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The Mexican Haunting of Venezuela's Oil Workers (1912–1948)[1]

A Legacy of Capitalist Incorporation

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Abstract

This paper examines early twentieth century labor movements in Venezuela and Mexico that offer an opportunity to better specify how global capitalism can spawn divergent, not just convergent, resistance movements. It zeroes in on the oil workers in the decades when Venezuela became incorporated into global oil production (1912–1948). Their bread and butter demands for improvements to wages and labor conditions paled in comparison to those of their anticapitalist counterparts in Latin America's first oil powerhouse: Mexico. This study elaborates why Venezuela's labor movement is surprising, devises a world-historical approach to explain it, and illustrates the potential of this approach to help us reconcile differences in resistance despite apparent universalizing pressures of global economic forces. It demonstrates that Venezuela's less radical forms of labor resistance derived from the earlier lessons the oil capitalists brought from Mexico to Venezuela on how to avoid anticapitalist labor militants. In unraveling the Mexican origins for Venezuela's less anticapitalist labor resistance, this study spotlights incorporation as a process which can forge distinct resistance agendas even in nations on apparently parallel development trajectories. It calls for delving into histories of incorporation and exploring how their legacies create conditions more, or less, conducive for anticapitalist resistance today.

Keywords: Anti-Capitalism, Labor Movements, Incorporation

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The death of Venezuela's long-time dictator in December 1935 kicked off a year of labor organizing which rallied the nation but stopped short of demanding nationalization of the prized oil industry.[2] Militants who "organized workers…without subverting their autonomy" (Tennassee 1979: 164) to any party led the charge. They galvanized nationwide protests against new, more restrictive labor regulations in June 1936 (Prieto Soto 1970; Tennassee 1979; Lucena 1982). They formed local worksite-based democratic organizing committees and an umbrella organization of unions which rallied the nation to demand "No More Imperialism" in October (Prieto Soto 1970; Lucena 1982). They mobilized a 43-day long strike to demand paid days off, overtime pay, eight-hour workdays (Lucena 1982), equalized pay for Venezuelan and foreign workers, and the rehiring of fired union organizers (McBeth 1983). They did not, however, demand nationalization of the oil industry. Nearly a decade later, at labor's first national labor congress (1944), radicals sparred with other leaders over a number of issues including the need for union "rights" in workplace management (Ellner 1980; Lucena 1982) but did not even discuss nationalizing oil.[3] Why not? Why did Venezuela's oil workers not advance a more radical anticapitalist agenda, despite laboring in one of the world's most productive and profitable oil fields at that time? This study elaborates why Venezuela's early twentieth century labor movement is surprising, devises a world-historical approach to explain it, and illustrates the potential of such an approach to explain divergent resistance agendas in the face of apparently universalizing global economic forces.

This study advances an agenda once staked out by Bergquist (1986): to lean into, rather than gloss, puzzles for world-systems analysis and dependency theory. To that end, it takes up a puzzle for Bergquist's own foundational account of labor resistance and global capitalism in early twentieth century Latin America. Bergquist (1986: 10) exposed the "tremendous inherent economic and political power" of those workers with direct potential leverage over "owners of the means of export production in peripheral capitalist economies after 1880." These export workers, he found, formed their nation's most "anticapitalist labor organizations" (Bergquist 1986: 10) and their nation's most influential movements which "deeply influenced" their nation's patterns of subsequent "political and institutional life" (Bergquist 1986: 10). By his own admission, though, Venezuela's early twentieth century oil workers did not fit this mold. Their demands for bread and butter improvements to wages and labor conditions paled in comparison to those of their counterparts elsewhere in Latin America such as the region's first oil powerhouse: Mexico. The latter forged anticapitalist labor coalitions which, unlike Venezuela's, successfully pushed the national government to nationalize oil in 1938 (Santiago 2006).

This study also leans into a puzzle for world-systems analysis by centering differentiation

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[2] President Vicente Gómez died in December, 1935.

[3] Radicals, mostly those who self-identified as communists, objected to the proposal from the unions allied with the reformist outsider party (Accion Democática). They latter wanted to ensure their party had 50 percent of the proposed Confederation's leadership even though they had only earned 31 percent of the labor congress' 130 delegates. The radicals wanted to qualify the labor congress' support for the Allies as beginning only once the Axis powers had invaded the Soviet Union (Ellner 1980). It was the latter that led to a shouting match which resulted in ejecting most communist union leaders.

within, rather than convergence towards, waves of resistance. World-systems analysis (Arrighi, Hopkins, and Wallerstein 1989; Boswell and Chase-Dunn 2000; Martin et al. 2008; Smith and Wiest 2012) pioneered a now broader corpus of research demonstrating how "large-scale macro processes shape the conditions for temporally grouped clusters of collective action and revolution" (Almeida and Chase-Dunn 2018: 193). This research maps out waves of resistance (Martin 2008; Jung 2023). It reveals how these waves of protest are related to such global dynamics of capitalism as rapid expansion (Agartan, Woo-Young, and Huynh 2008), contraction (Boswell and Chase-Dunn 2000), or decline in the global hegemon (Smith and Weist 2012) of the world-economy. While this bird's eye view offers an important corrective to the focus on imminent factors within nations of celebrated social movement research (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Meyer 2004; Tilly and Tarrow 2015) it tends to gloss the drivers of local and national variation in resistance within a given wave (Almeida and Chase Dunn 2018). Indeed, both Venezuela's and Mexico's early twentieth century labor movements might be collapsed as similar struggles that contributed to the 1930s wave of resistance, the first of four waves since the 1870s (Jung 2023).[4]

And yet differences in movement agendas, such as those of Mexico's and Venezuela's, are hardly trivial. Never has this been more apparent than it is today. We see today "polarization around the world between insurgent left and popular forces…and an insurgent far Right" (Robinson 2020: 4). We see movements "ranging from those that are predominantly exclusionary…to ones that are pointing (explicitly or implicitly) towards…a more just and equitable post-capitalist world system" (Silver and Jacobs 2023). We need, then, to reconsider, as Silver and Jacobs (2023) urge us to, how, precisely, resistance from below relates to the dynamics of global capitalism? Movement scholars have increasingly contemplated how "local and national movements have varied in their response to globalization processes" (Almeida and Chase-Dunn 2018: 203), and reveal how a movement's "resource infrastructures, political contexts, and their ability to translate world society templates to indigenous institutions" contribute to differentiated responses (Almeida and Chase-Dunn 2018: 203). In such analyses, globalization often operates as a largely homogenizing background condition.

The world-historical approach devised here, by contrast, offers a way we might contemplate how global dynamics splinter, as well as unite, resistance. The empirical analysis presented below reveals that the formative process of incorporation into global markets as oil producers did not lead to similar modes of labor resistance in Mexico and Venezuela. Rather, it locked the latecomer to oil, Venezuela, into a backward-gazing relationship to its oil exporter predecessor. This backward-gaze differentiated labor relations and resistance in Venezuela from Mexico's. This study brings to light several mechanisms whereby Mexico's labor struggles suffused Venezuela's labor relations. It is a taut relationship to Mexico that proved decisive in producing Venezuela's more disciplined labor movement. It is a relationship that compelled foreign capitalists, in concert

[4] They could even both be considered anti-systemic, according to the concept's deserved expansion to better capture the range of movements in the Global South (Martin 2008; Jung 2023) such that they include not just national movements for liberation from colonial powers (Arrighi et al. 1989) but also those "social movements" against "class" exploitation (Jung 2023), initially conceived as arising within the Global North (Arrighi et al. 1989).

with authoritarian as well as "populist" political leaders, to conspire against anticapitalist labor resistance. It reveals how the capitalist world-economy can produce divergent, not just convergent, labor movements. It thereby unveils how, in fact, such divergences are integral to the world-historical processes defining our capitalist world economy.

