

ELITE FAMILIES AND OLIGARCHIC
POLITICS ON THE BRAZILIAN FRONTIER:
Mato Grosso, 1889–1937*

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Abstract: One of the central issues in Latin American political history is the role played by oligarchies. In the case of Brazil, students of oligarchy have focused on elite family networks and coronelismo, the often violent manifestation of oligarchic politics at the local level. Drawing on the substantial body of literature on the family in Latin America, this essay proposes an interpretation of oligarchical politics in which changing family structures interacted in new political and economic contexts to produce distinctive types of oligarchy in a sequential rather than synchronic or functional manner. The dominance of traditional elite families on the Brazilian frontier was challenged during periods of social and economic change, resulting in the rise of transitional and new oligarchies with substantially different socioeconomic origins, career paths, and family structures.

In recent years, the more traditional subjects of political history—institutions and political elites—have been overshadowed by concerns about the role of subordinate classes and ideology in state formation. Although this focus represents an important expansion of research into new areas of “the political,” it should not prevent historians from addressing issues involving traditional political history. The research presented in this article revisits traditional issues concerning political elites and oligarchies in Brazil through the lens of family history.¹ The central issue addressed here is how family and politics interacted in Mato Grosso during the Brazilian Federation (1889–1937). A more thorough understanding of this relation illuminates the complex and changing nature of concepts such as oligarchy,

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1. Kuznesof and Oppenheimer, for example, view the family as a “central complex of relationships” for understanding political history in Latin America. See Kuznesof and Oppenheimer (1985, 220).

or rule by restricted elite family networks, and *coronelismo*, the means by which strongmen connected local politics with state and national structures.

This study will focus on two key vectors of change in oligarchic politics. First, it contends that change in family structure played a central role in the evolving constituting of oligarchic power during the Brazilian Federation. Change occurred both within families, from one generation to the next, and among families, from one set of alliances or clusters to another. Second, the article will argue that shifting socioeconomic and political contexts undermined traditional oligarchic family networks and allowed innovative oligarchic factions to gain political power. These nontraditional families formed what will be termed *transitional* and *new oligarchic factions*.

To sharpen the analysis of family-based oligarchy, I draw on the “three-generation model” of elite family structure. According to this model, dynasties are founded and consolidated into networks in a three-generation descent group made up of grandparents, children, and grandchildren.² The first generation holds local and state offices. The second generation aspires to important state and national posts and uses family strategies (such as marriage) to obtain them. The third generation reaps the power and prestige handed down from the second, institutionalizing and consolidating its members’ hegemony.³ Rather than limit my analysis to a strict three-generation model, I will focus on the importance of interplay between the generations over an unrestricted time frame.

The time of entry into politics by the first generation is a key factor in the subsequent development of an elite family’s political power. Early foundation accords status and wealth. Colonial origins (around 1750) characterized the traditional elite families of Mato Grosso. Later entry, by contrast, accorded greater opportunity for innovation by transitional and new elites as family strategy intersected with novel conjunctures such as the abolition of slavery (1888), a period of rapid export-led growth (1870–1913), and the end of the Old Republic (1930). The three-generation descent model, while broadly accurate, does not exhaust the scope of analysis for elite families. Traditional oligarchic family networks founded in the eighteenth century continued to exercise significant political and economic

2. For a comparative analysis using the three-generation model, see Balmori (1985) and Balmori, Voss, and Wortman (1984, 13–20). On the Mexican case, see Lomnitz and Pérez-Lizaur (1991, chap. 5) in Jelin (1991).

