

Neoliberalism and the Environmental Movement: Contemporary Considerations for the Counter-  
Hegemonic Struggle

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# Abstract

This thesis proposes a conceptual framework for understanding how neoliberalism has decreased the ability of environmental movements to manifest changes in political economic structure or spur state action on environmental issues that might be antagonistic to the neoliberal order.

Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi have developed reputable theories that describe social movements as exercising a degree of control over political economy. However, the problems with Marxist and Polanyian theory are twofold: first, they offer vague and homogenous descriptions of the social movements to which they refer. Second, a large shift in economic-political context towards neoliberalism since the 1970's has drastically altered the political opportunity structure of social movements. In the modern day, many social movements have rallied around environmental issues in response to an impending environmental crisis. The antipathy of neoliberal hegemony towards environmental regulation has set it in opposition with environmental movements and as such many factions of the movement can be described as 'counter hegemonic'. As neoliberalism constricts the political opportunity structure of these movements through domestic and international legislation and treaties, assimilation of loci of dissent into a neoliberal framework, and powerful financial coercion, limitations on environmental movement influence may yield dire consequences for the global environment.

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# Preface

First and foremost I would like to thank my advisors Liam Downey, David Ciplet, and Dale Miller for their invaluable guidance, expertise, and support. This thesis never would have come to fruition without your help.

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# Introduction

The generations succeeding 1970 are the first to understand environmental issues as global and potentially catastrophic problems, as well as the first to see multilateral climate talks on the global environment, attempted international treaties on environmental issues, and comprehensive environmental regulation. They have also seen the continued rise in carbon emissions, the growth of large and devastating storms, rapid deforestation, problematic ocean acidification, rapid melting of arctic glaciers, increased incidence of drought and wildfire, and myriad other environmental plights. We are clearly toying with the Earth's capability to endure our destructive behaviors. We are filling our carbon sinks (the atmosphere, the oceans) or else cutting them down (forests). We are overloading the planet's capacity to filter pollution. We are exhausting its natural resources (water, lumber, mines). The consequences are already upon us, and the global populace is noticing (Leiserowitz, 2007.)<sup>1</sup>

The generations since 1970 are also the first to see widespread social movements focused on environmental issues surface around the world. NGO's from Greenpeace to the Environmental Defense Fund to the World Wildlife Fund have taken on the cause of fighting environmental havoc. Activists all over the world call for bold action on climate change, with 350.org demanding that universities, churches, corporations and financial institutions currently profiting off of successful oil markets divest from fossil fuels, and activists gathering by the thousands to march in New York City or protest in Paris, demanding multilateral commitment to righting the

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<sup>1</sup> Leiserowitz is explicit that while familiarity with 'climate change' as a conceptual framework for understanding changes in our climate system is less pervasive in cultures of the developing world, this lack of familiarity did not mean that people were not aware of the changes in climatic systems.

myriad environmental imbalances in our world. This growing international fervor centered on environmental issues is due to an impending environmental crisis marked by the rapid exhaustion of natural resources, filling of sinks and degradation of qualitatively-measured notions of environmental health (air and water quality, for example.)

A surge in international attention to environmental issues from civil society begs the question of why multilateral action on issues such as climate change has been so slow to occur. Multilateral climate agreements have been lax and unsuccessful (Dimitrov, 2010; Prins & Rayner, 2007), and annual climate conferences continually yield results that fail to meet expectations. Many of the impediments to the formation of strong multilateral climate agreements have been related to political economy. At conferences related to climate, economic growth and right to development are central themes, with some nations appearing to be more concerned with their GDP than with the potential environmental crisis on the horizon. This preoccupation with economy has stirred concern amongst some environmentalists, with blame often falling on global Capitalism.

Through the rise of movements such as Divest, the publication of books such as “This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Environment” (Klein, 2014) and papers like “Is Sustainable Capitalism an Oxymoron?” (Schweickart, 2009), the discourse on political economy with an explicit environmental flavor within certain spheres of the environmental movement hints at the possibility of a serious disconnect or incompatibility between environmental sustainability and capitalist economies.

Continued stagnation on multilateral climate action from nations openly concerned with economic growth, amongst a surge in environmental activism from civil society, calls into question the relationship between society and political economy. Some environmentalists have

pointed to Capitalism as the problem, and most will admit that our present economic system does not properly value the environment. In the face of these allegations, is civil society capable of manifesting radical change in our economic system, as some environmentalists have suggested will be necessary? To answer this question, I turn to Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi, who each have reputable theories concerning the relationship between society and political economy.

Marx and Polanyi are two of the most important theorists of political economy and Capitalism. While highly critical of Capitalism, they both hold rather optimistic outlooks about the relative power of society to either exercise controls and regulations on the Capitalist system (Polanyi) or overthrow it (Marx.) In fact, both theorists describe different but related mechanisms that describe Capitalism as regulated or controlled by society.

Marx, for example, describes how Capitalism inherently polarizes society into two classes (the *proletariat* and the *bourgeoise*), alienating the worker and engendering *class conflict*, which consequently precipitates an uprising of the working class to overthrow Capitalism and establish a communist society (Marx, 1983.) Polanyi, on the other hand, claims that over the course of time the economic relations of society have been increasingly *disembedded* from social and cultural regulation in a move towards the self-regulation of markets, only to then be re-embedded by a *countermovement* of social movement actors that effectively re-establishes regulative control and once again subordinates the economy to social relations. This back-and-forth constitutes a Polanyian *double movement* (Polanyi, 1957.)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Sociologist Michael Burawoy adds considerable credibility to the claim that this ‘back and forth’ might very well be the case. He argues that instances of re-embedment have historically come in waves that rally around a central cause. He claims that the first wave centered on the issue of labor (consistent with the works and historical epoch of Marx) and that the second centered on money (consistent with the works and historical epoch of Polanyi). To summarize his argument in “Facing an Unequal World” (2015), there is now a third wave of social movements that

Marx and Polanyi have both theorized society to play an important role in exercising control over the economy, assigning considerable power to the *proletariat*, and the *countermovement*, respectively. I argue, however, that their conceptions are deficient in two principal ways. First, the descriptions of social movements provided by Marx and Polanyi are vague and homogenizing. They do not acknowledge counterproductive movements (movements that complement the established economic order) nor cultural, tactical, geographical, or political differences within the movement. They instead assume the perfect coordination and unity of civil society against Capitalism (Marx) or the market mechanism (Polanyi). Second, the contemporary social-political context presents social movements with a unique set of challenges that did not exist when Marx and Polanyi were alive and that they therefore could never have theorized or foreseen. I propose that these specific challenges are consequence of the modern-day omnipresence of neoliberal economic doctrine, as seen in international trade law or IMF structural adjustment programs, for example.

If predictions for the future of political economy and the environment were to be based exclusively on Marxist and Polanyian notions of social movements and their interaction with capitalist market economies, then the outcome would look rather bright. However, social movements do not exist in vacuums free from external influence, but are instead subject to social, political, and economic context. The contemporary context is much different from that in

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has adopted environmental issues as its central thematic discourse. In this third wave of what Burawoy calls 'marketization', society is found less able to re-embed the economy in order to properly re-embed it in societal values. Of the impending countermovement, Burawoy states that it is still in the distant future, if it is to come at all. In other words, the third wave of marketization has been so strong as to postpone the impending social movement. I disagree with Burawoy on one principal front. I believe there is indeed a 'countermovement' in place, it is happening presently, and this third wave of marketization (I call it neoliberalism) has instead just decreased the efficacy of the movement to effect change.



which Marx and Polanyi wrote and upon which they developed their respective theories. I argue that the most influential difference affecting the efficacy of social opposition is the onset of neoliberalism since the late 1970's. Following strong endorsement from economists such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman after World War II, neoliberalism was spearheaded and proliferated by Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, and Helmut Kohl in the years surrounding 1980, replacing the Keynesian welfare state as the predominant structuring of social and economic relations in the U.S. and western and northern Europe (Harvey, 2005; Polanyi, 1957; Downey, 2015; Overbeek, 2002.) Neoliberalism, which can be thought of as a cohort of political, economic, and cultural beliefs and ideologies, as well as practical and institutional organizations and structures that subscribe to neoliberal, market-centric thought, has dissolved many of the social protections and organizations through which civil society had previously found the power to oppose predominant socio-economic structures. Furthermore, it has constructed (often international) institutions, organizations, and decision-making spaces that are largely insulated from civil society influence (Downey, 2015.)

A series of patterned tendencies of neoliberalism have functioned to disable pathways of political influence which have been previously open and accessible to civil society. I categorize these neoliberal-inspired trends into three primary groups. I call the first category "*legislation*", which I use to refer to domestic and international legislation and treaties governing free trade, and domestic policies that distort political processes or serve to repress civil demonstration. Legislation includes the creation of new treaties and laws, as well as the neoliberal interpretation of old ones to subordinate environmental values to trade, protect neoliberal policy regimes from dissent, and shift decision-making fora away from democratic spaces where civil society can participate. Second, I use the term *assimilation* to refer to the process by which NGOs,

individuals, and government internalize neoliberal ideology. These entities are assimilated into neoliberal frameworks through the corporatization of NGOs, increased corporate influence and infiltration into government processes, and World Bank knowledge production processes.

Finally, *financial coercion* refers to the conditionality agreements enshrined in World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs. These agreements use the force of debt to impose neoliberal restructuring on developing countries in the Global South. Altogether, these tendencies have decreased the ability of civil society to re-embed the economy by shrinking the political opportunity structure<sup>3</sup> (Burawoy, 2015; Pellow, 2006) of environmental movements. A political opportunity structure can be understood as a movement's potential for influence on decision-making processes as determined by political, economic, and legal structures. Granted that neoliberal policy is antipathetic to environmental (and social) regulation, the continued dominance of neoliberalism and resultant inaction on environmental and climate issues may then spell widespread social disintegration in the wake of severe environmental degradation.

In this thesis I delve into the question: *how does neoliberalism as it exists as a cohort of ideologies, practical organizational structures, and institutional arrangements shape or alter the political opportunity structures of counter hegemonic environmental movements?* After explaining my research methods in the following section, I begin by describing the present situation of the global environment. I then characterize the modern-day environmental

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<sup>3</sup> Keck and Sikkink (1998, 7) define the political opportunity structure as “differential access by citizens to political institutions like legislatures, bureaucracies, and courts.” In other words, movements must engage the state in order to bring about lasting change. Pellow denounces this state-centric conception, offering instead a definition that acknowledges the influence of corporations on political opportunity structures: “...social movements have extraordinary power and can change the policies and practices of some of the world's largest corporations and most powerful governments. That nexus of state and corporate power is what I call the *political economic opportunity structure*, and movements are becoming adept at engaging those forces” (Pellow, 2006, 14.) Bakan (2004) notes the importance of not casting too much attention to the corporate side, however, for the risk of ignoring the essential role of the state, which holds the responsibility of ensuring democratic processes and providing for public welfare.

movement according to a series of traits proposed by Peter Evans in order to construct a more holistic account of social movements than the conceptions proposed by Marx and Polanyi. I then move to develop a conceptual framework that tries to explain how neoliberalism has inhibited the ability of environmental movements to overcome neoliberal hegemony, highlighting three overarching categories of tendencies that I call: legislation, assimilation, and financial coercion. In the empirical portion, I delve into a series of examples that will serve to illustrate the mechanisms I propose. I end the paper by describing the implications of this dynamic considering the time-bound nature of the impending environmental crisis.

# Methods

To develop the conceptual framework and gather the evidence I use in this thesis, I conducted an extensive and ongoing literature review to become better acquainted with the fields of political ecology, political economy, environmental sociology and Marxism. I consulted many influential texts by authors such as James O'Connor, John Bellamy Foster, Karl Polanyi, Brett Clark, and David Harvey. As my foundation of knowledge grew, a few important facets of the contemporary context came into view. For instance, I realized that neoliberalism must necessarily be included in any discussion of modern social economic political theory. I also observed that both Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi, two of the most influential theorists in the realm of political economic thought, had very strong notions of what social movements were responsible for in relation to Capitalism, and appeared to be rather liberal in the amount of relative power they assigned to these movements. I noted, however, that their theories were obviously written well before the onset of modern neoliberalism (Marx in the late 19th century, and Polanyi at the end of World War II) and this, for me, seemed to be an absolutely essential piece of information to include in any theory of social movements. I was curious how neoliberalism might have affected the capacity of social movements to manifest the sort of change described by Marx or Polanyi.

Upon further investigation, I developed a conceptual framework that tries to explain how neoliberalism may be affecting the power of civil society to spur change or challenge the existing neoliberal frameworks that dominate our modern world. It also occurred to me that Marx and Polanyi had both based their theories of social movements on what was happening in society at

the times of their writing. Marx in the late 1800's, for example, was very concerned with labor. Polanyi, too, wrote from a time when money and global networks of finance and currency were very much at the forefront of political-economic debate (this eventually precipitated the abandon of the gold standard and the creation of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund). In the modern context, many social movements and much popular dissent from indigenous groups to fossil fuel divestment movements to anti-globalization groups highlight environmental issues such as climate change. There is no shortage of thinkers that appear to agree that the movement has rallied around environment in this way (Klein, 2014; Burawoy, 2015.) I hence moved in the direction of attempting to determine the exact effect that neoliberalization was having on the efficacy of the environmental movement, with the hypothesis that it was decreasing its ability to manifest real, counter hegemonic change and precipitate bold action on climate change or any other major environmental issue facing the world today.

Michael Burawoy (2015), as it turned out, had a very similar theory. While he opted to use his own terminology of “third wave marketization” in place of the traditional language of “neoliberalization”, he too believed that this marketization would have a negative effect on social movements. His ideas differ from my conceptual framework, however, on a couple of important points. Burawoy is not entirely convinced that a ‘countermovement’ has begun, and argues that it will come in the distant future. I however, claim that there is indeed an environmental countermovement in the present day, but that it has been largely disabled by neoliberalization. Additionally, Burawoy is not particularly explicit about *how* marketization might affect the efficacy of the ‘countermovement’, while I highlight several specific mechanisms by which this might occur.

In this thesis I discuss the present global environmental crisis, and then propose a conceptual framework that first characterizes the modern environmental movement on the basis of four requisite characteristics that a successful social movement must possess and then describes three specific mechanisms by which neoliberalism specifically blocks or debilitates social movements from being successful. With this established, I move to explain the three mechanisms in more detail, using evidence to illustrate and test my conceptual framework.

# Environmental Crisis and Environmental Movements

We have reached a point in history in which there is widespread scientific consensus that the climate is changing due to anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases. Global climate talks and negotiations have been held since the first World Climate Conference in 1979 in Geneva, Switzerland (Gupta, 2010.) Now, 37 years later, the results have been dismal. Carbon levels in the atmosphere are still on the rise (IPCC 2014), action has been minimal, and many attempts to come to multilateral agreement have been unsuccessful or noncommittal. Those treaties and protocols on climate change that have been agreed upon have been lax and fruitless at best, and the Conference of the Parties (COP) conferences on climate have consistently been met with high expectations and disappointing results. It still remains to be seen how the supposedly binding Paris Agreement will fare in the absence of an international institution with the power to impose sanctions for violating the Agreement.

Moreover, as global carbon emissions have been on the rise consistently since the industrial revolution (IPCC 2014), so have other indicators of environmental malaise continued to increase. Polar ice caps continue to melt at accelerating paces, raising sea levels (IPCC 2007) and jeopardizing the future of innumerable small island nations and coastal cities across the globe. Deforestation rates continue to rise at the cost of incalculable biodiversity and monumental emissions of carbon dioxide, particularly in the South American Amazon, Southeast Asia, and the Congo River Basin in Africa (McGuffie et al, 1995; Laurance, 1999.) The world's oceans have continued to acidify (IPCC 2014), with incredibly perverse effects on the dissolution of coral reefs and other marine species in the world's oceans (Doney et al, 2009), denoting not only

a huge loss in biodiversity but also increasing vulnerability to large hurricanes or typhoons (Lugo, Rogers, & Nixon, 2000.) Massive storms are becoming more and more frequent each year (Webster et al., 2005), subjecting the developing world in particular to disproportionate incidence of natural disaster. Fires ravage Australia (Hennessy et. al, 2005) and the western US (Westerling et al, 2006) more severely each year. Fisheries flirt with collapse (Myers & Worm, 2003), crop failures leave millions hungry (Patz et al, 2005), desertification leaves more and more land uninhabitable (Kassas, 1995), and pollution leaves millions sick and dying (Steingraber, 1997.) I call the accumulation of these numerous and diverse environmental issues an *impending environmental crisis*, as most of this damage is irreversible and carries serious human consequences. In response to this impending crisis, environmental movements from indigenous groups in Ecuador to ranchers in Montana, to civilians in Greece, and students in the U.S. and beyond are calling for state action on climate and environmental issues with increased fervor.