Towards a World-Historical Approach to Labor Resistance

Here I advance a world-historical approach to analyzing resistance which centers on a relational logic of comparisons. Such an approach enquires into how differentiations, not just convergences, in resistance relate to the dynamics of global capitalism. Doing so requires moving beyond the logic often deployed to relate instances of resistance associated with world-revolutions to the long-term global dynamics of global capitalism; that of an "encompassing comparative" logic (Tilly 1984: 147). The latter tends to interpret such cases as "consequences of their relationships to the whole" (Tilly 1984: 124) or as "impacts" (Hart 2018: 374, see also Hart 2006) of globalization. A world-historical approach to resistance, by contrast, would relate instances within such waves of resistance. It would also, I propose, entail a methodology for selecting which instance(s) of resistance to study and compare relationally: that of selecting a puzzling instance and the instances of resistance to which they are connected vicariously.

The world-historical approach to labor resistance proposed here prizes puzzles. It advocates honing in on one or more instances of resistance which present anomalies for our best interpretations of global capitalism's role in shaping resistance. It anchors an empirical analysis, that is, by adopting a method of selecting "instances" for empirical inquiry with certain built-in advantages. Taking up such anomalies, or "negative cases," for a given theory (Burawoy 1989; Emigh 1997), builds in an opportunity to refine theory (Burawoy 1989; Paige 1999). I advocate integrating the methodology of selecting puzzles into a world-historical approach because it specifies why we might need to re-interpret concrete history (McMichael 1990; Tomich 1994, 2018; Gates 2018; Gates and Deniz 2019), and provides a logic for narrowing theoretical guidance to those already addressing analogous puzzles (Gates 2023).

A world-historical approach to resistance proceeds, then, with a relational analysis of the selected puzzling instance. It proceeds, that is, not as Tilly (1984) and Wallerstein (1983) did (Hart 2018) by presuming "a 'whole' that governs its 'parts'" (Tilly 1984: 80–83). Instead, it proceeds from the recognition that the "whole" is in fact emergent, constituted through "the mutual conditioning of the parts" (McMichael 1990: 391).[5] This recognition demands a methodological shift towards "incorporated comparisons:" analyzing "interrelated instances" "as distinct

[5] Hart (2018) clarifies the nature of this recognition which she shares with McMichael (1990) and which motivates her own adaptation of McMichael's world-historical approach for ethnographic studies. This recognition constitutes an "ontological moment" of "taking as given the world as a loosely structured totality" (Hart 2018: 389) while leaving aside the problematic epistemological moment of "how we organize our understanding of it" which encumbers "encompassing comparisons" (Hart 2018: 389) with all manner of unnecessary assumptions about the whole's concrete nature.

mutually-conditioning moments of a singular phenomenon posited as a self-forming whole" (McMichael 1990: 391). It calls, then, for describing "the specific relationships and processes that make the system by way of comparing its parts" (Tomich 2018: 157). This recognition demands a shift towards what Hart (2006, 2018) felicitously termed "relational comparisons."[6]

Prior world-historical research already demonstrates the explanatory power of such a world-historical approach to differentiated labor relations and points to an as yet unarticulated case selection strategy of a world-historical approach. Tomich (1994) unpacks how the highly industrialized mode of slave-based sugar production in nineteenth century Cuba resulted not from Cuba's singular national economic or political institutions. Rather, it represented an adaptation which arose in relationship to Cuba's nearest sugar producing competitors that had the advantage of guaranteed colonial markets. Similarly, we learn that Colombia's banana workers endured despotic labor relations, not despite, but in part, because Colombia's prosperous coffee farmers enjoyed more pacific labor relations. The latter provided popular support and legitimacy to a national political project anchored in an improbable chase for the success reaped in coffee by banana growers, even if by brute force (Hough 2022). These studies model strategies of selecting an empirical focus that differentiates, I argue, a world-historical approach from other kindred moves in historical sociology.

This proposed world-historical approach to resistance aligns in many respects with recent developments among today's third wave of historical sociologists. It reflects a "shift…to a focus on historical process" (Clemens 2007: 527) conceived of as continually "ordering and reordering" (Clemens 2007: 532). It aligns with the "commitment to 'relationalism'" (Go and Lawson 2015: 14) of an emergent global historical sociology. While the latter issues a broad call for examining "the contextually bound, historically situated configurations of events and experiences" (Go and Lawson 2017: 3), a world-historical approach prioritizes empirical inquiry into the role of "acting units or agencies" within particular "cumulating processes;" processes that are "formed, and continually reformed, by the relations between them" (Hopkins 1978: 204–5). This formulation has implications for how to select instances with which to compare the puzzling instance. It directs us to identify other sites of resistance which are connected through a particular "cumulative process." This could be, as it was for Hough, selecting an earlier instance of commodity production for global markets (coffee) with which to relate a subsequent such endeavor in another market (bananas) arising within a nation's "cumulative process" of inserting into global markets. Or, it could be, as it was for Tomich (1994), that of selecting instances of geographically and politically disconnected labor relations, but which are related vicariously through their sequential and mutual insertion into production for the same global market (sugar).

The latter logic narrows my initial research question to: how might Venezuela's more moderate labor resistance relate to the labor resistance unleashed by an earlier instances of oil incorporation? Next, I establish why Mexico constitutes a particularly relevant instance of labor

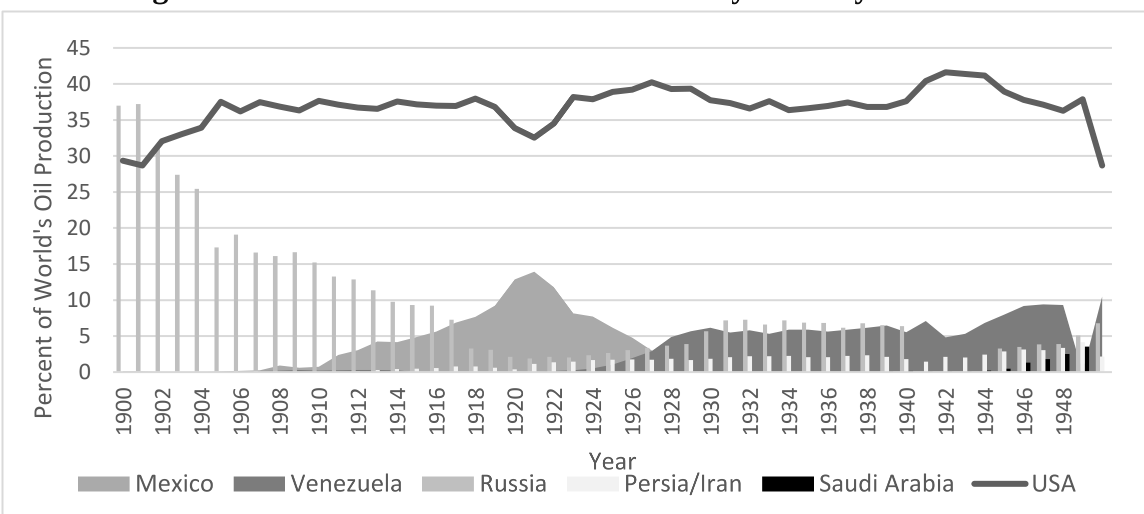
[6] Hart (2018) acknowledges her considerable debt to McMichael (1990) in devising her approach she calls "relational comparisons (2006), while delineating how she draws on Lefebre to extend the logic of "relational comparisons" such that they better specify the role of space and can be optimally paired with ethnography.

resistance to which to relate Venezuela's: it was Venezuela's immediate and successful predecessor in the world-historical process of oil incorporation.