3. For an excellent comparative rendering of generational analysis for Latin America, see Balmori (1985, 249–55). According to Balmori, first-generation families congealed into an oligarchic network during the chaos of the independence period and provided continuity. In Balmori’s view, “The second generation (1820–1860) was the most important. By the middle of the nineteenth century, a group of interrelated families not only had created a sound economic network among themselves but had gained legitimacy for their group in public affairs” (1985, 252). The third generation used modern institutions and infrastructures such as banks, universities, and railroads to consolidate their power.

power into the twentieth century, six or more generations after their foundation. In contrast, transitional elite families often rose to political and economic hegemony by the second generation, and the third generation often marked a decline in transitional oligarchical power.⁴

In emphasizing the importance of change within elite political families and among oligarchic factions, I argue for a fluid conception of oligarchic politics in Mato Grosso.⁵ Oligarchy was unstable in both form and content. Family structure evolved over generations, while the types of families that dominated politics changed according to their endogenous generational dynamic and in response to exogenous forces in political economy. Yet change took place primarily so that things might remain the same, to use Giuseppe di Lampedusa's memorable expression (1991, 41). Political hegemony thus remained the province of a narrow, albeit shifting, group of families.

In each instance, oligarchic rule depended on a mixture of coercion and co-optation. A family could co-opt its opposition through marriage strategy or other forms of alliance. Patron-client and extended family networks (*parentela*) stretched the reach of elite family power and provided the necessary henchmen where coercion was necessary. Overreliance on either coercion- or consent-based strategies, however, undermined oligarchic hegemony. Coercion angered enemies and generated rebellion, while co-optation was costly and tended to diffuse elite family power at the margins, eventually allowing for the creation of associated competing factions (Pareto 1966, 271–72).

Standard interpretations of Brazilian political history during the Old Republic (1889–1930) have focused on the state level, specifically the phenomenon of coronelismo and the role of oligarchies. In classic studies, Nestor Duarte (1966) and Victor Nunes Leal (1975) sought to illuminate politics through the optic of coronelismo. In this view, politics involved “a compromise” between the private power of local strongmen (*coronéis*) and

4. As Balmori, Voss, and Wortman have pointed out, traditional “generational theory maintains that the third generation is *the* generation.” This is not their position, but rather that of nineteenth-century theorists such as Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill, and José Ortega y Gasset (1984, 2–3).

5. My conception of change in oligarchic politics shares certain characteristics of Vilfredo Pareto's theory of the “circulation of the elites.” In this view, the ruling class underwent a constant process of renewal through the replacement of decadent elements by new ones. Pareto later acknowledged that elite politics were generally more stable than “the circulation model” implied. His subsequent theory presaged Antonio Gramsci's emphasis on the balance between coercion and consent required for hegemony. Herein lay the roots of instability and regime change in Mato Grosso. The pursuit of hegemony required constructing extended oligarchic networks, which tended to disperse power and create associated competing factions. Application of centripetal force on the part of the dominant faction brought out centrifugal reactions in both allied and opposition groups (Pareto 1966). For a good overview of Pareto's political theory, see Powers (1987, 129–37).

public authority. The imposition of modern representative government institutions on a traditional rural society has been cited as the root cause of coronelistic politics.⁶ This interpretation holds considerable explanatory power in accounting for the particular manner of articulation among local, state, and national levels of political power during the Old Republic. Moreover, this view provides a bridge to family-based analysis of oligarchical politics. Oliveira Vianna noted in 1955 that the “pre-capitalist form” of Brazilian settlement and society led to a breach between the underlying social structure and its putatively modern political institutions. Notable families filled in the gaps, articulating the private and the political by controlling politics at the level of the *município* (Vianna 1955, 1:332–40).⁷

Drawing on the pathbreaking work of Nestor Duarte, Victor Nunes Leal, and Oliveira Vianna, analysis of elite families and oligarchic politics in Brazil has occupied researchers such as Maria Queiroz (1969), Eul Soo Pang (1979), and Linda Lewin (1987). Pang’s highly original study categorized coronéis according to generic oligarchic family types. Lewin, in contrast, focused attention on the complex relations among family structures, economic development, and political systems.⁸ Her approach is the one largely advocated in this article. Lewin’s important contribution deserves emulation and expansion into other time periods and geographical regions. Thus, following Lewin, I define oligarchical politics in the republican era as factional and family-based (Lewin 1987, 8–11).