Meaningful action to confront these environmental ills will require extensive policy intervention from national governments. However, government action on environmental issues is not agreeable to neoliberal policy regimes (MacEwan, 1999.) Environmental regulation requires government involvement in global or domestic markets, but neoliberalism is sympathetic to corporate and private sector interests like free markets, flexible workforces, and the dissolution of trade unions (Harvey, 2005), and therefore deplores state intervention that does not cater to these precepts. Neoliberalism does not agree with regulations that might subordinate economic relations to societal values, so to speak. Many state interventions in the market, such as regulations on pollution or bans on trade from sources deemed environmentally unsustainable, for example, are policies sought out of societal values and necessarily restrict market autonomy



and the freedom of transnational corporations. As such, environmental regulations and neoliberalism are often necessarily oppositional and environmental issues serve as a good example of the re-embedding force of civil society and the disembedding force of neoliberalism.

In the face of neoliberalization and considerable social discontent in response to ecological instability, it is time, Polanyi might argue, for a counter movement to re-embed global economic relations into a realm of social and cultural control (Burawoy, 2015.) This might look like a restructuring of economic-political relations that restricts market sovereignty in environmentally sensitive situations (reflecting a societal value for environmental quality.) The political and social context in which social movements operate, however, is an ineluctably important element in determining the possibility for success of the movement. When discussing the importance of this context within social movement literature, some scholars use the term *political opportunity structure*, which I define as a movement's potential for influence on decision-making processes as determined by political, economic, and legal structures (Pellow, 2007.)

Marx and Polanyi do not account for a dynamic, ever-changing political opportunity structure in their respective theories. While the theories may be defensible for the time periods in which they wrote, there are two considerations that must be taken in the assessment of the adequacy of their theories in the contemporary context. First, their descriptions of social movements are relatively vague and homogenizing. They do little to demographically characterize their social movements (except for class, in the case of Marx) or to acknowledge the potential neither for a multiplicity of movements nor for a diversity of factions within the movement itself. Second, the international political economic context, or the political opportunity structure for social movements, has evolved. The new neoliberal political economy that followed embedded

liberalism and the Keynesian welfare state of the post-war years (Harvey, 2005), must be considered in any assessment of the political opportunity structure of environmental movements and the contemporary applicability of Polanyian and Marxist predictions.

Marx claims that Capitalism inherently creates a polarization of society into two classes, the *proletariat* and the *bourgeoisie*. That is, the working class and the owning class, respectively. Under a Capitalist system of production, the worker is forced to sell his labor in the market, turning himself from man into worker. Marx describes an extensive process of *alienation* in which, by the nature of class relations and the orientation of *conditions of production*, the worker is alienated from himself, from the product of his labor, and from nature. His value is measured only by his ability to produce capital, and he lives only to increase the wealth of the ruling class, the *bourgeoisie*. This relationship of exploitation creates a tension between the classes, Marx claims, and gives rise to *class conflict*. Marx argues that this class conflict, rooted in the industrial factory system, will then inevitably lead to a communist revolution of the immiserated, homogenized, and united proletariat. This revolution, which will forcibly dispossess and indeed destroy the bourgeoisie (Marx, 1983), is then marked by the creation of one single class under a system of political economy commonly known as communism, which abolishes private property.

This vision is, however, far too simplistic. First, it proposes a class binary in which all individuals fall into one of two very distinct categories. While today the global ‘middle class’ may be shrinking (Pressman, 2007), it is difficult to argue that there is not one at all.

Furthermore, Marx does not acknowledge the possibility for diversity of class structures or class relations across national contexts. That is to say, while some national contexts may indeed be inflammatory enough to precipitate the sort of *class conflict* that Marx envisioned, it is unlikely

that such class tension be universal, nor that it be effectively organized across national borders. Marx does not address this variation in class relations (nor those of race, ethnicity, or other demographics) across national borders at any significant length, nor does he particularly acknowledge the power of the state apparatus to ameliorate the hardship of the working class.

Second, the assumption that all of society that does not comprise the *bourgeoisie* necessarily forms part of a unified *proletariat* class that shares a common vision and is united on a front against the unchecked capital accumulation of the owning class is problematic. The most unifying statement one might make would be that perhaps the working class all over the world shares in some spirit of discontent, and this would still prove challenging. Indeed, working class movements have taken many forms around the world, from the International Working Men's Association with whom Marx worked, to the Landless Workers Movement (Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra) in Brazil, to Chico Mendes and the rubber-tappers (*seringueiros*), to the zapatistas of Mexico, and the Occupy Movement in the United States. These movements may represent a *proletariat* (all are movements of the lower, working, or agricultural classes), but they are not globally united in opinion, vision, or ideal method for change. Here the diverse identities of disparate movements can be a barrier to transnational and trans-demographic cohesion. Castells (2006) draws important distinctions, for instance, between movements grounded in resistance-based identities, project-based identities, and legitimizing identities, calling attention to incommensurability between the three. It is this diversity within the larger movement that is left unacknowledged in the Marxist conception, much as is the possibility that some factions of the proletariat might even be exacerbating current class relations and perpetuating the present system and structure of political economy.

Polanyi too conceives of social movements very broadly, without even venturing to name the movement he describes, instead opting for the vague notion of ‘society’. In Polanyian theory, society is the agent of a *countermovement* against the commodification and regulatory freedom characteristic of market economies. The countermovement versus the movement of markets towards self-regulation is conceived as comprising a *double movement* between society working to embed economic relations within social relations, and the political forces comprising the *market mechanism*, which pulls society towards a more disembedded state (Polanyi, 1957.)

Polanyi’s use of the term ‘society’ to refer to the agent of social change and dissent in relation to market economies (Burawoy, 2015) is generalizing and homogenizing. It is unclear just what ‘society’ he is referring to. Little effort is done to focus this theory on a more concrete faction of society. Indeed, we cannot conceive of society as the entire population, for then there would be no force against which to organize. Moreover, Polanyi is unable to distinguish between class, nationality, ideological conviction, creed, or other differentiating element in discussing the ‘society’ to which he assigns so much power. In employing such a vague description of the agent of social dissent, Polanyi raises two principal problems. First, he does not acknowledge the possibility for a multiplicity of social movements, thus neglecting the potential for counterproductive antagonisms between social movements with different goals. He does not even, for example, designate a class that might benefit from the market-centric structure of political economy. Second, in so doing, he also leaves the inverse side of the ‘double movement’, the side that works to disembed the economy from social relations, void of agency. He constructs an image in which all of human society is in a tug of war with a faceless entity called the market mechanism, which goes largely undefined as well. While it is important that Polanyi included society in the analysis, thereby acknowledging the role that civil society

inevitably plays in shaping economic relations, I still find this all-encompassing homogenization and lack of definitional clarity to be problematic in the development of any theory concerning social movements.

Given these deficiencies in Marx's and Polanyi's conceptions of social movements, I will now formulate a more precise characterization of the present state of social movements, and environmental movements in particular. To do this, I have drawn on Peter Evans' article "Is an Alternative Globalization Possible?" (2008.) Evans imagines 'counter hegemonic globalization' as a "globally organized project of transformation aimed at replacing the dominant (hegemonic) global regime with one that maximizes democratic political control and makes equitable development of human capabilities and environmental stewardship its priorities." (Evans, 2008; 2).

Evans introduces four general requisites that must be met for a social movement to be successful in achieving 'counter hegemonic globalization'. They are as follows: first, the movement must transcend national boundaries in ways that Polanyi's (and Marx's) conception did not; second, transnational movements must break free of 'organizational silos' and unite diverse constituencies around a focused political cause; third, the movement must have a shared vision of a goal around which they can rally and continue working toward in a concerted fashion; and fourth, the movement must integrate different levels and scales of contestation from the local level to the national and international levels<sup>4</sup> (Evans, 2008.)

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<sup>4</sup> Evans also introduces a concept that he calls "regressive movements for social protections". While Evans does not give a concrete example of a contemporary 'regressive social movement', the way he characterizes it is useful in that it draws attention to the multiplicity of social movements (they are not singular, monolithic, united fronts of the global populace) and the often-antagonistic goals of the varied movements. Regressive social movements, he claims, are still counter-hegemonic in that they may very well oppose neoliberalism, but they are regressive and

To elaborate, Evans argues that singular movements must not be contained by national borders, but instead must exhibit transnational coordination.<sup>5</sup> Second, he argues that the individuals and constituencies constituting this movement must not be homogenous. The demographic of the movement must be diverse and all-encompassing; organizations of different classes, races, and goals must find solidarity in a unified movement. Third, the movement(s) must have a shared vision of what success or victory looks like. Finally, building multi-scalar influence means the movement must be active at the local, national, and global scales. Without this omnipresence across scales, the movement will be unsuccessful according to Evans.

On these four points I argue that global environmental movements: (a) exhibit trends towards transnational coordination, (b) braid together diverse constituencies, albeit in select scenarios and, (c) have diverse visions of change that are similar enough to constitute a common goal, however; (d) although present across scales from local to international, do not exhibit strong counter hegemonic goals across these scales and therefore are currently unable to effectively challenge neoliberal hegemony.

Transnational unity around environmental issues is far from being a universal characteristic, but instances of such cohesion are becoming more commonplace. 350.org has created a habit of conglomerating thousands of photos of people from dozens of countries forming the 350.org

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antagonistic in that they come from the top and hold very different ideas and ideals of reform than Evans' 'counter hegemonic globalization'. He cautions that these movements may very well exacerbate and even accelerate the trend of state repression of social unrest that has so characterized the upswing of neoliberalism (Evans, 2008.)

<sup>5</sup> Pellow (2007) draws important attention to the delicacy of this issue as it crosses borders between the Global North and the Global South. He explains that the struggles of transnational social movements are incredibly racialized and that, if proper care is not exercised, this transnational coordination can constitute *environmental colonialism*, which would serve to perpetuate racialized and racially unequal relationships between the North and South.

symbols in unique and interesting ways. This centrality around the 350.org symbol and their message that 350 ppm of CO<sub>2</sub> is the maximum safe amount to have in the atmosphere has united folks from the pacific islands and sub-saharan Africa to activists in London and New York City, to small towns or villages in South America and eastern Europe, to the Middle East and far east Asia. In a similar fashion, the fossil fuel divestment movement has also seen a decentralized, international approach to tackling the financial end of the multifarious environmental movement. These examples seem to suggest that the environmental movement has indeed united and coordinated movements across national borders, as exemplified by 350.org in particular, but also through global organizations such as Greenpeace, the Basel Action Network, the Pesticide Action Network, and Global Response (Pellow, 2006) that have distinct movements in many countries all gathering around central issues to form the global conglomerate of activism. Furthermore, Ayres (2004) suggests a coherent transnational unity of the anti-globalization movements, which are largely grounded in social and environmental concerns, against the WTO as well as NAFTA, CUFTA, and other free trade agreements.

The degree of collaboration amongst environmental movements with differing identities and goals varies considerably. While separated by their particular sets of foci, as well as cultural, linguistic, strategic, geographical and other such barriers, we have witnessed instances of a grand coming together of several of these spatially separate movements, such as at the People's Climate March in New York City in September of 2014 and more recently at the Conference of the Parties in Paris in December 2015. Klein (2014) offers evidence for unity across constituencies in her book as well, citing examples from anti-tar sands (and related anti-pipeline) movements and anti-fracking movements all over the world from Native Americans and ranchers in the U.S. and Canada to cross-generational and all-encompassing public dissent in Greece.

While this unity may not be universal or perfect, these examples do suggest a trend towards greater cohesion across constituencies.<sup>6</sup>

It remains ambiguous whether or not the environmental movement has ‘captured the collective imagination’ so to speak.<sup>7</sup> I am tempted to say it is true in some respect, as populations around the world can all imagine (whether or not the actual image be the same) a better world in which human well-being and the environment are priorities, democracy works, and we have a system that will not yield climatic disaster and will work for all. Indeed, all factions of the environmental movement have visions of what ‘victory’ looks like on the local scale. While this may be different in every context, a true ‘victory’ for the environmental movement would necessarily be a composite of multitudes of smaller local victories. I therefore contend that distinct sects of the environmental movement need a common vision of justice and sustainability, and that it is inevitable and even necessary that they have appropriately differentiated visions of ‘victory’ as appropriate to the geo-cultural context.

The question of multi-scalar influence and presence of the environmental movement is a complicated one. On a superficial level, it appears that environmental interests may indeed pervade several levels of influence, present on the grassroots level as well as municipal, domestic, and international scales. The environmental cause has become a popular and necessary facet of governance and institutional focus. The environmental cause however, is not

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<sup>6</sup> Keck and Sikkink (1999) describe a process of *venue shopping* that explains one of the processes by which differentiated social movements center around issues that might not be directly related to their central cause. They cite the example of how many indigenous rights groups found more success framing their plight as an environmental issue than as a human rights issue. It is entirely possible that the environmental movement is that effective venue for a fair number of disparate movements around the world, and that this tactic constitutes part of the ‘braiding together of constituencies’.

<sup>7</sup> Choudry (2010), who describes social movements as “delinked but not disparate”, claims that this common vision is necessary in order to avoid compartmentalization across national borders.



always counter-hegemonic in nature, and as such does little to support the actual goals of the counter hegemonic environmental movement that stands to effect real change. While national-level organizations such as the Environmental Protection Agency in the United States and international-level institutions such as the World Bank have adopted the environmental cause, these institutions simultaneously embody the very neoliberal ideals and processes of operation that the counter hegemonic environmental movement stands to oppose (Holifield, 2004; Ervine, 2007.) As I explain later, neoliberalism has bent these institutions and the environmental cause to meet neoliberal ends (through corporate influence in government, neoliberal paths of development, or internalized market-centric strategies) and further the institutional entrenchment of neoliberalism. The counter hegemonic faction of the movement then, is still primarily a grassroots movement, disregarding the greenwashed attempts of businesses, governments, financial institutions, and NGOs to incorporate sustainability into their goals. Choudry (2010) argues a similar point, arguing that large NGOs that cooperate with government and corporations lose their critical discourse and tend to focus more on making change from within the economic system, rather than challenging the foundational ideology behind it. The more counter hegemonic discourse, he argues, sits with small NGOs.

Ultimately, I claim that many factions of the modern environmental movement, in simultaneously pushing for environmental regulation (a re-embedding force), are often times counter hegemonic in that their interests are innately in opposition to the globally dominant neoliberal regime. However, despite often exhibiting unity across diverse constituencies and national borders, and commonly motivated by the image of a safer, more sustainable, just and equitable world, the movement's political opportunity structure may be deficient in the proper institutional pathways to build multi-scalar influence from the local to the global and effect real

counter hegemonic change, leaving the movement stranded at the grassroots level of dissent. It is then the fourth precondition presented by Evans that is the most significant in preventing the success of the counter hegemonic environmental movement.

Furthermore, I must make three other important points on social movements. First, not every individual or collection thereof that is politically discontent and pursuing actions of dissent necessarily constitutes part of the environmental movement (Castells, 2006). Second, not every group exhibiting dissent is necessarily counter hegemonic (Evans, 2008), and groups who do not fit into the ‘environmental’ category could be either sympathetic or antagonistic to the goals of the counter hegemonic environmental movement. Third, not all movements that comprise part of the environmental movement conglomerate are necessarily counter hegemonic. Sects of environmentalism may indeed have been assimilated into neoliberal frameworks while abandoning (consciously or otherwise) practices that are oppositional to the market-centric discourse of neoliberal hegemony (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014; Pellow, 2006.)

Given that the movement is still primarily structured at the grassroots and local level, what is needed to build multiscalar influence and achieve what Evans calls ‘counter hegemonic globalization?’ I argue that any change that this movement may precipitate will require a political opportunity structure that provides an institutional medium through which the movement may build multi-scalar influence, free from the corrupt influence of neoliberal institutional structures that would inevitably attempt to assimilate the pathway into a neoliberal framework. This could be the pathway of the nation-state, the NGO, or other multinational organizations. However, this might be harder to find than one might presume. As I argue later, neoliberalism has largely reduced the number of institutional bodies through which social

movements might exercise counter hegemonic influence through extensive neoliberal legislation, the assimilation of forces of dissent into neoliberal frameworks, and financial coercion.