Venezuela's Belated Incorporation into Oil, 1912–1950

Just before Venezuela surged onto the global stage as an oil producer, Mexico reigned over global oil production. As Figure 1 illustrates, Mexico was the first country to bypass Russia as the leading oil producer outside of the United States. Mexican oil production accounted for nearly 15 percent of the world's oil in 1921, the same year its production peaked (at 27,707,000 metric tons). By 1928, however, Mexico ceded its position as the second-largest producer to Venezuela. Venezuela produced 5 percent of the world's oil in 1928 and reached Mexico's peak 1921 level of production in 1937. It outshined other leading oil producers such as Iran and Saudi Arabia and vied with Russia as the world's second-biggest producer of oil until after World War II.

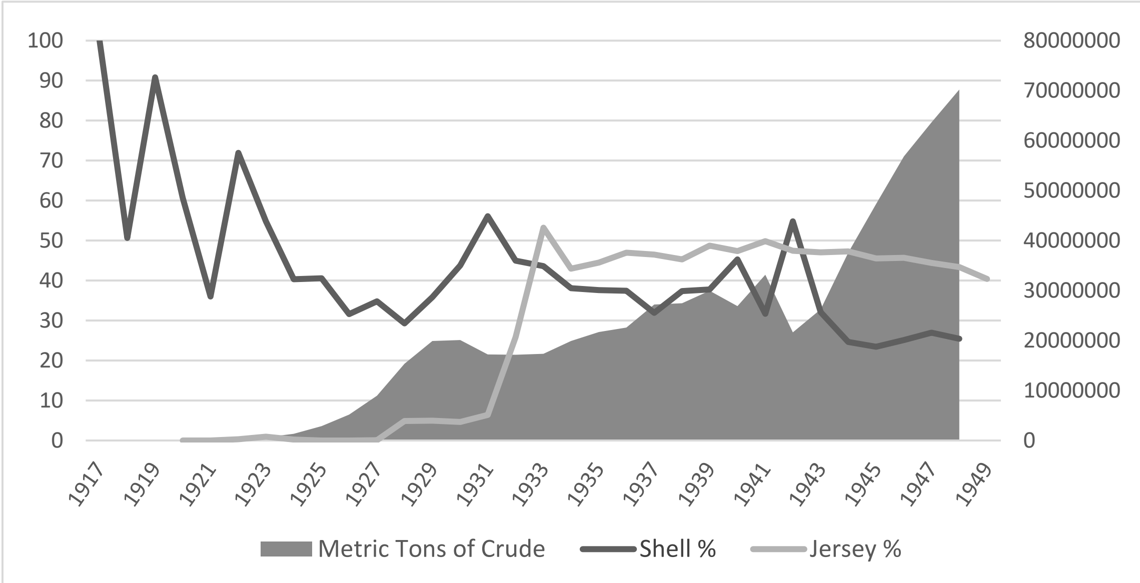
Figure 1: Percent of World Oil Production by Country: 1900–1950



Source: Calculated based on "D3. Output of Crude Petroleum" in Palgrave Macmillan (2013).

Two of the world's oil giants dominated Venezuelan oil: Royal Dutch Shell (Shell) and Standard Oil New Jersey (Jersey). Shell pioneered Venezuelan oil production, striking oil first in 1917 as depicted in Figure 2. After it discovered the gusher of La Barroso No. 2 in 1922, a wave of prospectors rushed to Venezuela and stoked Venezuela's overall production. Even so, Shell remained the single largest producer of oil throughout the 1920s, producing over 45 percent of Venezuelan oil in 1930. By then, however, American oil companies such as Gulf, Pan American, and Jersey, had swooped in. Jersey surpassed Shell's Venezuelan production in 1933 and remained Venezuela's largest producer. Together, Jersey and Shell produced 65–80 percent of Venezuela's oil (Gates 2023).

Figure 2: Percent of Venezuela Oil Produced by Company: 1917–1948



Sources: Total metric tons of crude oil produced in Venezuela from "D3. Output of Crude Petroleum," in Palgrave Macmillan (2013) as detailed in Gates (2023). Shell's percentage of Venezuelan production calculated with the volume of Venezuelan production from the Center for Global Economic History's database and Shell's annual reports available at http://cgeh.nl/1-data-oil-production. Jersey's percentage of Venezuelan production calculated with Standard Oil New Jersey's reports on average daily net barrels from Gibb and Knowlton (1956), and Larson, Knowlton, and Popple (1971). A measure of total Venezuelan production that matched Jersey's reported overall production in total daily barrels is from Tugwell (1975).

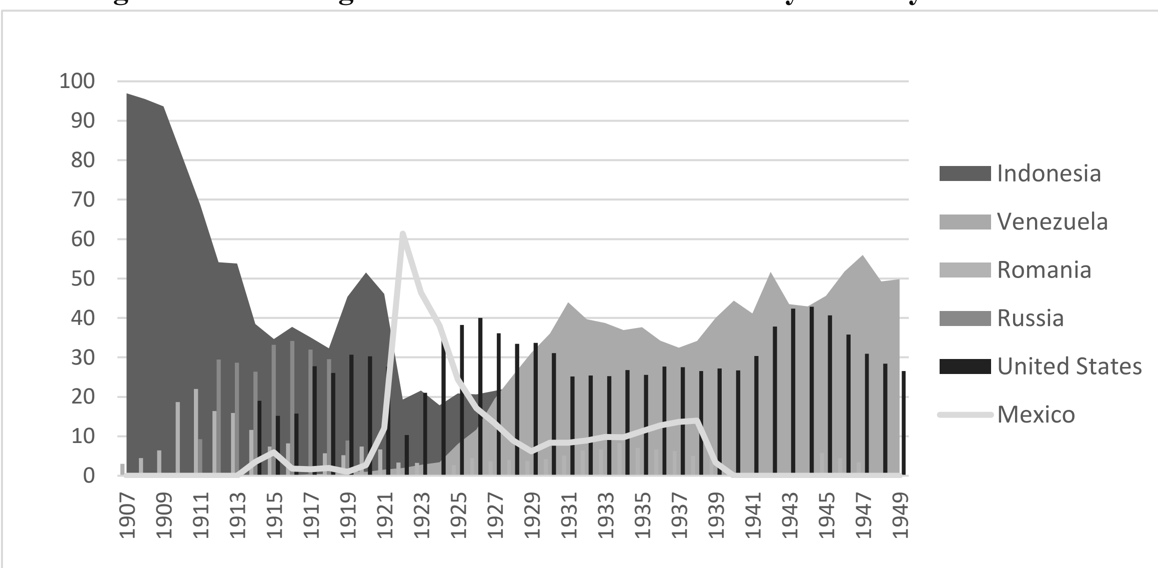
All of Venezuela's big oil companies came by way of Mexico.[7] Figure 3 documents how Shell came to the Americas as it sought to diversify its sources of oil from Indonesia, Russia, and Romania. Its efforts to move in on Jersey's home turf were first rewarded in the United States and Mexico. The white line in Figure 3 traces the meteoric rise of Mexico as a source of oil for Shell in less than ten years after it obtained its first license to explore in 1912. Shell made its first major discovery early in 1914 with an unheard of 100,000 barrel a day gusher (Howarth 1997). By 1918, Shell's holdings in Mexico already outpaced its historically most prolific wells in the Dutch East Indies (Royal Dutch Petroleum Company 1950; Howarth 1997). Then, in 1919, Shell acquired Mexico's biggest producer and former darling of Mexico's recently departed dictator (Howarth 1997): the British owned El Aguila (Royal Dutch Petroleum Company 1950).[8] The acquisition

[7] That included Gulf, Venezuela's third largest oil producer. With financial backing from the Pittsburgh-based Mellon Bank, Gulf had pioneered explorations in Mexico in 1913 and became Mexico's leading oil producer by 1916 (Brown 1993). In 1922, however, Gulf's Mexican oil wells dried up and it arranged to drill on another American oil company's leases in Venezuela. In 1929, they bought their productive wells and secured control over 27 percent of Venezuela's oil production (Lucena 1982). Not long after, in 1932, Gulf sold half its valuable Mene Grande Oil Company to Jersey Standard (Brown 1985; Tinker Salas 2009).

