, and the legacy of enslavement. As Tuhiwai Smith (2021) points out, that imperial legacy is closely tied to the complex and contentious ways the term 'Indigenous' is defined. Sometimes the word and the Indigenous identification are problematically associated with colonial insults and stereotypes about savagery and rebellion (Magalhães, 1876). Other times the term Indigenous is used to group together multiple diverse ethnicities whose histories, cultures, languages, and social circumstances were radically transformed by imperialism and the continuing influence of colonial logic (Resende, 2014). The results of imperialist incursions, and continuing invasions to the Amazon region, are multiple harms and rights violations to the environment and Indigenous communities, including *inter alia* territorial conflicts, disease outbreaks, dispossession, religious and cultural aggressions, and direct violence against those who resist extractivism (Hoefle, 2006) – all of which operate as routinely demobilising factors.

While extractivism has existed in Latin America since European colonists invaded the continent, during the birth of capitalism, the extractivist process has taken new dimensions in the 21st century. In response, a significant body of literature has begun to examine the issue of neo-extractivism in Latin America (Brand, Dietz and Lang 2016; Burchardt and Dietz 2014; Svampa 2019). Neo-extractivism is a new form of extractivism in which the State plays a role in creating social legitimacy for extractive activities by using the narrative of generating economic growth, surplus and redistributing it (Svampa 2019). The term was widely used to describe the cycle of progressive governments in Latin America, known as the Pink Tide. Neo-extractivism is based on the expansion of borders of exploitation to new territories. As a process, neo-extractivism has been associated with the increasing pressures of a commodities boom and the conflicts resulting from the pressure on territories and natural resources involving different groups, such as the

Indigenous Peoples, *Quilombolas*², socio-environmental organisations, governments, and corporations.

In Brazil, the neo-extractivist initiatives from the Workers' Party governments in the Brazilian Amazon maintained the colonial conception of the region as a "resource frontier" to be expanded for the sake of "development". Consequently, the neo-extractivist economy benefited from large-scale cattle ranching, monocultures, mining, timber trade, megaprojects, and port systems (Barreto, 2020). That occurred because Brazil's insertion into the world economy required adopting a neoliberal extractivist approach (Domingues and Sauer, 2021). Perhaps one of Brazil's most significant examples of a neo-extractivist process was the construction of the Belo Monte mega-dam, advertised under the "development" umbrella to increase national electricity production but responsible for severe socio-environmental impacts on the Amazon region (Silveira, 2016). As with other Latin American countries, Brazil experienced a growing dependence on extractivism with expectations of reducing poverty, unemployment, and inequality. However, (neo-)extractivism in the Amazon negatively impacts the local population once it creates a series of human rights violations (Smart, 2020).

The extractivist ideology worsened after the 2016 parliamentary coup that ended the Brazilian Workers' Party government period. As indicated by Soyer and Barbosa Jr. (2020), President Michel Temer's interim government (2016-2018) established an alliance with rural elites to deregulate environmental protection, leading to increased rural violence. President Bolsonaro's government dramatically consolidated that process by significantly intensifying violence, hatred for Indigenous Peoples, and unrestricted support for agribusiness and mining activities (dos Santos, 2022). In fact, Bolsonaro was accused by Indigenists of promoting an anti-Indigenous agenda and Indigenophobic policies (Saldaña and Gabriel, 2022). Some authors have defended using a new term to represent the current scenario: total extractivism (Dunlap and Jakobsen, 2020; Menezes and Barbosa, 2021; Soyer and Barbosa Jr, 2020). The particularity of this type of extractivism is its intention to consume all available human and natural resources. Total extractivism is only made possible through authoritarian processes that promote "violent technologies aiming at integrating and reconfiguring the earth and absorbing its inhabitants" (Dunlap and Jakobsen, 2020, p. 6). The cases examined here demonstrate that Bolsonaro's government intended to reduce political opportunities. They also show that by articulating macro-historical issues and analysing these interactions, it is possible to unveil the constitution of contested mobilisations.

3. Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative approach of inquiry based on three case studies to provide a description, analysis, and understanding of Bolsonaro's far-right government attitude towards the political mobilisation of social movements in the Brazilian Amazon. All three cases are based in the Amazonian region. In addition, they all have links to different forms of social mobilisation, are strongly intertwined with natural resource extraction, and the victims from each case study faced political violence due to their activism. Regarding the time frame of the cases, we selected one case where the reports of social mobilisation against political violence began before Bolsonaro's administration and continued after he was in office. The aim was to understand the scenario before and after the beginning of the far-right government. The second case study was chosen to examine events that began within the first year of President Bolsonaro's government and analyse how the government addressed them. Finally, the third case was selected to consider a more

² *Quilombolas* are descendants of African and Afro-Brazilian people who fled enslavement and settled in traditional Afro-Brazilian communities known as *Quilombos* in remote locations.

recent event, which occurred in the final year of the presidential mandate, to see how political violence and mobilisation had developed. Only the second case has been closed, while the first and the third are still unfolding. Through our analysis, we seek to reveal patterns or differences in Bolsonaro's administration *modus operandi* when responding to the violence denounced in each case study. The first case, focusing on a synthesis of the extraction of gold from Indigenous territories, enables a contextualisation of a form of extractivism in the Brazilian Amazon that provokes a complex scenario of various forms of violence and political struggle. The second case relates to the defamation and false criminalisation of activists accused of incendiary fires in the Brazilian Amazon in 2019. The third case is the murder of Bruno Pereira Araújo and Dom Phillips in 2022, which reveals the diversity of actors involved in the persecution of activists and the impact of state neglect on Indigenous struggles. Using these cases, we seek to demonstrate how the region's diverse forms of political violence and repression unfold in the context of total extractivism.

The qualitative analysis of case studies was chosen because, as Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) suggest, that is a relevant approach to researching real-time phenomena. Garvey *et al.* (2022) use a similar structure in their study of green crime and environmental harm in Brazil. We collected and analysed open-access data from all case studies between June and August 2022. In addition, we collected data from reports of several well-established social movements and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs): Articulação dos Povos Indígenas do Brasil (APIB), Comissão Pastoral da Terra (CPT), Conselho Indigenista Missionário (CIMI), Hutukara Associação Yanomami, and Instituto Escolhas. We also used relevant data from local, national, and international newspapers widely acknowledged for their commitment to ethical journalism. All data collected refers to the 2019-2022 timeframe, with August 2022 being the cut-off date for our data collection. All the data used for this article are publicly available in reports and newspaper articles.

Our commitment to critical theory and praxis for social transformation was a guiding compass for this research. The article draws attention to stories and experiences of Indigenous and environmental activists, which although publicly available remain occluded. Through a thematic analysis of their shared stories, we seek to bring to light the possibilities of collaborating to challenge discourses, narratives and practices that condone injustices affecting Amazonian people.

4. Case Studies

Case 1: Gold mining

The Yanomami are an Amerindian group whose current territory covers 96,650 km². Historical data suggests that the first wave of mining invasion in their region occurred in 1975, after a government mapping of its mineral potential. From the 1990s onwards, international pressure forced Brazil to be more effective in controlling illegal mining (Kopenawa and Albert, 2015). However, policy efforts to tackle mining in the Amazon significantly regressed during ex-President Bolsonaro's government (Biller, 2022).

As a result, series of invasions and confrontations unfolded between the Yanomami people and miners who have links with political and economic regional elites (Borges, 2022). An example of these confrontations occurred in May 2021 when illegal miners repeatedly attacked the Palimiú community. In one of those attacks, the invaders arrived in 40 boats to shoot at the Yanomami

People. The miners even confronted the federal police investigating the case (Oliveira and Fernandes, 2021). Other events under investigation include the rape of Yanomami women, young people, and children by gold miners with the aim of threatening and silencing the community (Resende, 2022). The Yanomami Indigenous territory is experiencing its most critically challenging moment since the demarcation of their land, including by experiencing widespread illness and deaths because of contact with the transient population of miners. An outcome of this is the destabilising of the Yanomami community through the ensuing environmental damage left behind – including soil upheaval and puddles of water left by miners, which provide an ideal context for the spread of illnesses such as Malaria. Environmental damage and poor health also impact on the Yanomami's ability to work their own crops, with widespread hunger as another harm associated with this example of total extractivism. The data is alarming: "In 2021, the deforestation caused by mining in the territory grew by 46% in comparison to 2020, representing an annual increase of 1,038 hectares [...] This is the largest growth observed since monitoring began in 2018, and possibly the largest annual rate since the demarcation of the Yanomami Indigenous Land in 1992" (Hutukara, 2022, p. 15).

