

Towards a Decolonial Theory of Domination: Process + Brokerage = Power

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Abstract:

Sociologists have long been captivated by powerful brokers. Existing theories cluster into voluntarist and formalist camps, both of which founder at offering convincing explanations for why, in some cases, brokers are able to dominate others and why, in others, they are not. I elucidate a processual alternative theory of brokerage and power, arguing that macro-historical processes give rise to contradictory interests, contradictions sharpen into open conflict, conflicts propel those who are negatively affected to seek protection from brokers, and brokers thereby gain followers whose obedience they can compel—making them powerful. Marshaling a variety of data in a comparative research design, I show that existing approaches fail and this theory succeeds at explaining powerful brokers that arose amidst the processes of European colonization, capitalist industrialization, and megacity urbanization.

Keywords: power; process; relations; brokers; intermediaries

1. INTRODUCTION

“Social reality stands behind social appearances not in the relation of face to veil but in the relation of process to moment”

—Philip Abrams (1982: 317)

Sociologists have long been captivated by brokers (i.e., actors who mediate between two or more people or groups), especially when they exhibit power (i.e., the ability to dominate others). Yet neither of the leading theoretical traditions that endeavor to explain powerful brokers have had much success. On the one hand, *voluntarists*, like Erving Goffman and Randall Collins, ask how some people or groups gain advantage over others to thereby grow powerful. Their answer is that power stems from the way the eventually-powerful party *maneuvers* vis-a-vis others. And yet many who maneuver fail to grow powerful, jeopardizing voluntarism’s explanatory credibility. On the other hand, *formalists*, such as Georg Simmel and Karen Cook, focus on the relationship between pre-existing social relations and power. They argue that influence and even domination inhere to certain kinds of formally-defined brokerage *locations*. But location is often unassociated with power, compromising the credibility of formalism as well.

In this article, I elaborate a processual alternative to the problem of brokerage and power rooted in decolonial sociology. A processual approach helps us move beyond both the voluntarist focus on *how* actors become powerful and the formalist focus on *whether* brokerage positions endow their occupant with power, to instead approach the problem of brokerage and power by asking *why* are some brokers able to exercise power while others are not? I argue that macro-

historical modernization processes flow through some brokerage locations (but not others), charging them with latent power and thus allowing their occupants (not just anyone) to actualize that latent force as domination. Brokers' power, on this account, stems not from voluntary maneuvering nor from pre-existing social relations, but from modernization processes. Process, then, makes the broker powerful.

Both relational and processual sociologies have garnered broad appeal in recent years. The respective literatures, however, have remained largely separate. Advocates pitch *processual sociology* as an epistemic commitment to methods that enthrone events (Sewell 2005: chapters 3, 7, 8) or narrative (Somers 1992; Somers and Gibson 1993), as an ontological commitment to the idea that society's normal state is flux (Hirschman and Reed 2014), and as a critique of methods that break with such ontological assumptions (Abbott 2001; Steinmetz 2005). While these philosophical positions may furnish little with which to disagree, they do not constitute substantive theories and are, therefore, unable to explain specific phenomena, such as powerful brokers. Adherents of *relational sociology*, in contrast, regularly disagree. The field is polarized into two camps (Emirbayer 1997:303-04; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994): those who focus on actions that give rise to relations or ties vs. those who focus on relational ties that pattern behavior (Erikson 2013; 2017). And while each camp can explain a variety of phenomena, both fail at explaining powerful brokers. Nor is either one necessarily processual (Emirbayer 1997:304-05). The wager of this article is that relational theory has heretofore been unable to explain powerful brokers *because* it is not yet processual.

I proceed as follows. I identify key theoretical precepts from decolonial sociology and show how they contrast from and complicate the foremost effort to combine processual and relational sociologies. I explicate the propositions central to both voluntarist and formalist theories of brokerage and power and delineate these theories' limitations. I develop an abstract model for why macro-historical modernization processes charge some brokerage locations with a latent form of power. I show that this model can explain the decentralized despots who arose from Spanish colonization of Latin America and British colonization of India and Africa, the labor bosses who arose from capitalist industrialization in the U.S., and the informal sovereigns who arose from the process of urban squatter settlement growth in Mexico City. Both the theoretical argumentation and illustrative evidence support the conclusion that *processes* endow the occupants of propitiously-aligned *brokerage locations* with the latent ability to command others, which those who occupy these positions can choose to exercise as *power*. This, in turn, points to the necessity of rethinking modernity.

2. RELATIONALITY AND POWER IN THEORY

The emerging literature attempting to combine relational with processual sociology has important explanatory limitations as regards explaining powerful brokers. Viewing *process* as a matter of continuous reemergence (cf. Abbott 2001: chapter 7), this literature posits a wholly contingent alternation over time between types of relations, i.e., between network-anchored (accountability) and field-oriented (autonomy) relations (Singh 2016). In *Power in Modernity*, Isaac Reed (2020) adopts these assumptions¹ and applies them in an account of Euro-American modernization. He maintains that in premodern society, intermediaries were accountable to monarchs; that during the transition to modern society, they were briefly autonomous; and that in modern society, they are accountable to the demos. This account views powerful or autonomous

¹ Albeit he utilizes different terminology.

intermediaries as a passing phenomenon, thus writing them out of the theory of modernity.

The alternative is to view processes as quasi-ineluctable (Archer 1995; Hirschman 2021). This allows us to shift from conceiving of modernity as a contingent outcome to understanding modernization as a series of macro-historical causal processes. This ultimately reveals how European colonization, capitalist industrialization, and megacity urbanization—all of which were quasi-ineluctable to those subjected to them—gave rise to powerful and autonomous (despotic) brokers. The theoretical implications are stark: as regards brokers, *modernity* may imply *powerlessness*, as on Reed’s account, whereas on the theory developed here, *modernization* describes *powerfulness*. While Euro-American theory maintains that *modernity* has an elective affinity, broadly speaking, with democracy, decolonial theory suggests that *modernization* foments despotism.

Decolonial sociology thus adds an indispensable rejoinder to such theories of modernity. Postcolonial humanities fields have long maintained that the concepts of the modern are bound to ones concerning the non-modern—that universalization initiatives counterintuitively spawned particularistic backwardness (e.g., Mbembe 2002; Mignolo 2003; Said 1979). Recent decolonial sociology moves beyond this epistemic focus (the Orientalism paradigm) to show how substantive but opposed phenomena—such as republican citizenship and colonial subjecthood—also emerge in tandem (Hammer 2020; see also Go 2016), thereby contributing to racial capitalism studies (Virdee 2019) and recovering a lost strand of dependency theory. Decolonial theory has much more potential as a theoretical paradigm than has yet been recognized; its ability to explain powerful brokers is effective not only in the domain of colonization, as one might expect, but also in the domains of industrialization and urbanization, two other macro-historical processes typically deemed constitutive of modernity (see Lerner 1968:387, 389; Taylor 2002:91).

While decolonial theory would be a poor substitute for theories of modernity tout court (Cooper 2005:142-45), it does provide a crucial counterpoint to contingentist Euro-American sociology and thus helps introduce a long-overdue balance to sociological theory. For not only was there a general trend towards the rationalization of everything, as Weber and the other modernity theorists would have it, but the key processes of modernization—colonization, industrialization, and urbanization—also counterintuitively spawned local-level counter-authorities. These actors—decentralized despots, labor bosses, and informal sovereigns—affected millions of people’s lives, just as do accountability chains extending from rational-legal authorities to brokers, only this is obscured by the inordinately-large shadow cast by Euro-American theory.

To develop decolonial sociology into a counterpoint to Euro-American such that sociological theory may encompass a real dialogue requires a two-pronged approach. First, it requires theoretical under-laboring: showing how both voluntarist and formalist theories of powerful brokers are irremediably flawed and sketching an alternative rooted in decolonial postulates. Second, it requires historical illustration: evidence of the general applicability of the alternative not only in the area of colonialism but also to subject matter beyond the typical remit of decolonial theory. I do both in what follows, applying the processual model developed in the theoretical discussion to not only colonization but also to the domains of industrialization and urbanization.

2.1. Shortcomings of the Leading Approaches

Two rich relational social research traditions—voluntarism and formalism—address the

relationship between brokerage and power.² Both have impressive records of explanatory successes in a variety of substantive domains (on voluntarism, e.g., Butler 2006; on formalism, e.g., Burt 2004). But they also both try to explain powerful brokers, at which they perform poorly. First, the evidence only supports the conclusions if we adopt each respective theory's assumptions, which are sometimes dubious. Second, findings in each of these research traditions suggest what an alternative might look like; they point, namely, to the processual approach advanced here.

2.1.1. The vulgarity of voluntarism

The idea that maneuvering is key to social explanation is central to the voluntarist sociological tradition founded by Erving Goffman and further developed by Randall Collins, among others. Voluntarists explain domination on the basis of the powerful party's willpower, performance, and maneuvering, much as did Nietzsche and, before him, Machiavelli. In his advice to late-15th century Florentine ruler Lorenzo de' Medici, the Renaissance theorist stresses that if a prince is to dominate, he must be decisive: he should give "proofs of his ability," "resort to unusual and distinctive acts," and, in the face of conflict, "[declare] himself openly for or against one of two conflicting parties" rather than remain neutral (Machiavelli [1513] 1966: chapter 21). In general, players move and try to anticipate other players' counter-moves in pursuit of "control of the . . . relationship" (Goffman 1969:137). In order to do so, "[the actor] should exhaustively enumerate the distinctively different courses of action open to the opponent as a response to each of his own possible moves, and in light of these settle on his own best course of action," much like a master chess player (Goffman 1969:100).³

Since Machiavelli, voluntarism has continued to straddle the genres of general theory and self-help. As a general theory, it boils down to the Nietzschean idea that "the winning generals are usually the most energetic ones" (Collins 2004:132). Since "powerful persons re-create their power [by moving] from situation to situation" (Collins 2004:131), "those who dominate [are people who] have the energy to dominate situations in which they encounter other persons" (Collins 2004:132). That is, powerful actors dominate in virtue of their maneuvering (cf. White 2008:131). Meanwhile, voluntarism is also a practical, self-help genre (Kamenev 1962:40). For the would-be powerful person, it "[gives] him [or her] a way of being systematic" (Goffman 1969:99-100). To the would-be powerful person, it counsels "taking into consideration their consideration of each other's consideration" (Goffman 1969:136). The theory downgrades those who fail to follow this mantra as people who "aren't quite players and aren't quite playing" (p. 135). Like the corporate self-help genre, it assumes that the uninitiated are gullible and will thus deem such performances "felicitous" (Reed 2020:77, 87, 92, 166).

Voluntarism is not a processual approach. But only when rendered in diachronic form do its predictions become clear. If maneuvering remains constant, rulers will gradually amass power with time. If they are only working with a interval of time, those rulers who maneuver more will amass more power. This, in turn, points to clear bases for comparison: within roughly the same

² Erikson and Occhiuto (2017) embrace the descriptor "formalism" much as I do. They consider "relationalism" to be the main alternative, whereas I instead parse much of what they call categorize in this way as "voluntarism." This is preferable because "voluntarism" agrees with "formalism"—both terms point to an explanans, willpower and forms, respectively—a semantic virtue "relationalism" lacks.

³ While Goffman emphasizes "strategic interaction," he admits that "social relationships" (which I discuss under "formalism," below) and "social gatherings" (which he discusses only in static terms) are also important (pp. 138-40).

interval of time, the ability to dominate will accrue to the person or organization that maneuvers, rather than the one who does not.

VOLUNTARIST PROPOSITION: The party that maneuvers from one relational situation to another will grow powerful over time; the party who does not will not.

While it is difficult to argue against voluntarism, it is even more difficult to sustain it as a general explanation for domination. First, voluntarism seems to miss an inordinately large part of the *empirical* picture. It is not just that those who try to dominate others typically fail, pace Machiavelli and Nietzsche. More importantly, those who do not appear to even try sometimes succeed at dominating others. This is especially the case for intermediaries. Thus, it was because late-19th and early-20th century Britain required “a king at the center of every polity, a chief on every piece of administrative ground, and a patriarch in every homestead” to mediate between the English overlords and the average colonial subject in tropical and southern Africa that these intermediaries, once installed, became “decentralized despots” capable of ruling ruthlessly over the local population (Mamdani 1996:39). Unless we are to misunderstand, the grand intentions and designs were Britain’s, but “decentralized despots” nevertheless arose in this country’s African colonies. Their power often had relatively little to do with voluntary maneuvering and always much to do with colonization. Voluntarism has trouble explaining such powerful brokers.

As a *theory* for explaining powerful intermediaries, voluntarism is *question-begging*. It assumes what it should explain by positing that the ability to compel obedience is most likely only when the order-giver *already* has power and order-receivers are “too weak [to resist orders]” and therefore “do not react angrily to domination” (Collins 2004:127).⁴ The counterfactual is worth considering: When acquiescence is not forthcoming, the would-be dominator could try to boss others around “with an imperious tone and demeanor,” but the would-be dominated, whether or not they assent “verbally and in bodily posture,” might just refuse to do whatever would be necessary to ensure that “the orders are actually carried out” (Collins 2004:284). Voluntarism has no substantive response.

Taken together, the theory’s self-help status and the fact that it presupposes that the would-be powerful actor already has power make voluntarism a social theory for management.⁵ Indeed, it is the corporate self-help genre that may provide the insights about the counterfactual of resistance: when one is already powerful, the myriad techniques found in *How to Make it Happen* (Hatzistefanis 2020), for instance, are immediately relevant. When one is not already powerful, though, voluntarism must resort to the bald assertion that willpower just works. Thus, the would-be powerful actor is fully capable of creating the “impression of an entity behind the action as its ‘essential cause’” and thereby eliciting the desired response even in the face of resistance (Reed 2019:340).