[8] The British entrepreneur, Weetman Pearson, had secured vast tracks of land for oil exploration before revolutionaries ousted his patron, Porfirio Díaz, in 1910. With the acquisition of Pearson's El Aguila, Shell controlled a quarter of the

ensured Mexico would be Shell's most important source of oil for several years (Royal Dutch Petroleum Company 1950). Shell's Mexican wells had even helped Shell produce more than 10 percent of the world's oil for the first time in 1917 (Royal Dutch Petroleum Company 1950). But Shell took notice of Venezuela after it made the discovery at La Barroso No. 2 in 1922 (Howarth 1997).[9] Shell continued to invest into Venezuela even after it found success in the United States, and it secured a 23.75 percent share of Iraqi oil in 1928. Very quickly, Venezuela eclipsed Mexico and vied with the United States as Shell's leading source of oil, supplying nearly 50 percent of Shell's oil at its peak in 1948–1949 (Royal Dutch Petroleum Company 1950).

Figure 3: Percentage of Shell's World Production by Country: 1907–1949



Source: Calculated based on Shell's gross metric tons produced annually by country, as compiled by the Center for Global Economic History from Shell's annual reports, available at http://cgeh.nl/1-data-oil-production.

Jersey too turned to Venezuela only after riding the Mexican oil boom. Mindful that the independent American oil prospectors who had developed Mexico's oil industry, not to mention Shell, posed a looming threat to their market dominance in Latin America (Larson, Knowlton, and Popple 1971), Jersey snapped up two "independent" oil companies, Transcontinental and Pierce, in 1917.[10] As the white line tracing Mexico's percent of Jersey's oil in Figure 4 shows, Mexico quickly became a key source of oil for Jersey, accounting for up to 40 percent of its oil in 1920. Shell's success in Venezuela, nonetheless, piqued Jersey's interest (Brown 1985). It explored for oil there, even as it pursued parallel ventures with varying success in Peru and Colombia in the

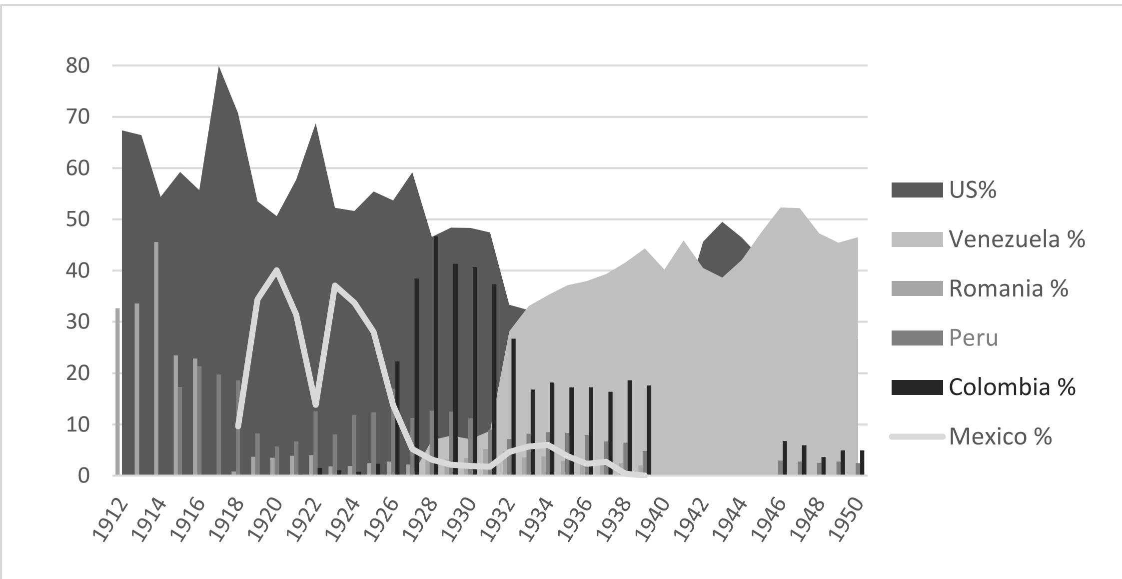
land possessed by foreign oil companies (Santiago 2006) and multiple wells producing 70,000–100,000 barrels a day (Howarth 1997).

[9] The rate of successful drilling operations in Mexico also dropped from 83 percent in 1921 to 28 percent in 1929. In contrast, all but one of the 101 wells drilled in Venezuela in 1928 produced oil (calculation based on Brown 1985).

[10] Before that, Jersey had been content to acquire just a skimming plant in Mexico's oil capital, Tampico (in 1912), where it processed the crude oil it bought from a British independent, Huasteca (Brown 1985: 370).

1920s. By 1928, after squandering $40 million over seven years of failed Venezuelan explorations (Brown 1985), Jersey decided it needed in on Venezuela. That year, it acquired a controlling interest in the Creole Petroleum Corporation in 1928 (Larson et al. 1971). In 1932, it acquired the even more valuable Venezuelan Lago Petroleum Corporation (Giddens 1955).[11] Venezuela's prolific oil fields quickly satiated Jersey's thirst for foreign oil supplies (Larson et al. 1971) to feed its refineries on the Eastern seaboard, supplying 30 percent in 1932, and between 40–50 percent thereafter. As Figure 4 shows, Venezuela overtook even the United States as its primary source for oil for a time, and quickly overshadowed its earlier successes in Mexico and Colombia, not to mention the as yet unproven promise of Jersey's share of Iraq's oil secured in 1928 (Larson et al. 1971).

Figure 4: Percentage of Jersey's World Production by Country: 1912–1950



Source: Calculated using Jersey's reports on daily net barrels produced annually by country or affiliate in Gibb and Knowlton (1956); and Larson and her colleagues (1971).

Mexico ventures haunted the two oil giants that would come to dominate Venezuela's new oil industry. Mexico delivered a gut punch to both Shell and Jersey when it nationalized oil in 1938. Both companies had major investments in Mexico. In retrospect, a Shell historian described it as Shell's "single most shocking business event" (Howarth 1997: 178) of the 1930s. Mexico's booming postwar economy, with an internal market for oil second only to Argentina in Latin America, had enticed Shell to reinvest in Mexico in the early 1930s.[12] As Figure 3 illustrates, its

[11] Jersey gained control over Lago Petroleum Corporation's valuable wells, refinery and transport hub by taking over Indiana Jersey (Larson et al. 1971), which itself had only consolidated its control over Lago through stock purchases of its parent, Venezuelan Pan American, just three years prior (Giddens 1955).