A series of political choices have encouraged illegal mining. Current legislation has established less transparency about the origin of the gold traded in Brazil, facilitating the sale of illegally extracted resources. Brazilian Law 12,844/2013 prescribes that the guarantee that the gold was extracted in a legal mining operation depends solely on the buyer's good faith (Brasil, 2013). The dismantling of federal agencies responsible for acting to protect the Amazon compounds this organised abandonment, especially between 2019 and 2022, including the precarisation of institutions such as *Fundação Nacional do Índio* (FUNAI), *Instituto Chico Mendes de Conservação da Biodiversidade* (ICMBio) and *Instituto Brasileiro do Meio Ambiente e dos Recursos Naturais Renováveis* (IBAMA) (Hutukara, 2022). The Federal government's disarticulation of these organisations, or the scaling back and regressive approaches adopted, has led to a lack of supervision and adequate infrastructure for protecting Indigenous peoples and the environment. Indeed, according to a Brazilian Federal Prosecutor working with Indigenous cases, the Brazilian Indigenous Agency (FUNAI) no longer existed once it stopped protecting Indigenous rights (Militão, 2022). A clear example of the consequences of dismantling environmental policies is the death of Indigenous children from malnutrition and lack of medicines (G1, 2022a). The Yanomami leader Davi Kopenawa, speaking at a UN session, explained that Brazil's President Bolsonaro encouraged the invasion of Indigenous lands. In his words: "That's what he really says: 'I own this forest, these rivers, this subsoil, the minerals, the gold, and the precious stones! All this belongs to me, so get it all and bring it to the city. We'll turn everything into merchandise!'" (El País, 2020).

Some initiatives from the Judiciary and Legislative powers counterbalanced the ongoing problem. For example, in 2022, the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies set up commissions to investigate violations against the Yanomami population (Jornal, 2022a; G1, 2022b). In addition, different spheres of the Judiciary have demanded that the federal government plan and implement the protection of Indigenous territories (Jornal, 2022b). These demands to comply with the law and environmental regulations have repeatedly been made by the Yanomami, who also organise and take action through distinct associations to denounce the abuses they suffer. A growing articulation between movements to support the Yanomami population, such as the 'Movement in defence of Roraima' and the actions of the Association of Indigenous Peoples of Brazil (APIB), has emerged. A research project launched by APIB in collaboration with environmental and human rights organisations such as Amazon Watch points to this articulation to denounce abuses (APIB 2022).

Case 2: The Fires

Activists Daniel Gutierrez Govino, João Victor Pereira Romano, Gustavo de Almeida Fernandes, and Marcelo Aron Cwerner were members of the Alter do Chão Fire Brigade, part of the Instituto Aquífero Alter do Chão, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) created in 2017 in the State of Pará. In September 2019, these activists were dragged into the middle of an international environmental scandal after Alter do Chão's forest – one of the Amazon's main touristic destinations with an area of environmental protection of 650,000m² – was burnt down during a series of fires that became known as 'Fire Day'. When these activists denounced the abnormal fires that year, they were accused of the crimes that they were reporting.

They were taken to prison that same year, their hair was forcibly shaved (Oliveira, 2019), and an NGO in which one of the activists had also volunteered — *Saúde e Alegria* —, had their equipment seized by the police, among other arbitrary measures (Borges, 2019). Alexandre Rizzi, the judge of the 1st Criminal Court of Santarém, decided to maintain the four activists arrested in 2019 with no evidence that connected them to the fires (Cavaleiro, 2022). Yet, the bogus accusations made by Pará's Civil Police linked the brigade members to a plan to set the forest on fire, allegedly to draw international attention and receive donations from international NGOs to fight the fire that they were then being accused of having started (Ibid). Furthermore, the accusations linked the activists to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the actor Leonardo DiCaprio by stating that donations to help NGOs combat the fires in the Amazon were deliberately causing those organisations to start fires (Ibid).