2.1.2. The failures of formalism

Formalist theory contrasts with voluntarism in almost every way, except that it is also question-begging. It maintains that domination stems from certain kinds of relational forms, making brokerage location per se a source of power. Following Kant in distinguishing between

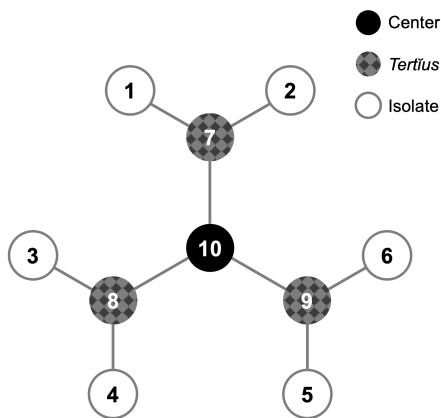
⁴ This is why violence—an existential form of domination—is so difficult to accomplish and maintain (Collins 2008:20).

⁵ Voluntarism is also an excellent theoretical paradigm for individual morality (Mead 1964:149).

phenomena and noumena and focusing entirely on the former, Simmel argues that an “object abstracted from reality” has “laws entirely inhering in the objective nature of the elements” (Simmel 1971:28; see also Erikson 2017; Erikson and Occhiuto 2017:232). Formalists thus advance theories of phenomena, not noumena, giving their substantive theories a methodological inflection. Simmel does so in his discussion of *tertius gaudens* (“the third who enjoys”):⁶ when two or more parties balance one another in conflict (or when one party enlists a third party to spite the second party), that is, when parties are related to one another in the form of a triad, this form allows the *tertius* to “seize upon the chances that this quarrel gives him” in order to “make a gain which one of the two would otherwise deny him” (Simmel [1908] 1950:154, 157).

The idea that power inheres to formally-defined relations, that power flows from interdependence per se, has been carried over into network sociology in general and power-dependence theory in particular (Emerson 1962; 1972). When considering relations beyond the triad, there are central brokers, like Figure 1’s node 10—whom we may continue to call the *tertius*—as well as peripheral brokers, such as Figure 1’s nodes 7, 8, and 9. (These peripheral brokers mediate between the *tertius* and the outer periphery of the network, comprised of relatively-isolated nodes.) Karen Cook et al.’s now-canonical experimental research finds that under such conditions, *not* the *tertius* but instead these peripheral brokers become most “powerful” after a pre-designated amount of time.⁷ The explanation that power-dependence theory puts forth is that this is because the isolates (1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 5 and 6) *depend* on peripheral brokers (7, 8, and 9, respectively) for access to others in the network (Cook et al. 1983:285-86, 294; see also Mizruchi and Potts 1998).

Figure 1. A Brokerage Network Structure



Thus, formalism contrasts with voluntarism by attributing power not to intentional maneuvering but instead to morphological forms (see Ermakoff 2019:583-86). Since formalists focus on phenomena rather than noumena, they emphasize formally-defined location in a network of ties and nodes. Since the broker’s power is said to come from the location itself, the only relevant question is *whether* one occupies a brokerage position, not *how* one maneuvers to

⁶ Simmel (1950:159, emphasis added) defines the *tertius* or broker as one that “has an equal, equally independent, and for this very reason decisive, relation to *two* others.” But relations between brokers and alters are now routinely conceptualized in a variety of ways (Freeman 1979; Gould and Fernandez 1989:92-93; Obstfeld, Borgatti, and Davis 2014).

⁷ I.e., they came to monopolize exchanges.

acquire it: “it is not the actor’s intentions and actions leading to occupying a certain position that creates the outcome, but the actual occupation of the position. A rock dropped from the same place in the same way has the same outcomes regardless of whether it was dropped on purpose or by accident” (Borgatti and Halgin 2011:1178, punctuation corrected). Location, not the willpower or maneuvering of the person now occupying it, is the source of power. The corollary is that “the greater one’s dependency on the relationship, the less power he/she has” (Savage and Whitham 2018:35). Thus, in contrast to voluntarism, which prescribes an energetic exercise routine when the goal is to win a war, formalism’s main practical implication is epistemic: people can learn to “see” brokerage location (Burt and Ronchi 2007). If voluntarism recommends that the intermediary create an intimidating impression, formalism recommends that intermediaries cling to their bureaucratic posts. For the powerful who intend to keep others powerless, the practical advice would be to regularly replace intermediaries, cycling them out of their current brokerage positions and into others before they amass too much power, something precolonial (Spalding 1984:212), bureaucratic (Newman forthcoming), and colonial (Burbank and Cooper 2010:108) rulers are known to do.

Formalism is not a diachronic approach.⁸ Since formalism blurs the distinction between methods and theory, it rarely explicitly theorizes diachronic implications. But it always assumes that brokerage takes place over an interval of time. Indeed, only when viewed diachronically does it even point to a clear prediction, which we can denote with the colloquial term, *the incumbent’s advantage*: the time that one occupies in a brokerage position correlates positively with her or his power. For Simmel, incumbents of central locations accumulate power *over time*.⁹ Similarly, for power-dependence theory, which is better-substantiated than Simmel, intermediaries’ advantage will grow *over time*.¹⁰ As with voluntarism, this also has comparative implications: when considering comparable amounts of time, we should expect a similar amount of power to accrue to similarly-positioned actors.

FORMALIST PROPOSITION: Power accrues to those who occupy brokerage positions; thus, those who occupy formally-comparable positions for a given amount of time will have functionally comparable amounts of power.

Like voluntarism, formalism has mixed success as an explanation for brokers’ power. The *non-experimental empirical evidence* for formalism is decidedly mixed. There is some positive support. Padgett and Ansell (1993) examine the 15th century Florentine ruler, Cosmo de’ Medici (Lorenzo’s predecessor), arguing that he occupied a unique bridge between “doubly-disarticulated parts” of the elite (p. 1285)—namely, new economic elites and old patrician families—giving the incumbent Medici family a “structurally induced” advantage over

⁸ Formalists do, however, readily concede that “networks do not emerge *ex nihilo*” (Centola 2015:1296).

⁹ While Simmel does not discuss the problem diachronically, his centrality view clearly implies this by saying that only the incumbent intermediary can “seize upon” the opportunities her brokerage position gives her to “make a gain”—i.e., that centrality allows the *tertius* to capitalize on opportunities as they arise, as a result of which she will grow dominant over time (e.g., Yohanani 2020:251). According to Simmel, the *tertius* need not *start out* powerful “in comparison with the power of each of the two parties”; rather, “what alone is important is that the forces of two antagonistic elements paralyze one another and thus actually give unlimited power to the intrinsically extremely weak position of a third element not *yet* engaged in the issue” (Simmel 1950:154, 157, emphasis added).

¹⁰ This is why researchers in this tradition impose the relevant relational configuration and then let their experiments run for a period of time; for only by letting the experiment run will peripheral brokerage positions gradually grow dominant (Molm 2003:5).

challengers (p. 1298). They imply that this centrality was the cause of his dominance. But studies of other cases uncover at least as much evidence that intermediaries do not necessarily grow powerful over time in virtue of occupying a brokerage location. Provincial nobles helped the French monarch recover from the Fronde, but in so doing they lost power vis-a-vis the crown (Kettering 1986). Overseas investors mediated the coalition between Puritan radicals and London's merchant elite that was central to the English Civil War, but they did not become dominant (Hillmann 2008). And Han brokers bridged interethnic relations between Mongolians and the Manchu court during the late Qing period, but nor did they grow powerful (Wang 2015). Moreover, for many cases of powerful intermediaries, there are others who are just as "between" who are not powerful. Thus, one could say that the reason Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema were able to obstruct the Joe Biden Build Back Better Plan is that they had power borne of brokering between their respective constituencies and the Democratic Party delegation. But many others occupy equivalent locations and lack such power. Thus, the historical empirical evidence does not point to a clear association between brokerage location and power. Indeed, even some of the experimental evidence shows that power is associated with multiple morphological forms depending on other factors, not just with brokerage location (Burt 1998).

As a *theory*, formalism is dogmatic. One could reasonably ask: does the origin of a brokerage location have any bearing on its function? Since it attributes power differentials solely to specific combinations of the presence and absence of ties, formalism must answer "no," the origins of such combinations are exogenous to their effects. According to formalism, the way networks form is irrelevant to how they function (Borgatti and Halgin 2011:1178). Simmel attributes the power of *tertii* to their centrality, not to any underlying social configuration that came about historically and that can be rendered in terms of broker centrality; power-dependence theory also assumes that the genesis of that which can be rendered as isolates' isolation is explanatorily unrelated to that which can be rendered as their ties with peripheral brokers. The genesis of brokerage location is theoretically exogenous.

This arbitrary designation of exogeneity makes formalist theory *question-begging*. It leaves formalists with no choice but to explain brokers' power on the basis of existing power differentials: "power comes from being connected to those who are powerless" (Bonacich 1987:1171; cf. Borgatti and Halgin 2011:1173-74; Cook and Emerson 1978; Markovsky, Willer, and Patton 1988:232; Simmel 1950:155, 156, 159, 160).¹¹ And yet, if *powerless* parties already exist, so too do *powerful* ones—meaning formalism assumes the powerful intermediaries it purports to explain. Therefore, while formalism contrasts with voluntarism, it is burdened by the same exact theoretical flaw.

2.1.3. Slippery syntheses

While strict voluntarism contrasts with strict formalism, versions of the two are

¹¹ While it is beyond the scope of this article to delve into this matter in any depth, I believe that this interpretation is based on an erroneous understanding of the experimental method. For in an experiment, the experimenter introduces *all* stimuli ex nihilo—in this case, deciding which nodes will *and* which will not be tied to one other—in order to determine which stimulus or sets of stimuli (as in this case) may be causally important if somehow introduced into the real world. (The implication being that, for the real world, we would consider as a cause whatever it is that substitutes functionally for the stimulus or stimuli.) But the interpretation of the results in question is based on the assumption that the researchers' intervention was limited to *introducing ties* between some nodes, when in fact they *also* produced a *lack-of-ties* between others. The assumption is ubiquitous; Erikson and Occhiuto (2017:232) baldly assert that "the absence of relations produces a structural effect."

(sometimes thought to be) compatible. The problem is that, like voluntarism and formalism on their own, these combinations also perform poorly at explaining powerful intermediaries. White (2008) invokes relational form to explain voluntary willpower. He argues that one's identity is itself the product, principally, of a massive sea of relations that, in effect, dominates everyone (p. 167), and, secondarily, of a "primordial and continuing urge to control" (p. 10). While these efforts to control were, in White's theory, "the catalyst for the whole social edifice" (Seeley 2014:31), the growing density of relations means that voluntary will gradually ceases to be driven by urges to control and is increasingly driven by the concatenation of relations into "disciplines." Accordingly, exercising efficacious will "becomes a higher-order project, [based on] playing off [existing] disciplines and their [specific] embeddings . . . [by] making use of decoupling" (White 2008:282).

While his approach successfully merges formalism and voluntarism, White has trouble explaining—indeed, he has trouble even perceiving—power. The crux of the problem centers on his core concept: "control." He argues that whether this verb is transitive (an action exerted on an object, like *dominate*) or intransitive (an action intelligible in itself, like *walk*) "depends on perspective" (p. 283 n.). "Control" may or may not even involve others! This ambiguity is inherent to explaining voluntary will by form. Pursuing such an explanation, White, of course, owns up to it: he makes it the center of his concept of "robust action," which he defines as "[that] which prevents *anyone* from seeing clearly" (p. 288, emphasis added). Did Harvey Weinstein dominate others? Not only is it impossible for Weinstein to say, on White's theory, but it is also impossible for White himself to say, for Weinstein was dominated by relations that created his identity, making it somewhat inevitable that he would do what he did.¹² Such an explanation may suffice for other explanatory goals but with reference to power it is dissimulation.

An alternative is to appeal to willpower to account for relational form (the reverse of White's approach). Indeed, this is essentially Padgett and Ansell's (1993) strategy. They argue that Cosimo de' Medici derived his *power* from his position, but that he came to occupy this position by adapting lessons he had earlier in life "to revolutionary circumstances," thereby maneuvering to get himself into his position (p. 1307). Martin (2009) builds this view into a full-fledged theory, arguing that people have substantive reasons for entering into relationships, but that once they enter into them, the relations themselves have implications much like those outlined by formalists: they allow some to dominate others (see also Goffman 1969:100, 138). He calls these relations "command structures" and makes a big reach, attributing political party and military organizational successes to them.

But to overcome the formalist version of question-begging requires addressing the problem of how the genesis of relations affects their function. Rather than address it, Martin proceeds on the *assumption* that people must somehow be *unable* "to form relationships among themselves that would allow them to bargain collectively with the [powerful party]," i.e., that isolates (like Figure 1's nodes 1 and 2, 3 and 4, and 5 and 6) are unable to break free of their isolation; it is on this basis that the latter can derive power from relations with the former (Martin 2009:227). He suggests two ways this assumption can be justified (p. 196). The first is if there is *already* a "differentiation of persons in terms of power." This would lead the less-powerful (isolates) to seek out benefactors by aligning with their superordinates rather than their peers. But as regards a theory of power, this is question-begging. The second reason people might enter

¹² White does, however, grant that some people stand above disciplines, like Napoleon (p. 131), and he notes that agents can wrest free of the former's dictates, presumably after seeing such relations (though presumably not clearly) as domination (p. 293). So in White's world, relatively discrete relations of domination exist, we just cannot grasp them. What his theory completely precludes, then, is that "*relata* are able to see each other without suppressing each other" (Rose 2009:76).

into dominant-dominated relations is if they confront a context of *danger*, or “anarchy.” For this would logically lead some to ally with others out of a “need for protection,” and could eventually give rise to powerful leaders. But if the power of central actors (like Figure 1’s nodes 7, 8, and 9) depends on a Hobbesian state of nature capable of keeping isolates isolated from one another, this kind of context does the explanatory work (Rose 2009:56). Martin (2009:226), however, takes context as an assumption rather than an explanans, leaving him with formalist dogma.

The foregoing critiques of White’s and Martin’s syntheses suggests that combining voluntarism and formalism does not overcome their shortcomings. The one dissolves into dissimulation and the other doubles-down on dogma. Nor can they coexist in the same explanatory project without leading to conclusions that are either ambiguous (insisting on the causal importance of both factors, even though they are at odds with one another descriptively) or arbitrary (insisting on the overriding importance of one factor, even though both feature in the explanatory account). Padgett and Ansell’s account leaves unanswered the question of whether Cosimo de’ Medici’s power stemmed from his propitious network-structural location (as their blockmodel figures suggest) or this man’s maneuvering by means of which he came to occupy it (as the 20 pages of narrative about these dynamics suggest). Had Cosimo maneuvered in different circumstances, would he have been as successful? Would just any occupant of that location have enjoyed the power the Medici family enjoyed? The conclusion is ambiguous; and if these authors were to answer one way or the other, the choice would be arbitrary.¹³ Joe Manchin occupied an intermediary position *and* maneuvered to get there. Who is to say which is important?