According to many textbook depictions, the first two decades of the Old Republic represented the high point of traditional oligarchic politics.⁹ Pang, for instance, argued that in the transition from “aristocratic monarchy to democratic republic,” coronelismo “was the bedrock of the politics of the transitional phase that allowed the traditional oligarchies to sustain themselves in power” (Pang 1979, vii). I suggest a different approach that examines the family history of each oligarchic faction, defining it according to historical origin and generational development as well as economic context and manner of insertion into politics. The years 1889 to 1911 witnessed

6. The view of the pre-republican era as politically “backward” is by no means universally accepted in the literature. Fernando Uricoechea (1978) argued the contrary, that the bureaucracy in the empire performed a progressive function. If he is right, then the imposition of “modern institutions” during the Old Republic was less novel than otherwise assumed.

7. For an excellent synopsis of Vianna’s views, see Lewin (1987, 17).

8. All three authors have continued to focus on the role of coronelismo in Brazilian politics and to emphasize the importance of family structures. See Queiroz (1969), Pang (1979), and Lewin (1987, 8–9).

9. For example, José María Bello asserted that one result of Campos Sales’s political plan was “the immediate consolidation of the state oligarchies” (1966, 169). See also Burns (1993, 265–66). Skidmore and Smith claimed, “In every state a tightly organized political machine emerged . . .” (1984, 161). Roett averred that the Old Republic “signified . . . the continuation of oligarchical rule” (1992, 21).

the rise of distinctly nontraditional oligarchies in Mato Grosso. The extraordinary participation of these transitional and new oligarchic factions depended on their specific family backgrounds and strategies combined with concomitant changes in social, political, and economic structures.¹⁰

Terms such as *political elite* and *oligarchy* require a degree of precision to be of any use. I define a political elite as consisting of those with direct high-level involvement in politics at the state and national levels. An oligarchy refers to a shifting group of family-based factions whose power derives from a mixture of public and private resources, including numerous subordinates bound to the family by patron-client relations.¹¹ Recently, political scientist Frances Hagopian has argued against the tendency to categorize political elites too narrowly: "The advantage gained by establishing distinct group boundaries is outweighed by the disadvantage of losing sight of what is common to the traditional political elite per se. Economically defined terms such as 'agrarian elites' or 'bankers' cannot capture the sources of cohesion and political behavior of this group . . ." (Hagopian 1996, 16–20). She noted, for example, that a lawyer might come from a family of large landowners and that his group category cannot be simply "liberal professional" or "landowner." I agree but would add that the focus of study should be the elite political family—the basic foundation of political power in the period under review. Families contain members with various and overlapping characteristics; landowners and lawyers share common parents and grandparents. Thus the family is the most appropriate category of analysis for classifying elite oligarchic factions flexibly. This approach avoids functionalism while still providing the means to draw relevant distinctions.¹²

10. Décio Saes made the same assertion from a very different standpoint (1990, 51–55). He viewed the abolition of slavery and proclamation of a republic as a genuine "bourgeois revolution" that implanted modern capitalism in Brazil. My own position is that, at least for Mato Grosso, the term *bourgeois* has little explanatory value for the transitional oligarchies that dominated frontier political and economic life in the first decades of the Old Republic. Rather, the crises of abolition and republican state formation created opportunities for the unprecedented abuse of political power and a mixing of public and private interest by transitional oligarchies. For a similar emphasis on the Old Republic's lack of insulation between private and public interests, see Faria (1993, 231–32). For a succinct explanation of why this mixture of political and economic power is inimical to the proper functioning of capitalism or the modern nation-state, see Giddens (1987, 135).

11. For a similar distinction, see Roett (1992, 30). Public officials used public resources to consolidate and expand their private power and wealth.