[12] Shell's re-investment in Mexico, including a major new discovery (Poza Rica), a pipeline and a refinery, drove up Mexico's share of Shell's oil to 14 percent by 1938 (Brown 1985).

share of oil produced in Mexico rose again in the 1930s, reaching close to 20 percent in the year before nationalization. More than anything Shell wanted to "avoid the road taken by Mexico" (Howarth 1997: 180–84) in its new explorations in Nigeria, Ecuador, and Colombia, but most especially in Venezuela. Jersey too, took a hit when Mexico expropriated its oil investments. By that point, Jersey had reentered Mexico via its 1932 takeover of Standard Indiana's foreign affiliates, as indicated in Figure 4. Indiana's Mexican holdings included one of the country's biggest producers (Huasteca), a major Tampico refinery, and a quarter of Mexico's sizable market (Brown 1985).[13] Jersey produced 10–23 percent of Mexico's oil in the 1930s, second only to Shell's 60 percent in 1938 (Howarth 1997).[14]

Mexico's nationalization only confirmed what the oil companies already knew: militant oil workers could cost them. Jersey had downshifted its Mexican commitments and focused on Venezuela at the point when it faced labor militants in Mexico and growing nationalist challenges to its global dominance (Larson et al. 1971).[15] A resurgence of labor militancy in the mid-1920s had made operating in Mexico increasingly intolerable for Shell by 1924 (Howarth 1997). Mexico's oil workers had regrouped after a 1919 crackdown and hit back at the industry in the mid-1920s. They pressured the federal government to extract more from the oil companies.[16] The company's labor troubles in Mexico echoed the labor militancy and nationalist challenges that had complicated, if not wiped out, nearly all of Jersey's foreign explorations up to that point. Strikes and government pressure to raise taxes stymied Jersey's early success in developing its 1913 acquisitions in Peru.[17] Strikes in 1924 interrupted the Colombian operations of Jersey's Canadian-based subsidiary International, just as four years of investment first produced significant flow (Gibb and Knowlton 1956). Nationalizations of both Russian and Romanian oil in the early 1920s thwarted Jersey's aspirations to produce foreign oil near its European markets.[18] Thus, even though

[13] The purchase of Indiana's foreign assets likely had more to do with Venezuelan than Mexican oil (Brown 1985) as Indiana's Venezuelan holdings produced four times more oil (105,000 barrels a day) than its Mexican holdings (26,000 barrels a day) and its Aruba refinery refined nearly as much oil (100,000 barrels a day) as all its Mexican refineries (120,000 barrels a day) (Giddens 1955).

[14] Jersey's losses were compounded by the smaller compensation from Mexico ($24 million) it conceded to than Shell's $130 million settlement five years after nationalization (Howarth 1997; Jayne 2001).

[15] Jersey's Transcontinental slashed its American supply contracts in 1921, phased out production after 1923, and in 1928 closed its Tampico refinery and handed its remaining production to Standard Indiana (Brown 1985).

[16] Labor militancy also contributed indirectly to the oil companies' woes in Mexico, by putting pressure on Mexico's new leaders to challenge the legal basis of foreign oil company claims on land, and to increase taxes (Brown 1985). Between 1922 and 1927, for instance, Venezuela obtained merely about half the revenue per barrel that Mexico procured (McBeth 1983) once Mexico implemented the 1921 tax hike of an additional 40 percent per barrel (Brown 1985).

[17] Jersey's negotiations over taxation with Peru stalled for nearly a decade, obstructing profits from the major discoveries made by its Canadian affiliate, International Petroleum Company (Gibb and Knowlton 1956).

[18] Russia's 1922 nationalization of oil hurt Jersey, which had in 1920 entered an expensive alliance with the Swedish oil titans, the Nobel brothers, to redevelop Russia's languishing oil fields. Romania's 1924 nationalization further dashed Jersey's hopes of rebuilding its major production sites there which it had lost when it had set its fields ablaze in advance of German occupation in World War I (Gibb and Knowlton 1956).

the "secret police, sudden arrests and torture" (Howarth 1997: 133) under Venezuela's dictator Vicente Gómez posed a "moral quandary," Shell, like Jersey, could not resist the political stability and labor pacification Venezuela promised in the 1920s. In developing this new site for oil extraction, however, the oil executives took heed of their troubles in Mexico.

How Venezuela's Early Labor Relations in Oil Related to Mexico's

Foreign oil companies did not just mirror their Mexico labor relations when they crafted labor relations in Venezuela. They adapted their Mexico blueprint for labor relations in ways that belie a design to better contain anticapitalist labor resistance. In Venezuela, for instance, the oil companies veered from their Mexico preference for refineries near oil extraction. Instead, they avoided placing in Venezuela the very workers which had given them so much trouble in Mexico: refinery workers. They migrated many aspects of their segregationist style of labor relations from Mexico to Venezuela. In Venezuela, however, they added immigrant workers, perhaps to undercut the nationalist bond Mexico's oil workers had forged in opposition to the foreign firms. Finally, they took full advantage of their greater assurance that Venezuela's authorities would help them control workers with force if necessary.

In these ways, foreign oil companies exerted their agency, making choices and wielding sway over political leaders, to engineer a less anticapitalist labor movement in Venezuela than in Mexico. In emphasizing the agency of capitalists at this historical moment, I also shift the emphasis from the "magical" quality of Venezuela's state rooted in its role as "manager of income" derived from "ground rent" (Coronil 1997: 76). I redirect from the state as dispenser of oil revenue to secure stability (Yarrington 2018) or even democratic consensus (Karl 1997). I emphasize, instead, the complicity of the state's security apparatus, even in the heady days of surging oil production and prices, with the oil company's project to craft a more disciplined less anticapitalist labor force.

Avoided Mexico's Radical Refinery Workers

Abundant labor might have convinced oil companies that establishing refineries close to their Venezuelan oil fields would pose little risk. After all, jobs in the oil industry attracted a sea of "indebted peons" (Lieuwen 1961: 16) from Venezuela's "semi-feudal" (Croes 1973: 52) agrarian society aspiring to "upward social mobility" (Lucena 1982: 42, 45, 87–89) and life as "free wage laborers" (Tennassee 1979: 100).[19] Despite promising modest wages (Mieres 1962; Tennassee 1979; Lucena 1982) in the 10–16,000 new jobs created by oil in the 1920s (Mieres 1962), about 60–80,000 people (3–4 percent of Venezuela's total rural population) migrated to the oil region between 1920–1926 (Mieres 1962). The 1930s depression near death knell to Venezuela's agro-exports spurred even more internal migration to oil fields (Mieres 1962). As a result, the population in the main state of oil production increased 111 percent between 1920 and 1936 (Lucena 1982).

[19] Debt peons, rural producers who provided labor, rent, or a share of their output to landowners, represented 80 percent of agricultural producers in 1920 (Lieuwen 1961).

This intense competition for jobs in the oil fields made it easy for the companies to replace perceived troublemakers in Venezuela (Lucena 1982). Furthermore, Venezuela's oil workers could not count on solidarity from burgeoning ranks of industrial workers elsewhere in their country as Mexico's could.[20]

The oil companies that came to Venezuela did not leave labor discipline to market conditions. They also structured their industry in ways that seemed designed to avoid the threat of anticapitalist labor militants they had experienced in Mexico. In Mexico, both Jersey and Shell had acquired oil companies that had refineries. Perhaps believing that abundant labor in Mexico would ensure labor discipline, they acquired these refineries even after a "culture of defiance" (Santiago 2006: 225–55) had taken root among their workers.[21] And yet, Mexico's refinery workers made it painfully clear to the oil giants that a vast labor supply would not ensure their compliance.