2.3. Elements of an Alternative

The relationship between brokerage and power can be conceptualized by starting with macro-historical *processes*—and subsuming relevant insights from the voluntarist and formalist approaches. (I do not wish to refute voluntarism or formalism, but rather to emphasize processes as the key driver of brokers’ power, and thereby demote the components of these theories from cardinal to ancillary status.) The processual alternative posits that concrete but general historical processes make people align with some but not all brokerage locations, giving the occupants of these locations the latent ability to exercise power. Willpower is not unimportant, for brokers must still *opt* to exercise power; however, pace voluntarism, brokers’ power is not a function of the voluntary exercise of will to locate oneself in such a position or maneuvering to change between such positions, for even those who end up in such locations by accident will still be able to choose to exercise the power latent in them. Nor is location unimportant. But the processual approach reconceptualizes formalism’s sine qua non, considering brokerage locations in terms of their *alignment* with macro-historical processes.

Together, this adds up to idea that brokers will grow powerful not because they maneuver, changing their position, nor because they were located in a certain position. Instead:

PROCESSUALIST PROPOSITION: Brokerage locations that are aligned with quasi-ineluctable processes are charged with latent power, making their occupants powerful; occupants of positions not so aligned will not be powerful.

¹³ This problem is not unique to Padgett and Ansell. The ambiguity or arbitrariness that results from combining voluntarist and formalist approaches also characterizes, for example, Barkey’s (2008:18, 21-23) model of brokerage in colonial states (focused on the Ottoman empire) and Walder and Chu’s (2020:106-08, 129-30) model of violent factional conflict (focused on the Cultural Revolution).

2.3.1. Power

I define power as a person's or organization's capacity to *compel obedience*. Kings and states are powerful, for example, to the degree that they conscript citizens to control territory, extract taxes from the population, or enforce a quarantine (and regardless of whether they are legitimate). So are gangs, mafias, parents, and many other people and organizations powerful insofar as they mobilize others to control space and extract resources. Consent facilitates power (Foucault 1977), but it is not power itself. States can only conscript soldiers, levy taxes, and enforce quarantines if a critical mass consents to these activities. So too do gangs, mafias, parents, etc. rely on a degree of consent among those they rule. But nor does power require the possibility of resistance (Weber 1978:53). It may be completely impossible to resist a gang, mafia, parent, etc., and indeed the greater the powerful person's or organization's power the less possible resistance becomes.

The telltale feature of the powerful is that they are able to get others to *mobilize for* their ends. People sacrifice themselves on the battlefield for the powerful, relinquish their wealth to the powerful, wash the dishes or maintain six feet of distance from others when the powerful tell them to. Moreover, to the degree that some people mobilize *in favor* of the powerful party's ends, disobedience becomes correspondingly less feasible for others; this, in turn, increases the potency of the coercion necessary to compel obedience, making a little bit go a long way. Thus, when relatively few mobilize for the powerful party, it is relatively easy to get away with refusing to do so, and brutal coercion is sometimes necessary to compel obedience; but in the face of widespread mobilization, it is often far easier to mobilize for the powerful party's ends than to oppose them, and sometimes unthinkable to mount resistance. Power is a stampede: if thin, it may be possible to choose one's own direction; but when thick, it does not impart opportunities to choose, or even to hesitate.

2.3.2. Brokerage

Brokerage refers to "the linking of two or more currently unconnected social sites by a unit that mediates their relations with each other and/or with yet another site" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001:142). Brokers are the people or organizations who constitute these bridges from site to site, linking one person or group to another person or group. Voluntarism directs attention to any maneuvering necessary to become a broker and the activity of *brokering*; it views brokerage as an expression of will and of skill, and thus something that exists *for itself*. Formalism designates all those who inhabit a "structural hole" node (Burt 2004), or a node between two or more "weak ties" (Granovetter 1973), brokers;¹⁴ it sees brokerage as location, something that exists *in itself*. Given the divergence in definitions, these theories identify somewhat different sets of people or organizations as brokers.

Under the processual approach, brokers are all those who occupy locations constituted by enveloping processes. Thus, there is variation *within* the category of broker: brokerage spans the in-itself and for-itself categories. This points to a question: when is a broker merely a broker *in* itself (unpowerful) and when is a broker a broker *for* itself (powerful)? Neither voluntarism nor formalism even allow us to formulate this question, much less answer it. Part of the answer is that, since *processes* spawn conflict, they can impel those who suffer from them to seek

¹⁴ For a more elaborate typology, see Gould and Fernandez (1989).

protection from brokers; the rest of the answer is that only some brokerage locations are propitiously *aligned* so as to benefit from such a quest for protection. For both reasons, brokerage locations vary as regards the capacity they give their occupants to dominate others.

2.3.2. Process

Processes vary in two key ways. First, they vary in terms of momentum. Some are Markovian, in the sense that the historical present leaves almost all future possibilities open, even if each is of restricted probability (Abbott 2001:53). This is the conception of time integral to Eurocentric theory which seeks to discover the conditions for freedom (Carreira da Silva and Brito Vieira 2020:976-77).¹⁵ Others are quasi-inexorable (albeit ultimately temporary), exhibiting a definite momentum that makes them seem unstoppable (Hirschman 2021). Hegel and Marx initially developed this seemingly-unstoppable conception of process (Postone 1993:76), but it goes well beyond them and is the conception of process inherent to decolonial theory. In the case of quasi-ineluctable processes, “history” tends in a certain direction; processes are *asymmetrical*. Not only do they persist, even against many peoples’ wills (though they obviously cannot persist when enough people oppose them), their asymmetry means they impact some people in one way and others in a different way.

Second, processes vary in terms of their relationship to unification and polarization. Some may unite people under a common framework, driving an outgroup to agree with an ingroup.¹⁶ Others, however, generate conflict between people, reinforcing if not generating factions. On this question Hegel and Marx diverge: Hegel’s vision is that everyone must bring about what already exists, such that we will observe a grand, society-wide convergence if we look backwards on past history (Taylor 1975:376); Marx’s is that some have an interest in perpetuating the status quo and others have an interest in a different future, such that processes themselves are conflict-ridden and point to an open-ended future (Marx and Engels [1848] 1978:473). This points to a continuum between actors who merely *exist* in latent form (in themselves) and ones that manifestly *act* (for themselves). The characteristic feature of the processual approach is to posit that variation along this continuum is driven by process—i.e., that when stimulated by process, groups move from existing in themselves to acting for themselves.

When I refer to modernization processes, I refer to processes of this quasi-ineluctable, conflict-ridden kind. There are several obvious such processes. They include colonization, industrialization, and urbanization. To most of those affected by these processes, they seem unstoppable. Moreover, they inherently affect different sets of people differently, such that there are relative winners and relative losers. Due to this combination of quasi-inexorability and conflict-provocation, such processes impel the negatively-affected parties to seek protection. This can drive them into the arms of brokers, converting the latter from brokers who exist in themselves to ones who act for themselves. The scope condition, however, is that these brokers must be aligned propitiously vis-a-vis the process in question.

2.3.3. Alignment

The existing literature offers several actor-centric conceptions of alignment, but they are not quite apt for describing alignment between brokerage locations and processes of the aforementioned kind. The first is action-centered, denoting the congruity of a particular

¹⁵ It is this view that would allow will to be the motor of process, as voluntarists assume.

¹⁶ This is the basic assumption, e.g., in Meyer et al.’s (1997) world society and Alexander’s (2006) civil sphere theories.

individual's disposition with an emergent and general "line of conduct" (Ermakoff 2008:182); it is on the basis of this kind of "alignment" that people gradually get on the same page to do something, as, for example, when a collection of governing officials abdicates. The second conception of "alignment" is habitus-centric, referring to the degree to which a habitus befitting of one context is also advantageous in another (Stuart Brundage 2018:1266); it is on this basis that diplomats, who originate from one milieu, may be effective in another. The third conception describes a blunted form of loyalty; it is such "alignment" that describes U.S. organized labor's relationship to the Democratic Party (Zieger 1995:141). While none of these conceptions addresses brokers, they all suggest that alignment has as much to do with the *fit* between, as with the *asymmetry* among, the things that may come into alignment.

I take brokerage locations as the unit—and focus on how well they align with macro-historical processes. My thesis is that *propitious alignment* of location with process is what makes brokers powerful. Because processes are asymmetrical, some locations are always already aligned *with* the direction of history, as with Facebook, which mediated between end-users as they flocked to social media in general and to that platform in particular. Others are always already aligned *against* the direction of history, as with MySpace, which hemorrhaged end-users as people nevertheless flocked to social media in general. A brokerage location can only be propitiously aligned with a process amidst such asymmetry; given asymmetry, it is readily apparent whether an alignment is propitious: MySpace's alignment was not propitious, whereas Facebook's alignment was.

Which kind of alignment ends up being propitious depends on which of the parties to the process-borne conflict is gaining ground. First, the process-borne conflict could trigger a backlash. In such situations, brokerage locations that are aligned *against* the direction of history might be charged with latent power, as when residents mobilize behind civic organizations during "not in my backyard" campaigns. While such episodes do occur, more common and more poorly understood, I think, is the opposite. That is, second, those locations that are aligned with the leading edge of a process—not only *with* the process but *for more of* the process—are charged with latent power. As a given process continues, there is a tendency for more people to be implicated in it. Such an increase represents a growing pool of possible-followers for the occupants of brokerage locations aligned with the process and a decrease in the relative size of the pool of possible-followers for the occupants of other positions.

For a given process to continue in spite of the conflict inherent to it, those who oppose the process, including anti-process brokers, cannot win. Crucially, in the face of opposition, people who constitute the leading edge of a process will naturally be inclined to rally to the occupants of brokerage locations that favor them, i.e., to pro-process brokers (cf. Smith et al. 2014:163). Thus, in the face of quasi-inexorable, conflict-generating processes, there is a stochastic tendency for anti-process brokers to fail and a causal tendency for pro-process ones to succeed at mobilizing others for their ends.

Amidst quasi-ineluctable, conflict-generating processes, pro-process brokers gain the ability to mobilize followers for a simple set of reasons. For quasi-ineluctable, conflict-generating processes to continue, the newly-implicated need to be insulated from the effects of conflict—need to be protected—more than those implicated earlier on. If they do not rally to pro-process brokers, anti-process brokers may repress them, the chances that they will be shed from the process will increase, and the process may itself slow (or may cease to be quasi-ineluctable, or may even cease altogether). The newly implicated are therefore likely to seek protection more energetically than others who may also be negatively impacted by such a process, leading them

to rally behind broker-benefactors.

2.4. Summary

Brokerage is related to power only when affected by quasi-ineluctable, conflict-generating processes. Pace the voluntarist claim that maneuvering, borne of a will to power, is inherently important, only maneuvering *into* a position that is aligned with such a process will yield the ability to exercise power.¹⁷ And pace the formalist claim that location is inherently important, only brokers who occupy locations that *are* aligned with quasi-ineluctable, conflict-generating processes—whether because they maneuvered to get there or ended up there by accident—have the ability to realize the power latent in their propitiously-aligned positions.¹⁸

During certain periods, in certain ways, history moves quasi-ineluctably in a determinate direction—as with colonization, industrialization, and urbanization. At least some quasi-ineluctable processes generate conflicts between the actors implicated in them. When these conflicts grow severe, they propel at least some of those negatively affected by them to seek protection. This tendency stems from the quasi-ineluctable processes at play and is thus, to a significant degree, outside of any one individual’s control. Those brokers who, for whatever reason, are aligned so as to benefit from this tendency are thereby made powerful. Their alignment with a quasi-ineluctable process gives brokers followers that they can mobilize for their “own” ends, to dominate others.¹⁹

Not all brokerage positions are aligned with quasi-ineluctable processes that generate conflicts between groups: some bridge between groups in the absence of such conflict-generating processes; others bridge in the presence of a conflict-generating process but fail to align with the process such that people who seek protection do not tend to gravitate to them. When brokers are so aligned, though, this configuration (the alignment of brokerage location with process) gives them the ability to mobilize followers, which they can then use to compel obedience in the form of controlling space and extracting resources. The propitiously-aligned broker is the ultimate beneficiary of a chain of causation running from quasi-ineluctable process, to conflict between those who are already implicated in the process and the newly-implicated, to a quest for protection among the newly-implicated, to the newly-implicated group’s support for pro-process brokers. It is on the basis of this chain-reaction that alignment with process makes brokers powerful.

¹⁷ The *decision* to dominate is not per se a precondition for powerful brokers. This is because brokers may enjoy dominance only in its latent state, never exercising it to mobilize others for their own ends. While the broker’s decision to dominate is important to actualize and reveal her or his power (making it methodologically relevant), it is in no sense its cause. In any case, those with power usually decide to exercise it.

¹⁸ Nor are *conflicts* per se the source of brokers’ power. Bracketing quasi-ineluctable processes, conflicts just create objective interests for everyone who is negatively impacted to take collective action against the vector of harm; for this reason, there is nothing inherent to conflicts that will necessarily generate anything besides a tendency to resist (Einwohner 2003).

¹⁹ The ends among which powerful brokers can “choose” are limited to those that are consistent with the processes empowering their locations. This theory therefore points not only to the power stemming from double-duty predication but also the limitations this places on the exercise of power. Processes *mobilize* people in concrete ways, thereby charging certain brokerage locations with latent power; and brokers who occupy those locations are thereby able to *mobilize* people for their “own” ends—but only insofar as their ends are consistent with the process.

3. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

One of the leading techniques for identifying causes is counterfactual analysis. Voluntarism's counterfactual centers on *maneuvering*: had the broker not maneuvered (or maneuvered less), s/he would not have grown powerful; but since she did maneuver (or maneuvered more), s/he did grow powerful. Formalism's counterfactual centers on *location*: had the person *not* occupied the brokerage location, s/he would not have grown powerful; but since she did occupy it, she did grow powerful. The counterfactual by means of which we can attribute pro-process brokers' power (their success in mobilizing followers) *to* a given process must reference *the process*. For a given process, the argument must be: had the *process* slowed or stopped, *then* pro-process brokers would not have benefitted from the tendential ability to mobilize others for their ends; but *since* the process continued, they did benefit from this tendency, and grew powerful as a result.

Counterfactual reasoning is an epistemic technique useful for verifying the accuracy of claims, not a valid basis for a theory of social ontology. Its use allows me to examine the broker-empowering processes of colonization, industrialization, and urbanization, but only by proceeding as if they were separate substantive domains. In reality, however, they were integrally connected: colonial systems contributed decisively to the industrial revolution (Marx [1867] 1977:931-40; Williams 1944), and industrialization spawned urban growth (Collins and Wanamaker 2015:977; Engels [1845] 1958). In tandem, these processes (along with other processes, events, accidents, etc.) contributed decisively to the modern world. A more comprehensive understanding of them—of how they gave rise both to modern society and also to countertrends in the form of despotisms—therefore contributes important content to any theory of the historically-changing social totality.

4. EVIDENCE

The processual approach explains the power of decentralized despots that arose with colonization, labor bosses that arose with capitalist industrialization, and informal sovereigns that arose amidst rapid urbanization. I address each in turn.

4.1. Colonization and Decentralized Despots

Prior to European conquest, precolonial societies were often characterized by a balance of forces that kept despotism at bay. This was true within Europe, under the Carolingian empire.²⁰ And it was true in much of the rest of the world prior to European conquest; indigenous notables often had to serve followers in order to retain them, for otherwise followers would defect to other notables who offered better terms (Bandyopadhyay 1993:A-151; Geertz 1980:***; Lemarchand 1977:291-92; Mamdani 1996:45). This pattern was not universal. And

²⁰ Charlemagne came to control a network of nobles, who in turn kept retainers and extracted revenues from which the crown benefitted. But the conquest of Europe was different. The “Carolingian government contained checks and balances . . . All free persons were required to take an oath of loyalty to the emperor. But direct relationship to the emperor was only one dimension of the political system: everyone owed allegiance to someone else. Multiple hierarchies of allegiances made the empire hang together and created the risk that if it fell apart, each piece might challenge the rest”—that is, “that imperial intermediaries would take off on their own” (Burbank and Cooper 2010:83-84).

when it did obtain, nor were precolonial societies utopias; they were riven with domination. But the balance of forces precluded despotism. Modern colonialism changed all this.

There were two major colonization booms, one in the 16th to 18th centuries and another from the mid-19th to early-20th centuries. The two leading colonial powers central to these respective booms were Spain (with the Netherlands and Britain vying for second place) and Britain (with France in second); during their respective heydays, Spain colonized much of the Americas and Britain colonized India and much of Africa.

Colonization was a quasi-ineluctable, conflict-generating process. Each new colony put more territory and people under colonial control. This required that Spanish and British colonial powers rely increasingly on local intermediaries in most of New Spain (Gibson 1973) and Peru (Silverblatt 1995:280) and in much of India (Burbank and Cooper 2010:306-07) and British Africa (Mamdani 1996:73-74). The reason is simple: to consolidate control of a contiguous territory (in the case of Spanish conquest of Mexico and Peru) or to expand from coastal enclaves to inland protectorates (in India and Africa) required a corresponding increase in the number of brokers tasked with ruling indirectly on behalf of the colonial power. Expanding colonies entailed increased reliance on indirect rule.²¹ Indirect rule, in turn, gave rise to what Mamdani (1996) calls *decentralized despotism*: brokers implicated in colonial conquests who rode the wave of colonization to become local potentates unto themselves.

I examine Spanish colonization of Spanish America and British colonization of its Indian and equatorial African possessions, showing that neither formalist nor voluntarist theory can explain the rise of decentralized despots and that the processual approach can. Colonization made those intermediaries aligned with this process into decentralized despots.

4.1.1. Spanish colonization of New Spain and Peru

Spanish conquerers “set out to destroy the top of Aztec and Inca society and to exploit the people on the bottom, but they needed to be careful in the middle” (Burbank and Cooper 2010:164). Mid-level actors—known to natives as *tlatoani* in the Aztec world and as *kurakas* and *mallkus* in the Incan sphere, and to Spaniards as *caciques* and sometimes *principales*—were integral to the 16th-century conquest of Spanish America. Some of them opposed colonization; they were routed and lost power. Those who aligned with colonization, in contrast, became powerful decentralized despots.

Prior to the Spanish invasion, three Nahua city-states collectively ruled central Mexico. Though hierarchical, the configuration was quite “fluid” and was “subject to constant political maneuvering and manipulation” (Sanders and Price 2003:70). When Hernán Cortés and his men arrived in Central Mexico, the Aztec alliance was ascendant in much of the region, but it faced some steadfast resistance, especially from Tlaxcala. Naturally, the Spaniards approached the Tlaxcalan natives to propose an alliance. After three failed military ripostes, the Tlaxcalan leaders resigned themselves to collaboration with Cortés (Oudjik and Restall 2007:46-47). Tlaxcalan senators convinced the paramount leader Xicohtencatl the Younger to ally with Cortés

²¹ Erroneous counterfactual arguments sometimes deduce that the transition to indirect rule was due to an insufficient number of European colonial administrators. This is misleading (Mamdani 1996:73-76). The correct counterfactual is if colonial powers had reigned in their ambitions, contenting themselves with their very first, small overseas possessions; that scenario would have afforded direct rule. Only due to *colonial expansion* was there a relative scarcity of colonial administrators. The reason for the transition to indirect rule was, therefore, that colonization continued.

and the Spanish-Tlaxcalan alliance proceeded to vanquish the Aztec emperor, Moctezuma Xocoyotzin, seated in Tenochtitlán (present-day Mexico City).

When Francisco Pizarro arrived in Peru, the Incan empire was beset with a major factional struggle. The result, however, was a fluid dynamic characteristic of many precolonial societies. This allowed a small group of Spanish opportunists to defeat Inca Atahualpa in Cajamarca and install Manco Inca as their puppet. Thereafter, “some Inca royals cooperated [with the invaders],” helping them expand their control and conquer the Incan capital, Cuzco (Burbank and Cooper 2010:164). But Manco Inca soon broke ranks, and was “able to mobilize up to fifty thousand men against the Spanish and lay siege to the ancient capital” (Burbank and Cooper 2010:164). Yet in the face of colonization, many soon defected and Manco Inca quickly lost control of the city.²²

From the fateful invasion events onward, everyone in what would become Spanish America faced a de facto question—which side are you on?—to which there was ultimately only one viable answer. In the immediate term, natives polarized vis-a-vis the colonization process. Some, like the Tlaxcalans, aligned with colonization; many others opposed it.²³ Given the quasi-ineluctability of colonization, opposition was foreordained to fail. Cuauhtémoc succeeded Moctezuma to lead the Mexica resistance, but soon met the same fate as his predecessor. And just as colonization did not stop for Cuauhtémoc, it did not stop for anyone else on the wrong side of history, including Túpac Amaru II, the alleged descendent of the Incan emperor who, along with his wife Micaela Bastidas, led the last upsurge of native resistance to Spanish colonialism prior to independence, in 1780-1781 (Walker 2014). If it were true that “the winning generals” are the “most energetic ones” (Collins 2004:132), Cuauhtémoc and Túpac Amaru II would have defeated the Spanish. Instead, they were coerced, punished, and killed.

The compromise option—accepting some colonization but not ongoing colonial expansion—was unappealing to natives. It portended uniting their destiny with coercive Spanish settler-colonists. While Spaniards were integral to the overall colonization process, they constituted its trailing edge. Relatively few Europeans were involved in the initial conquests,²⁴ and settlers were unenthusiastic about risking life and limb in adventures to spread Christianity. Most Spaniards just wanted to take advantage of the colonial possessions already at their disposal—to extract resources through the exploitation of native labor (*encomiendas*) and then to usurp land (*haciendas*). Thus whereas the Mexica opposed colonization and the Tlaxcalans aligned with the process, the Spanish conquerers represented a *via media*, in favor of *some* colonization. They were not, for that, an attractive alternative to natives: when they were not

²² If elite politics were more turbulent in Peru than in Mexico, at the local level, Incan society was likely more static, adhering to a pattern according to which “authority was conferred by the community [onto the *kuraka*] in exchange for services rendered for communal solidary interests” (Spalding 1981:19).

²³ This polarization started during the siege of Tenochtitlán, when Xicohtencatl the Younger deserted the battlefield. The Tlaxcalan senators broke ranks, condemning the deserter, and Cortés ordered him hanged. This left Tlaxcalan notables largely on the side of colonization, and led them to become the most important pro-colonization intermediaries in what is now Mexico, Central America, and the Southwestern U.S. (Gibson 1952:183-89; McEnroe 2012:37-43; 2020:168-69, 172-73; Restall 1998:29-50). The Pech people served a similar role as collaborators in the Spanish conquest of Mayan Yucatan (Restall 1997:286) and the Cañaris in Incan Peru (McEnroe 2020:150). In Mexico and the Southwestern U.S., polarization persisted through the late-18th century as the colonization process annexed more space, affecting the lives of more natives (McEnroe 2012:91-92).

²⁴ The military dimension of the conquest had both Spanish and native participants, with the latter being decisive due to their numerical preponderance.

working natives to death, they killed them by spreading contagious diseases. And in Peru, Spanish priests were notorious sexual predators (Mumford 2012:149).

Between-generation conflict ensured that natives gravitate, instead, towards pro-colonization brokers. This conflict manifested as one between settler-colonists (who sought to exploit natives) and frontier-colonists (like Tlaxcalans) (Gibson 1952:189).²⁵ And when colonists treated the natives despotically, they drifted away from settlers towards the Tlaxcalan sphere of influence (McEnroe 2012:97). With opposition to colonization essentially futile, natives were faced with a choice between colonization's leading and trailing edges. Given the direction of history, the best choice was the most extreme one: to rally to pro-colonization brokers.

Pro-colonization brokers excelled. Since relatively few Europeans were involved in the conquest and initial colonization, more and more native intermediaries were needed—especially in Mexico and the southwestern U.S.—as Spanish America annexed more and more territory (McEnroe 2012:109, 116). Those who aspired to collaborate often *claimed* to be precolonial nobility (in Mexico, *tlatoani*; in Peru, *kurakas* or *mallkus*). When recognized, these leaders became local potentates (*caciques*), often retaining the members of their pre-conquest inner circle (*principales*) (Gibson 1973:19). (Some *caciques* also became official governors [*gobernadores*] [Yannakakis 2008:205-06].²⁶) But in the context of colonization, privileged status was largely independent of traditional authority; when no one who had actually been a member of the Indian nobility could be found, Spanish overlords could simply elevate a leading Indian personage as *cacique* (Gibson 1964:70; Mumford 2012:151)—an administrative practice that recurred numerous times during subsequent European colonization drives.

Status was also largely independent of ethnic *bona fides*. In New Spain and beyond, those who aligned with the leading edge of colonization were designated “Tlaxcalan” (McEnroe 2012:68-69, 85, 109); the term came to describe not membership in a particular ethnic group but rather the status and power of the group that had initially aligned in favor of colonization (Gibson 1952:188; McEnroe 2012:92-93, 95-96, 111, 138). The crown granted titles to Tlaxcalans who claimed noble lineage, incorporating them as integral parts of the monarchical political system. This was not because of their alleged traditional authority or ethnic *bona fides*, but in begrudging recognition of the military contribution they made to the conquest (Matthew 2007:112, 121; McEnroe 2012:***; 2020:179, 184-85; Oudjik and Restall 2007:35, 48, 52; Portillo Valdés 2015:48, 51; Yannakakis 2008:201-02). Privileges included the right to carry swords, ride horses with saddles and bridals, bear arms, and wear Spanish-style clothing (Gibson 1952:163, 184; 1964:***; Martínez Baracs 2008:***; Portillo Valdés 2015:48). “Tlaxcalan” was a practical category and “traditional” authority in part a fiction; in some ways, so too was “Spaniard.”²⁷ These were secondary considerations compared to alignment vis-a-vis the colonization process.

Alignment with the direction of history redounded to *caciques* as the capacity to mobilize followers for their own ends.²⁸ *Caciques* and *principales* not only administered labor drafts, land

²⁵ In some cases, frontier Tlaxcalans were excused from subjection to Spanish law (Gibson 1952:187).

²⁶ This office “furnished its holder with local judicial authority [backed by the viceroyalty] and some other powers that a *cacique* could not comfortably allow to fall into non*cacique* hands” (Gibson 1973:20).

²⁷ In Peru, Spaniards sometimes became *caciques* (Mumford 2012:166).

²⁸ *Caciques* gained the ability to mobilize followers less because of royal recognition and the associated official right to exploit the labor power of native peasants (Portillo Valdés 2015:53)—the same

grants, and the local state on behalf of the crown, but also became decentralized despots unto themselves (Gibson 1973:21; McEnroe 2012:53-56). In Mexico, *caciques* like Nicolás Méndez de Luna grew capable of mobilizing followers for their own ends (Martínez Baracs 2008:378); they “forced peasants to plant their fields and build their homes, to run their errands, to labor for them and serve them in unprecedented [sic] ways” (Gibson 1973:23; see also Martínez Baracs 2008:378; McEnroe 2020:184)—aping Spanish colonists “by intensifying the severity of their treatment of the common [native] people” (Gibson 1973:23). In Peru, in the precolonial system, *kurakas* and *mallkus* had to beg for labor tribute from the Indian communities over which they presided (Spalding 1974:37); after the conquest, *caciques* like the Guarachi family were able to mobilize Indian labor for their own ends (Choque Canqui 1979:745; see also Mumford 2012:154, 164; Spalding 1973:593-94; 1984:220-22; Stern 1993:38-39). In both Mexico and Peru, brokers secured control of territory (Choque Canqui 1979:742-43, 745; Gibson 1973:21; Matthew 2007:112; McEnroe 2012:42-43, 80, 96-97; 2020:184; Mumford 2012:66; Sanders and Price 2003:80)—as one claimed, like “Spanish vassals” (quoted in Matthew 2007:119; see also Oudijk and Restall 2007:56)—and extracted rent from natives: “money, mantas, cacao, chickens, chiles, firewood, salt, and various other goods in quantities sufficient to enable them and their families to live in abundance” (Gibson 1973:23; see also Choque Canqui 1979:738; Martínez Baracs 2008:377-78; Matthew 2007:116-17; McEnroe 2012:80; 2020:175).²⁹ In sum, they secured “wealth, security, and political status”—in a word, they became despots (Wachtel 1973:142)—because they were “on the winning side of history” (McEnroe 2020:173).