12. Narrowly drawn functional or generic categories of political elites or oligarchies confuse matters more than elucidate them. Such is the case with the four types of oligarchy and seven kinds of coronel found in Pang (1979). See Pang for an exhaustive table of characteristics of "the four Brazilian oligarchic types": familiocratic, tribal, collegial, and personalistic (1979, 209). His analysis covers specific attributes of each of the four types in terms of membership, objectives, means of control, and loyalty.

For purposes of this study, Mato Grosso's political elite is defined as the family-based oligarchic factions that held both the state executive office and national posts.¹³ The number of families that fit this definition in Mato Grosso are a mere half-dozen during the Brazilian Federation: the traditional Corrêa da Costa, Alves Corrêa, and Costa Marques families; the transitional Murtinho and Ponce families; and the new Müller family. These six families will be analyzed to examine the family basis for oligarchic politics through detailed case studies.

In-depth case studies of frontier oligarchic factions have identified the chief characteristics of the three main types of elite political families in Mato Grosso: traditional, transitional, and new. Traditional elite families were founded in the eighteenth century, lived in the capital município, possessed a large patrimony of landed property, operated sugar *usinas*, and owned slaves up to 1888.¹⁴ Transitional elites were founded in the first half of the nineteenth century. They had one foot in the past in the form of assets dating from the late empire (1870–1889) and the other in the future, via commerce in frontier commodities. New elite families founded in the latter half of the nineteenth century represented a partial transfer of power from landed and commercial elites to the rising urban middle groups, especially after 1930 and the overthrow of the Old Republican regime.

The meaning of the term *oligarchy* must be viewed as evolving over time. Its traditional content was gradually attenuated by the rise of innovative families from the commercial or middle segments of society, even as the power of the state and the controlling political elite grew.¹⁵ All three forms of elite political families are distinguished on the basis of economic conditions, marriage strategies (networks), educational backgrounds, timing and level of entry into politics, and subsequent career paths. Individual members are analyzed along with elite families as political actors. For instance, the ability of an extended family to control multiple levels of politics simultaneously is viewed as a form of family-based oligarchy that is vertically integrated.

13. I do not intend to undertake here an elite study in the manner of Joseph Love, John Wirth, and Robert Levine. They have defined the political elite more broadly, and although they have addressed the issue of family networks, they have focused on issues such as political party affiliation, business interests, age of entry into office, and educational background. Nevertheless, when possible, I compare Mato Grosso's oligarchic factions to those described in Love (1980), Wirth (1977), and Levine (1978).

14. The term *usina* is problematic insofar as it conveys the image of a modern sugar refinery rather than a rustic mill. Some of Mato Grosso's *usinas* were modern refineries, but most were not. It is tempting to refer to the rustic mills by their proper designation as *engenhos*. In Mato Grosso, however, the mills and their owners are always referred to as *usinas* and *usineiros*, and it seems best to stick to local terminology in this case.

15. Victor Nunes Leal noted this process in his theory of a "compromise" between a "decadent" private realm and an expanding state (1975, 8).

MATO GROSSO: THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Before delving into the case studies, the general aspects of Mato Grosso's political and economic history will be addressed to delineate patterns of continuity and change and to depict the context of the frontier. In many respects, Mato Grosso represents an extreme case in political or family history. Its isolation from the rest of Brazil was extreme, so great that news of the declaration of a republic arrived three weeks after the fact (see Faria 1993, 198).¹⁶ The sheer size of the state (1,400,000 square kilometers) and the scarcity of its population (90,000 in 1890; 430,000 in 1940) have distinguished Mato Grosso significantly from most other political units of the Brazilian Federation. Political violence on the frontier has been frequent and intense.¹⁷ Finally, the integration of Mato Grosso into world capitalist markets (and later national markets) created high levels of state dependence on revenues from exporting frontier commodities, especially *erva mate* (Paraguayan tea), rubber, and cattle products.¹⁸

The political history of Mato Grosso was associated with changes in the economic and social characteristics of the state, reflected largely in the changing composition of the political elite. This connection was complex and shifting. Trends in oligarchic politics intersected with trends in the region's economic and social development. The results of this intersection were contingent: export-led growth created opportunities for enrichment through commerce, and elite families focusing on trade increased their political power commensurately from the 1880s to the 1910s.