Related to the rise of neoliberalism as it concerns social movements, I argue much like Michael Burawoy (2015) that the heyday of neoliberalization has decreased the political opportunity structure<sup>8</sup> of society (the environmental movement) that might permit it to re-embed the economy into social relations, or otherwise construct an organized, multi-scalar movement. While Burawoy argues (and I believe a requisite characteristic of a ‘countermovement’ as he imagines it is that it be successful) that the countermovement is still in the distant future, I argue instead that the movement is now, in the present day, and that it is instead paralyzed by neoliberalism, unable to effect real change. Furthermore, I propose a series of mechanisms by which this paralysis and narrowing of the political opportunity structure occurs. They are numerous and most certainly incomplete, but useful in the theoretical conception of neoliberal proliferation and perpetuation.

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<sup>8</sup> Burawoy does not use ‘political opportunity structure’ terminology, I do.

# Neoliberalization and Political Opportunity

Neoliberalism as I define it can be understood to be a bundle of political, economic, and cultural beliefs and ideologies, as well as practical and institutional organizations and structures that, though numerous and variant in practical form, all cater to and center around three central institutional pillars: private property, free markets, and the rule of law to uphold the two former. In other words, networks of individuals and institutions that adhere to neoliberal doctrine believe that all things should be privatized and be able to be owned privately, that the chore of determining the distribution of that private property should be left to a system of autonomous, uninhibited markets and market actors, and that these paramount values, as well as the success of the corporate and private sectors (the economy) be upheld and reinforced by “legislation” across various scales of governance (by legislation I mean rules codified and enforced by governments and international organizations at the local, national, and global levels.)<sup>9</sup>

To extrapolate this definition a little, neoliberalism is an elite-driven ideology<sup>10</sup> that guides and informs the decisions of economic policy that is favorable to the free

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<sup>9</sup> While neoliberalism has no universally accepted definition, the ideological underpinnings of neoliberalization seem to be more steadfast, and it is from this ideological basis that I construct my definition. Brenner, Peck, and Theodore (2009) discuss the variegated geographies, modalities, and pathways of neoliberalism that make defining neoliberalism such a daunting task. It is therefore with such a broad definition that I mean to both include all the diverse forms that neoliberalism has assumed across geographies, while simultaneously assigning it the characteristics that allow for an accurate interpretation of the general pattern of neoliberalism that is perceivable across those same geographies.

<sup>10</sup> While I do not dedicate much space in this paper to discussing the role of an elite capitalist class in the global proliferation of neoliberal doctrine, nor the mechanisms by which they are the true ‘winners’ in this particular organization of political economy, this is important in assigning the agency to neoliberalism that Polanyi so lacked in describing the *market mechanism*. Downey (2015) and Domhoff (1990) discuss the role of the global power elite

movement of goods across state-lines, privatization of public services, decreased public spending, flexibility in labor markets, and high rates of foreign investment. Insofar as the aforementioned is true, neoliberalism caters to the centralization and concentration of capital within an elite corporate class, the integration of all spheres of human society into the broad reach of the global market<sup>11</sup>, and the innate supposition that free markets will ensure the wellbeing of humans, nature, and continued economic growth.

As I will demonstrate in the following sections, neoliberalism has shrunk the political opportunity structure of environmental movements through a variety of mechanisms that I categorize into three main groups: legislation, assimilation, and financial coercion. I define legislation loosely to include actual domestic and municipal legislation as well as international treaties and agreements subject to enforcement by some institutional body. This legislation serves to insulate civil society from decision-making processes, increase corporate influence on decision-making, and protect neoliberal hegemony from social dissent. Assimilation refers to the capture of traditional pathways of civil society influence, such as democratic state government and NGOs, into neoliberal frameworks, deepening the neoliberal project via the internalization of neoliberal ideology within these pathways. Financial coercion refers to the use of debt and high finance to force states into adopting neoliberal ideologies in their economic and legal structures (for example, structural adjustment programs administered by the IMF and World Bank in particular.)

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extensively, and Ong (2007) and MacEwan (1999) touch on this dynamic as well. For all extensive purposes, I concur with this attribution of agency.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Polanyi claims that the 'self-regulation' towards which the *market mechanism* is always working must commodify everything so that everything be subjected to the rule of the market. In doing so, he highlights three *fictitious commodities*: land, labor, and money. These are false commodities, he says, because they were not created for sale on the market, but they are bought and sold on the market anyway.

It is important to note that these are complex issues and, as such, the mechanisms I outline do not each always fit perfectly into only one of the three categorical groupings. There are many instances, for example, in which one particular mechanism falls into two or perhaps even all three of my groupings. Ideally, I would be able to explain them simultaneously, but that is simply not possible. I will do my best to shed light on these overlaps and complex instances of interplay, but the reader should still remain cognizant of this categorical dynamism.

Furthermore, I will urge the reader not to simplify the relationship between these three sections that follow and my definition of neoliberalism. While I have defined neoliberalism on the basis of three foundational pillars, these three sections do not correspond to the three pillars in a ‘one-to-one’ fashion by any means. Instead, the three sections outline general trends in the influence of neoliberal doctrine that are all consistent with the three deified pillars of neoliberalism that I have just reiterated. They all stand to support the autonomy and continued hegemony of the three conceptual pillars in complex, unique ways that often cross my organizational boundaries.

It is through these three primary mechanisms that neoliberalism has narrowed the political opportunity structure of the environmental movement, in effect obstructing many of the pathways that it needs to build multi-scalar influence and challenge neoliberal hegemony on a global scale. By severely limiting the ability of civil society to meet it at the global scale, neoliberalism and the political systems and power structures that embody it largely reduce the ability of the environmental movement to successfully build multi-scalar institutional frameworks that could successfully counter neoliberalism and the elite capitalist class.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> I do not wish to oversimplify neoliberalism here. It is important to note that the relationship between neoliberalism and the political opportunity structure of social movements is different inside every national context,

Furthermore, this outcome could have deterministic undertones. If the political opportunity structure of environmental movements continues to shrink, the possibility for future re-embeddment may be exceedingly slim. Moreover, while neoliberal hegemony continues to negate civil society attempts to pass environmental regulations, the environmental situation continues to deteriorate. Here the temporal consideration becomes troublingly apparent. If environmental action is not taken in some point in the near future, then human society may very well overfill its carbon and pollution sinks, over-exhaust its resources, and over-degrade the environment, pushing the climate and other natural systems past a tipping point where environmental disaster, climate catastrophe, and indeed, the ‘demolition of society’ are inevitable (Hansen, 2009; Polanyi, 1957.) Avoiding a situation in which society crosses a catastrophic environmental tipping point will require substantial action on environmental issues, and thus a “re-embeddment” of economic relations into social relations. However, because neoliberalism continues to constrict the political opportunity structure of environmental movements by blocking their pathways of influence, the possibility for true counter hegemonic change dwindles. It is with this in mind that I propose that a “social tipping point” exists, beyond which civil society will not be able to re-embed the economy in sufficient time to avoid environmental disaster. See figure 1 for a representation of this dynamic, using Polanyian notions of embeddment and disembeddment. Over the course of time (depicted on the y axis) society has oscillated back and forth, moving between states of relative *embeddment* and states of relative *disembeddment*. While the bends in the line depicting the state of embeddment do not

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and as such the effects will be variegated in the same way that neoliberalism and geographies are variegated (Brenner et al, 2009; MacEwan, 1999.) I do however, in adopting a very general definition of neoliberalism, aim to characterize a general trend that describes the relationship as a whole, even though some more localized instances may very well yield entirely different results.

correspond specific points in history<sup>13</sup>, the last bend, at which point the line moves back towards a state of disembeddment, can be understood to be at the onset of modern neoliberalism in the 1970's. If the state of embeddment of the economy were to cross the 'social tipping point', I argue that society would not have the time nor the power to re-embed the economy and avoid environmental crisis. Figure 2 visually lays out how my conceptual framework differs from the theories of Marx and Polanyi.

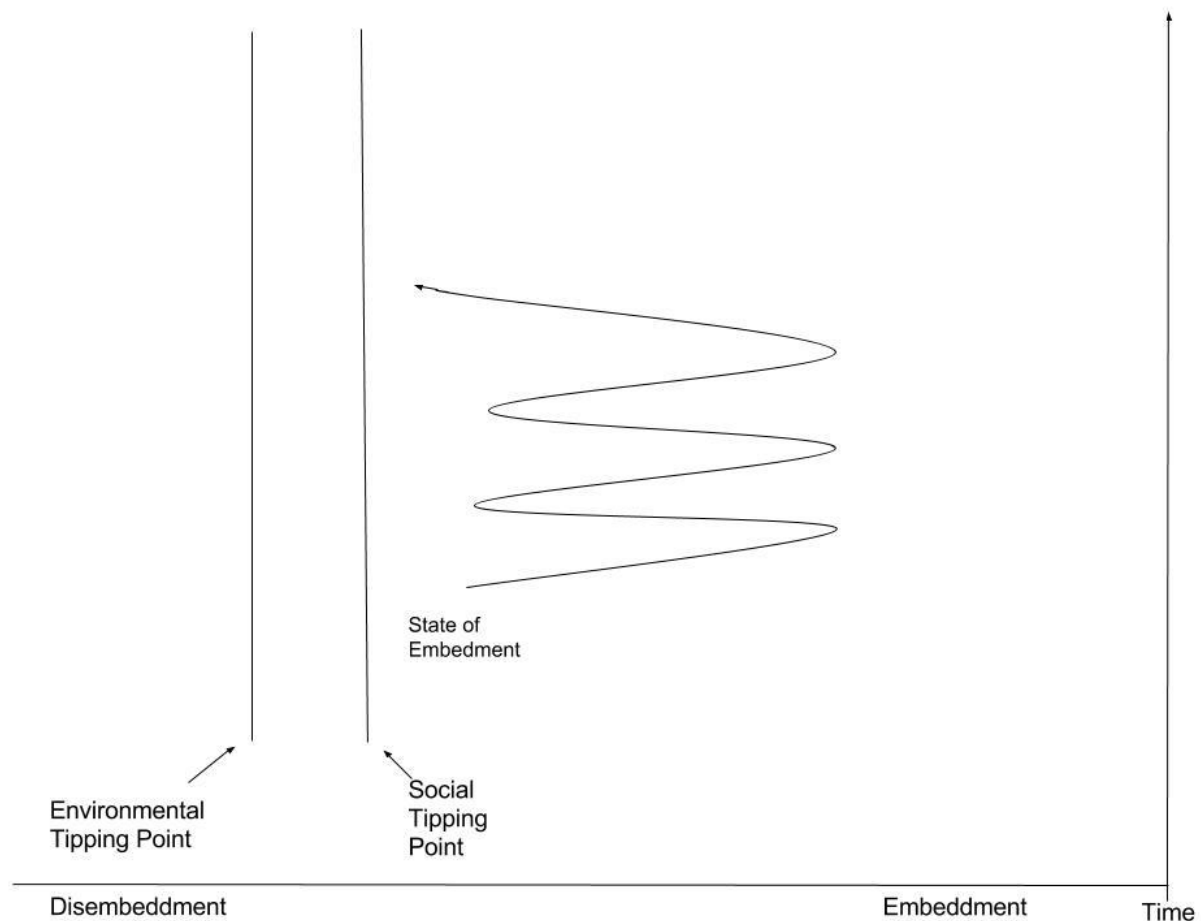


Figure 1. Disembeddment and Tipping Points.

<sup>13</sup> Burawoy (2015) provides a similar depiction, and proposes distinct historical moments for each 'wave' of marketization, as he calls it.



	<b>Capitalism - Class Conflict</b>	<b>Market Mechanism- Double Movement</b>	<b>Neoliberalism - Counter Hegemony</b>
<b>Form of Resistance</b>	Proletariat, Class Conflict	Society, Countermovement	Amalgam of Disparate Counter Hegemonic Grassroots Movements
<b>Driver of Crisis</b>	Capitalism, Alienation of the Worker, Metabolic Rift	Market Mechanism	Neoliberalism
<b>Inhibitor of Resistance Effectiveness</b>	Class Relations, Bourgeoisie, Superstructure, False Consciousness	Double Movement, Fictitious Commodities (Privatization of land, labor, money)	Legislation, Assimilation, Financial Coercion
<b>Possibility for Counter Hegemonic Change</b>	Inevitable	Inevitable	Unlikely

Figure 2. Marx, Polanyi, Bernier: Theories of Crises and Social Movements.

I now transition into the ‘empirical’ portions of my thesis. Here I will provide evidence that supports my conceptual framework. Beginning with ‘legislation’, I explain how domestic legislation, international treaties, and established trade rules serve to constrict the political opportunity structure of environmental movements by shifting decision-making fora away from democratic bodies and into private spheres, allowing undue corporate influence in democratic elections, and repressing civil demonstration. Second, in the ‘Assimilation’ section I show how NGOs, governments, and individuals internalize neoliberal ideology through increased collaboration with corporations and the World Bank knowledge production process. Finally, in ‘Financial Coercion’ I illustrate how structural adjustment loans administered to developing nations by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) force neoliberal restructuring upon debtor countries.

## “Legislation”

Before I commence this section, I need to clarify my use of the term ‘legislation’. I define the term rather loosely to refer to both actual legislation, such as laws passed by the Legislative Branch of the U.S Government or other domestic rulings and to extra-state, international treaties and agreements that, although they might not qualify as ‘legislation’ per se, still set forth a set of rules and norms that are subject to enforcement by international institutions such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), or other forms of governance that hold the authority to enjoin compliance or impose commonly recognized and upheld sanctions.

I focus in on three representative examples that outline a global picture of the *modus operandi* of neoliberal legislation as it interacts with civil society and democracy. I argue that the ultimate effect of legislation is to (a) construct barriers to democratic participation in decision making by insulating the processes from democratic influence, (b) allowing disproportionate corporate influence in decision making relative to civil society, and (c) repressing civil demonstration. To begin, I look at the World Trade Organization and free trade agreements, which represent the global level of ‘legislation’ that institutionalizes neoliberal doctrine and removes decision-making power from the domestic sphere where grassroots movements may still exert notable influence and places it into an insulated international sphere. Second, I discuss Citizens United, a ruling in the United States that distorts the political process in the favor of corporatism<sup>14</sup> and

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<sup>14</sup> Pellow casts important attention on the power dynamic between the state and the corporate private sector: “While many scholars underappreciate the power of corporations, others have considered the adaptive role the state plays in the face of capital. In fact, Bakan argues that the state’s powers have not actually receded in the face of capital’s dominance; they have only shifted and even expanded away from protection of public goods to protection of corporations and private goods.” (Pellow, 2007, 63; Bakan, 2004.) This is important for understanding how this

effectively diminishes the voice of the populace at large. Finally, I explore policies and practices by which anti-neoliberal civil demonstration (i.e., protest and non-violent direct action) is suppressed, again on the level of the nation-state.

In this section it is of particular importance to cast special attention to how the ‘rule of law’ is utilized to uphold the neoliberal values and powers of private property and free markets in the face of popular opposition. That is to say, I argue that this body of “law” both safeguards neoliberal policies and rulings while simultaneously capturing or obstructing the institutional pathways through which civil society might exert counter-hegemonic influence. I stress that while many of the forms of legislation that I reference in this section are by no means unique to neoliberalism, they are a force that serves to quiet dissent against neoliberal structures and processes, hence embodying the ‘rule of law’ to uphold the neoliberal faith in free markets and private property. For example, repression of protest is certainly an older phenomenon than neoliberalism, but it is utilized under neoliberal hegemony to quell civil society opposition as well.

## Free Trade Agreements and the World Trade Organization

Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are multilateral agreements between two or more states that reduce or eliminate trade barriers between the states involved. The parties involved in an FTA, collectively called a “trade bloc” or a “free trade area”, agree to lower or eliminate tariffs or

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increased corporate influence both shrinks the political opportunity structure for anti-neoliberal social movements and reinforces the power of a capitalist elite to push forward the neoliberal policies that benefit corporations and elites (Downey, 2015.)

other such hindrances on the commerce of goods and services crossing borders between the members of the trade bloc. However, external tariffs are usually placed upon trade with nonmember countries (Frankel, 1997.) Such tariffs serve as an incentive for nation-states to sign onto free trade agreements, or else sit with a relative disadvantage in world markets as compared to those states that comprise the trade bloc.