“Tlaxcalans” continued to help with Spanish colonial expansion, both to the south, reaching through Central America to Peru (Martínez Baracs 2008:269-70), and to the north, to at least Texas (McEnroe 2012:128 ff.). And as colonization swept across space, the capacity to mobilize others for their own ends moved with the leading edge of colonization. Not only did their role in colonization translate into an excuse from most forms of tribute to the crown (Martínez Baracs 2008:282-84). As frontier colonists, they also gained control of territory: on the one hand, they de facto wrested hold of land previously used by local inhabitants; on the other, they compelled the viceroy to give them de jure autonomy within their settlements, i.e., their settlements were autonomous from those of both Spaniards and other natives (Martínez Baracs 2008:279-80, 308). Under this configuration, those who aligned with colonial expansion gained the capacity to mobilize others for their ends, such as the right to exploit native labor (*encomienda*) (Martínez Baracs 2008:271). Those who opposed it lost such power (Martínez Baracs 2008:288-91).

Since *caciques*’ power stemmed from colonization, it also suffered when colonization flagged or slowed. It diminished in Tlaxcala after the 17th century because Spaniards were vectors of such voracious diseases and worked the natives so hard that the central Mexican

privilege the crown granted to Spaniards (*encomienda*)—than due to their propitious alignment with the direction of history. Tlaxcalan and non-Tlaxcalan Indians availed themselves of one of the incentives the crown offered Spanish conquerors (Gibson 1964:75-76; Matthew 2007:112)—namely, the rights to use Indian labor power for mining, agriculture, and other wealth-producing activity in exchange for a portion of the rent. Among the non-Tlaxcalans who did so was Moctezuma’s daughter, Isabel (Gibson 1964:50, 69-70).

²⁹ Since those who were governors had the official responsibility to collect taxes from commoner family heads and deliver revenues to the Crown and to Spanish *encomenderos*, it gave them “opportunities for coercion, extortion, embezzlement, and other illegal methods of enriching themselves” (Gibson 1973:21).

population declined by 70-90 percent; the figures for Peru are hotly debated. The demographic implosion changed everything. It led most *caciques* to abandon their positions as tax-farmers, as the diminished population made these positions cease to be lucrative and often made them a liability (Gibson 1973:25; Spalding 1984:234). And it generated considerable discontent among those who continued in this capacity. One late-18th century *cacique* who mediated between natives and the colonial authorities—José Gabriel Condorcanqui Noguera, or “Tupac Amaru II”—decided to do something about the suffering he endured from onerous tribute demands. He and his wife led the last major native revolt prior to independence in lower Peru (1780-1781). After the crown routed the uprising, it turned to structural reform, and eliminated the position of *kuraka* and the special privileges attached to it, making exceptions only for those who had proven their loyalty during the uprising (1793) (Spalding 1984:237).

The beginning of the end of powerful natives also stemmed from their loss of control over land with the rise of creole-owned landed estates (*haciendas*). Native leaders had transferred much of their land to Spanish settlers when the population was at a low ebb (Gibson 1964:407). But when the native population rebounded, Indians could not be incorporated into the remaining native agricultural communities (*capulli*), now drastically reduced in size, leaving them with little choice but to work on the *haciendas* (Gibson 1964:408). This made creole (American-born Spaniard) landlords (*hacendados*) supplant *caciques* as the principal mediators between the colonized natives and the crown. Power differentials *within* the native population receded and virtually all natives, regardless of precolonial or conquest-era status, were subordinated to the *hacendado* class (Frye [1996] 2010:50, 53; Gibson 1964:408; Van Young 1983:24; Yannakakis 2008:218). Relations of domination were henceforth exercised principally *across* racial lines (rather than between ethnic groups within the native races), cementing modern racism and making creole *hacendados* racist despots.

4.1.2. British colonization of India

England busied itself with colonizing Ireland when Spanish Castile was conquering Peru, and Britain used the same chief-coopting methods as its Spanish rival (Allen 2012:57-58). It then moved on to India, under the auspices of the East India Company (EIC). The British colonization of India took place amidst the early-18th century decline of the Mughal empire and represented an expansion of English coastal trading outposts, which had existed alongside Dutch, French, and Danish analogues. Europeans had traded with Indians since the 17th century, negotiations brokered by translators-intermediaries (*banians*). Just as in New Spain and Peru, both princes (*nawabs*) and local notables (*zamindars*) were also present in India. The princes tended to oppose the EIC’s expansion; given the quasi-inexorability of colonization, however, this represented the losing side of history. And as the British implemented a new and more onerous revenue system, many local notables went bankrupt. This, however, left opportunities for *banians*, many of whom purchased estates and established themselves as *zamindars*. Propitious alignment with colonization enabled them “to use their positions . . . to exercise a measure of power for themselves” (Burbank and Cooper 2010:307).

Indian princes were not strong enough to stop English penetration. Bengal’s Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah (1756-1757) opposed the British to the best of his abilities in the Battle of Plassey. He conquered the British-controlled outpost of Calcutta in an effort to slow the British invasion. But Siraj’s army paymaster, Mir Jafar, broke ranks and made overtures to the British. The EIC Select Committee viewed the situation in a Machiavellian spirit, opining that “it would remain a great

error in politics to remain idle and unconcerned spectators of an event, wherein by engaging as allies to the person designated to be set up we may benefit our employers and the community very considerably” (quoted in Khan 1969:8). Mir Jafar ascended as the Nawab of Bengal (1757-1760). This opened the territory to quasi-ineluctable British colonization. Thus, when Mir Jafar grew independent in his political dealings, the EIC forced him to abdicate in favor of his son-in-law, Mir Qasim (1760-1763). And when Mir Qasim also maneuvered to kick the East India Company out of his realm, the EIC simply overthrew him (causing him to lose his power in spite of occupying an intermediary position) and reinstated Mir Jafar (1763-1765)—who had since reconciled himself to colonization.

The EIC’s first governor of Bengal, Robert Clive, took maximum advantage of the tax collector (Diwani) grant he secured from Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II (1765). He elevated Saiyid Muhammad Reza Khan to deputy of the Nawab of Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa (Naib Nazim) (1765-1767), making this man, essentially Clive’s puppet, an effective counterweight to the 19-year-old Nawab Najm-ud-Daulah (1765-1766) and successors (Khan 1969:103-04).³⁰ Soon, both Mir Jafar and Najm-ud-Daulah criticized Khan for failing to meet revenue targets (Khan 1969:131-32). Beyond the obvious political motives these criticisms betrayed, they also represented recognition among the key elites that the Clive’s and thus the British’s revenue extraction operation was non-negotiable.

EIC expansion presented Indians with the implicit question faced by Native Americans—what side are you on?—for which, given the asymmetry of colonization, there was a right and a wrong answer. The British already controlled part of the region and had ambitions to expand their control; Indian princes, especially in Mysore, tried to hold them at bay, staking out a *via media* between British colonial ambitions and Nawab Siraj ud-Daulah’s total opposition. But given the momentum of colonization, this option was the least attractive alternative for ordinary Indians. The princes of Mysore resisted the British onslaught. Haider Ali (1761-1782) and his son Tipu Sultan (1782-1799) opposed the British expansion into the Carnatic region to the best of their abilities, even making recourse to alliances with France, which was vying with Britain for control of the region, in the Anglo-Mysore Wars. To do so, however, required special levies to fund the military campaign, which led these rulers to reform their revenue extraction systems.³¹ Haider Ali imposed a land tax directly on the peasantry. He did so by making new demands of brokers (Habib 2002:xxi). Tipu Sultan built upon these innovations, modernizing agriculture, commerce, and industry. To fund the initiative, Tipu Sultan squeezed the peasantry. He developed a commercial company scheme, mimicking the EIC, which promised investors dividends on their investments (Habib 2002:xxxii-xxxiii).³² The result was “savage displays of force” (Washbrook 1988:89). The peasantry and the broker-revenue collectors were made to foot the bill for opposing conquest.

Given the brutality of the war requisitions, the compromise option that Tipu

³⁰ Najm-ud-Daulah, who died from a sickness he contracted at a party in honor of Clive, was succeeded by his even younger brother, Najabat Ali Khan (1766-1770), who soon died of the European disease smallpox.

³¹ Hereditary potentates, such as *deshmukhs* and *palegars*, in addition to subordinate holders like *goudas* and *patels*, held a variety of rights, leaving the state’s right to extract produce sharply restricted.

³² Tipu seems to have recognized the pressure this would put on peasants, since the scheme’s rate of returns were inversely proportionate the the size of loans (though this would not have been enough to prevent investors from putting the squeeze on the peasantry and making large investments in many “small deposits under fictitious names”) (Habib 2002:xxxiii).

represented—to allow some colonial control but not continuing colonization—grew less and less attractive to Indians. To fund the war, a pincer was put on the peasantry as a function of the force of the British onslaught, on the one hand, and the steadfastness of Tipu’s some-but-not-more position on colonization, on the other. On the EIC’s side, prospects were bright. By the 1790s, the EIC already had a solid relationship with the Nizam of Bengal. The EIC also had a working relationship with Muhammad Ali Khan Walla Jah, the Nawab of Arcot in the Carnatic (1749-1795), initially a vassal of Deccan, who opposed the French (Gurney 1968:***). And the Marathas showed willingness to join the British offensive as well. On Tipu’s side, in contrast, colonization presented itself increasingly as a foregone conclusion. The post-1792 French government was beleaguered by belligerent royalist neighbors and no longer inclined or even capable of supporting its military elite in a foreign theater of war. Tipu “began a war of manoeuvre [sic],” trying to make up the difference through sheer force of will. But Governor-General Lord Cornwallis soon forced him to retreat and ultimately to surrender. The peace agreement stripped Tipu of half his domains and imposed a massive indemnity upon him, due in one year, with the British holding two of his sons hostage as collateral (Habib 2002:xxxviii-xxxiv). The British demanded three times the annual gross revenues of the territory left in his possession. To pay the sum, he “devastated [what was left of] the country” (Habib 2002:xxxix), making his anticolonialism even less appealing. His last-ditch appeal to France could not have been more poorly timed. France was no longer in a position to furnish troops (Forrest 1970:242-43). The British took advantage of Tipu’s weakness to attack, and “the Mysore of the Sultans went down in flames” (Bayly 1989:98). Britain took Tipu’s continued attempts to court French military aid as pretext for a final invasion of Mysore in 1799 (Habib 2002:xl). Though foreordained to defeat, “Tipu resisted coolly and skillfully” until his last: “a fight to the death” (Habib 2002:xl).

As India polarized between those opposing continued colonization and those reconciling themselves to it, the *zamindar* brokers came under incredible strain and were reshuffled as a result. While Tipu’s Mysore *zamindars* mobilized anticolonial troops to brutally extract revenues from the passive peasantry, the British made increasing revenue demands of the *zamindars* of Bengal. They grew increasingly incapable of raising enough revenue to meet the increased rates put in place with the Five Year Settlement, the Ten Year Settlement, and then the Permanent Settlement (1793), leading about half of them to relinquish their lands (Islam 1974:55; 1979:157; see also McLane 1977:20-23). In response, “mercantile capital tended to be transferred to land purchases,” a “diversion” that stemmed largely from the decline in cronyism borne of bureaucratization of political functions (Chaudhuri and Bhattacharya 1983:113, 114)—i.e., political modernization spawned political backwardness. Most Calcutta *banians* bought *zamindar* lands with the money they had earned in commerce (Marshall 1979:193; Rahman 2013:71; see also Sinha 1961:80, 95 *et passim*).³³ Under the terms of the Permanent Settlement, this made these new *zamindars* absolute proprietors for the first time (Islam 1997:162). Since they were also responsible for delivering fixed tribute to the British, the new *zamindars* were far less flexible than the Mughal officials who enjoyed land-grants who went by the name “*zamindars*” in precolonial times (Bandyopadhyay 1993:A-151; Mukhia 1977; Nurul Hasan 1964:***). And where *zamindars* had not existed prior to EIC rule, such as Orissa, the Company appointed people as landlord-tax collectors, thereby constructing *zamindars* (Marshall 1987:145-46).

³³ Marshall (1987:147), in contrast, argues that the main trend was “a redistribution among existing landed families rather than the formation of new estates by outsiders.”

Thus there was a major conflict, often latent but sometimes manifest, between those who were increasingly in favor of colonial expansion and those against it. The EIC tried to ensure that their revenue collectors would not pillage the peasantry (Marshall 1987:117). Given the squeeze Tipu Sultan put on the peasantry to raise money for his military initiative—and in spite of him constructing the war against the British as an Islamic holy war (Habib 2002:xxiv-xxv)—peasants gravitated away from his anticolonial *zamindars* and towards the new pro-colonization *zamindars*, who needed peasants to work the land (Marshall 1987:150-51). Alignment with colonization redounded to these pro-colonization *zamindars* in the form of power. One example is the Pal Chaudhuri family, which, “having participated in the conditions created for the accumulation of commercial capital in Bengal” as salt and food crop traders, they “ended up as zamindars [by] investing that capital in land” that became available with the Permanent Settlement (Ray 1987:512). Since peasants gravitated towards pro-colonial *zamindars*, they were able to mobilize peasants for their own ends, such as coercing them to grow indigo and linseed, and extracted rent from them (Ray 1987:513), making them local potentates. When such *zamindars* had festivals or celebrations, they extracted additional rent from peasants (*ryots*) to pay for it (Marshall 1987:150).