The refinery workers of Shell and Jersey formed the nucleus of self-professed "reds" that had organized the first strike wave in the 1910s, had instigated another wave of militancy in the mid-1920s and had regrouped in the 1930s to push for nationalization (Santiago 2006). A radical flank of Shell's refinery workers defied nearly a decade of co-optation to force a "red" split within their union in 1932 (Santiago 2006). They would go on to take over two refinery unions, five of Shell's most bountiful oil fields and mobilize wildcat strikes to enforce a new pro-labor ruling across refineries in early 1935. That December, they championed an independent national oil workers union (Sindicato de Trabajadores Petroleros de la Republica Mexicana) and successfully pressed Mexico's national labor confederation to lobby for nationalization.[22]

With Mexico's militant anticapitalist refinery workers in their rearview mirror, Venezuela's oil companies structured their Venezuelan operations to exclude refineries. Instead, they built, or in the case of Jersey, acquired, major refineries in the nearby Dutch-controlled islands of Curaçao and Aruba.[23] Even in 1954, 10 years after the oil companies conceded to government pressure to

[20] Venezuela's waged workers made up only 3.1 percent of its economically active population before oil (1914–1925) (Lucena 1982) and reached just 4.7 percent of the labor force by 1936 (Lucena 1982). They labored in "an artisanal industrial sector" (Lucena 1982: 70) made up of entities employing an average of six workers. Thus, unlike in industrializing Mexico, then, such workers offered little leverage as allies against Venezuela's political elites (Ellner 1980).

[21] When Jersey acquired Pierce, an oil company that had established Mexico's first oil refinery, in 1917 (Santiago 2006), they acquired refinery workers that had already successfully called a general strike of Mexico's refining and transport hub, Tampico, in 1916 (Santiago 2006). Pierce refinery workers would go on to participate in the first "mass oil workers' strike" (Santiago 2006: 235) in 1917 and form the first refinery-wide union in 1918. When Shell acquired El Aguila in 1919, they acquired a major refinery (Brown 1985; Santiago 2006) whose workers had co-led the 1916 Tampico strike, the industry's 1917 "mass strike" (Santiago 2006: 235) and helped Jersey's refinery workers lead the general strike of 1919.

[22] Shell and Jersey's refinery workers who identified as "reds" instigated wildcat strikes from 1934 to 1936, as the "reds" sought to force oil companies to respect the new "closed shop" ruling that had "reduced managerial privilege" (Santiago 2006: 320–22) and rebuffed the government's initiative to form a national union under its tutelage in 1936 (Santiago 2006).

[23] Shell completed one of the world's largest refineries in the Dutch colony of Curaçao (Royal Dutch Petroleum Company 1950) in 1918 to process its Venezuelan oil (Howarth 1997). Jersey acquired Indiana's Aruba refinery, built

build refineries in Venezuela (Tennassee 1979), Jersey processed 45 percent of its crude at its massive Lago Refinery in Aruba, and just 25 percent in Venezuela (Taylor, Lindeman, and López R. 1955).[24] Shell even recruited the many Venezuelans who came to Curaçao in search of employment (McBeth 1983). That so many Venezuelans were eager to go to Curaçao further underscored the ease with which the oil companies might have hired Venezuelans to extract oil, let alone refine it, in Venezuela. Restructuring the industry was not the only way that the oil companies hoped to avoid a Mexico-style anticapitalist labor movement.

Undercut Mexico's Nationalist Unity by Hiring Immigrant Workers

A Tampico freight company recruited immigrant workers from the West Indies to break a strike of their Mexican longshore workers in 1911 (Brown 1993). It is ironic, then, that it was not in Mexico where recruiting immigrant workers took hold (Santiago 2006). Instead, it was in Venezuela, where the oil companies ramped up recruitment of immigrant workers. Their efforts to do so and the way they used these workers suggest a strategy to undercut the nationalist labor solidarity which gripped so many of their Mexican workers.

The oil companies in Venezuela undercut the possibility that nationalist sentiment would bond the workers they segregated from their Anglo-workers and unite them against foreign oil companies as they had in Mexico.[25] They did so by hiring immigrant workers. Ironically, though, they did not recruit workers from the deep pool of experienced workers in Mexico, as Venezuela's fear-mongering political leaders liked to pronounce. Instead, they tapped a source of labor largely new to oil. They recruited mostly Afro-descendant foreign workers from the British West Indies (Trinidad) and the Dutch West Indies (Curaçao and Aruba) (Lieuwen 1961; Tinker Salas 2009). It is difficult to know precisely how many Black West Indian workers the industry employed, given that most oil companies tabulated these workers as part of payroll for "natives" (Tennassee 1979: 111). There is some evidence that they had a disproportionately high representation on the oil companies' payroll. "British West Indian" (Tinker Salas 2009: 131) workers, for instance, made up 10 percent of Standard Oil of Venezuela's labor force in 1933, but just 1 percent of Venezuela's population at the time (Lieuwen 1961).

The oil companies did not just hire immigrants, they structured their labor relations in ways

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in 1929 to process Venezuelan oil, with its 1932 purchase of Indiana's foreign assets (Giddens 1955; Taylor, Lindeman, and Lopez R. 1955).

[24] Although Jersey built a small refinery built at its Eastern terminal of Carapito in 1939 (Taylor et al. 1955), it did not build a refinery to process the crude oil from its main wells near Lake Maracaibo until 1950. Shell opened its first major Venezuelan refinery in 1949, also at Punta Cardon.

[25] As in Mexico, in Venezuela the oil companies favored mostly white American or European "foreign oil men" (Lieuwen 1961: 12) for their more highly remunerated skilled positions such as drillers and geologists and compounded these privileges of occupation and pay hierarchies with segregated housing, health, and basic services. Much like their Mexican counterparts, Venezuelan workers earned far less than their Anglo or European peers, typically working as day laborers for a foreman's "squad" (Tinker Salas 2009: 97), and endured squalid living conditions such as hammocks under thatched-roof barracks, or "tiny huts" (Tennassee 1979: 106) in labor camps supplied with overcrowded latrines (Tinker Salas 2009).

which suggests a design to redirect any potential ire of Venezuelan laborers away from their collective white bosses (Tennassee 1979). The oil companies hired many Black West Indian as "intermediaries between Venezuelans and their European and North American bosses" (Tennassee 1979: 110–11), sometimes in clerical, but often in supervisory roles (Tinker Salas 2009). They paid their Black West Indian workers much less than white foreigners, but slightly more than Venezuelans, even when they performed the same work (Tennassee 1979; Lucena 1982). At work, Black West Indian workers endured segregated bathrooms, cafeterias, and water fountains (Tinker Salas 2009) which differentiated them from their white peers. They resided, however, in their own labor camps (Tennassee 1979: 108, 128–31) with slightly better living conditions such as "double cabins" than the often adjacent open-air dormitories of the Venezuelan labor camps. These segregated labor camps further undermined any sympathy Venezuelans might have had for their fellow Black West Indian workers (Tennassee 1979).

The labor relations policy of hiring immigrant workers appeared to successfully undercut the potential unity of workers around a national identity which had proved so potent in the campaign to nationalize oil in Mexico (Lucena 1982). Venezuela's dictator, Vicente Gómez, tapped into this mixture of racist nativism with worker grievances when he instituted a ban on Black West Indian and Chinese immigrants in 1929 (Peloso 2003; Tinker Salas 2009). The oil region's local newspaper reported on "The Black Threat" posed by "Antilles Blacks" (Tinker Salas 2009: 138) at the height of labor mobilization in 1936. The editorials demonized "Antilles Blacks," charging that they had "contaminated" Venezuela—they had "displaced poor Venezuelans from work in the foreign oil companies…and become Venezuelan citizens just to keep their jobs" (Tennassee 1979: 218–19). Introducing a third tier to their Mexico-based segregated labor relations policy was not the only adaptation the oil companies made in Venezuela. They also devised numerous means of more direct control over their workers.