Furthermore, FTAs often go well beyond the simple removal of trade barriers between member countries and have explicit clauses claiming that countries may not pass legislation that unfairly restricts the activity of foreign industry within their borders relative to their own industries. This stipulation, called ‘national treatment’, is contained in almost all FTAs and asserts that governments make no distinction between goods produced locally and those produced by foreign firms (Fieleke, 1995; McCarthy, 2004). That is to say, free trade agreements are consistent with neoliberal beliefs in the uninhibited reach of the market.<sup>15</sup> Free trade agreements then, serve to break down the barriers and limits for markets to cross national borders in search of lower costs and prices, or ‘efficiency’. They are the breakdown of regulation that specifically inhibits the capacity of markets to ‘self-regulate’, and as such are one of the organizational, legislative elements of neoliberalism. The World Trade Organization (WTO) is one of the multilateral institutions responsible for enforcing compliance with the rules established by free trade agreements. Other arenas for settling free-trade related disputes are the World Bank’s International Centre for the Settlement of Investment Disputes (ICSID) and the United Nations Commission for International Trade Law (UNCITRAL), however I focus specifically on the WTO as an example.

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, McCarthy (2004) explicitly calls trade agreements “neoliberal governance”.

Created in late 1993, the formation of the WTO was perhaps the most notable outcome of the Uruguay Round of comprehensive international trade agreements under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).<sup>16</sup> The purpose of the WTO is to facilitate the implementation of multilateral trade agreements, serve as a forum for future negotiations, administer dispute settlement mechanisms and trade policy review, and cooperate with the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) (Fieleke, 1995).

The delegates from the 117 nations present at the Uruguay Round in Geneva in 1993 created an institution with one of the most powerful enforcement procedures of all international agreements. The WTO is armed with a dispute resolution process in which WTO tribunals can issue compliance rulings to member states that are automatically binding. The member state is then forced to either comply or face heavy trade sanctions or fines. Still more, the only manner to overturn the ruling is unanimous consensus on behalf of the rest of the member states. This has no precedent, in that this is the only example of an international agreement in which consensus is required to *stop* an action (Wallach & Woodall, 2004.) The dispute resolutions system, as outlined by the WTO's Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU), replaced the GATT's old dispute resolution system, which relied more on diplomacy, as opposed to the DSU, which is unique in its ability to unilaterally administer and enforce the myriad Uruguay Round agreements (Wallach & Woodall, 2004). Here I illustrate how the dispute settlement process transfers decision-making fora to international spheres that are structurally inaccessible to civil society.

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<sup>16</sup> The Uruguay Round was the eighth installment in the series of forums comprising the multilateral trade negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Launched in Punta del Este, Uruguay in 1986 and concluded seven years later in Switzerland, this particular "round" of negotiations was more all-encompassing than any of its predecessors (Fieleke, 1995.)

The characteristics of the WTO dispute resolution process that most stand out could be argued to be secrecy and inaccessibility. The process begins when a member country files a complaint against another member country's policy, usually out of the interest of domestic business(es). The dispute panels (both the lower panels and the Appellate Body) are held in secret, exclude the public and the press, and restrict access to the documents produced to the countries involved in the dispute, who are not obligated to release the documents to the public. When a challenge is instigated, in the U.S. as well as in most other member countries, the government is not required to give notice to the public, much less give the public the opportunity to comment on the decision, further insulating the proceedings from civil society influence and allowing only business interests to decide which (and whether) cases are brought to the WTO (Wallach & Woodall, 2004; McCarthy, 2004.) This in addition to the fact that WTO panels are not required to seek information and technical advice from outside individuals or bodies of experts, makes it impossible for environmental or others interest groups to stop WTO attacks that might be antagonistic to the public interest. Even if the WTO panel does decide to seek outside advice, it is prohibited for citizens of the countries involved in the dispute to serve on expert review groups, eclipsing the possibility for the policy experts most knowledgeable on issues relevant to the domestic measure to influence the proceedings whatsoever. Moreover, the few instances in which groups have sent *amicus* briefs to the panels, the briefs have been sent back without having been consulted. The nature of these processes specifically prevents proponents of health, environmental, or other public interest policies from gaining enough information to offer any input (Wallach & Woodall, 2004.)

Even after a ruling is passed, civil society is still restricted from influence. No outside appeal to a WTO ruling is available. Once a ruling passes review by a panel of three trade experts, there is only one possibility for appeal. A government (and *only* a national government) can only appeal through the WTO's Appellate Body. The Appellate Body is made up of "persons of recognized authority with demonstrated expertise in law, international trade, and the subject matter of the Agreements generally" (249) that must be permanent WTO staff on payroll, again negating the possibility for environmental or labor experts to serve on the Body (Wallach & Woodall, 2004.)

These types of provisions that allow business interests to nullify attempts at social and environmental regulation do not stop here however. Much as governments are allowed to bring claims against other member country governments under WTO provisions, similar provisions for investors are often included in free trade agreements. Investor protections found in the Investor-State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) system contained in many FTAs, such as those included in chapter 11 of NAFTA, establish a new system of private arbitration for foreign investors to bring legal action against governments for passing legislation that present damages to their operations or their property, including in the form of anticipated profits (Greider, 2001; Sierra Club, 2016.) This effectively shifts sovereignty away from the nation-state and to corporate-dominated fora, posing a direct threat to democracy. These sections of free trade agreements have intensified the argument surrounding the question of whether globalization should trump national sovereignty and, under such clauses of investor protections, it most certainly does. Indeed, according to Greider (2001): "Mexico, Canada, and the United States effectively waived the doctrine of sovereign immunity...when they signed NAFTA."



Stephen Gill describes this process of crafting investor protections and constructing corporate immunity *new constitutionalism*, the aim of which he claims is to “allow dominant economic forces to be increasingly insulated from democratic rule and popular accountability” (Gill, 1998, 27.) The processes by which he claims investor protections accomplish this are threefold: (a) to make governments operate within the context of market values and market discipline, and even make them facilitators thereof, by “locking-in” already-adopted free market policies through the use of legal guarantees and sanctions to favor private determination of economic policy, ultimately protecting capital from popular democracy; (b) extensive measures to construct markets<sup>17</sup> and protect private property rights nationally and internationally and; (c) to protect against the social response to neoliberalization (i.e., double movement) via a strategy of “cooptation of opposition” (Gill, 1998), which I later refer to as *assimilation*.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, the ‘Non-Violation Clause’ of the WTO, commonly referred to as “Nullification and Impairment” extends the top-down reach of the WTO dispute resolution mechanism even deeper into the realms of domestic policy. These provisions allow governments to submit complaints that ‘any benefit accruing to a WTO member country directly or indirectly under WTO rules is being nullified or impaired or the attainment of any objective of that Agreement is being impeded...whether or not it conflicts with the provisions of that Agreement’ (Wallach & Woodall, 2004, 250; Cho, 1998.) Simply stated, challenges submitted under this clause do not require government noncompliance with the rules in WTO agreements in order to be legitimate. Instead, a government must only claim that the actions of one country have impaired the benefits that they could reasonably have expected to attain from the Uruguay Rounds. Hence the pool of

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<sup>17</sup> Gill is referring to what Marx calls ‘primitive accumulation’, Polanyi calls ‘fictitious commodities’, and is often referred to generally as ‘enclosure’.

<sup>18</sup> The aim of *new constitutionalism* as described by Gill, then, fits perfectly with my definition of neoliberalism.

domestic policies that can be repealed top-down by trade interests grows even bigger, further lessening the control that society or the state can exert over markets and extending the rights and power of transnational corporations that directly benefit from subordinating environmental values to trade.

Free trade agreements and the WTO, then, serve to shift the locus of decision-making on which trade-related issues (such as agriculture, textiles, mining, and intellectual property rights, for example) are made to the global level. Since treaties are established between nation-states, and are negotiated and deliberated at the global (realistically, global-regional) level with input from corporations but not from other interest groups, these free trade agreements are outside the realm of influence of civil society. FTAs are drafted in private proceedings that are closed to the public, but open to corporate representatives (Downey, 2015; Wallach & Woodall, 2004.) As such, civil society is unable to see the content of the deal until it is largely complete. Therefore, the first distortion of democracy in favor of corporate influence begins with the creation of the agreements. For example, the Trans Pacific Partnership has recently released the final text of the free trade deal, five years after the process began, when it is nearly too late to influence the finalized content. The release of the text is the first chance that civil society has had to look at the contents of the trade deal (Sierra Club, 2015.) A 2014 report by the Washington Post reveals that 85% of the committee members comprising the 28 different trade advisory committees that provide counsel to the Obama administration on the Trans-Pacific Partnership represent corporate interests. Out of 566 committee members, only 16 come from NGOs, and 14 from academia, law, and other organizations (Ingraham, 2014.)

Excluded from influence in the formative stages of free trade deals, civil society is also unable to challenge the rulings based on these deals after they are made, as this ability is restricted to national governments and private investors. The relationship between FTAs and civil society is therefore top-down, shifting the forum of decision-making on final rulings related to local-level issues such as the banning of harmful chemicals or fracking away from democratically elected domestic bodies to global-level secretive WTO tribunals (Wallach & Woodall, 2004.)

Indeed, when legislation for the establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) was approved in U.S. Congress in 1994, it was done without the support of a single environmental, conservation or animal welfare group (Wallach & Woodall, 2004.) Furthermore, many environmental and labor groups opposed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), but it was signed anyway (Klein, 2014.)

Moreover, it makes perfect sense that environmental groups would be opposed to these free trade agreements. The rules under FTAs are often made indifferent to local social or environmental repercussions, or otherwise use soft, non-binding language in sections concerning the environment (Sierra Club, 2015.) Looking at the record of WTO cases, almost every single health or environmental law challenged in WTO proceedings has been declared a barrier to trade and either annulled or changed to be in accordance with the WTO rulings.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, the terms of the WTO create almost explicitly anti-environmental incentives. For example, ‘tariff escalation’ - the escalation of tariffs from relatively low for raw materials to increasingly high for value-added goods - encourages ‘rip-and-ship’ style exploitation of natural resources,

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<sup>19</sup> Exceptions include France’s ban on asbestos and the instance in which the U.S. simply lowered (not repealed) requirements of the Endangered Species Act specifically related to sea turtles to comply with a WTO ruling.

effectively creating a one-way stream of natural resources from the Global South to the Global North, leaving environmental destruction in the former. Increased trade flows following the free trade agreements facilitated by the WTO also cause serious threats to biodiversity through the increased rate of infestations by invasive species brought in with foreign products. Furthermore, the all-importance of WTO rulings is increasingly undermining previously existing multilateral environmental agreements (Wallach & Woodall, 2004.)

I now provide examples that illustrate how free trade agreements and dispute settlement processes form top-down power-dynamics to exercise sovereignty over democratically elected government, often to the detriment of the environment. I provide examples from Canada, Mexico, and India in which local-level environmental controls and rulings have been effectively exercised by national or subnational interests, only to be undermined by WTO enforcement of international trade law or similar dispute settlement processes under NAFTA.

In 2010 the Italian solar company Silfab decided to locate its first solar plant in Ontario, Canada. Auspiciously, Ontario had just finished passing its comprehensive Green Energy and Green Economy Act, which included a ‘feed-in tariff’ program that promised very specific benefits for installing solar panels. Under the ‘local-content’ provision of the plan, renewable energy providers would be allowed to sell excess power back to the grid provided that at least forty percent of their workforce and materials were local to Ontario. The environmental benefits were twofold, a transition to green energy that would also eliminate much of the carbon emissions associated with foreign sourcing of energy and materials. Furthermore, the Italian company had bought an old abandoned building from an auto parts factory, where it planned to utilize much of the same machinery to provide jobs for many of those left unemployed when the previous

business failed. This seemed the perfect win-win solution for Ontario. However, Japan and the European Union claimed that the local-content provision of the plan discriminated against equipment for renewable energy facilities that might have been produced outside of Ontario. The WTO concurred and ruled against Canada, declaring the buy-local provisions illegal according to the established international trade law. The province quickly removed the local-content provision from the program. However, this provision was vital to the success of the solar company in a relatively cloudy climate, and its removal caused foreign investors to rescind their financial support for factory expansion (Klein, 2014.)

More recently, the United States won a WTO dispute that it filed against India following solar legislation passed in 2011 as part of India's National Solar Mission that sought to eliminate chronic energy shortages without creating pollution. In response to a drop in solar exports to India after the legislation was passed, the U.S. claimed that the domestic content requirements in India's new legislation violated articles in both the TRIMS (Trade-Related Investment Measures) and GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) agreements that dealt with 'national treatment provisions' (WTO.)

In 1997 the state of San Luis Potosí, Mexico blocked US waste-disposal company Metalclad from constructing a waste site in the village of Guadalucazar following complaints from residents that the Mexican government was not enforcing environmental standards and that the waste site endangered the town's water supply. Metalclad used the clauses under chapter 11 to sue the Mexican government and claim \$16.7 million in damages (Greider, 2001.)

Similarly in 2012, Lone Pine Resources (a United States oil and gas company) sued Canada for \$230 million following a recently passed fracking moratorium in Quebec. Lone Pine filed the suit on the basis of NAFTA's rules concerning expropriation and 'fair and equitable treatment', complaining that the moratorium amounted to an "arbitrary, capricious, and illegal revocation of the Enterprise's right to mine for oil and gas under the St. Lawrence River" in arbitration documents. The case is still active, but regardless of the result the government of Canada will have spent a large sum of money defending itself (Sierra Club, 2015; Klein, 2014.)

In one of the largest retaliatory cases under ISDS protections, TransCanada, the company behind the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline, filed a lawsuit suing the United States for \$15 billion following the rejection of the pipeline proposal. After years of significant protest and demonstration from civil society, the Obama administration rejected the Keystone XL pipeline in November, 2015 out of an interest for protecting American communities and environments lying in the project's proposed path, as well as to protect the global climate (Sierra Club, 2016.) However, under NAFTA, TransCanada is protected from such regulation and seeks extensive compensation for a loss in 'expected revenues' from the United States government. The outcome of the lawsuit remains to be seen.

Aside from circumventing democratic processes and bearing harsh consequences for people and the environment, such instances of retaliatory action under free trade rules likely also serve as a disincentive for governments to enforce environmental regulation or listen to the complaints of the citizenry. Moreover, even when states or municipalities decide to pass environmental regulation, it is often likely to be challenged on the basis of free trade law. Based on the history of WTO rulings on trade versus environment issues, environmental values are unlikely to trump

the neoliberal prerogative of uninhibited free trade. These decisions are made in secret WTO tribunals, constituting a forum-shift that extracts the decision-making power from the nation-state and puts it in the hands of trade-centered institutions and international capital.

I have discussed how under FTAs and WTO sovereignty, legislation made on the international scale without the influence or input of civil society has served to weaken both democracy and environmental protection. By subordinating environmental protection to international trade, free trade agreements are able to nullify environmental regulation such as with the cases of fracking in Quebec and the Metalclad waste site in Mexico. Neoliberal commitment to free trade therefore constricts the political opportunity structure of environmental movements by (a) excluding civil society from the process of creating and drafting free trade agreements, and (b) taking the sovereignty of local, democratic bodies to pass environmental regulation and subordinating it to corporate-dominated private tribunals on the international level. However, legislation that weakens democracy and favors capital can also be found on the domestic level, as I explore next.

## Domestic-Level Inhibitions on Democratic Intervention

Having analyzed the anti-democratic processes of the World Trade Organization and free trade agreements, a form of decision-making that takes place on an international scale practicing a *de facto* global sovereignty, I now turn to legislation on the national level. There are various laws that pass in domestic spheres that effectively reduce the power that civil society has to exercise its voice, in particular when trying to effect change that would threaten the pillars of

neoliberalism. Here I look at several specific examples that serve to represent a larger trend. I begin by looking at Citizen's United, a judicial ruling that set a legal precedent for the interpretation of the first amendment that permits incredibly large corporate influence on 'democratic' elections in the United States. This disproportionate influence allows capitalist corporate elites to promote neoliberal policy out of corporate and personal interest. Second, I look closely at a number of anti-protest laws that essentially serve as grounds for government to limit and repress any sort of demonstration. Although repression of protest is hundreds of years old, much older than neoliberalism, the formal laws have been recently created, or otherwise rejuvenated after a long period of dormancy, to repress counter hegemonic protest. Note that these protests are usually sparked by political inaction or unresponsiveness to the demands of civil society through more traditional pathways of influence (elections and the democratic state, for example.)