Alignment with the process of colonization—not brokerage location nor voluntary maneuvering—empowered *zamindar* intermediaries. Since at least some of the old *zamindars*, who occupied the position between the peasantry and political rulers, lost power—many (Marshall 1987:147) if not most (Islam 1974:55; 1979:157; McLane 1977:20-23) of them even lost control of the land—brokerage *location* cannot be deemed the source of *zamindars*’ power. Power, instead, stemmed from occupying a brokerage location *aligned* with colonization; it is for this reason that a portion of the old *zamindars* were able to survive and the new *zamindars* grew powerful. While many maneuvered to become *zamindars*, they did not grow powerful due to maneuvering. Maneuvering was not correlated with power; while *banians* did maneuver to become *zamindars*, and thence grew powerful, those who maneuvered most—like Tipu Sultan—were vanquished, and still others—like Reza Khan—were forced to maneuver out of alignment with colonization and then lost power. The new *zamindars*’ maneuvering only resulted in power dividends because it saw them move into the pro-colonization *zamindar* location. Alignment with the process of colonization made these brokers powerful.

The new *zamindars* took prominent positions in the emerging colonial society. Many of the founding members of India’s most important families—like the Datta, Deb, Ghoshal, Kandi, Mukherji, Mullick, Nandi, Palchaudhuri, Shobhabazar, and Tagore families—were *banians* who became *zamindars* and thence powerful players in colonial and postcolonial India (Banerjee 1965; Chaudhuri and Bhattacharya 1983:110-15; Marshall 1987:146-47, 152; Rahman 2013:90-100; Rungta 1970:58-59; Sinha 1961:90-96). In the case of the Shobhabazar family, Raja Nabakrishna (Nabakishan) was a close associate of Robert Clive and his successor, Governor-General Harry Verelst (1767-1769), who had helped Clive oust Nawab Najm-ud-Daulah (1766) and grew wealthy taking advantage of commercial opportunities his service to the British presented him. The EIC awarded him with the tax-collector position (*taluk*) in one of the three villages that became Calcutta (Suttanuti), giving him exclusive right to collect ground rent and grant leases in the greater part of northern Calcutta (Rahman 2013:98-100; Sinha 1961:68), a tax-free status the family enjoyed into the 21st century (Chatterji 2019). Krishna Kanta Nandi (Kantoo Babu) was a *banian* for Governor-Generals Warren Hastings and Sir Francis Sykes. He became a revenue farmer and then used his wealth to purchase the highly-productive Barharband farm (*pargana*) of Rangpur, the first Bengal estate to be permanently settled for a very low

revenue demand, and made many other purchases after the Permanent Settlement came into effect (Nandy 1981:231-32; Rahman 2013:94-96).

In spite of the British defeat of the superexploitative Tipu Sultan, things did not improve for ordinary Indians under British rule. Since resistance to colonization was not preferable to the peasantry, it would have been natural for them to release a sigh of relief with the British military victories over anticolonial princes. But colonial subjugation ultimately left ordinary Indians badly off. Soon after vanquishing the princes, the Company warmed to the “traditions” it had excoriated, helping rigidify caste hierarchies that had been relatively flexible prior to British rule (Dirks 2001; Washbrook 1988:90). And since most of the purchasers of land in places like Dhaka were made by individuals from upper castes (Brahmans, Kayasthas, and Vaidyas), agrarian restructuring helped “consolidate the position of the high caste local gentry” (Ray 1979:253, 223). In this way, alignment with colonization reinforced caste privilege. And since the Indian population, while it suffered famines, did not decline nearly as much as the Native American populations immediately after the conquest (Visaria 1983: table 5.1), this configuration endured. And the *zamindars* gradually increased their exactions from peasants (Marshall 1987:157), making agrarian India a system of caste capitalism. Caste-supported decentralized despots—with the ability to mobilize followers for their own ends—therefore continued to shape Indian society through the republican period.

The consolidation of caste was just the latest episode in the saga of hierarchical sorting brought on by colonialism. Not only did the Spanish colonization of Latin America, because it produced a genocidal population reduction, leave Latin American societies polarized between a mostly white agrarian elite and a largely indigenous peasantry. Moreover, in the British colony of Virginia, Bacon’s Rebellion (1676) saw both English and African laborers rise in a common armed rebellion to demand the abolition of bonded servitude (Allen 1997:239),³⁴ prompting political elites to promote the idea that poor people of European ancestry should enjoy special privileges compared to those of African ancestry—and, in the face of the allure of some concrete advantages, many “whites” agreed, helping solidify hierarchical racial difference (Allen 1997:17; Virdee 2019:12). Consequently, Black-Africanness was coded as racially inferior.

4.1.3. *British colonization of Africa*

British colonial expansion and conquest of much of Africa took place when the idea of white racial superiority over Blacks was already firmly entrenched.³⁵ Thus, British colonization of equatorial and southern Africa was initially based on direct rule: natives were to be tutored until they became “civilized,” i.e., deemed ready to govern themselves. However, the British had finite colonial personnel; thus, with colonial expansion in the late-19th century, they pivoted to collaboration with African chiefs in a framework of indirect rule.

³⁴ Albeit couched in an anti-indigenous idiom of requisitioning native peoples’ lands (McGee 2021).

³⁵ Spanish colonization was racist, to be sure, but did not obey a racial logic per se, because the modern idea of race and racism did not yet exist. Spaniards certainly thought their religion was superior to native beliefs. But, initially, they did not view natives as racially inferior per se; Christopher Columbus famously thought telltale indicators of racial group, such as skin tone, did not represent essential differences between groups but instead stemmed from behavioral and environmental differences. And British colonization of India served to rigidify caste difference, a hierarchical system that put Indians in both subordinate and superordinate positions, alongside Europeans.

Prior to colonization, one fraction of African elites (clan-based hereditary chiefs) often counterbalanced the power of another (king-appointed administrative chiefs)—while councils at the clan- and village-level often counteracted the power of each through their ability to access land and other natural resources (Mamdani 1996:42-48, 119). These societies were often characterized by an elite balance-of-power configuration that kept despotism in check (Lemarchand 1977:292). This changed with the conquest.

African kings responded differently to colonial expansion, though those who resisted were unable to prevent colonization. The Xosa king Ngqika broke from Xhosa tribes' longstanding opposition to colonial expansion and accommodated overrule. To such collaborators, anti-colonization kings like Ngqika's uncle Ndlambe—who had served as regent and ensured that Ngqika, rather than his older brother, succeed to the throne—represented a threat. Their followers attacked those of pro-colonization brokers like Ngqika.

As in Spanish America and India, colonization of Africa thus posed a *de facto* question to Africans: which side are you on? Since the slave trade, city-based leaders had occupied an initial brokerage location, mediating between Britain and the African population. With the colonization boom, Britain needed more collaborators and came to rely increasingly on local notables. Colonial powers needed brokers and sought ones who were both loyal and appeared to have the recognition of the native populations in question. To these ends, colonial officials tried to determine which “traditional” leaders were deemed legitimate and which were not. The effort was misguided, though, due to the balance-of-power nature of precolonial Africa: the sought-after “traditional” leaders with undisputed legitimacy did not exist in the facile way Brits imagined them, making it impossible to sort chiefs on this criterion.

Rather than discover “customary” authority, the British constructed it, elevating those who aligned with the colonization process and demoting those who did not. Colonial authorities actively sought collaborators in the rural inland areas they sought to conquer who would help them consolidate territorial control and extract labor-power from the population. The “state-appointed customary authorities” appeared to have most legitimacy and were thus heavily favored (Mamdani 1996:22, see also 49-52, 79-81). Administrative chiefs, in turn, warmed to ongoing colonization. The British deemed them legitimate “traditional” leaders. As these rural chiefs gained from colonization, urban leaders lost. Under direct rule, urban leaders were relatively privileged. But in the larger arc from European trade through coastal port cities to conquest and indirect rule of entire territories, urban leaders were demoted. The transition from direct to indirect rule saw the elimination of discriminatory civil legislation from which they benefitted and its replacement by a legal regime designed to enforce “tradition” (Mamdani 1996:19, 75-76). Amidst these declining prospects in the face of colonization, the compromise option represented by city-based leaders gradually became a losing proposition. Before this was clear, these leaders mobilized their followers in opposition to colonization-aligned brokers, championing proto-nationalist ideologies—efforts that would only really bear fruit decades later—giving rise to conflict between anti- and pro-colonization brokers.

Given the quasi-ineluctability of the colonization process, pro-colonization brokers excelled in this conflict. Colonization-aligned brokers' followers, principally peasants of various kinds, responded to the conflict stemming from conquest by rallying to “traditional” leaders for protection. In this way, colonization-aligned broker locations became charged with latent power. The fundamental reason for this was that colonization generated conflict *among* the colonized (in addition, obviously, to conflicts between colonizer and colonized). Beyond assenting to colonization, pro-colonization brokers typically had other priorities. Thus while anti-colonization

notables “resisted the land-grabbing, labor-coercing, justice-denying side of colonization” (Burbank and Cooper 2010:325), pro-colonization brokers accepted the charge and then “sought new opportunities for themselves in the imperial context, sometimes pushing to the limits of what colonial regimes could tolerate” (Burbank and Cooper 2010:325-26). Since they were deemed “traditional,” they controlled land through “customary” law; whereas the remit of city-based leaders was sharply limited in the context of agrarian societies, these colonization-aligned brokers were highly relevant for all kinds of rural-dwellers and peasants.

Continued colonization did away with the precolonial balance-of-power, the checks-and-balances from which ordinary people benefitted, allowing for the emergence of decentralized despots (Mamdani 1996:54)—“traditional” chiefs who were aligned with the process of colonization and who, on that basis, acquired the ability to mobilize others for their own ends (Mamdani 1996:52). When they chose to capitalize on this ability, they were able to control territory (Mamdani 1996:140-41) and extract resources from the native population (Mamdani 1996:52, 56, 145). Given the quasi-ineluctability of colonization, demoted-chiefs’ followings decreased in relative terms compared to colonization-aligned brokers’ followings. This essentially ensured that the latter grow stronger as the process of colonization unfolded. The colonization *process*, then—not voluntary maneuvering or intermediary position per se—was responsible for the rise of decentralized despotism.

4.1.4. Summary

Pro-colonization brokers tended to gain from the process of colonization, whereas anti-colonial notables tended to lose. This was for two reasons. First, since pro- and anti-colonization notables answered the question of colonization differently, they were incompatible. Their respective factions opposed one another, often violently. Such conflict drove each following to rally to their respective leaders. Second, since colonization continued, pro-colonization brokers usually won in battles against anti-colonization notables. Indeed, for colonization to continue, they *had* to win most of the time. In turn, the fact that pro-colonization brokers tended to win gave off the appearance that they were able to call in favors from colonial overlords (and they did have this ability in some cases). This demoralized anti-colonization brokers’ followers.

It also made pro-colonization brokers powerful. Naturally, since these factions answered the question of colonization differently, they were incompatible and thus clashed with one another. This conflict drove followers to rally to notables. Anti-colonization kings—like Cuauhtémoc in Mexico, Tipu Sultan of Mysore, and Ngqika in the Cape Colony—mounted major military campaigns against conquest, but nevertheless suffered major military defeats necessary for colonization to continue. As it continued, the process affected more and more natives’ lives, becoming increasingly unbearable to stand in opposition and increasingly rational—given the tilted playing field—to view conquest as a *fait accompli*; those intermediaries who aligned against the process therefore tended to lose potential followers while pro-colonization notables gained them. Thus, not only did anti-colonization intermediaries tend to lose in the face of this quasi-inexorable process; pro-colonization ones usually *won*. The playing field was tilted against anti-colonial elites, making them relatively ineffective at providing protection. So natives increasingly rallied to pro-colonization brokers. The ability to mobilize followers, in turn, made pro-colonization brokers “decentralized despots,” enabling them to mobilize followers, control turf, and extract rent.

4.2. Capitalist Industrialization and Labor Bosses

Prior to the 20th century, the leaders of American labor unions—which ranged from conservative to utopian—were not powerful. Conservative craft unions collectively known as the American Federation of Labor (AFL) successfully inserted themselves between employers and workers in skilled trades like construction, shipping, etc. Vis-a-vis employers, these unions restricted the supply of labor; vis-a-vis workers, they stewarded the intergenerational transfer of skill. Utopian unions—organized by the Knights of Labor, the International Workers of the World (IWW), the Socialist Party, and the Communist Party—sought to create a society in which workers would be free. Since they were never powerful enough to achieve their goals (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003:53), utopian unions served a counterweight to AFL conservatism, which held AFL leaders’ despotism in check.

The largest boom of capital accumulation was in the postwar United States. The process of industrialization spawned intraclass conflict. During the economic crisis of the 1930s, initial attempts to organize industry-wide unions began to emerge spontaneously (Mills 1948:55-56). This new type of labor union inserted itself between employers and the factory-based workforce. Amidst the wartime and postwar industrial boom, when millions of workers were absorbed into industrial occupations, they upset the balance of forces between the guild-like AFL affiliates and the utopian minority unions. Since utopian unions were an impossible alternative, assuming continued capital accumulation, this soon gave rise to a rift between the pro-capitalist leadership of the older and newer generations of American workers (Mills 1948:68-69). AFL leaders—a “gerontocracy” (Mills 1948:73; see also Zieger 1995:19)—were hostile to industrial unionism in general and to the Black workers absorbed into the industrial workforce in particular. They favored the older generation,³⁶ which meant anti-Black exclusion or “Jim-Crow unionism” (Foner 2017:169).³⁷ The productionist unions’ leadership, in contrast, was younger and more dynamic (Mills 1948:55) and favored the newer generation of workers by promoting industrial unionism.

Conflict between older and newer generations of workers—intraclass conflict often taking place along racial lines—was endemic, driving leaders of the old and new generations of workers to clash with one another.³⁸ The structural and dynamic features of this figuration led

³⁶ In theory, this was due in part to the “law” of supply and demand: AFL leaders thought that “restrictive membership policies in trade unions were largely legitimate efforts to avoid overloading the labor market” (Foner [1981] 2017:175).

³⁷ Black workers had long wanted to join unions; but AFL presidents Samuel Gompers (19***-1924) and William Green (19***-19***) did almost nothing to oppose racism in AFL affiliates, much less to integrate these unions (Foner [1981] 2017:168-69, 230-31, 234, 236). Thus, “ten years after the exodus of the black workers from Southern agriculture to Northern industry . . . black labor was no more able to gain large-scale admission to the AF of L than before the Great Migration” (Foner [1981] 2017:169).