Relied More on Authorities to Punish Labor Militants

The oil companies squashed anticapitalist mobilization in no small measure by importing many tried-and-true techniques of punitive labor control from Mexico. When they could not contain workers on their own, however, they could turn to both local and national authorities for back-up in Venezuela much more reliably than they had in Mexico. Venezuela's authorities at many levels up, especially before 1935, had personal stakes in oil which motivated them to protect oil from renegade workers; stakes which Mexico's revolutionaries, initially helmed and later backed by landed elites far from the oil region, largely lacked (Brown 1985).

Many of the security techniques deployed by companies in Venezuela, echo the "hybrid of the colonial plantation and the company town" (Santiago 2006: 172) which they had created in Mexico. Just as they had in Mexico (Santiago 2006), the oil companies blanketed their production sites, camps, and company-built roads with armed guards who enforced company regulations as the de facto law of the land (Tinker Salas 2009). Just as their "white guards" in Mexico had, the company guards in Venezuela spied on workers, used violence with impunity, and often reported those who violated the company's many overbearing rules (Tennassee 1979). The labor camps that became ubiquitous in Venezuela (Tennasee 1979) also bore an uncanny resemblance to Gulf's prisonlike labor camps in Mexico, where workers were "surrounded by a high cyclone fence and patrolled by armed guards" (Santiago 2006: 305). Caged in labor camps, Venezuelan workers struggled to build organizations that could build labor solidarity in the company, let alone across the industry (Lucena 1982).

By the time Shell struck Venezuela's first major gusher in 1922, oil companies already had to confront Mexican labor militants without reliable assistance from authorities. After Mexico's revolutionaries ejected the oil friendly dictator, Porfirio Díaz, in 1910, oil companies largely lost "the services of the rural police or company policemen appointed by the local jefe político" (Brown 1993: 314). The companies struggled to contain rising labor unrest between 1914 and 1919 (Brown 1993; Santiago 2006), despite a renegade local general (from 1915–1920) who promised to shield them from the reigning revolutionary faction and their questioning of the oil industry's legal rights to Mexico's subsoil. The oil companies relied largely on their company "watchmen" (Brown 1993: 308), but on occasion even faced local police who had "taken sides openly with the strikers" (Brown 1993: 351).[26] They received government backup only when the reigning "constitutionalists" needed elite allies to fend off their revolutionary rivals as they did in 1919. The companies received federal assistance in crushing an industry-wide strike that year, soon after an upstart general disgruntled with the reactionary bent of constitutionalists declared his sympathies with the strikers.[27] But by 1921, the oil companies once again had to take matters into their own hands.[28] The general and now president, a champion of land reform (Hall 1980) who needed revenue to stabilize federal finances, raised taxes on oil companies (Brown 1985) and courted labor. Struggling to eradicate festering labor unrest, the companies resorted to an industry-wide lockout. They shut down production, dismissed approximately 50 percent of Mexican workers, reduced Mexican wages by 20 percent, and downgraded many Mexican oil workers to positions as day laborers hired by subcontractors (Santiago 2006).

In Venezuela, however, the oil companies could and did turn much more reliably to Venezuelan security forces to contain militant workers. There, they encountered "a network of spies…and strong political repression" (Lucena 1982: 114) developed to protect the monopolies of an entrenched dictator and his cronies (McBeth 1983). The dictator Vicente Gomez (1908–1935) put his formidable security apparatus at the behest of oil companies. He dispatched hit man who "disappeared" (Prieto Soto 1970: 15) the leader of the 1925 strike, infiltrated Venezuelan labor organizers at Shell's Curaçao refinery in 1927 (McBeth 1983), and imprisoned those leading

[26] The American consul reported an incident at Pierce, the refinery Jersey would soon (May 1917) acquire, where local police helped strikers eject the company's despised watchman (Brown 1993).

[27] Soon after the eventually victorious presidential contender General Álvaro Obregón kicked off his electoral campaign by backing the Pierce strikers in May 1919 (Brown 1993), the incumbent revolutionary faction occupied union halls, clashed with workers, and killed six to shut down the first refinery-wide and second industry-wide strike in 1919 (Santiago 2006).

[28] The 1920 elections had brought to power the new general, Obregón, who promised to do what the constitutionalists had failed to do: rein in foreign oil.

"mutual aid societies of oil workers" (Lucena 1982: 179) in 1931. By providing security and instituting a labor law hostile to unions in 1928, Gomez ensured the development of an industry in which he acquired a personal stake, and which afforded him myriad ways to consolidate his political power. [29]

Local authorities in the oil region, often strong-men beholden to Gomez for their land and right to collect local taxes, had their own reasons to aid the oil companies. Many profited from bribing company officials and some even secured concessions from Gomez that they would sell to oil companies (Lieuwen 1955; Coronil 1997). They needed little prompting to keep tabs on "any subversive propaganda that took place in the oilfields and in the camps" (McBeth 1983: 150; see also Tinker Salas 2009). Indeed, they put an end to the first oil strike in 1925, granting "full protection" (McBeth 1983: 140–41) only to those who retreated and accepted half the pay raise they had initially demanded.

The dictator's successors after 1935, nonetheless, outdid even the dictator himself in carpeting the oil fields with surveillance and leaping to the companies' defense. For instance, the troops of the dictator's immediate successor, President Eleazar López Contreras (1935–1941), killed several hundred workers and detained many more to contain the widespread looting and rioting in the oil region even as they permitted looters to ravage Gomez' properties (Lucena 1982; Tinker Salas 2009). When oil workers launched their most ambitious industry-wide strike for union recognition at the end of 1936, López Contreras reversed his decision to authorize unions and instead imprisoned their leaders (Lucena 1982). Forty-three days into the strike, he not only dissolved the union, and imprisoned or expelled its leaders, but also outlawed all political parties (Lucena 1982). He then created a new security force, the National Guard, to "protect" the oil regions from "disturbances of all classes" in 1937 (Tinker Salas 2009: 213-14). The National Guard was so identified with doing the companies' bidding by their routine bribing of local agents, that it earned the moniker "Guardia Petrolera" (Tinker Salas 2009). President Isaías Medina Angarita (1941–1945) introduced a national identification card that doubled as a means of tracking suspected labor agitators and integrated the National Guard into the military in 1944 (Lucena 1982; Tinker Salas 2009). With these security initiatives, Gomez' successors protected the steady flow of the state's revenue from oil so central to consolidating their power. Although they ended Gomez' practice of granting oil concessions to private individuals (Ellner 1995), they exponentially grew the slush fund Gomez had created to favor allies and win over regime skeptics (Yarrington 2018). In doing so, they entrenched the practices which arguable made Venezuela's state appear "magical" (Coronil 1997).

Even the outsiders who pushed the dictator's military successors out in 1945, did not

[29] Gomez profited directly from oil after 1923 when he created a company which fronted his negotiations with oil companies over the sale of concessions to explore for oil on a given piece of land; concessions which he had the authority to grant (Rabe 1982; McBeth 1983). He consolidated power by strategically using his power over the rights to explore for oil on a given allotment not just to reward loyalists, but to win over reluctant support from urban professionals (McBeth 1983). He also created a government slush fund with oil revenue and used it to burnish his reputation as a generous patron of individuals, thereby shoring up legitimacy (Coronil 1997).

disappoint the oil companies. They created an "FBI-type organization" (Tinker Salas 2009: 214), called National Security, in 1947 to identify and purge unwanted political opposition They, like their immediate predecessors, were eager to protect a continued flow of revenue from oil during their short-lived first foray in governance (1945–1948). With it, they aspired to incubate Venezuela's own industrialists; a vision they temporarily rallied workers, rural producers and even Venezuela's traditional elites in agriculture and commerce to support (Bond 1975; Márquez 1997: 46; Moncada 1985: 152).