## Citizens United

Citizens United is an emblematic example of how the corporate sector has (legally) entered into, taken a disproportionate role in, and distorted election processes. Citizens United is a judicial decision that has allowed unfair influence from corporations (arguably the ultimate winners under neoliberal regimes) in the United States. The judicial decision falls under 'legislation' because it has set a legal precedent reaffirming the concept of 'corporate personhood' which supports the notion that corporations, like people, are protected by the first amendment right to free speech. The interpretation of a fundamental constitutional law that is central to American democracy such as the first amendment that extends the right to corporations allows powerful



neoliberal actors to influence democratic decision-making. That is, corporate elites, some of the largest benefactors of neoliberal policy, have been given the right to disproportionate influence in electing government officials. Citizens United is an example of the neoliberal interpretation of legislation that paves that extends the reach of neoliberal corporate influence.

First of all, “Citizens United” refers to two distinct but intimately related things. First, it refers to the conservative political organization Citizens United, founded in 1988, largely funded by the Koch brothers, and ultimately dedicated to the causes of limited government, freedom of enterprise, strong families, national security. In a nutshell, the organization supports and advances neoliberal policy reform. Second, it refers to an important judicial decision between Citizens United and the Federal Election Commission.

*Citizens United vs. FEC* was the court case that followed Citizens United’s 2009 challenge to the 2002 Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, which strictly prohibited corporations (and unions) from funding media outlets to advertise for or against political candidates in the time leading up to elections (Briffault, 2010.) During the 2008 election season, Citizens United wanted to pay for and broadcast an ad for a film that criticized democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton. Unhappy with the reform act, Citizens United decided to challenge the Federal Election Commission (FEC), the authority on campaign financing and election rules. The case went through the lower courts, was appealed, and the law was eventually overturned in a 5-4 Supreme Court decision.

The first thing to note here is the concept of ‘corporate personhood’. This is the legal term for the fact that in the United States corporations are legally considered to be people and are

therefore entitled to the same rights and protections as individuals. While corporate personhood is nothing new, corporations have only been able to use it to advance neoliberal policy since the onset of neoliberalism in the 1970's. The Supreme Court decision on *Citizens United vs FEC* is largely consistent with this conviction, saying that corporations, or 'associations of individuals', should be entitled to protection under the first amendment right to free speech (Pollman, 2012.) Setting aside the ethical, moral, and practical questions that this decision poses, considerable attention should be cast on the practical implications of this ruling. First of all, the court ruling on *Citizens United* clears the way for serious corporate financing of political campaigns (and unions, but corporations have far more money and resources), a powerful tool for actually getting a candidate elected. As such, any given politician inclined to advance their career has a very strong incentive to accept this corporate financing and indeed, virtually all politicians do (with the exception of Senator Bernie Sanders of Vermont, who has adopted a grassroots funding model). However, as a precondition for campaign financing, a corporation will likely want the politician they are funding to exercise their political power to make decisions that favor the corporate interests of their financiers, or else run the risk of losing corporate funding that is considered to be absolutely essential to remain competitive in any given election cycle. It is exactly by this process that politicians further cater to the interests of their corporate partners instead of the interests of their constituents, who do not have the same level of capital available to influence their politicians, constituting a general shift of influence away from civil society and towards the corporate sector.

Second, even in the age of information, most citizens do not explore the seas of information at their disposal in formulating their opinions. Instead, the mainstream media largely determine what information gets the most time and attention (Crow & Boykoff, 2014.) If corporate funding

can buy advertisements and media attention, then it can also buy the attention of the masses. Essentially, it can control what information people are exposed to, and guide popular opinion in a desired direction.

A central implication of this ruling is the empowerment of corporations, or the magnification of corporate voice. Corporations, which make money by selling goods or services, are the engine of consumer culture and the ultimate beneficiaries of open markets, flexibility in the workforce so as to pay workers less and improve their bottom line, and other such policy prescriptions central to neoliberal practices, now have a largely disproportionate voice in political elections and procedures. As a result of the Citizens United decision, corporations are legally permitted to exert gargantuan force in pushing the neoliberal Trojan horse through the long and arduous political election process.

Conversely, public, non-business interests are stifled in the context of inflated corporate influence. Grassroots environmental movements trying to influence institutional, structural outcomes by electing representatives who could be potential allies on national or international scales (an important level of representation in the era of neoliberal globalization) see their voices and influence repressed by this type of legislation, further debilitating the opposition. When attempts at using traditional pathways of influence are immobilized, civil society and environmental movements often resort to non-traditional pathways of influence such as protest and nonviolent direct action. However, neoliberal legislation on national and municipal levels have come to meet and quell the counter hegemonic opposition inside this sphere as well.

## Anti-Protest Laws

Protesting and other forms of demonstration often emerge when civil society finds itself in a situation in which traditional pathways of influence over the political economy, such as representative democracy, are ineffective and not yielding results. As neoliberalism continues to spread across the planet, largely ignoring the voice of civil society (MacEwan, 1999), protests are surfacing around issues such as climate change including protests at the 2015 Conference of the Parties in Paris (COP 21) and the People's Climate March in New York City in 2014. Other examples include protests in Washington D.C. against the corporate-supported Keystone XL Pipeline and demonstrations against oil drilling on indigenous lands in Canada and South America. In response, cities, provinces, and nation-states around the world have passed extensive legislation, sometimes temporary and other times more lasting, that expands the power of the state to suppress this form of dissent and limit free speech and assembly. Often, these laws operate under the misnomer of anti-terrorist legislation, to the chagrin of environmental activists (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014.)

Although the repression of protest is nothing new, it is a tool that is used by neoliberalism to quell counter hegemonic protest. Neoliberalism as embodied in national and subnational government leverages the power of the state and both new and extant legislation to control civic demonstration against neoliberal policy and practice such as free trade and globalization. By repressing civil demonstration, neoliberalism neutralizes one of the last tools that social movements have to apply pressure on the state. Under the threat of state repression, many

activists and NGOs are more likely to forego civil demonstration altogether. Here I look at some specific examples of such anti-protest legislation from various nations.

In 2003, shortly before the Free Trade of the Americas meeting in Miami, Florida, the Miami City Commission revised its Street and Sidewalks Ordinance to reduce the possibility for protest. The ordinance placed limits on what people could carry, arguing that glass bottles and other normal day-to-day items could be used as potential weapons, and made it illegal for two or more people to ‘parade’ and disrupt traffic and for groups of eight or more people to congregate as a ‘public assembly’ for more than thirty minutes. A very similar ordinance was passed in Savannah, Georgia in the lead up to the 2004 G8 summit. Three years later in 2007, before the G8 meeting in Heiligendamm, Germany, a general directive was passed that there could be no protest allowed in the zone outside the G8 security fence (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014).

State and provincial governments have passed similar legislation as well. Ahead of the 2010 G20 meeting in Toronto, the government of Ontario enacted regulation 233/10, which effectively activated the old Public Works Protection Act from 1939. This move gave the Toronto police incredible power to search, seize, detain, and arrest protesters. It barred protesters from coming within five meters of the fence, and the rule was never broadcasted ahead of time. An Ontario ombudsman later investigated the issue, commenting that the act: “gave police powers that are unfamiliar in a free and democratic society, ...operated as a trap for those who relied on their ordinary legal rights...[and] was likely unconstitutional.” (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014, 67.) And in 2012 the British government passed the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill, which prohibited the citizenry from sleeping, putting up a tent, or using a loudspeaker in London’s Parliament Square, carrying fines of up to £5,000. In the same year Quebec passed

Bill 78, which allowed for up to C\$5,000 in fines for “unauthorized” protesting, and Vladimir Putin passed laws criminalizing protest even further in Russia, citing similar laws in the United States and Britain as proof of how the laws followed ‘global best practices’. (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014).

In the United States, the FBI’s Violent Gang and Terrorist Organization File, set up originally in 1995 to track criminal gangs, has been expanded to include ‘anarchists’, ‘environmental extremists’, and ‘animal rights extremists’, amongst numerous other categories. The United Kingdom and Canada have similar provisions. This recategorization of environmentalists as potential terrorists yields perturbing implications when juxtaposed with some of the ‘Homeland Battlefield Provisions’ of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2012 that allow any member of a group deemed by the state to be a terrorist organization, including American citizens, to be seized by the military and held indefinitely without trial (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014.) This extension of applicability of anti-terrorist legislation to include ‘environmental extremists’ is a perfect example of how existing legislation has been re-envisioned to protect neoliberalism from demonstration or advocacy that threatens the neoliberal policy agenda, such as advocacy for environmental regulation or animal rights regulation for animals used in the meat industry, for example.

The 2011 Federal Restricted Buildings and Grounds Improvement Act (HR 347), in the United States, is a further example of the state’s war on protest. Known by many as the “anti-protest” bill, HR 347 “enables secret service agents to arrest protesters and authorizes fines and/or jail time for anyone who ‘knowingly, and with intent to impede or disrupt the orderly conduct of Government business or official functions, engages in disorderly or disruptive conduct in, or

within such proximity to, any restricted building or grounds when, or so that, such conduct, in fact, impedes or disrupts the orderly conduct of Government business or official functions.’’

Judge Andrew Napolitano, who comments on legal news and trials, claimed that the act made “free speech a felony...allowing secret service agents to decide where there are no Free Speech Zones” (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014, 71.)

Another extant law that is utilized by neoliberalism to quell anti-neoliberal civil demonstration and protect capital is that which prohibits the making of false statements “generally” (18 U.S.C. § 1001.) One example of when this legislation was used to punish environmental activism was in 2008, when Tim Dechristopher walked into a BLM auction and bought more than two dozen land leases of public land in Utah, that he could not afford, totaling more than two million dollars (Myers, 2014). This sort of false statement is strictly prohibited in United States Code and, free from moral exemption, Dechristopher was sentenced to two years in prison for disrupting the process.

These examples begin to paint a picture of what happens, at least in the U.S., Canada, and much of Western Europe, when people speak out against the hegemonic regimes that they oppose.

Neoliberalism as embodied here in the institutions of state, provincial, and municipal governments, explicitly utilizes the power of the state to repress demonstration. It disarms civil society by taking one of the last tools it has to apply pressure on the state. Unsurprisingly, activists and those with anti-neoliberal convictions are less likely to run the risk of protest under the threat of serious state repression. This type of localized legislation discourages people from questioning, much less defying, the neoliberal order.

To recapitulate, legislation upholds neoliberal hegemony in the face of dissent by (a) shifting decision-making fora away from democratic processes and insulating them from civil society influence, (b) assuring disproportionate corporate and private sector influence on government elections through the neoliberal interpretation of existing laws, such as the case with Citizens United and the first amendment, and (c) utilizing existing legislation and creating new laws to quell civil demonstration that opposes neoliberal doctrine. In the face of this powerlessness, it is little surprise that many activists and NGOs begin seeking ways to make change from *within* neoliberal frameworks in place of opposing the foundational systems that it is built upon, which constitutes a large part of what I call ‘assimilation’.



# Assimilation

By ‘assimilation’ I mean specifically the process by which NGO’s, government, and individuals internalize neoliberal ideology, consequently operating in accordance with ideals that are central to neoliberalism and markets. That is, assimilated environmental groups try to effect environmental change *through* the utilization of free markets, consumerism, and other efforts that are predicated on neoliberal ideology instead of *opposing* the neoliberal hegemony that these particular systems and strategies reinforce. Through this assimilative process of internalization, we see traditionally counter-hegemonic forces become sympathetic to neoliberal ideology, consequently forfeiting their ability to disrupt the entrenched hegemonic ideology itself. To be clear, ‘assimilation’ very specifically refers to the *process by which* groups internalize neoliberal ideology. Mechanisms that encourage this internalization include the infiltration of corporate elites into NGO boards or positions in government, disproportionate corporate influence on state decision-making and policy formation, the receipt of corporate funding, and enrolling in neoliberal knowledge production networks, amongst other possibilities.

Antonio Gramsci theorizes this process of assimilation in terms of hegemony and counterhegemonic movements. He defines hegemony as a ruling coalition of actors, which he calls a ‘historic bloc’, that is capable of achieving consent and ‘negotiating’ the conditions of its continued rule. The continued rule of the historic bloc, he contends, is then comprised of not just coercive power, but also non-coercive legitimate power by which “various actors, both state and non-state, strategically act and interact to contest, construct, solidify, and leverage shared ideas of what is socially acceptable” (Ciplet, Roberts, & Khan, 2015, 29.) This hegemonic rule by the

historic bloc, he says, is always under threat by forces seeking to change the dominant way of thinking and doing, what he labels a ‘counterhegemonic movement’ (Gramsci, 2012.) Ciplet, Roberts, and Khan (2015) posit that a modern day ‘historic bloc’ might be comprised of a managerial elite from multinational corporations, professionals from NGOs and academia, and government agencies. I think this conception is useful, though I would argue that for our purposes professionals from environmental NGOs, academia, and government agencies do not necessarily comprise part of the ‘historic bloc’ until *after* they are assimilated.<sup>20</sup>

In this section, I provide examples of how three particular pathways of counterhegemonic influence are both already assimilated into neoliberal frameworks, as well as actively being assimilated into neoliberal frameworks. First, I explore the assimilation of NGOs, which have increasingly worked with, acted like, and been infiltrated by corporations and individuals of the ‘historic bloc’. Second, I examine the neoliberal assimilation of government, which I show to work disproportionately with corporations and to be infiltrated by corporate members of the historic bloc through a government-corporate ‘revolving door’. Third, I provide examples for how the World Bank is actively working to assimilate individuals and groups into neoliberal frameworks through a ‘knowledge production process’.

## Corporatization of NGOs

As articulated in Dauvergne and Lebaron’s book (2014), the nature of activism has changed over the last several decades to more and more resemble and internalize the ideologies of the capitalist

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<sup>20</sup> I should clarify that this *assimilation*, as I call it, is not a process unique to neoliberalism. Gramsci essentially argues that this process is what hegemony is all about. I instead intend to shed light on how neoliberalism is consistent with this characterization.

system activists and NGOs once opposed. This section explores how the tendency for NGOs to increasingly work with, accept funding from, and share board members with corporations has driven NGOs to internalize neoliberal ideology. Once they have done so, NGOs often adopt market-centric strategies and behave more like corporations than they did before.

Many NGOs have become (and continue to become) tied to the corporate community as corporate elites are integrated onto the very boards that run environmental NGOs. The Nature Conservancy includes BP America, Chevron, and Shell amongst the members of its business council, and Sam Rawlings Walton (grandson of Wal-Mart founder Sam Walton) sits on the Environmental Defense Fund's board of trustees (Klein, 2014). Antony Burgmans, the former CEO of Unilever and the current non-executive board member of British Petroleum, sits on the board of WWF International. Neville Isdell, former CEO of Coca-Cola, is currently the chairman of the board of the US WWF. Conservation International's board is even more infiltrated, including Rob Walton (chair of Walmart), Paul Polman (current chief executive of Unilever), Heidi Miller (former president of JPMorgan Chase), and Orin Smith (the former CEO of Starbucks) (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014.) This list may be incomplete, but it is indicative of a much larger trend of corporate infiltration of NGOs. All of the corporations just mentioned are either related to resource extraction, largely dependent on the benefits from free trade, or are large banks, all of which benefit from neoliberal doctrine.

Perhaps partly due to this infiltration, we have also seen the explicit teamwork between corporations and environmental NGOs. The US Climate Action Partnership unites the Natural Resources Defense Council, the Nature Conservancy, the World Resources Institute, and the Environmental Defense Fund with Shell, Dow Chemical, Dupont, Chrysler, Johnson & Johnson,

Rio Tinto, PepsiCo, GE, and Weyerhaeuser (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014.) Furthermore, the National Wildlife Federation, the Environmental Defense Fund, Conservation International, the National Audubon Society, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the World Wildlife Foundation, *all* signed on to the ‘Environmental Coalition for NAFTA’, a free trade agreement with a disturbing track record of environmental degradation and largely consistent with neoliberal doctrine (Schneider, 1993.)

The increased obsession with profit and the collusion between NGO and corporate sectors has also precipitated a relationship in which NGOs sell their brand, their logo, and their name in order to certify certain products. Once NGOs are assimilated into neoliberal frameworks, they begin to turn to market-oriented solutions in coordination with corporations, instead of challenging the anti-ecological nature of market mentalities themselves. NGOs and big business team up to wed socio-environmental goals to corporate profits and market growth. For example, IKEA and the World Wildlife Fund work as so-called ‘marketing-partners’ to source money from the Global Forest and Trade Network to “create new markets for environmentally responsible forest products” (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014.) Co-branding and co-advertising then reinforce international trade and markets by using their name and certification labels to legitimize corporate activity and create markets for ‘sustainable products’.