From 1889 to 1911, transitional oligarchic factions associated with the frontier export boom dominated state politics. The first years of the Old Republic were therefore anything but a continuation of traditional oligarchic rule. Traditional and transitional oligarchic factions joined together in a series of shifting and ultimately unstable alliances. Then from 1912 to 1930, traditional oligarchies regained their grip on political power at the state level. Finally, the national revolution of 1930 ended the Old Republic, brought Getúlio Vargas to national power, and opened the door for a new oligarchy to exercise political power in Mato Grosso. By 1937, the new oligarchy held the posts of interventor in Mato Grosso as well as chief of po-

16. Mato Grosso is bordered on the south by Paraguay, on the west by Bolivia, on the north by the Brazilian states of Amazonas and Pará, and on the East by the states of Paraná, São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Goiás.

17. Brazilian scholar Valmir Batista Corrêa counted thirty-three major armed conflicts between 1891 and 1922. See Corrêa (1995, 33–35).

18. Mato Grosso continued to depend on export taxes for more than half of state revenues well into the 1930s, whereas São Paulo, with its enormous coffee industry, relied on export duties for just a quarter of its revenues during the 1920s. For a discussion of São Paulo revenues, see Love (1980, chap. 8).

lice in Rio de Janeiro.¹⁹ At that time, the transitional oligarchy had become extinct and the traditional oligarchy was exiled from the highest offices of the state until the 1950s.

MATO GROSSO'S OLIGARCHIC FAMILIES: A CASE STUDY IN CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Building on the general outline of Mato Grosso's politics and the definitions of the political elite already adumbrated, I will now delve into case studies of particular elite families. The oligarchic categories defined here are simple and roughly sequential: first, traditional oligarchies founded on patrimonial power amassed in colonial times; second, transitional oligarchies based on exploitation of opportunities inherent in the transition from empire to republic and the contemporaneous period of export-led prosperity; and third, new oligarchies formed in the context of new social and political structures associated with the consolidation of a strong nation-state during the Vargas years. Evidently, these oligarchic classifications refer to specific historical phases. Yet this categorization does not imply that they cannot continue into subsequent phases or do not often coexist, form alliances, or battle one another for political power. The point is that different oligarchic types form at certain times and carry their founding characteristics forward with them to varying degrees.

Traditional Oligarchy

The patrimonial power of traditional oligarchies in Mato Grosso, as in much of Brazil, rested on a combination of land and slaves. Colonial authorities granted vast tracts of land as political favors or in the hope of peopling the vast territory of the colony or both. The *sesmaria*, an ancient form of land grant, became the standard unit of rural property. Sesmarias thus formed the landed base of traditional oligarchic power. When these lands were not held for purely speculative reasons, improvements in the form of crops, buildings, and livestock added to the value of the family's patrimony. Whatever original value land may have possessed in the composition of traditional oligarchic fortunes in colonial times had grown by the period under study to a significant proportion. But the largest single component of traditional oligarchies' foundational wealth consisted of slaves.²⁰

The dominant traditional oligarchic faction in Mato Grosso was the

19. Interventors (appointed state executives) were named by the central authority in Rio de Janeiro and exercised broad powers.

20. This conclusion is based on examination of 103 probate records (referring to the provincial capital, Cuiabá) for the period 1870–1888. Among the three largest components of frontier fortunes, slaves accounted for 24 percent of frontier fortunes, followed by urban real

Corrêa da Costa family. No other oligarchic group ruled as long or as often, and few could match the vast patrimonial resources available to this dynasty.²¹ In all, four direct members of the family held the office of provincial or state president between 1831 and 1937, three of them on more than one occasion. Three others in the extended Corrêa da Costa family held state presidencies.²² In addition, several members of the Corrêa da Costa family held posts in the national legislature. The family thus provides an important opportunity to examine the specific characteristics of traditional oligarchy on the frontier.