The criminalisation process took off in 2019. Although it was legally dismissed due to lack of evidence, the case illustrates the repression dynamics and narratives occurring during the far-right government. The evidence presented by the Civil Police was exclusively based on a video connecting the four young men to the fire since they were in Alter do Chão at the time (Mori, 2019). In November of that same year, the Prosecution Service found no evidence of their participation in the fires (Ibid). However, this did not impede the government from taking advantage of the wrongful accusations. President Bolsonaro, who had long accused NGOs of being the culprits of the Amazon fires, used this situation to spread misinformation, sustaining his position on criminalising NGOs and activists (Bolsonaro, 2019). He claimed that they committed a crime to draw the government's attention. The former Minister of the Environment, Ricardo Salles, also tried to incriminate the activists by publicly posting on social media comments and media reports about the case that intended to frame the activists as perpetrators (Salles, 2019). The case and narrative fabricated by a far-right government are problematic. Still, they show a straightforward plot used in the far-right context to set in motion the demobilisation of struggles for environmental justice through the criminalisation of NGOs' activities and by extension, the silencing of dissenting voices.

Case 3: The murder of Bruno Araújo Pereira and Dom Phillips

The disappearance and discovery of the bodies of Brazilian Indigenist Bruno Pereira and British journalist Dominic Phillips in the Amazon in June 2022 garnered international attention, raising concerns about growing levels of political violence in Brazil. Pereira and Phillips went missing on 5th June 2022 after an incursion into Brazil's second-largest Indigenous territory in the municipality of Atalaia do Norte within the Vale do Javari (Javari Valley). Pereira was a well-known Indigenist, a defender of Indigenous Peoples' rights, who had worked for FUNAI. In 2019, he was dismissed from his duties after leading a successful operation to dismantle an illegal mining operation in the Yanomami reservation (Downie, 2022a). More recently, Pereira worked for UNIVAJA (the Union

of the Indigenous Peoples of the Javari Valley). He was one of Brazil's most experienced Indigenists and knew the region well. According to UNIVAJA, Pereira received constant threats from primary industry people (G1, 2022c). Dominic Phillips was a British activist and journalist, who had been living in Brazil for 15 years and was writing a book about the Amazon. He published about conflicts in Indigenous lands and environmental issues (G1, 2022d).

The Indigenous community started the search on the day the victims were meant to arrive at their planned destination (G1, 2022e). Yet, Brazilian government authorities were slow to get involved in the search for Bruno Pereira and Dominic Phillips, despite calls for support from the victims' families and from Indigenous groups who searched for them (UOL, 2022). In an interview, Antenor Vaz, a former leader of FUNAI in the region, explained that the region is only accessible by boat or aircraft (Café da Manhã, 2022). And, that it is generally affected by conflict with illegal timber loggers, fishermen and gold miners, who since 2019, started to be supported by drug traffickers and organised crime who control the riverine region. "Every day we received information from Indigenous people in the Javari Valley who have been intimidated by gunmen [...] in 2019, a worker from FUNAI [Maxwell Pereira dos Santos] was assassinated in the city of Tabatinga, precisely because he was the leading inspector in the Javari Valley" (Ibid). Following the murders of Pereira and Phillips, workers from FUNAI went on strike with protests across 34 Brazilian cities, demanding that FUNAI's president steps down (Avila and Lobato, 2022). In addition, they denounced a climate of persecution of public servants at FUNAI and demanded information about who ordered the murders and the circumstances that led to the bodies being burned and hidden in the Javari Valley.

Despite significant international attention to the case, disregard for human rights remained a relevant trait of Bolsonaro's far-right government. Brazil's government was accused before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights of failing to thoroughly investigate the case and implement measures to prevent recurrences (Downie, 2022b). At the time of writing, the police investigation had resulted in eight people being arrested for supposed links with the murders. In addition, three people face criminal charges before Federal Justice due to the heinous crimes (Downie, 2022c).

Bruno Pereira was implicated in two of the three case studies presented in this article. When Bolsonaro's administration dismissed him from FUNAI's service after his successful operation against illegal mining in the Yanomami territory, he engaged directly with social movements. His experience in FUNAI shows that political repression also affects public servants during far-right governments. His violent death while working with social movements sheds light on the extreme forms of silencing, repressing and systematically demobilising struggles for justice.

5. Discussion: What changed in the far-right era?

By choosing case studies that had different starting points, we sought to identify commonalities and discrepancies between them. Here, we reflect on relevant aspects of these case studies to present a reflection on the dynamics of political violence and mobilisation in the Brazilian Amazon. The three cases reveal the complexity of *contentious politics*. Just as McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) proposed, in all cases, a government is central to the conflict, but political actors also include national and international corporations, paramilitary, local population and activists. Those relationships usually reveal a growing disparity of interests and a lack of dialogue between the federal government and social movements between 2019-2022. With the caveat that some dissenting actors within government institutions acting more cooperatively with local demands.