Related to this is the emergence of product certification schemes like fair trade and eco-certification labels. Such labels, advertised as using market forces to engender environmental and socioeconomic benefit, often serve to legitimize corporate activities that are not so different from the status quo. Blackman & Rivera (2010) provide evidence suggesting that more often

than not these benefits are never realized.<sup>21</sup> While the production activities under these labels are certified as sustainable, they often still involve displacement of local communities where global products are sourced, serve to give the certified company a market advantage or to develop new markets, and often still necessitate environmentally destructive activities. Pellow (2007) explains this type of assimilation:

*Most movement organizations running corporate campaigns tend to shy away from presenting a fundamental challenge to the market economy's principle of growth at all costs. Instead, these campaigns generally seek a reduction in the negative impacts of production rather than confronting the deeply antiecological nature of the market economy itself. (64)*

Sustainable certification schemes include those offered by the Marine Stewardship Council, the Forest Stewardship Council, the Roundtable on Responsible Soy Association, and myriad others that develop mainstream products for mass consumption.

Dauvergne and Lebaron use the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) as an example to show how fair trade and eco-certification are not always so reliable. The ASC was formed in 2009 by the WWF and the Dutch Sustainable Trade Initiative to certify and provide a consumer logo for ‘responsibly farmed seafood’. Supposedly, the initiative brings together environmentalists, scientists, communities of producers, processors, and retailers to certify shrimp, salmon, and other seafood as sustainable. However, the ASC has been criticized as doing far more for the aquaculture industry than for local environmental or community well-being. Local groups and NGOs claim that the export-oriented certifications were developed out of industry interest, the standards were diluted under industry pressure, and 20% of producers were certified immediately

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<sup>21</sup> Rametsteiner & Simula (2003) concur, and even take a stronger stance, claiming that forest certification schemes have failed to stimulate a significant shift towards sustainable sourcing of forest products altogether, claiming that only 10% of forest products are certified, which come primarily from forests that are not in deforestation hotspots, and that the label appeals, ineffectively, to consumer sentiment.

after the certifications were adopted. In 2012, several community activists issued a statement calling the ASC ‘a poor attempt that has only perpetuated unsustainable systems of production’ (49). When the WWF Aquaculture Dialogue was held in Jakarta, Indonesia, members from unrepresented local fishing groups in Indonesia gathered to protest outside the venue, claiming that “99% of those in attendance were from the shrimp industry and government” (49). The industry, according to local groups, the Mangrove Action Project, and the Stockholm Shrimp Action Group, continues to destroy mangrove forests and displace local communities in the industrial production of shrimp, pangasius, and salmon, primarily. (Dauvergne & Lebaron, 2014.) One of the certification schemes used by the ASC, Selva Shrimp®, was awarded a “Best Choice” rating by Seafood Watch (Brisdon, 2013.) However, the criteria and standards do not include any content related to community impact and according to the Mangrove Action Project, verification projects for the certified shrimp are inadequate, many farmers cheat by mixing inorganic shrimp with organic shrimp to fetch higher profits, and mangrove forest destruction is still a large problem. A positive endorsement from Seafood Watch and negligible environmental impact suggest that, just as the Mangrove Action Project and other organizations claim, Selva Shrimp® and other ASC certification schemes do much more for industry than for the environment.

Beyond explicit cooperation with corporations and the endorsement of market-based solutions like sustainable certification schemes, some environmental NGOs have even gone so far as to seek profit-yielding endeavors inconsistent with their explicitly-professed values, more and more resembling corporations addicted to profit and neoliberal conceptions of the world. One example is the Nature Conservancy, which had acquired a parcel of land in Texas for the sake of preservation. The land, a crucial habitat and breeding-ground for a rapidly disappearing species

of wild prairie chicken, had been rescued and named the ‘Texas City Prairie Preserve’. The Nature Conservancy subsequently opened up a parcel of the land to oil drilling on a piece of the plot that was later determined to be one of the most crucial for the prairie chickens, effectively counteracting the entire reason that the land had been purchased in the first place. This was not an isolated case for the Nature Conservancy, either (Klein, 2014.)

As extra-state pathways of civil society influence like NGOs begin to more and more resemble corporations in structure, values, and ideology, they lose their counter-hegemonic nature by accepting mass consumption, unrestricted trade, and other conditions that are distinctly neoliberal and favorable to corporations. As members of the ‘historic bloc’ envisioned by Gramsci infiltrate NGO boards and NGOs begin working with corporations, NGOs internalize neoliberal ideology and consequently begin working with corporations on market-based solutions, sell their brand, and even sign on to support free trade agreements with weak, nonbinding environmental provisions. Just as corporations have been able to assimilate NGOs into neoliberal frameworks, something very similar is happening in government.

## Assimilation of Government

Much as assimilative processes see the ideological and practical alignment of NGOs with neoliberal frameworks of thought in ways that benefit corporations, so too do governments and public officials internalize neoliberal ideology and become assimilated into neoliberal frameworks. Here I aim to illustrate assimilation of government as occurring primarily through: (a) lobbying and political contributions, (b) the corporate-government revolving door, and (c) the

bias present in the process of policy creation by selecting the appointed decision-makers on a case-by-case basis and differentially allowing access to the process of policy formation. This is assimilation because (a) providing valuable campaign contributions allows corporations to sway politicians in their favor, (b) corporate elites holding government positions and forming part of the neoliberal ‘historic bloc’ can vote and propose neoliberal policy, and (c) by contributing a disproportionate amount of input in policy formation corporations can ensure the government creation of neoliberal policies. Through these three mechanisms the state apparatus, both its decision-makers and its policy formation processes, internalizes neoliberal ideology and is assimilated into neoliberal frameworks.

First, the so-called ‘revolving door’ between seats on corporate boards and government positions assimilates government into a neoliberal framework by directly placing members of the historic bloc into government. Corporate employees often hold positions in the executive branches of government. Additionally, many government officials find employment in the corporate world after fulfilling their service in government posts. The natural outcome of this dynamic is to introduce corporate sympathy and disproportionate corporate influence into government.

An excellent example would be the conditions that precipitated the so-called Halliburton Loophole, a provision of the 2005 Energy Bill that gained exemption from Clean Drinking Water Act regulation for fracking companies. Ushered in under the Bush Administration, Vice President Dick Cheney (former chief executive of Halliburton, a large oilfield service company) managed to add a rider clause to the bill to ensure that fracking companies did not have to report any of the chemicals they were injecting underground to the EPA, effectively shielding their use of the riskiest chemicals from EPA monitoring (Hines, 2012.)



Even government officials working in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are not immune to such influence or infiltration through the corporate-government revolving door. The first administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, William Ruckelshaus, became the senior vice president and director of Weyerhaeuser, a large timber and paper products company, after ending his term with the EPA. In the meantime, his law firm Ruckelshaus, Beveridge Fairbanks & Diamond, was working hard to defend many dangerous chemicals such as vinyl chloride for the Society of the Plastics Industry (SPI) in the face of strict regulations from OSHA, the EPA, and the FDA. He then continued to work for Monsanto for a period before being reassigned as the fifth administrator of the EPA under the Ronald Reagan administration. Later on, Ruckelshaus became the CEO of Browning-Ferris, one of the largest waste companies in the nation that was at the time being sued by the EPA for committing thousands of violations at a Louisiana landfill. Ruckelshaus then became George H. W. Bush's environmental advisor just a few months later, and appointed his close friend William Reilly as the EPA chief and former employee Henry Habicht as deputy EPA administrator. The case against Browning-Ferris was settled shortly thereafter (Collins, 2010). Such corporate-state crossover is an obvious method for pushing corporate agendas through political and legal processes, resulting in loopholes like the Halliburton Loophole, lax regulation, or light punishment for violations of existing legislation. If even the EPA fails to enforce environmental regulation, then the assimilation of government into neoliberal/corporate frameworks should be rather clear. This explicitly highlights my point that even though the environmental cause might be present on the national scale, in this case, it is not counter hegemonic in that it has been infiltrated by corporate members of the 'historic bloc' and allows de-regulation for some of the most polluting activities like fracking.

Second, high corporate spending on lobbying and more direct political contributions can serve to sway politicians decisions by establishing a relationship based in mutual favors. Corporations, for mobilizing so many resources in name of a particular candidate or politician, more often than not expect some benefit in return (Snyder, 1990.) As such, politicians are not forced but rather persuaded into pursuing the neoliberal policies that limit environmental regulation and promote free trade, or even vote for large environmentally destructive projects like the Keystone XL pipeline, for example. Whether the internalization of neoliberal ideology in this case is voluntary, feigned, or a direct result of persuasion or bribery is impossible to tell. Regardless, when the practical outcome is that politicians actively pursue neoliberal policy, the process can be considered assimilation for all extensive purposes.

For example, in 2013 the oil and gas industry spent \$400,000 dollars a day lobbying government officials, and the industry doled out \$73 million in federal campaigns and political donations during the 2012 election cycle (Klein, 2014.) A recent Huffington Post report reveals that TD Bank and the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, two of the largest investors in the Keystone XL Pipeline, have paid democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton for eight different speeches totaling \$1.6 million all in the period not long before she announced her campaign for president. This may shed some light on why the democratic Secretary of State has been reluctant to take action against, and has even expressed support for, the controversial project.

Collins (2010) claims that this type of corporate influence is the reason why presidential campaigns or administrations that have posited environmental issues as a top priority have never actually followed through with dramatic or bold action related to the environment, and he cites it

as a major reason why George W. Bush defeated Al Gore in 2000, pointing out how much financial support Bush garnered from the chemical, oil, coal, timber, and mining industries.

Finally, in many instances when policy working groups are put together to form domestic policy, corporate members of the ‘historic bloc’ have a disproportionately large number of seats at the table. Part of this may be due to the number of members of the historic bloc already holding government positions, but either way, allowing so much corporate input, and so little input from civil society, allots the historic bloc a great deal more influence on the policy formation process than civil society. This methodology constitutes an assimilation of government processes into neoliberal frameworks by ensuring that most of the decision makers involved are members of the historic bloc.

The story of the National Energy Policy Development Group is a perfect example. Established in 2001, the NEPDG was charged with the task of developing a plan for securing an adequate future energy supply in the U.S. Spearheaded by then Vice President Dick Cheney, the group was comprised of nine cabinet officials and four senior administration officials, many of whom had ties to the oil and gas industry. True, Cheney himself is the former CEO of Halliburton, and a large portion of the Bush administration had ties to the oil industry.<sup>22</sup> The Bush presidential campaign in 2000 also received \$1.9 million from oil interests (Downey, 2015).

The NEPDG met with hundreds of members from the private sector in developing its plan, but it wasn’t until it was forced by court order that they would release information regarding with

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<sup>22</sup> For example: Donald Evans (Tom Brown Inc.), Condoleezza Rice (Chevron), Donald Rumsfeld (PB-Amoco), Christine Todd Whitman (had holdings and oil-producing properties.)

whom they met. Even when they released the information, it was minimal. As it turns out, the development group “met almost exclusively with high-level representatives of the petroleum, electricity, nuclear, coal, chemical, and natural gas industries” (Downey, 2015, 240.) Of the more than four hundred corporations that attempted to meet with the NEPDG, only half were successful, and of those half 158 were energy companies, as opposed to 13 environmental groups, 22 labor unions, and one sole consumer organization, all of whom only met on one single occasion, after the initial NEP draft was mostly complete, more as an afterthought (Downey, 2015.)

Downey explains how this process is undemocratic quite eloquently:

*“It should be fairly clear, then, that the Bush administration’s decision making process was undemocratic ...First, the decision making process was non-transparent. As a result, U.S. citizens did not know how NEPDG decisions were made or who most influenced these decisions, making it difficult for citizens to determine whether these decisions were made democratically and who...most benefitted from them. Second, energy industry officials had much greater access to the NEPDG than did any other social or economic group in the United States. This not only undermined an important condition of democracy, that all citizens and interest groups have equal access to government decision makers, it also meant that energy industry officials were the only economic or social group in the nation that was able to provide significant input into the NEP’s policy recommendations. As a result, the NEPDG can be viewed as an important elite-controlled mechanism that allowed energy industry executives to make their views known to the administration while preventing other groups from similarly influencing US Energy Policy, thereby providing the administration and energy industry executives with the means to monopolize decision making power regarding US energy policy.*

*Third, because the NEP failed to discuss the social, economic, environmental, geopolitical, and military implications of its recommendations, and because obtaining government documents*

*describing these implications was difficult or impossible to do, U.S. citizens could not fully evaluate the NEP, making it easier for the administration to divert the public's attention away from its true policy goals and more difficult for citizens to determine whether they supported the Bush administration's energy policy" (Downey, 2015, 240-241).*

So the process of input seeking that the NEPDG practiced during the development of the National Energy Policy was largely undemocratic in that it relied almost exclusively on corporate input and was drafted in a large part by individuals who had an unfair incentive to favor oil and gas interests, while they kept the proceedings largely secret from the public. This distortion of democratic processes and the reliance on corporations that most benefit from the *laissez faire* market practices and social/environmental deregulation assimilates the policy formation process into a neoliberal framework and constricts the political opportunity structure of environmental movements by denying them a seat at the table.

As I have explained, the assimilation of government into neoliberal frameworks of thought, manifested primarily as undue corporate influence on domestic-level decision-making, is seen through at least three mechanisms: political contributions and lobbying, the corporate-government revolving door, and the biased selection of contributors in the process of policy creation. Pellow (2007, 64) contributes considerable insight into the role of corporations in domestic policymaking: "TNCs exist within and beyond national boundaries and legal structures (and can influence the adoption of new laws and push states to change old ones). In such cases, the role of the state is undermined or exploited for private gain. Corporate power today is as important as the power of states as sites of environmental policymaking." This assimilation of traditional pathways of influence into neoliberal frameworks is not only seen in NGOs and

government processes and officials, however, but also on the international scale in actual schools and training institutes designed to inform leaders and elites in developing countries how to reform the economic and legal structures of their home countries according to the World Bank's neoliberal agenda.

## World Bank Mechanisms of Neoliberal Assimilation

In this section I describe how the World Bank directly influences the worldview of elites and government officials in debtor countries via what Michael Goldman (2006) calls the *knowledge production process*, in order to assimilate them into neoliberal frameworks of understanding and policy construction. Two of the various stated responsibilities of the World Bank, in addition to providing structural adjustment loans to developing countries (as I explain in the next section), are to provide technical advice and support, and to evaluate the promise of projects seeking investment. These responsibilities are often carried out in such a way that promotes the construction of neoliberal worldviews in groups and individuals. Thus, the World Bank directly inserts neoliberal frameworks of knowledge into the developing world by (a) directly educating elites, professors and government officials of the developing world in myriad World Bank institutions and schools and (b) distorting the project assessment process to yield very specific desired results (Goldman, 2006.) In controlling the knowledge production process in this way, the World Bank is able to ensure that the information that is available about development or World Bank projects is pro-neoliberal and sympathetic the World Bank's neoliberal agenda. Consequently, the Bank can minimize opposition to its activity by limiting the availability of

knowledge antagonistic to their goals, effectively assimilating groups and individuals without access to better information into a neoliberal framework.

Moreover, in assimilating individuals and groups into neoliberal frameworks, the World Bank produces knowledge consistent with what Goldman (2006) calls the Bank's "most profound discursive framework... 'green neoliberalism.'"<sup>23</sup> Goldman describes green neoliberalism as an expansion of the Bank's neoliberal economic agenda in such a way that adds the "restructuring and capitalization of nature-society relations that exist as uncommodified or underutilized by capital markets" (7) as a primary goal.<sup>24</sup> Under the protection of this discursive framework, the Bank proposes 'sustainable' loan-driven projects that benefit foreign investors and utilize natural capital to 'sustainably' introduce natural resources to the market, despite serious social and environmental plight on the ground.<sup>25</sup>

Goldman concisely describes the nature of green neoliberalism in a way that is useful for my argument:

*"That few development practices, beliefs, and truths can be expressed today outside the parameters of environmentally sustainable development, on the one hand, and neoliberalism, on the other, is a testament to the efficacy of the Bank's latest power/knowledge regime....Gramsci noted...the moment of hegemony is revealed when the dominant bloc also poses the questions around which the struggle rages". Because so many people...now accept as fact that there is no alternative to development and that the only question is how to make it more sustainable, that Gramscian moment may have arrived." (Goldman, 2006, 7).*

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<sup>23</sup> Goldman also emphasizes how the assimilation of environment-centered discourse into the guiding ideology of neoliberalism has allowed the Bank to expand into more places and proliferate its worldview into more "life-worlds" than ever (Goldman, 2006.)