The first detailed information on the scope of the Corrêa da Costa family fortune was provided in the postmortem inventory of the estate of Antônio Corrêa da Costa. When he died in 1855, Antônio left in land alone eight and a half *sesmarias*, probably totaling more than one hundred thousand hectares.²³ The antiquity of the estate was reflected in a key *sesmaria* named "Aricá." This land and the sugar usina on it came down from Antonio's ancestor Francisco Corrêa da Costa, who first gained title in 1780. The Corrêa da Costa patrimony also included ten urban properties, ninety-two hundred head of cattle, almost a hundred horses and other domesticated animals, and nearly two hundred slaves (Alencar n.d., 1:137–41).

The division of this estate demonstrates how numerous children could fragment large holdings. Antônio Corrêa da Costa's fortune was divided among twelve sons and daughters. One heir, also named Antônio, received just ten slaves, parts of several *sesmarias*, and less than three hundred head of cattle. Yet it would be misleading to think that elite political families allowed their economic base to disintegrate through succession. The deceased patriarch, as required by law, left half of his estate to his widow, Maria da Conceição de Toledo: eighty-nine slaves, numerous urban properties, fifty horses, *sesmarias*, and eight thousand head of cattle. This patrimony provided a modicum of continuity for the family fortune. When

property at 15 percent, and rural property at 15 percent. Probate records (*inventários*) are found in Arquivo Público de Mato Grosso (hereafter APMT), Cuiabá, 2d and 3d *cartórios*, various *caixas*.

21. Land tax data provide an approximate indication of the landed wealth of the Corrêa da Costa family over time. Those bearing the Corrêa da Costa name on Cuiabá's tax rolls held 40,352 hectares in 1911, 52,659 hectares in 1921, and 58,837 hectares in 1930. See APMT, *Coletoria*, Cuiabá, 1911, 1921, and 1930. This estimate does not include married female members of the family or holdings outside of the município of Cuiabá.

22. During the Old Republic (1889–1930), the Corrêa da Costa family held the office of president of the state of Mato Grosso on five occasions for a total of twelve years. Members of their extended family held the state executive office for another five years. Time served as president cited in Corrêa Filho (1994, anexos 718, no page number).

23. A *sesmaria* in Mato Grosso usually comprised just over 13,000 hectares. But any land for which the title dated to colonial or early imperial times might be termed a *sesmaria* in probate records, even if much smaller.

Maria passed away in 1876, her portion of the estate was divided among the surviving children. Unlike her husband, Maria da Conceição left a will. She was thereby able to free some of her slaves as well as remember numerous godchildren and the Catholic Church.²⁴ Even so, her eldest sons Fernando, Cesário, and Antônio received additional infusions of the family patrimony some twenty years after their father's death (Alencar n.d., 1:141–42).²⁵ The most important generation in the Corrêa da Costa dynasty was composed of the four sons of Antônio Corrêa da Costa (1825–1883): Antônio, Luiz Augusto, Pedro Celestino, and Jonas.²⁶ Born in Mato Grosso between 1857 and 1869, the four brothers completed their education in Rio de Janeiro. Antônio, the eldest, took a degree in civil engineering from the Escola Central, returning to Mato Grosso in 1879. Pedro Celestino completed a secondary degree in pharmacy, while Jonas became a doctor. Luiz Augusto is also referred to as “doctor” in various sources, although his course of study is not mentioned.²⁷

The early professional careers of this generation of Corrêa da Costas included stints of school teaching as well as work linked to their formal professional education. Antônio entered politics first as a deputy in the provincial legislature. He then moved up to the office of deputy for Mato Grosso in the national legislature (1891–1894). In 1895 he became the second popularly elected president of the state of Mato Grosso, a post he renounced in 1897 after a dispute with Generoso Ponce.²⁸