As the article has shown, violence against the Yanomami has remnants of the military dictatorship in Brazil in the 1970s. However, after Bolsonaro, the total extractivism policy was put in motion. A direct consequence of that policy is that the Amazon and Indigenous peoples are currently under siege, threatened by destruction and death (Bombardi and Almeida, 2022). This episode of contention shows how the conflicts in the Amazon involve both state and paramilitary actors to extract the region's natural resources and mineral wealth. For Svampa (2019: 11), the growth in state and parastate violence in Latin America, during both conservative and progressive governments that defend extractivism, is associated with criminalising practices and the murder of environmental activists. There is a growing articulation between market interests and state action that triggers a series of forms of violence against local populations (Rapozo, 2021). At the local level, this would be performed by "environmental *militias*", which are criminal networks associated with state agents and economic elites (Souza et al., 2021).

Demarcated Indigenous territories are protected 'in theory' by law since those lands are reserved for exclusive use by Indigenous peoples who have ancestral and sustainable relationships with the environment in which they live. However, in practice, the law has not prevented widespread and routine invasions of Indigenous territories for exploitation by timber loggers, miners, and other extractivist groups (e.g., illegal fishing and cattle ranching industries). Even if no previous Federal government has ever succeeded in guaranteeing that right, Bolsonaro is the first president to oppose Indigenous territories' existence publicly³.

That is why one of the Yanomami's central claims is that their constitutional rights are not guaranteed in practice (Alkmin 2022). The Yanomami have endeavoured to establish support networks to assist them in these demands and to denounce violations of their rights. The second case reveals that the government accused the fire brigade activists to divert attention from the actual problem: a large fire in a protected environmental area. The brigade was engaged in direct action to put out the fire. They sought to ensure the safety of the Amazonian environment. However, using a line of police investigation that proved inaccurate, Bolsonaro and the former Environment Minister disseminated a false narrative claiming that the fire brigade caused the fire to attract later international investments to their NGO (Cavaleiro, 2022). Moreover, the government officials generalised their false narrative, arguing that many NGOs had the same criminal line of action (Bolsonaro, 2019; Salles, 2019). However, after the criminal charges were dismissed because they had no grounds, neither of the political agents came forward to retract their previous claims. As Tong et al. (2020) suggest, politicians use misinformation as a tool to shape public opinion. Furthermore, activists and environmental experts have argued that Bolsonaro's racist and anti-Indigenous discourse, in combination with the underfunding and dismantling of environmental agencies, has led to a surge of land invasions and violence against land defenders and environmentalists in the Brazilian Amazon (Brown, 2022).

The third case is emblematic of the 'apotheosis' of violence escalation against activists. As we pointed out, activists and Indigenous peoples face constant rural violence. However, most cases rarely get attention from the international community or the mainstream media. Usually, the mainstream media focus on cases where high-profile victims or foreign nationals are involved. The brutal murder of Bruno Pereira and Dominic Phillips unravels to the international community the struggles local communities and Indigenous peoples routinely face (Ladeira, 2022). While the case was under investigation, President Bolsonaro blamed the victims by claiming they should not be there and that such a violent crime could occur in any part of the globe. Bolsonaro also

³ Alkmin's study (2022) found 81 anti-Indigenous legislative proposals that aim to change the statute of protection for Indigenous Peoples established by the 1988 Constitution. Those projects have two primary purposes: opening up territories for commercial exploitation, mainly mining and agribusiness, and expanding state control over those territories.

affirmed that he would not send more backup to investigate the disappearance of both victims (Medeiros, 2022). This case confirms a pattern during the far-right administration: the constant effort to make false narratives that privilege aggressors, legitimating the continuity of harmful actions. Those false narratives include symbolic forms of violence such as stereotypical ideas about Indigenous peoples as being 'against development', the slandering of activists and blame-the-victim discourses. In the periphery of capitalist societies, political violence and repression are often deployed through various legal and extra-legal measures. The cumulative effect of such measures is to demonstrate the effectiveness of state coercion over Indigenous activism, particularly in light of the deteriorating conditions for the Yanomami people. Events such as the Fire Day in Alter do Chão and the brutal murder of Bruno Pereira and Dom Philips underscore the misinformation tactics employed to dissuade future activists from taking action.