<sup>24</sup> Notice the resonance with Polanyi's theory of false commodities.

<sup>25</sup> For more on green neoliberalism, framing processes, and the suppression of subaltern knowledges within this context, see Goldman, 2006.

That is, the World Bank, which constitutes part of the ‘historic bloc’, is able to incorporate sustainability into its neoliberal agenda, what Goldman calls green neoliberalism. By doing so, it is more able to assimilate individuals and groups who value sustainability, without actually challenging its neoliberal convictions. With green neoliberalism the Bank is able to pose questions of sustainability, placating opposition, without ever calling neoliberalism or development into question. The presence of an environmental agenda on the scale of an international institution such as green neoliberalism in the World Bank is a perfect example of why I claim that *counter hegemonic* factions of the environmental movement remain at the grassroots level. Moving forward, I analyze how the World Bank produces knowledge consistent with green neoliberalism in its many training institutes around the world.

The World Bank has a system of providing technical advice that includes training institutes and technical presentations. Goldman takes us inside one of these settings, where the World Bank is giving a presentation on National Environmental Action Plans (NEAPs) at their headquarters in Washington D.C. Here World Bank senior officials explain to an array of participants invited primarily from Anglophone Africa (Ethiopia, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, plus Chile and Russia, who would be hosting similar events in the future) about the environmental benefits of structural adjustment and utilizing the concept of natural capital. It is through the mitigation of environmental problems with microeconomic tools, they explain, that we may find the “true value of nature” (Goldman, 2006.) At more than fifty World Bank policy and training institutes throughout Africa (as of 2006), the World Bank’s training programs teach African professionals about various themes consistent with green neoliberalism ranging from environmental economics and water-sector privatization to how to make the WTO work in the developing world.



The ‘knowledge production’ of these Bank training programs does not end in the training rooms, however. The materials for these training sessions not only become required reading in the economics classrooms of underfunded universities<sup>26</sup>, but also influential background resources for African policy-makers who are being pushed to hastily restructure state agencies and regulatory authorities and liberalize forestry and water sectors (amongst others) as a precondition for the release of World Bank loans for which they are vying (Goldman, 2006.) By directly ensuring that southern elites and decision-makers with limited resources have access to distinctly neoliberal training and materials, the World Bank is able to cultivate neoliberal sympathy in developing countries. In so doing, the World Bank plays an active role in constructing the opinions and worldviews of these individuals, assimilating them into neoliberal frameworks.

The way in which World Bank experts conduct evaluations for the promise and feasibility of potential projects also serves to distort available information and produce knowledge about its projects that supports the advancement of the Bank’s neoliberal agenda. The World Bank’s coordinated suppression and promotion of information that they use in their project assessment reports functions to assimilate individuals and groups into a neoliberal framework by controlling the information they have access to and can therefore use to inform their opinions and worldviews. By fostering the development of worldviews sympathetic to neoliberalism, the Bank reduces the possibility for protest or opposition to its activities.

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<sup>26</sup> This is a common by-product of structural adjustment programs administered by the Bank, which I will discuss later.

When the World Bank hires researchers, scientists, and surveyors to do project assessments, it utilizes what are called “Terms of Reference” (TOR). These terms of reference specify what kind of information is needed from the study, assigns a time frame for completing the research, and a deadline for the written report. In exchange, researchers receive high salaries, unique research opportunities, and access to previously inaccessible research sites. The TOR often result in what are called “Rapid Rural Appraisals”, expedited research projects with incredibly little (and according to researchers, insufficient) time in the field to complete comprehensive reports with accurate findings. The rapid appraisals do not allow enough time for transport between incredibly remote locations, to speak with enough locals and understand important cultural context, or to study the complex cultural and ecological dynamics of the environment surrounding the project site. The TOR also leave a limited amount of time for consultants to actually write the report. Furthermore, once the report is produced, the contracting agent of the study is given direct ownership over both the report and the raw data, as stipulated by the TOR (Goldman, 2006.)

For example, in a World Bank administered field study on the effects of the Sardar Sarovar Dam in the Narmada River Valley of India, the World Bank was later found to have omitted several papers and reports from their study that held that the dam would not allow water to reach two drought-prone regions and would cause the collapse of entire fisheries. By excluding this information from the report it made available to the public, the World Bank selectively chose what knowledge was available to the state, NGOs, and civil society, reducing the accessibility to information that might spark protest against its actions.

The Nam Theun 2 Dam project in Laos is an even better example. This dam project was proposed with a very ‘green neoliberal’ version of ‘sustainable development’ in mind. It proposed projects associated with dam construction that promised extractive reserves, ecotourism, sustainable logging and tree plantations, investments for a conservation area, and other similar developments. The Bank was even working with large conservation NGOs like the IUCN, which would stand to benefit from dam-related conservation projects. On the surface, and according to information provided by the World Bank, the project seemed flawless. However, following review of the report by NGOs based in Bangkok and Berkeley, the Environmental Impact Assessment and the Social Impact Assessment were deemed inadequate, and a study of alternatives was missing altogether. In fact, many researchers and locals warned of severe environmental and human impacts of dam construction. Those researchers who shed light on the danger of the project for downstream fisheries and ecosystems, as well as human populations, either had their reports suppressed or were fired and had their visas revoked. Indeed, in the face of reports unfavorable to the project advancement, the IUCN demanded that reports be rewritten and that they refrain from using the term ‘indigenous people’ (Goldman, 2006.) Even though the project would have serious implications for a massive number of Lao citizens who depend on the rivers and the fish and related agricultural activities that they could not practice if resettled, the project went forward anyway. In the wake of dam construction, thousands were resettled and denied access to critical ecosystem resources, fisheries collapsed, flooding, sedimentation, and erosion devastated ecosystems, water quality was reduced, and wildlife poaching began in a previously protected area (Downey, 2015.)

By manipulating researchers and the research process, and selectively suppressing or encouraging information about the project and its social and ecological effects, the World Bank

is able to build support and minimize opposition to its large development projects operating in accordance with their neoliberal agenda. The implications of this dynamic are important. This manipulation of scientific processes grants the Bank the ability to control the information to which people are exposed. By producing these types of reports the Bank specifically influences the type of knowledge held by (in this case Lao) decision makers, encouraging support for Bank projects and reducing the possibility for dissent. Individuals and groups are therefore assimilated into a neoliberal framework as the available information informs their worldviews in such a way that leads them to believe in the legitimacy of World Bank activities. As in the Nam Theun 2 case, we then see environmental (and social) degradation at the hands of development for the sake of private benefit (dam investors).

In this way, the World Bank assimilates organizations, government, and the individuals that comprise these groups into frameworks of neoliberalism. Using the discursive framework that Goldman calls ‘green neoliberalism’, the World Bank produces knowledge in both training institutes and project assessments that specifically promotes the ‘sustainability’ of neoliberalism and World Bank activities. By influencing the formation of opinions and worldviews through the knowledge production process, the Bank encourages individuals and groups to internalize neoliberal ideology, hence assimilating them into a neoliberal framework. Often, however, neoliberalism is much more explicitly forced on the larger political and legal structures of entire nation-states. Here I refer to international financial institutions that operate under the guise of development-as-imperative and utilize high finance to push the adoption of neoliberal economic policy in the developing world.

## Financial Coercion

This section analyzes the way in which the structural adjustment programs administered to developing countries by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank use debt to force neoliberal restructuring of the political and economic structures of the debtor countries. The forced adoption of neoliberal doctrine in these countries further decreases the ability of civil society to exert counter-hegemonic influence. It does this by (a) transferring decision-making power from localized democratic processes to international financial institutions<sup>27</sup> on the global level thereby insulating decision making from civil society influence, and (b) impoverishing local populations (as result of market-centered restructuring), leaving them more concerned with meeting basic needs than with forming large social movements. Furthermore, this debasement of democracy and impoverishment of civil society most often walks hand in hand with environmental degradation in the debtor countries.

### IMF and World Bank Conditionality Agreements

In July of 1944, on the tail end of World War II, delegates from 44 nations came together at the Mount Washington Hotel in the small town of Bretton Woods, New Hampshire to discuss the need for a new international monetary system and to establish the rules by which to abide under this new systemic framework. This perceived need sprang from the state of the floundering world economy following the havoc wreaked by the “beggar thy neighbor” economic policies of

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<sup>27</sup> This is what Sell (2009), drawing on Drahos, calls ‘forum-shifting’, and can take a variety of different forms.

the inter-war years (Woods, 2006). The rendezvous was called the Bretton Woods Conference, and would set the foundations for the major structure and events in international finance for decades to come (indeed, up to the present day.) It was agreed that the proposed reconstruction of the monetary system would need to address how to finance post-war reconstruction, how to stabilize exchange rates, the fostering of trade, and a defense mechanism against balance-of-payment crises. A major result of the Bretton Woods Conference was the establishment of two principal international financial institutions: the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

The charters for the World Bank and IMF direct them to protect and stimulate employment, real income, and standards of living, facilitate the “balanced growth” of international trade and the world economy, and develop productive resources in all the member countries by pooling resources, assuming credit risk, and building information and research capacity (Woods, 2006.)<sup>28</sup> This was their original goal and purpose. However, since at least the early 1980’s, the IMF and the World Bank have been encouraging their member countries to integrate into global markets, principally through the political and economic mechanisms of trade liberalization, privatization of state-owned enterprises, the opening up of developing countries to foreign investment, and the deregulation of labor markets. However, the Bretton Woods Institutions (BWIs) do not only prescribe neoliberal economic advice to developing countries, but also force borrowing countries to comply with this advice using the conditionality agreements that form part of larger structural adjustment programs.

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<sup>28</sup> For an account of the rationale for the creation of two separate institutions, and the characteristics that make them unique, see Woods, 2006 or Biersteker, 1990. Essentially, the IMF is associated with short-term loans directed at stabilizing the economies of countries with balance-of payment troubles, while the World Bank is concentrated on medium and long-term loans meant to more drastically restructure (or “adjust”) entire economies (Biersteker, 1990).

A Structural Adjustment Loan (SAL) is a loan issued by the IMF or World Bank to developing countries experiencing balance-of-payment troubles. The SAL is part of a larger Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), which is supposed to adjust the political, legal, and economic structures of a state, to the end of catalyzing development. Most often, balance-of-payment difficulties are spurred by large and persistent fiscal deficits, high levels of external and/or public debt, unfavorable exchange rates, or strong, rapid increases in the price of a key commodity such as fuel or food. It is important to note that these countries are almost exclusively developing countries that constitute the Global South. The fiscal difficulties experienced by these nations are often so severe that they become dependent on the loans given by the IMF and World Bank, or else face considerable social unrest (Bello, Cunningham, & Rau, 1994.)<sup>29</sup> However, debtor nations cannot receive the loans without agreeing to adjust their political-economic structures according to explicit prescriptions from the IMF and World Bank found in SAL conditionality agreements, essentially making them the puppet of the financial institutions and diminishing their political sovereignty.

The concept of conditionality was adopted to protect the BWI's resources and ascertain that their investments were effective. It enshrines what is, according to Harvey (2005), one of the principal differences between liberal and neoliberal economic policy. This is to say, under liberal economics, investors bear the financial burden of making a poor or failed investment. However, under neoliberal policy, which is exemplified by IMF and World Bank conditionality, the

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<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that, in the 1950's and 1960's the economic growth of the Global South was faster than that of the North. However, following the oil shocks and economic recession in the North in the 1970's and early 1980's, the Global South saw the lowest prices for export commodities since the 1930's, leaving them unable to pay outstanding loan balances to northern lenders. The situation left them borrowing from one set of lenders to pay off the others in order to avoid default. Their hands were tied. (Bello, Cunningham, & Rau, 1994).

borrowing party suffers the consequences of not returning on the lender's investment. In this context, this means that borrowing governments do not receive the next installment of their loans from the BWIs if they do not meet the agreed-to terms of conditionality.

Common conditions posed by the IMF and the World Bank include: radically reducing government spending, cutting wages or severely constraining their rise to reduce inflation and make exports competitive, liberalizing imports and providing incentives for export production, removing restrictions on foreign investment in industry and financial services to allow foreign competition domestically, devaluing the local currency relative to hard currencies, and privatizing state enterprises and embarking on radical deregulation. Beyond these extensive measures, borrowing states are also required to agree to Bank or IMF monitoring of their 'compliance' with the targets previously agreed to with Bank technocrats. If the states are noncompliant, the institution may delay or otherwise cancel the loan disbursements (Bello et al., 1994.)

The above conditions make sense according to neoliberal economic theory. They all foster the uninhibited reach and disembedding of markets by reducing state intervention, liberalizing trade, facilitating (if not catalyzing) foreign investment, and lowering environmental and social protections. The above prescriptions would ideally (they do in some cases) make exports more competitive and make local industry more efficient.

What is not included in neoliberal economic theory, however, are the consequences that these prescriptions might have for civil society and its ability to control or regulate the economy.



By privatizing services formerly provided by the state and simultaneously cutting wages, cutting government spending and wages primarily hurts the nation's poor by reducing their ability to pay for the now privatized services. Liberalizing imports and incentivizing export production puts local companies in developing countries out of business because they simply cannot compete with foreign companies from richer countries. This forces them to rely on just a handful of natural resource or agricultural commodities, the prices for which tend to fluctuate wildly, subjecting them to the vicissitudes of global markets, and reducing their food security by fostering dependence on imported foods and forcing them to grow only a couple foods designated for export. Devaluing the local currency then makes these imports on which people are dependent more expensive, further decreasing their security with respect to food and other essential commodities. Privatization precipitates massive worker layoffs, raising unemployment, as the government sells off government assets and services to foreign investors, resulting in the absence of industry or jobs for the country, and often reducing governmental protections for workers and the environment. Removal of restrictions on foreign investment further takes national sovereignty away from the government and its constituents and places it in the hands of foreign investors who now have a much higher say in the economic decisions facing the country. These same investors, who do not necessarily place any stock in the economic growth of the nation, can also flee the country at a moment's notice, leaving countries with little or no investment capital helpless. Increased interest rates are often raised so high that none of the local farmers or businesses can borrow money, stalling the economic growth of the country. The net effects of many structural adjustment programs, then, has been increased poverty and increased national debt (Downey, 2015; Ayres, 2004; Bello et al., 2004.)

This conditionality, as it has come to be called, is essentially disguised coercion. Much like free trade agreements, structural adjustment shifts decision making power away from the local, domestic level to fora where rich countries that dominate the World Bank and the IMF (the United States and the EU) can use conditionality to force debtor countries of the Global South to reform their political and economic structures according to neoliberal doctrine that ultimately benefits the Global North. The massive debt that comes with the distribution of loans to developing countries is inescapable and forces developing nations to structure their economies and their regulatory structures according to IMF or World Bank goals. This dynamic, as explored below, serves to simultaneously remove political sovereignty from southern states and export a disproportionate amount of environmental degradation to the debtor countries.<sup>30</sup>

Downey provides an example of this dynamic in his book (2015.) In Ghana, structural adjustment loans largely went into reforming the mining sector. However, the result was relatively little mining sector growth, despite massively increasing exports, because the royalties and taxes paid to the government were so negligible that most of the money was allowed to leave the country. The increased mining activity, however, displaced tens of thousands of inhabitants, many of them farmers, with the net effect of creating massive unemployment. In addition, low government spending meant less government capacity to conduct Environmental Impact Statements for the new mine activity or enforce environmental regulations and standards. The effect here was to severely degrade and pollute biodiverse areas, lower water tables and divert

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<sup>30</sup> This is essentially the premise of ecologically unequal exchange literature, which explores the relationship between relatively higher level of consumption and lower environmental degradation in the North, and lower rates of consumption and higher incidence of environmental degradation in the South, often related to patterns of international trade of the sort encouraged by World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs.

water courses, and emit harmful heavy metals and chemicals, cause severe soil erosion, and contribute a massive amount of air pollution in the country (Downey, 2015.)