Younger brother Luiz was elected as a federal deputy on three separate occasions (1894, 1897, 1909) and once as a senator (1912) (Faria 1993, 344; Corrêa Filho 1994, 597–98). Pedro Celestino Corrêa da Costa was the most powerful individual in the clan. He entered politics in 1891, at age thirty-one, as a member of the Mato Grosso Constituent Assembly. A key

24. The importance of godparenting in building extended parentela is well discussed in Lewin (1987, esp. 131, n. 8). Another well-drawn portrait of this institution is found in Mattoso (1992, 172–77). For a general discussion of the practice in relation to the issue of politics and coronelismo in the Old Republic, see Queiroz (1989, tomo 3, 1:165–71). Information on Maria da Conceição's disposal of her estate is found in Alencar (n.d., 1:141); and APMT, 2d cartório, caixa 101, 1876.

25. Fernando added the usina “Bom Jardim” to his personal wealth; Cesário received his mother's house in Cuiabá; and Antônio got the family silver. My research turned up a more detailed list of Maria da Conceição's estate. Its value totaled 68 contos in 1876, making her first in wealth among the pre-republican probate records analyzed in APMT, 2d cartório, caixa 101, 1876.

26. In terms of the three-generation descent-group model, this generation was the third one removed from the first Corrêa da Costa to hold an important state office.

27. Data on the formal education of the Corrêa da Costa family can be found in Alencar (n.d., 1:142–49).

28. Virgílio Corrêa Filho reports the dispute between Antônio Corrêa da Costa and Generoso Ponce in his *História* (1994, 591). Antônio's political career is reported in Mendonça (1974), Alencar (n.d., 1:142), and Ferreira (1997, 113, 115).

ally of Generoso Ponce in the rebellion against Antônio Paes de Barros in 1906, Pedro rose to the state presidency in 1908, succeeding Ponce. Pedro returned to this office in 1922, serving only half his term before resigning in order to join the Federal Senate in 1924 (Alencar n.d., 1:147; Faria 1993, 597–98). Jonas, half-brother to the other three, held a variety of local and state political posts in Mato Grosso.

The success of the Corrêa da Costa brothers in state and national politics suggests that traditional oligarchic power—its wealth, prestige, and extensive parentela—provided each one with enough advantages to guarantee political participation at a high level. Although Pedro had a powerful personality, none of the Corrêa da Costas depended primarily on a charismatic or personalistic style to win office or maintain their political power. Rather, economic power and social prestige came first and enabled the family to be the dominant oligarchy in Mato Grosso. Antônio Corrêa da Costa (b. 1825) did not participate in high-level politics as an elected official. Thus the positions of political authority held by Antônio, Luiz, and Pedro were a legacy of the family's socioeconomic position in Mato Grosso, not direct succession. Traditional oligarchy was traditional and oligarchic first, and political second.

As Linda Lewin has made clear, a traditional oligarchy is composed of more than simply a patriarch, his family, and its possessions. Rather, an oligarchy is a complex social structure with wide-ranging cultural, social, and economic ramifications (Lewin 1987, 10–14). Understanding the political power of the Corrêa da Costa oligarchy therefore requires more than merely reciting the family's fortune and elective offices. It is also necessary to examine the strategies by which a traditional oligarchic family expands or conserves its power through marriage, patronage, and other strategies.

To begin with, the Corrêa da Costa family utilized the institution of *compadrio* (godparenthood) to build alliances with other prominent families in Mato Grosso. As noted, Maria da Conceição, grandmother of Antônio, Luiz, and Pedro, included several nonconsanguine beneficiaries in her will. Among these was her *afilhada* Cordolina Novis, daughter of Dr. Augusto Novis, to whom she left the sizable sum of one *conto*.