³⁸ This conflict erupted among union leaders at the AFL’s 1935 convention, where a minority of delegates “proposed *unrestricted* issuance of industrial union charters wherever workers were engaged in work that did not ‘fully qualify them for craft union leadership’” (Foner [1981] 2017:209, emphasis in the original). Since Blacks were overrepresented in the lower end of the labor market, Black labor leader A. Philip Randolph’s simultaneous plea for racial integration of AFL unions was consonant with the call for industrial unions (Foner [1981] 2017:210). Appeals to racial justice had no effect on the AFL leadership, however, which remained steadfast in its opposition to the new generation. Disagreement got heated. John L. Lewis vaulted over a row of conference chairs to land a punch on the jaw of William L. Hutcherson,

Black workers—along with others absorbed into the industrial workforce—to not only “[abandon] the [AFL’s] separate federal and local unions in droves” (Foner 2017:173),³⁹ but also to rally to the pro-capital productionist unions. The organization soon called the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) was founded the day after the AFL convention adjourned (Foner 2017:212).⁴⁰ The U.S.’s wartime manufacturing absorbed large numbers of Black workers, bringing them into contact with CIO unions.⁴¹ The CIO’s alignment in favor of the new generation took the form of integrated unions: “Unlike the traditional racial policies of the AF of L, the CIO policy from the first was to open its doors to all black workers on an equal basis. There were no constitutional bars, no segregation of blacks into separate locals, no Jim Crow rituals” (Foner 2017:216). Naturally, Randolph hailed the advent of industrial unionism and the National Negro Congress became one of the CIO’s most important allies (Foner 2017:213, 217-21). From its inception, “AFL leaders denounced the CIO project” and “demanded that the CIO disband,” while in the newly-organized “auto plants, rubber factories, and steel mills, . . . nothing so validated the new CIO as the AFL’s hostility” (Zieger 1995:30). While often racialized, the conflict latent to industrialization was intergenerational factionalism. CIO leaders were not racial justice warriors;⁴² they were pro-capital accumulation intermediaries.⁴³ This had two implications. First, it meant that they were productionists. “Our economy must grow and expand

president of the Carpenters’ Union and a major craft unionism stalwart (Zieger 1995:22-23) with a long history of opposing racial equity in the AFL (Foner [1981] 2017:166 n.). To the dismay of proponents of industrial unionism, however, the conservative resolution in favor of restricted charters won by a landslide (Foner [1981] 2017:209). Lewis’s pugilism catapulted him to fame as the leading proponent of industrial unionism (Zieger 1995:23). It also represented a crossing of the Rubicon: the AFL’s executive board told Lewis to stop organizing industrial unions, an order he disobeyed to the utmost of his abilities by dedicating himself to organizing industrial unions on a mass scale (Mills 1948:56).

³⁹ Black workers had by 1935 “seen too many promises broken or ignored,” and “abandoned all hope that the AF of L would end racism in its ranks” (Foner [1981] 2017:212). This initiated “a situation . . . that had no precedent in American labor history. . . . [Namely,] an organized movement for industrial unionism and organization of the unorganized, which was to encompass black as well as white workers” (Foner [1981] 2017:212).

⁴⁰ In 1938, the AFL expelled ten unions involved in industrial union organizing, and three others left the AFL voluntarily; these 13 unions, about 40 percent of the AFL’s membership, became the CIO (Mills 1948:56).

⁴¹ By 1940, only 25 percent of AFL affiliate unions’ members were manufacturing workers, whereas 75 percent of CIO unions’ members were industrial workers (Mills 1948:61).

⁴² Thus, “most CIO officials and organizers tried to minimize the racial character of the CIO enterprise. They believed that the rising tide of unionism would benefit all workers” (Zieger 1995:84). What they were was anti-AFL. Thus, “Lewis framed CIO goals as activities in opposition to the AFL,” and when he “blasted the federation, enthusiasm for the CIO surged” (Zieger 1995:31). Nevertheless, Blacks flooded into CIO unions. By the mid-1940s, USWA counted approximately 70,000 Black members while of the UAW’s 1 million members approximately 100,000 were Black (Zieger 1995:153).

⁴³ Those who had opposed capital accumulation either had been annihilated, in the case of the Knights of Labor (Voss 1993), were still being annihilated, in the case of the IWW ([the key work on IWW is Dubofsky (1969) *We Shall Be All*; Foner ***; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003:***), or were about to be annihilated, like the Communist Party; those who refused to take a position one way or the other, like William Green (AFL president, 1924-1952), were soon outstripped; whereas those who favored industrial unions but opposed the Communist utopians, namely the top CIO leaders (Zieger 1995:25-27)—i.e., union leaders who aligned in favor of the capital accumulation process—grew powerful on the basis of their alignment.

every year,” preached Walter Reuther (Zieger 1995:312). Second, it meant they favored the newer generation of workers absorbed into the industrialization process. Their newfound following helped make them powerful labor bosses.⁴⁴

Neither formalist nor voluntarist theories can explain the power of these labor bosses; only the processual approach, rooted in decolonial sociology, can. Labor leaders became bosses by riding the wave of capitalist industrialization. Pro-capital labor leaders gained from the process of industrialization, becoming able to use this mobilization capacity to control the shop floors of many of the foremost American workplaces and to extract dues from workers.

4.2.1. Steel (USWA)

Over the course of the 1930s, by brokering the relationship between industrialists and American workers amidst industrial expansion, the CIO’s Steel Worker Organizing Committee (SWOC), renamed the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), grew powerful. This made its president, Philip Murray, “a labor leader fully comparable to Lewis and the AFL’s William Green” (Zieger 1995:135). Since he occupied this brokerage position, and since the position was aligned with capital accumulation, this man grew powerful.

Before then, there had been two major attempts to unionize the steel industry workforce, one in 1892 and another in 1919, though U.S. steel production did not peak until 1945, when the country producing 62 percent of the world’s total (Warren 1973:10-11). The meaning of the 1892 strike in Homestead vis-a-vis capital accumulation was somewhat unclear, though it did represent a challenge to management control for which it was brutally suppressed by private security forces and 8,000 National Guard troops. The organization behind the strike, the Amalgamated Association of Iron, Steel, and Tin Workers (AA), steadily declined in the aftermath of defeat, until the 1919 strike, which coincided with the wartime production boom. In addition to the symbolic inclusion of AFL president Samuel Gompers, the two other leaders of the National Committee of the Iron and Steel Industry who led the strike were leftist John Fitzpatrick, the impetus, and William Z. Foster, the executioner—and a Communist fellow traveller. Immigrant workers from abroad who had been absorbed into the industrial workforce formed the strike’s backbone. Native-born whites were unenthusiastic and, due to their anti-Black racism, undermined African Americans’ support, paving the way for the employer to employ Black workers as strike breakers (Goldfield 2020:133, 135). This defeat at the hands of an avowed leftist foreclosed the utopian alternative in steel for the foreseeable future.

There was an influx of workers into the steel mills prior to and after the Depression,⁴⁵ which spawned factional conflict on the basis of two dynamics. The first was intergenerational conflict: “conflict between new recruits and the lethargic veteran leadership [of AA] dominated the association’s affairs” (Zieger 1995:35). Oppositionists, with the sympathy of many AA members and nonmember steelworkers alike, led a “rebellion” against the incumbent leadership

⁴⁴ Labor bosses are leaders of “business unions” who subscribe to the class-collaborationist doctrine of a fundamental harmony of interests between capital and organized labor (Lichtenstein 1995:225, 290; Mills 1948:130-31).

⁴⁵ A high estimate is that “more than 150,000 workers joined the AA in 1933, paying full initiation fees,” although “most of them soon quit” out of frustration with the leadership (Goldfield 2020:139), reducing membership to less than 10,000 by 1935 (Galenson 1960:75). A low estimate is that it only exceeded 50,000 that year, though this was still over 12 times more members than AA the year before (Zieger 1995:35).

(Goldfield 2020:143). The second dynamic triggered by the absorption of more workers into the steel workforce was an upsurge of class struggle militancy: there was a “dramatic upsurge, beginning in 1933, of the militancy of this multiethnic, multiracial workforce” (Goldfield 2020:136). The following year, “militant steelworkers had begun agitating for a strike” (Goldfield 2020:140). These two dynamics intersected, giving rise to factional conflict between the new and the older generation of workers: “the national officers of the union were adamantly opposed [to strike action]” (Goldfield 2020:140). And a significant layer of workers who recalled the brutality meted out at Homestead were also reticent. On the other side was the new generation of militant workers. By 1935, the insurgent leaders and the old AA leadership were playing a cat-and-mouse game. The former publicly denounced the AA leadership’s lethargy, and AA president Michael Tighe responded by expelling and suspending locals (Goldfield 2020:143). The rebel locals aligned with the new generation of workers, seeking to “organize the industry” (Goldfield 2020:143). In spite of the hemorrhaging AA membership, in 1937 there were multiple steelworker sit-down strikes in Alabama (Goldfield 2020:154). And when steelworkers struck in Pennsylvania that year, they “took over the functions of [the Aliquippa] government. They were in complete control” (Goldfield 2020:153).

The conflict between older and newer generations of workers posed the question: which side are you on? Since the utopian option had been defeated in 1919,⁴⁶ making capital accumulation a seemingly inescapable fate, there were only two options: the AFL and the CIO. The CIO formed the SWOC, a declaration of war with the AFL (Zieger 1995:34). And AA leaders signed an agreement with the CIO that “effectively dissolved the AA into the SWOC” (Goldfield 2020:145). This move put SWOC in conflict with the AFL; CIO president Lewis publicly ridiculed AFL president Green for naysaying the initiative (Zieger 1995:37). The initiative was explicitly anti-utopian and in favor of capital accumulation. In 1937, SWOC secretary-treasurer David McDonald stated that this initiative stood in favor of “continuation of the classical American economic system, . . . preservation of American business institutions[,] . . . [and] continuing opposition to economic philosophies which seek to destroy the present economic system in America” (quoted in Zieger 1995:70). It was so aligned with capital accumulation that, initially, SWOC focused on “gaining influence within the company unions” (Zieger 1995:39; see also pp. 54-58; Goldfield 2020:157).

The AFL alternative represented by Green was increasingly unappealing. The AA itself helped discredit the *via media*—some capitalism but not accelerating capital accumulation—over the course of the 1930s by turning a blind eye to the new generation of workers. The SWOC did just the opposite, albeit within the parameters of capital accumulation. Starting with the 1934 upsurge, SWOC leaders began “trying to control worker militancy” to ensure it did not drift in the direction of the utopian alternative (Goldfield 2020:154). As one SWOC organizer reported despairingly in his plea for “self-restraint,” “new members of some of our recently formed Lodges have begun issuing ultimatums to their employers as well as to this Committee saying that unless the contract is signed by a certain date, the men will go out on strike” (quoted in Goldfield 2020:154)—as though that was not essentially the point of coworker concerted action! Only on the basis of heightened worker militancy in the 1930s was it possible for the CIO to successfully gain employer recognition in the steel industry. But the SWOC and then USWA

⁴⁶ Though the Mine Mill union continued to give expression to utopian unionist ideals into the mid-20th century, and though “Staughton Lynd (1972) argues that the rank-and-file upsurge in steel from 1933 to 1935 was perhaps sufficient to have formed an industrial union independent of the AA and AFL” (Goldfield 2020:143).

ensured that militancy stay within bounds. This left one remaining option for the workers absorbed into industrial jobs: rally to the pro-capital CIO union leaders.

Under these conditions, the SWOC excelled. Membership grew steadily with industrial expansion. Whereas by the end of its first three months, the SWOC only had 15,300 members (or about 3 percent of the steel industry workforce) (Zieger 1995:55), by late-1953, membership was approximately 4.65 million (Zieger 1995:304). To build the union organization, the SWOC assimilated the advice of William Z. Foster, the Communist fellow traveller who had helped organize the 1919 strike, and thus recruited Black and Communist organizers (Goldfield 2020:146; see also p. 137).⁴⁷ Initially, Blacks responded to SWOC in myriad ways (Zieger 1995:84-85). Soon, though, they joined the SWOC swiftly, and “in some areas of Pittsburgh and Chicago they signed up in greater proportions than the white steel workers” (Foner 2017:221; see also Goldfield 2020:140-41). The reason for this lay in the combination of two factors: the SWOC aligned with capital accumulation and the capitalist industrialization processes absorbed a growing number of workers, disproportionately African American workers. (Between 1940 and 1950, the proportion of Black steelworkers grew from 6.67 percent to 12.97 percent [Goldfield 2020: table 4.4].) This, however, did not mean the SWOC’s leadership was antiracist; to the contrary, Murray proclaimed in 1936 that “*It is our conviction that the organization of the Negro steel workers will follow, rather than precede, the organization of the white mill workers*” (quoted in Goldfield 2020:151).

The SWOC, renamed the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), represented the advent of a new form of labor union with an “authoritarian business unionist leadership” (Goldfield 2020:126). Unlike utopian unions, “it endorsed standard collective bargaining goals” of business unions, and unlike the compromise AFL, it “appealed directly to the steelworkers, recognizing that mass recruitment and shop-floor power alone could bring Big Steel to the bargaining table” (Zieger 1995:37). These innovations were ensconced in “a highly centralized organization, with little provision for local union initiative or rank-and-file participation” (Zieger 1995:38). Central control allowed it to purge “Communists and other oppositionists, many of whom had played major roles in organizing the union, doing its best to stifle most of the grassroots democracy and militancy that had been so central to building the union” (Goldfield 2020:158); and its “fervent anxiety to please the corporate heads of the industry” justified “the absolutism of its bureaucratic methods of operation” (Aronowitz 1991:235). Both of these even allowed it to “turn toward racism, defending white supremacist practices, especially inside the workplace and union” (Goldfield 2020:158).