In Zimbabwe, structural adjustment efforts in the 1990's were directed towards the agricultural sector, which was responsible for approximately 70% of the nation's employment and 40% of its total export earnings. The structural adjustment conditions in Zimbabwe stipulated a reduction of state involvement in the production, distribution, and marketing of agricultural inputs and commodities, the removal of subsidies on agricultural inputs and credit, the liberalization of export and import trade, and the privatization of agricultural marketing. Interviews with stakeholders revealed that no farmer's groups representing large producers or small holders were consulted about these changes. Consequently high prices of agricultural inputs and low returns on agricultural activity served to put small farmers out of business. Liberalization of trade shifted the national agricultural focus from maize and other staple food crops to paprika and cotton, which exacerbated food insecurity and left 30% of children under 5 years of age chronically malnourished. Deregulation of the cotton industry allowed the Cotton Company of Zimbabwe to establish monopoly power of cotton prices, hurting small farmers with low prices and high quality standards. The devaluation of Zimbabwean currency, combined with the market liberalization of the beef sector, left the state-run Cold Storage Commission of Zimbabwe unable to compete with new foreign private sector involvement. In sum, structural adjustment in the Zimbabwean agricultural sector allowed a handful of large companies and foreign investors to benefit from neoliberal reform, and left most Zimbabweans disenfranchised, food insecure, and impoverished (SAPRIN, 2004.)

In Mexico, structural adjustment of the agricultural sector precipitated very similar results. In this case, the adjustment conditions were: constitutional reform to facilitate the privatization and concentration of land and natural resources, reduction of state participation in agricultural production, privatization of the production and distribution of agricultural inputs and services, and liberalization of trade in agricultural commodities. Much like in the Zimbabwean case, expensive agricultural inputs and inaccessibility to credit left small farmers unable to compete with large producers and has increased the rate of extreme poverty in Mexico. Liberalization and privatization in the agricultural sector has disenfranchised small Mexican farmers, leaving them unable to produce their own food and dependent on imported foodstuffs that they cannot afford. In addition to increasing poverty and food insecurity, the agricultural changes forced on Mexico by SAP conditionality have engendered a massive loss in biodiversity, soil erosion, and the degradation of soil and water tables. This effect is compounded as unemployment and poverty have forced small farmers to intensively cultivate more marginal lands, further contributing to soil erosion and environmental degradation (SAPRIN, 2004.)

Structural adjustment outcomes such as ‘rip-and-ship’ resource extraction and the simultaneous rise in poverty as illustrated above are pretty typical across Africa, Latin America, and the rest of the developing world. Bello, Cunningham & Rau (1994) highlight the combination of increased impoverishment, inequality and environmental degradation that tends to follow the implementation of structural adjustment programs in the Global South. They specifically cite patterned surges in poverty and pollution with exhausted fish supplies and deforestation (including some of the world’s oldest trees) in Chile, deforestation due to cocoa in Ghana and resultant soil erosion and food insecurity, and destructive subsistence farming as a result of

poverty-induced migrations and industrial fishing, coral reef destruction, overfishing, and massive deforestation of mangrove forests in the Philippines.

I wish to highlight two specific implications of these effects that follow structural adjustment. First, increased impoverishment in the wake of higher unemployment, lower wages, and lower worker protections and less government services, as well as forced displacement, higher rates of sickness, and severely reduced social services, means that civil society is forced to focus much more on day-to-day survival and providing for their families, likely leaving them much less able to participate in or incite social movements.<sup>31</sup> Second, much like the situation engendered by free trade agreements and the WTO, conditionality and structural adjustment block an institutional pathway of influence by shifting the forum of decision-making from the domestic level to the global by (a) forcing developing nations to comply with prescriptions set by international financial institutions instead of responding to the needs and demands of society, as is supposed to be the case in democratic societies and; (b) actually weakening the state's ability to help citizens, help itself, and fight destructive foreign capital.

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<sup>31</sup> Marx might disagree here, though the lack of urban factory life in much of the developing world might serve as a barrier to the sort of uprising that he envisioned.

## Discussion

I have just illustrated how neoliberalism decreases the efficacy of environmental movements to manifest real environmental change that is oppositional to the contemporary neoliberal hegemony. I now move into a discussion surrounding a few of the implications of my findings and other important points that I wish to make. I first discuss considerations regarding the polycentricity of both neoliberalism and environmental movements, and therefore certain inconsistencies that might arise from the variegation across their respective centers of operation. Second, I discuss a few important considerations of the global *political opportunity structure* as it relates to the ideas I have discussed. Finally, I look to the future, hoping to draw insight from the relationship between the strong temporal aspect of the *impending environmental crisis* and the effect that neoliberalism has had on environmental movements.

I would like to draw attention to a characteristic that I believe both environmental movements and neoliberalism hold in common that is important for understanding the relationship between the two: polycentricity. That is to say, neither neoliberalism nor environmental movements are perfect, globally concerted regimes working in perfect tandem amongst their various factions. Instead, both entities are incredibly diverse across their respective centers of operation. Some factions might be more globalized than others, for example the fossil fuel divestment movement is a strong example of one of the more globally orchestrated environmental movements, much as the World Bank or the IMF might be good examples of a more centralized, globalized form of neoliberal propagation. The two actors here are actually amalgams of movements all working in accordance with a roughly-defined cohort of ideologies and beliefs. Neoliberalism most

certainly takes variant forms across geopolitical boundaries, and does not necessarily always coordinate transnationally. However, it may be described as driven by a semi-coordinated group of actors from the global capitalist elite (Harvey, 2005; Downey, 2015; Domhoff, 1990; Carroll & Carson, 2003) that pushes forward a regime of policies, laws, and institutions that strongly adheres to private property, market autonomy, and the rule of law. Similarly, counter hegemonic environmental movements are incredibly diverse and demonstrate various degrees of cohesion, but they might all be described as working towards a more sustainable world with environmental regulations and an economy thoroughly embedded in social relations.

It is due to this diversity of environmental movements and neoliberalism that it is impossible to adequately describe the implications of every relationship and interaction between the two. The exact effect of neoliberal legislation, assimilation, and financial coercion will take different forms in every social-political-cultural context. Neoliberalism affects some places differently than others, as discussed in Brenner, Peck, and Theodore's paper on variegated neoliberalism (2010.)

I claim that a common trend amongst the relationships between variegated neoliberalisms and environmental movements, however, is a constricted political opportunity structure. Most literature that analyzes political opportunity structures has taken a decidedly nationalist approach, looking at the political opportunity structure of social movements within select national contexts. This may be because this particular sub-field of academia is still young, and has not yet developed enough to include analyses of global political opportunity structures, or it could be that due to the incredibly variegated nature of the political and economic climate within different national contexts, theorizing on a transnational level about political opportunity

structures might yield overly universalizing conclusions. Regardless, in this thesis I have tried to draw conclusions about the effect that neoliberalism may have on the transnational political opportunity structure of environmental movements. While I recognize that the relationship between neoliberalism and political opportunity structures is nuanced and distinct from instances of this interaction in other geopolitical spheres, I do argue that it is possible to characterize a general trend in the effects that this relationship precipitates. It is precisely this trend that I have tried to identify.

Specifically, I argue that neoliberalism as it operates through practical organizations and institutional structures, largely traps counter hegemonic environmental movements at the grassroots, reducing the possibility for the multi-scalar construction of an integrated, counter-hegemonic environmental movement from the local level to the global. I argue that this is specifically because as factions of environmental movements ascend the ladder of scale, the environmental cause is assimilated into neoliberal frameworks, and its counter hegemonic character is denatured in the process. If we apply Peter Evans' conceptual framework to this conclusion, the counter hegemonic environmental movement would be unable to be successful due to an inability to build multi-scalar influence, his fourth condition.

The implications of this potential incapacity of environmental movements to counteract free-market, neoliberal ideology that freezes climate negotiations and continues to perpetuate the valorization of trade over environmental quality, for example, are ecologically disastrous. The impending environmental crisis that society faces places almost tangible deadlines on action to reduce emissions and implement extensive environmental regulation. It is possible that in many local contexts, the political opportunity structure has been or will be constricted so much that it



takes society past a tipping point beyond which civil society will find it incredibly difficult to regain the influence that would permit extensive environmental regulation and re-embeddment. Meanwhile, global sinks are pushed to capacity and the environmental situation continues to worsen. Evading climate disaster and the ‘environmental tipping point’ that awaits around the corner will require the dismantling of a global neoliberal order that is swayed predominantly by economic growth, free trade, and capital accumulation instead of true social and environmental values. Doing so will require the construction of truly democratic processes that allow environmental movements to exert influence across scales, which would fulfill the fourth characteristic of a successful counter hegemonic social movement according to Evans (2008).

This sort of re-embeddment and reclamation of democracy is certainly always possible, no matter how difficult it may prove to be. Indeed, Polanyi and Burawoy would both argue that such a re-embeddment of the economy is in fact inevitable. The points that this thesis intends to highlight are: (a) the difficulties that a modern political and economic context of neoliberalism imposes on re-embeddment, (b) that given these difficulties, re-embeddment is *not* inevitable, and (c) the importance of the temporal consideration, as extensive action on climate change and other environmental issues is absolutely necessary in order to avoid climate disaster and social disintegration.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, I have analyzed the relationship between contemporary environmental movements and neoliberal regimes of political economy. Specific discourse within certain environmentalist spheres suggests an incompatibility between environmental sustainability and capitalist market economies. To investigate the relationship between society and social movements on the one hand, and Capitalism and free markets on the other, I consulted two of the acclaimed thinkers of society and political economy of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Karl Marx and Karl Polanyi.

While Marx and Polanyi offer sound theories of Capitalism (Marx) and the ‘market mechanism’ (Polanyi), they offer incomplete characterizations of the social movements that play critical roles in their theory. In order to construct a more robust understanding of civil society in this dynamic, I assessed the current global environmental movement according to four specific characteristics proposed by Peter Evans as necessary for a successful counter hegemonic social movement. While I claimed that the global environmental movement exhibits trends towards greater coordination across diverse constituencies and over national boundaries, and shares a common but differentiated vision of success, I argued that counter hegemonic factions of the environmental movement do not exist across scales, but are stranded at the grassroots.

I then argued that perhaps neoliberalism is responsible for this repression to the grassroots, claiming that three generalized trends in neoliberalism are responsible for shrinking the political opportunity structure wherein a counter hegemonic environmental movement might build multi-

scalar influence. The salient trends are: legislation, interpreted to include any treaty or agreement subject to enforcement by an institutional body; assimilation, by which individuals, NGOs, and government internalize neoliberal ideologies and are assimilated into corporate-neoliberal frameworks and; financial coercion, by which developing countries in particular are forced to restructure their economic and legal structures to be consistent with neoliberal doctrine as prescribed by the World Bank and IMF.

I then showed that neoliberalism, in fact, relies on “legislation”, assimilation, and financial coercion to stifle dissent. For instance, I demonstrated that legislation across scales from the municipal and domestic levels to the international often serves to remove decision-making from local or domestic level fora, and place them into corporate dominated multinational fora that are well insulated from civil society influence. International trade law as established by free trade agreements such as NAFTA, and enforced by the World Trade Organization and other institutions with dispute settlement processes, have consistently functioned to subordinate environmental values to the values of international trade extolled by neoliberal institutions and political structures, often in spite of clear, democratically expressed popular desire for the inverse. Domestic policies like Citizens United further operate to skew democracy by shifting influence away from civil society and to the corporate private sector, which, as well said by Pellow (2007), simply does not have any obligation to ensuring democratic processes but rather only to its financial investors and the bottom line, and as such tend to sway in favor of neoliberal economic policy. Furthermore, when civil society is discouraged with the inefficacy of resorting to traditional democratic processes through the state apparatus, protests erupt, which then in many cases also prompts municipal and domestic-level legislation to limit civil society’s capacity to effectively demonstrate against or in favor of specific policies.

Further supporting my thesis, I demonstrated that assimilation sees NGOs, individuals, and government internalize neoliberal ideology and coordinate with corporations, increasing the amount of influence that the corporate private sector holds over governmental decisions and policy making. As NGOs partner with big business, sell their brand, certify products to the end of promoting ‘sustainable consumption’, and promote ‘free market solutions’, their counter hegemonic character is lost entirely. Likewise, the ‘revolving door’ between government and corporate boards further distorts the democratic nature of governments in favor of the system of elites who most benefit from neoliberal policy and weakens the potential for counter hegemonic influence through democratic processes. Moreover, World Bank practices of knowledge production that include the manipulation of project evaluation and formal training institutes directly educate elites in the developing world with neoliberal doctrine so that they may better pursue the World Bank’s agenda of neoliberal development.

Finally, I showed that financial coercion, perhaps the most explicit propagation of neoliberal regimes in the developing world, also weakens the ability of civil society to launch a counter hegemonic movement. Using the powerful coercive mechanism of debt, the conditionality agreements of the structural adjustment programs of the World Bank and IMF specifically serve to ‘lock in’ neoliberal policy into the economic and legal structures of developing nations. By linking further loan disbursements to top-down prescriptions of neoliberal state restructuring, the BWIs force debtor countries of the Global South to liberalize trade, privatize state agencies and publicly provided services, open up their borders to foreign investment, cut wages, and rescind social and environmental regulation to the ultimate benefit of global elites and the Global North. In doing so, the domestic populace is left impoverished, amidst extensive environmental

degradation, and without a political opportunity structure that would permit democratically inspired state restructuring consistent with social and environmental interests.

This large-scale debilitation of environmental movements via the constriction of a transnational political opportunity structure crucial to building multi-scalar influence largely diminishes the likelihood of meaningful counter hegemonic change. That is, neoliberalism greatly reduces the ability of social movements to challenge neoliberal hegemony. In the modern context, this diminished chance of hegemonic overthrow may yield dark consequences considering the time-sensitive nature of the impending environmental crisis. If neoliberal ideology is not dismantled from its current ideological and structural dominance, then true environmental change, largely at odds with neoliberalism, may not come fast enough to avoid the environmental crisis on the horizon.

## Suggestions for Further Research

As with any research, this thesis has its shortcomings, and I would next like to acknowledge where the topic could use further investigation. The omnipresence of neoliberalism in the contemporary context means that the different mechanisms by which it legislates, assimilates, and financially coerces constitute an immense body of different areas of potential investigation. While the examples that I specifically reference are indeed significant and very telling of larger trends of neoliberalism, the evidence I provide is incomplete. Further investigation into how legislation, assimilation and financial coercion constrict the political opportunity structure of counter hegemonic environmental movements would only help to develop a more complete view of these trends across geopolitical contexts.

To that end, the conceptual framework that I have developed could be applied to other topics as well. Looking at neoliberalism through the lens of legislation, assimilation, and financial coercion is a model that could very easily be applied to other social movements, or any topic related to re-embedding, for that matter. With this in mind, further research into the complex relationships between neoliberal economic policy and social movements, civil society, or democratic processes could be a valuable contribution to academic literature. As I mentioned in the discussion, the literature on political opportunity structures is still largely undeveloped and further study of the specific relationship between neoliberalism and social movements presents many opportunities for continued investigation.

The variegated forms of neoliberalism and the possibility for different evaluations of global environmental movements, as well as the vast multiplicity of social movements provide opportunities for similar studies to be conducted. Indeed, this study could be emulated within specific national contexts, could look at different social movements, or could expand the notion to study the effect of neoliberalism on direct democracy generally. Alternatively, further inquiries could take a more empirical approach to the study of the relationship between democracy and neoliberalism. If specific definitions of democracy and neoliberalism were to be developed, the two could be compared in different localities of neoliberalism, with the ultimate goal of ascertaining or disproving the existence of a correlation. The project could be a comparative study of several different contexts or a case study of neoliberalism and democracy inside a particular national context.

Finally, the conclusions drawn from this thesis are rather bleak. I have outlined how the predominating system of global political economy simultaneously neutralizes attempts to pass environmental regulation and civil dissent that searches to overturn it. I then argued that if this self-protecting structure of political economy is not re-embedded into social relations very soon, it may be too late to save our planet from environmental crisis. However, although I do not concur with Polanyi and Burawoy in saying that re-embeddment is inevitable, I do not propose that it is impossible either. An interesting, uplifting possibility to counteract the grim nature of my findings might be to identify select instances in which social movements have indeed succeeded in overturning or changing neoliberal policy regimes in the modern day, and aim to qualitatively characterize those movements in attempt to isolate certain qualities that may have allowed for counter hegemonic success. Such a study could serve to elaborate on Evans' framework by either supporting his claims or suggesting a slightly or radically different

framework for understanding what a counter hegemonic social movement needs to be successful.

The findings of such a study could prove a valuable resource for activists and social movement actors trying to re-embed the economy before it is too late.



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