Conclusion and Implications for Anticapitalist Resistance

This study devises and illustrates the value of a world-historical approach to resistance. This approach integrates two methods of "case selection" into a world-historical approach centered on a relational logic of comparison (McMichael 1990; Tomich 1994). It begins with selecting a puzzling instance of resistance: one that does not conform to our expectations. It proceeds by selecting not just any instances of resistance that differ, rather than mirror, the puzzling instance of resistance, but ones with which it relates vicariously via a common "cumulative process" of our capitalist world-economy. Such processes might include incorporating successive space into producing the same global commodity. It is this case selection strategy which differentiates a world-historical from global historical sociology despite the latter's similar emphasis on relational analysis and inquiry into "global and transnational" forms (Go and Lawson 2017).

This study illustrates the explanatory power of such a world-historical approach. It traces how labor movements diverged in their substantive agendas not despite, but because of, arising in nations traveling seemingly parallel, but actually mutually conditioning, paths of capitalist incorporation. It reveals how the process of incorporating new sites within a single global circuit of accumulation can create opportunities for capitalists to learn what to avoid—in this case anticapitalist labor movements—from earlier instances of incorporation. This sequential process of incorporation gave capitalists the advantage of hindsight. It bequeathed them with a labor relations benchmark from their earlier forays in foreign production, that they could adapt to enhance labor control in their new site of extraction. It launched their search for resource-rich locations where authorities might be more eager to back them up in controlling labor. Capitalists, that is, used the advantage of hindsight to craft labor relations in Venezuela in ways that made it much more difficult to repeat Mexico's anticapitalist labor movement.

This study refines our understanding of capitalist-labor relations as a dynamic and cumulative process which forms and re-forms the very nature of capitalist incorporation. It traces not just how producers trapped in less remunerative niches of a commodity, such as Colombia's banana agro-exporters, may turn to more despotic labor relations (Hough 2022). It traces how and why global capitalists producing the very same valued commodity may intensify collaboration with authorities to devise more punitive means of labor control. It pin-points, in other words, a capitalist, rather than cultural, institutional, tactical, or personality-based origin for the wide variety of movements which shy away from threatening the dominance of global capitalists. This study also specifies several mechanisms whereby labor resistance and the forces shaping it in an earlier incorporator (Mexico) condition capitalists' labor relations strategies in a later incorporator (Venezuela). It specifies how capitalists may structure their operations to remove from local labor relations those positions with the greatest structural leverage in order to minimize the chances of a potent anticapitalist radical flank. It affirms that capitalists can and often do structure labor relations around xenophobic and racialized labor hierarchies in order to undercut labor solidarity.

Admittedly, a world-historical approach offers no neat or succinct story for explaining more versus less anticapitalist resistance today. From it, however, we can draw several implications for would-be architects of anticapitalist labor resistance today. The success of Mexico's anticapitalist radical flank of oil workers to persuade their national labor leaders to adopt nationalization of oil affirms the potential value of instigating anticapitalist resistance in valuable sectors of the global economy (such as oil). The fate of Venezuela's workers in producing the exact same commodity, however, should give any global labor strategist pause before rushing to replicate such influential anticapitalists as Mexico's. It is not enough, then, to pick strategic targets such as highly valued economic activities, choke points in their production processes, or high-profile global companies sensitive to their image. Those of us who wish to advance anticapitalist labor solidarity will also have to anticipate the many ways capitalists continually adapt their labor relations strategies from perceived earlier missteps in containing resistance. We should be attuned to the myriad ways that capitalists re-design racialized labor hierarchies across their global production to enhance labor control, as they did in Venezuela. Counter-acting such capitalists labor relations strategies, would then entail recognizing, naming, and counter-acting such racialized labor hierarchies. It would entail considering how labor might better engage with broader anti-racist struggles as integral to effectively countering labor control, on the ground and in transnational labor networks. We should also expect capitalists to seek out new ways they might maximize surveillance and security operations, public and private, to tamp down anticapitalist threats. Doing so would nudge us towards exposing capitalist complicity with security agents, be they local police, paramilitary, or national security operatives, and seeking out common ground with abolitionist movements. Knowing that capitalists are always reinventing their means of containing labor as they hopscotch across the global also suggests several opportunities for when and where anticapitalist resistance might succeed.

Anticapitalist resistance might have greater chance to take hold and wrest a modicum of power away from capitalists in the times and places where capitalists are pioneering expansion, as oil companies were in Mexico or Russia. New developments of valuable resources with strong demand for growth such as, perhaps, the mines producing the highly sought after natural resources to make batteries for electric vehicles, might present strategic opportunities for anticapitalist mobilization. Such sites might be considered the equivalent of Russia's Baku region which seeded the Russian revolution and the world's first nationalization, or Mexico's Tampico oil fields which seeded their revolution's most anticapitalist move. These are sites where capitalists experiment with industry structure and labor relations in new social and political terrains. Such pioneering endeavors may hold the best possibility for surprising site managers and corporate tycoons with new tactics for advancing anticapitalist labor agendas. Early successes in such sites may also create another kind of opportunity for labor resistance.

Labor resistance, even if more oriented towards bread and butter demands, may have a special opportunity in the late incorporators into a particular global market which anticapitalists already successfully hit elsewhere at earlier sites of expansion (early risers). Mexico's anticapitalist labor militants not only spooked Venezuela's oil executives such that they doubled down on surveillance and punitive measures of controlling workers in Venezuela. They also may have nudged the oil executives in Venezuela to concede to engaging in contract negotiations with the more moderate unions representing oil workers in 1946. The oil companies' failed bid to retain ownership control over Mexico's industry in 1938 came after they had resisted union contract negotiations in Mexico. When confronted with seemingly analogous pressure in Venezuela from a new regime of political outsiders who, like Mexico's, insisted they negotiate labor contracts with their workers, they shifted gears and agreed. In Venezuela, unlike in Mexico, the oil companies negotiated union contracts, albeit with a labor movement already so disciplined as to eschew the anticapitalist demand for nationalization. Thus, even if capitalists do adapt after an anticapitalist push succeeds in one corner of its global operations, they may be more willing to accommodate moderate, or less anticapitalist, labor demands in new sites of operation. While this does not constitute an opportunity for forging real anticapitalist futures, it may represent a realistic opportunity for building labor organizations and real material benefits for workers in certain companies and industries.

Finally, this study affirms the value of, and glimpses the possible opportunities for, those anticapitalist movements which seek to realize what life outside the bounds of our capitalist system might look like. Such "exilic communities" (Grubačić and O'Hearn 2016) as Mexico's Zapatistas or Syria's Rojava, carve out critical spaces for people to re-imagine society autonomous from the crescendo of surveillance and armed security so effectively chocking off anticapitalist resistance globally. It is such anticapitalist zones of autonomy which can seed broader movements for change within their nation, and inspire anticapitalist "everyday revolutions" (Sitrin 2012) elsewhere. The logic of capitalists continually adapting how they can best contain such anticapitalist movements also suggests when and where we might find opportunities to seed and cultivate such zones. It suggests we might find opportunities for autonomous anticapitalist zones when and where global capitalists are less actively investing and hence less interested in defending, at least for a time.

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