Intergenerational conflict drove workers to mobilize behind the USWA—giving Murray the capacity to mobilize followers for his own ends, and ultimately making him powerful. In 1946, during the UAW strike and after president of U.S. Steel Benjamin Fairless was unable to compel other firms in the industry to grant acceptable wage increases, Murray ordered USWA members to down their tools (Lichtenstein 1995:242).⁴⁸ And in 1952, Murray led workers out on

⁴⁷ Thus, the CP’s and the CIO’s interests coincided at the outset of SWOC campaign. The CP wanted more members in the steel mills, but opposed capital accumulation; the CIO wanted to recruit more workers by aligning with capital accumulation (Goldfield 2020:148). But they ultimately diverged, insofar as Communists remained utopians, for the SWOC was committed to capital accumulation.

⁴⁸ After government intervention, the resolution to both the USWA and the UAW strikes was that both of these major industrial unions secured identical wage increases (of 18.5 cents per hour) (Lichtenstein 1995:242-43). For Reuther, given the amount of effort that went into the UAW strike as compared to the brief USWA walkout, this deal, along with the more technical concessions he tried to

strike when only union security was the sticking point—mobilizing workers for his organization’s ends, rather than theirs: wages, working conditions, etc. (Zieger 1995:302). Unlike the strikes of the 1930s, when mobilization had been a bottom-up process, strikes were now top-down affairs: Murray mobilized his followers (Zieger 1995:223).⁴⁹ The ability to mobilize followers secured the union’s recognition from U.S. Steel, “[tipping] the balance in behalf of the CIO organization” (Zieger 1995:59). Although smaller steel companies held out in the immediate term, in light of its pro-capital alignment, U.S. Steel “came to regard SWOC as a stabilizing force” (Zieger 1995:59). Amidst the absorption of workers into the steel workforce, and given its pro-growth alignment, “workers flocked into SWOC. Soon the new union was granting charters in every kind of metalworking subindustry” (Zieger 1995:60). The SWOC gained control of the shop floor of over 1,000 workplaces (employing over 300,000 union members) by October 1937 (Zieger 1995:63).⁵⁰ Initially, the SWOC was unable to extract dues from workers. In the 1930s, “Even when steelworkers did sign union cards, they were reluctant to pay SWOC’s \$3 initiation fee and dollar-a-month dues” (Zieger 1995:56).⁵¹ But with control of the shop floor, the “SWOC was [soon] strong enough to begin collecting per capita tax (dues)” (Zieger 1995:63). Especially after the 1952 strike, revenues shot up (Zieger 1995:304). By the 1970s, rent extraction was a matter of course, leading some to conclude that the union’s only purpose “is to get that \$1.00 a month out of you” (Burawoy 1979:112-13).

4.3. Urbanization and Informal Sovereigns

Urbanization has taken a variety of forms, but the most prevalent in history is, ironically, the “informal” settlements often deemed abnormal since they fail to adhere to U.S. settlement patterns. By the turn of the second millennium C.E., following several decades of rapid urban growth, almost a third of the world’s population lived in squatter neighborhoods and slum settlements concentrated in the Global South’s large cities. Latin America urbanized quicker than any other world region in history during the mid- to late-20th century (see appendix for more information). The wave of urbanization during the preceding several decades surpassed that of the previously-exceptional urban growth in 19th-century Europe⁵² and early- to mid-20th century North America. And since it was accompanied by relatively little industrialization and concomitant waged remuneration, this left millions of new denizens to form vast squatter settlements. Mexico City experienced the fastest and most extensive urban growth in the region, making its urban expansion the foremost in world history. Between 1966 and 1990, the city’s squatter population grew rapidly from 1.5 to 9.47 million (from 45.6 to 60 percent of the city’s population).

spin as wins, turned out to be a significant blow (Lichtenstein 1995:244-46).

⁴⁹ And when bottom-up mobilization threatened, the USWA leadership employed thuggery to keep members in line (Goldfield 2020:176-77; see also Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 2003:57).

⁵⁰ Ability to mobilize followers also allowed the USWA to raid utopian unions—even in alliance with Klansmen—in order to increase the membership (Zieger 1995:280-82).

⁵¹ As one SWOC put it, “Steel workers will go out and die for the union in the excitement of the picket line, but they’ll be damned if they’ll pay another dollar to ‘that lousy shop steward’” (quoted in Zieger 1995:95).

⁵² Since Europe was already more urbanized than is often thought, the wave of urban growth coinciding with the 19th-century industrial boom was actually less extensive than often assumed (see de Vries 1984:73; see also Bairoch [1985] 1988:227).

Urbanization is a quasi-inexorable, conflict-generating process.⁵³ Amidst urbanization, local leaders mediate relations between residents and the state. In Mexico City, they interfaced with the state in efforts to equip newly urbanized spaces with infrastructure.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, urban growth fills finite space with inhabitants. Due to the extent of the urbanization process in Mexico City, it gave rise to a divergence of interests between generations of residents. As urbanization continued, the contradictory interests sharpened into conflict; conflict, in turn, drove some people into urban brokers' arms for protection. I examine three distinct parts of Mexico City—Iztacalco, Tlalpan, and Nezahualcōyotl—to show how, on the basis of this chain of causation, those who were aligned propitiously with the urbanization process became what some call “informal sovereigns” (Weinstein 2014:27): they gained followers that they were able to mobilize for their ends and thereby consolidated control in their respective settlement by controlling neighborhood turf and extracting resources (Alonso et al. 1980:367-68; Cornelius 1975:141).

Neither voluntarist nor formalist theories can explain why. Across each of these neighborhoods, as I will show, it was alignment in favor of the process of urban growth that made Mexico City's urban brokers informal sovereigns.

4.3.1. *Iztacalco*

In 1965, Francisco “Pancho” de la Cruz Velasco, Alberto Carbajal, and Guillermo Méndez led 400 people in a land invasion of a plot that had recently been expropriated to build social housing, establishing Campamento 2 de Octubre (Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales, Archivo General de la Nación [hereafter DGIPS]/1524D/13:149-51; DGIPS/1658A/4:204-05; DGIPS/1658A/5:231-32). The settlement grew to over 3,000 families by January 1976 (DGIPS/1524D/13:149-51). Four years hence, Pancho claimed there were 7,000 families living there (DGIPS/1658A/5:260).

As the settlement grew, Pancho aligned with newer residents while a portion of the organization, led by Carbajal, aligned in favor of older ones. In 1978, Pancho signed an accord with the state to legalize the settlement's residences—the first step towards the introduction of urban services (DGIPS/1658A/4:206-07; DGIPS/1658A/5:243-44). Against their wishes, older residents from the established Bachilleres neighborhood were excluded from the accord, which was cause for great discontent.

That Pancho capitalized on aspiring denizens' need for land, rather than focus on existing residents' needs for legal recognition and services, exacerbated discontent. Carbajal and others had formed a faction that represented older residents' interests and opposed Pancho's introduction of newer ones into the area. Pancho and his coterie nevertheless introduced new residents, threatening, confronting, and evicting recalcitrant older residents to allow the new ones to settle (*Ovaciones*, 17 June 1977). This provoked anger and discontent on the part of existing residents (DGIPS/1656A/4:127; *Ovaciones*, 17 June 1977). The Carbajal faction formed a new

⁵³ Urbanization has, however, often been seen as a force that atrophies old commitments and makes people receptive to new patterns of social and political behavior (Deutsch 1961:494; Park 1967:203).

⁵⁴ They usually came to occupy their intermediary position between the urban poor and the state as leaders of land “invasions,” in which the urban poor requisitioned open spaces (Azuela 1989:98; Cornelius 1975:138), or as the spokespersons for aspiring residents who sought to purchase land that was not zoned or equipped for urban development, land often not owned by the “seller” or not legally salable (Alonso et al. 1980:343-44; Azuela 1989:89-93; Durand 1983:72-80; Gilbert and Ward 1985:76; Montaña 1976:153).

organization that opposed more new residents (DGIPS/1658A/4:204-09).

Newer and aspiring residents rallied to Pancho for protection. He mobilized squatters for dozens of rallies and meetings with state officials to defend the settlement (DGIPS/1524D/13:149-51; DGIPS/1658A/5:233). Pancho also mobilized residents to enforce control in the area. He evicted those who opposed his decisions and installed new settlers in the plots they vacated (DGIPS/1524D/13:86-87; DGIPS/1658A/5:233-34, 238). Pancho's ability to mobilize followers also allowed him to extract resources from residents, (DGIPS/1524D/13:41-42, 149-51, 167; DGIPS/1658A/5:233-34; *El Universal*, 5 August 1975; *Últimas Noticias*, 11 July 1978).

4.3.2. Tlalpan

Although it was illegal to urbanize communally-held agricultural land (*ejidos*), as Mexico City grew, this happened with great frequency. By 1971, there were 405 residents—known in the press as “parachuters” (*paracaidistas*)—living in Tlalpan's Héroes de Padierna *ejido* who had arrived during the course of a land invasion (*La Prensa*, 11 July 1973a; *Últimas Noticias*, 18 September 1973).⁵⁵ By September 1973, there were 15,000 *paracaidistas* living there (*Últimas Noticias*, 18 September 1973).

Paracaidistas may have initially come to a mutually-agreeable quid-pro-quo with one of the *ejido*'s leaders, Carlos González Reyna. González aligned with residents (*avecindados*) who had purchased land in the area (the legality of which is questionable) in the context of increasing real estate values due to the completion of a nearby highway. The *avecindados* viewed the *paracaidistas* as a threat. And since González allied with the *avecindados*, he, too, was hostile to more urban growth.

For urban growth to continue, the *paracaidistas* had to find a benefactor. In early 1973, as the conflict between older and newer residents escalated, squatters approached Celestino Gasca Villaseñor, a veteran of Mexico's revolutionary war (*La Prensa*, 11 July 1973b). Gasca aligned with the new generation of *paracaidistas* who sought to settle the area.

The ensuing conflict between the older and the newer residents led the latter to increasingly mobilize behind Gasca. *Ejido* residents met the arrival of new residents with violent opposition; both sides sustained injuries (*Últimas Noticias*, 6 July 1973). Gasca and newer residents stood fast (*Últimas Noticias*, 9 July 1973) and older residents doubled down (*La Prensa*, 11 July 1973a). This conflict and the asymmetry borne of ongoing urban growth in which new residents sought protection more energetically than older ones lent Gasca the ability to mobilize over 3,000 *paracaidistas* (*La Prensa*, 11 July 1973). This capacity, in turn, allowed him to control his settlement by evicting residents and reallocating land (DGIPS/1705A/4:103-05; *El Sol de México*, 4 July 1973; *La Prensa*, 11 July 1973) and by extracting resources from squatters (DGIPS/1705A/2:151-52). Like Pancho, Gasca derived power from the conflict borne of urban growth.

4.3.3. Nezahualcóyotl

Land speculators, who had acquired state land through corruption and cronyism (Aréchiga Torres 2012:24), began selling parcels in Nezahualcóyotl in the 1950s. Starting in July 1969, the Neighborhood Restorer Movement (MRC) organized residents into a boycott of

⁵⁵ There was some dispute as to the political unit to which Héroes de Padierna belonged, some alleging Tlalpan and others Magdalena de Contreras (*Ovaciones*, 5 April 1975). Since the official location is unimportant to my analysis, I just assume it is in Tlalpan.

payments (Vélez-Ibañez 1983:102-03). Simultaneous with the boycott, Nezahualcóyotl grew rapidly as a large wave of *paracaidistas* descended upon the area. By June 1972, the MRC had between 40,000 and 50,000 members (DGIPS/1175A/1:320).

The MRC's main leaders were Artemio Mora Lozada and Odón Madariaga Cruz. The former was the incumbent organization president, but the latter acquired greater power as the process of urban growth continued. These urban brokers reacted differently to Nezahualcóyotl's growth: Mora aligned with older residents and Madariaga aligned in favor of newer ones, leading multiple land invasions. The invasions angered older residents, who blamed Madariaga for leading new residents to usurp existing residents' plots; they organized shock brigades and ejected invaders (*La Prensa*, 24 June 1972). As urban growth continued, tensions between existing and aspiring settlers escalated and erupted into shootouts (*El Universal Gráfico*, 29 March 1973; *El Universal*, 30 March 1973).

This conflict put those who sought to settle the area in a position of vulnerability, driving them into Madariaga's arms. Earlier, residents of Nezahualcóyotl mobilized to guard the MRC's headquarters and demand the release of political prisoners (DGIPS/1174A/2:531; DGIPS/1702B/6:111-19); they also rallied to put pressure on the President (DGIPS/990, policía 0990/001:7-11) and on the state agency responsible for squatter land legalization (DGIPS/1175A/1:347; DGIPS/1702B/6:230). The ongoing ability to mobilize these followers now enabled Madariaga to decide who could settle in the area, even when it contravened the older generation's wishes, and to extract resources from residents (DGIPS/1174A/2:534). This was because continued urban growth served to sharpen between-generation conflicts, driving new residents still more strongly into Madariaga's arms, thereby giving him command of followers (DGIPS/1702B/8:158-60; cf. Vélez-Ibañez 1983:200).

4.3.4. Summary

As Mexico City grew, space became relatively scarce, and urban growth generated *contradictory interests* between a generation of people that had become urban denizens somewhat earlier, and the newly-arrived. By and large, the older generation opposed the newer generation's arrival to existing neighborhoods, for this put state recognition in jeopardy, which, in turn, threatened to stall the installation of basic services (Alonso et al. 1980:325; Cornelius 1975:191). This led the older generation of residents to adopt "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) forms of protest vis-a-vis the arrival of more neighbors, i.e., to oppose urban growth. In the 1950s, intergenerational conflicts could sometimes be resolved if the new generation left the settlement in question in favor of settling elsewhere in the city (Alonso et al. 1980:308-10). But as finite space filled due to urbanization, this became correspondingly less and less viable.⁵⁶ Continued urban growth therefore sharpened the contradictory interests between older and newer squatters into open *conflict*. Anti-growth brokers and residents confronted the newly-arrived in an effort to stave off urban growth. Newer residents, therefore, *mobilized* behind pro-growth brokers for security, giving their patrons the power to control *space* and extract *resources*.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

[To be included in the final paper.]

⁵⁶ Moreover, once land was successfully settled, officials needed a judge's ruling to carry out evictions. In the interim, to the disappointment of older residents, the state often acted merely as mediator.