In addition, FUNAI worker's strike refers to the fact that, from the outset, Bolsonaro's era has been marked by a stark breakdown of environmental protection policies. An example of this was the attack on employees of state environmental agencies, such as Pereira, with the concomitant appointment of military personnel to occupy leadership positions in those agencies. Corroborating the evidence of environmental dismantling, according to recent data from the *Climate Observatory*, April's monthly deforestation rate nearly doubled in the Brazilian Amazon between 2021 and 2022 (The Guardian, 2022). The *Instituto Nacional de Pesquisas Espaciais (INPE)*, an official Brazilian agency, reported that between August 2020 and July 2021, deforestation had its highest increase in the last decade, with a 21,97% increase rate in one year (INPE, 2021). Those rates are not a coincidence. In the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, President Bolsonaro's administration rejoiced with the diverted media attention to the health calamity and decided to seize the public health crisis as an opportunity to try to pass bills for environmental deregulation (G1, 2020). Since environmental devastation is seen as necessary for economic development, environmental legislation and environmentalists are seen as obstacles to national development. Environmental governance is then strictly constrained by extractive interests. The arguments from all of those scholars find ground in claims from Brazilian activists, such as Claudelice dos Santos, who explains that Bolsonaro's environmental policies are practically void, allowing total extractivism to thrive as desired by capitalist interests (Bombardi and Almeida, 2022).

Our analysis corroborates Barreto's (2020) insofar as the novelty during President Bolsonaro's far-right government is a peculiar combination of authoritarian geo-political conceptions, the absolute unblocking of initiatives that "value" the region, the disarticulation of environmental regulation systems and the systematic use of distorted information about the region. On the one hand, Araújo (2020) concludes that the Congress – in conjunction with civil society – has been essential in minimising the federal government's deregulation attempts. On the other hand, the government has promoted the large-scale deinstitutionalisation of environmental policy governance, modifying non-statutory rules and cutting budgetary resources. Those actions can characterise a calculated and ideological form of inaction and systematically dismantle national environmental protections (ibid, p. 18). Political violence occurs through attempts to demobilise struggles for justice, including restriction of social participation in decision-making processes and attacks on scientists, environmentalists, local populations and non-governmental organisations.

6. Conclusion

Throughout this article, we sought to highlight the political contention that is part of a governance based on total extractivism. We start from the understanding that extractivism has a long history in the region and persists in different political regimes. Nonetheless, there are essential particularities in recent years that arise during Bolsonaro's far-right government. The far-right shift in politics deepened extractivism and political conflicts, intensifying diverse forms of violence

against the most socio-economically vulnerable populations, including Indigenous peoples and environmental and social justice activists. During this time, a series of throwbacks to public policies, the collapse of environmental policies, cuts to spending in public institutions and attempts to erode environmental protections (including legislative amendments to the constitution) have accentuated interconnected environmental and social harms.

The cases presented here can be comprehended within a framework of repression, where the State seeks to discourage its citizens from mobilising. First, in the context of total extractivism, we have asserted that PPT has underscored the role of repression in demobilising citizens but has not captured the subtleties of repression beyond the global North, including in the Amazonian region. In the Amazon, paramilitaries and various state actors collaborate to hinder activists from acting. Second, far-right governments employ coercion as a strategic tool to prevent activists from gathering, which has recently involved the dissemination of false information and the criminalisation of activists through legal proceedings, intending to discourage others from acting. Different social actors are articulating two conflicting sides. On one side are Indigenous-peasant movements, socio-environmental movements, NGOs, collectives, and networks of experts concerned with climate change, deforestation, pollution, and the dispossession that Indigenous communities face. Some of the strategies adopted by these actors are networking, public denunciations, direct actions to protect the territory and life, as well as legal demands to state agents and the government. On the other side are the vortex of mega-corporations, agri-business and mining lobbies, and state and parastate actors that propose the expansion of the borders of capitalist accumulation through a version of 'progress' that entails highly profitable extraction of natural resources at the expense of the environment and humanity. This state-corporate side of the conflict mobilised to dismantle state institutions previously tasked with protecting Indigenous peoples, their territories and the environment. The cases highlight the importance of developing an understanding of political violence and mobilisation in new, fast-changing contexts, where if unchallenged and hidden, the scale of environmental harm has the potential to destroy not only Indigenous resistance but the very planet.

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Conflict of interest statement

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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