Nine years later, in 1885, Maria's grandson Pedro Celestino married Constança Novis, one of Cordolina's sisters (Alencar n.d., 1:141, 147). On Constança's death, Pedro married another Novis sister, Corina. Pedro's son Clóvis continued the family tradition by marrying his cousin Cora, the daughter of Alfredo Novis, who was Augusto's son (Alencar n.d., 2:86–87). While the Novis family never played a significant role in Mato Grosso politics, one member participated in the state legislature, and Dr. Augusto Novis was influential behind the scenes.²⁹

29. Alencar chronicled how Dr. Novis served as physician and confidant to a range of Mato Grosso's most powerful men (n.d., 2:91).

Endogamy (marrying within the family) provided the Corrêa da Costa family with a means of avoiding excessive fragmentation of the family patrimony.³⁰ Like Pedro Celestino's son Clóvis, the sons and daughters of brother Luiz also married first or second cousins. For instance, daughter Luiza Moraes da Silva Pereira married Evaristo da Silva Pereira, the son of Eudóxia Corrêa da Costa. Eudóxia was the sister of Luiza's grandfather, Antônio Corrêa da Costa. To strengthen family bonds further, the marriage was held in the home of Pedro Celestino, Luiza's uncle.

Another ramification of the Corrêa da Costa network was that represented by the Alves Corrêa family. Future state president Estevão Alves Corrêa (1881–1949) was closely linked to the Corrêa da Costa oligarchy through his grandfather Cesário Corrêa da Costa (1827?–1901), the brother of Antônio (b. 1825) and the son of Antônio Corrêa da Costa (b. 1782) and Maria da Conceição. Estevão's son José also married within the family, wedding Pedro Celestino's granddaughter Inês, who was also the daughter of Estevão's cousin Virgílio Alves Corrêa Filho.

Estevão, like his Corrêa da Costa relations, obtained his higher education in Rio de Janeiro, taking a degree in medicine. According to land tax records, the original composition of his fortune (apart from what he might have received from his more removed Corrêa da Costa and Leverger relations) consisted of some sixty thousand hectares in the município of Miranda, eighty-four thousand in Aquidauana, and forty thousand in Três Lagoas.³¹ These holdings were obtained by his father after the Paraguayan War, when the provincial government made huge land concessions, ostensibly for strategic reasons, to those who would settle in southern Mato Grosso (Alencar n.d., 1:154).³² The concentration of Estevão's landholdings in the southern portion of Mato Grosso also indicates the shift in economic activity and source of elite fortunes from the northern rubber-gathering zone and the sugar plantations surrounding Cuiabá toward the south, focusing on cattle ranching and the growing national market. Estevão rose to the position of state president when his uncle Pedro Celestino resigned in 1924. Estevão later handed the state's executive position over to his cousin, Mario Corrêa da Costa. The state presidency remained in the grip of the extended Corrêa da Costa parentela for eight full years (1922–1930), and for a total of twelve out of the forty years of the Old Republic. During the Var-

30. Endogamous marriage also helped consolidate family power. See Balmori and Oppenheimer (1979) and Balmori (1985, 255).

31. Data concerning Estevão Alves Corrêa's landholdings are found in APMT, Coletoria, Imposto Territorial: Miranda, 1911; Aquidauana, 1917; and Três Lagoas, 1925.

32. The Paraguayan War was fought between Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay on one side and Paraguay on the other, from 1865 to 1870. Some of the heaviest fighting took place in southern Mato Grosso, where the Paraguayan forces penetrated as far as the city of Corumbá.

gas years, Estevão served in 1935 as the president of the state Constituent Assembly.³³

This pattern of political domination did not preclude rifts between members of the Corrêa da Costa family. A serious dispute arose between Pedro Celestino and Mario Corrêa da Costa over the ongoing relationship between the state and the Mate Larangeiras Company. Mario continued to back the company into the 1920s, although Pedro Celestino had been an outspoken critic of the monopoly since his days as state president in the 1910s. The family feuding eventually rose to such a pitch that Pedro Celestino accused Mario of selling out the best interests of Mato Grosso to the company. Mario, then president of the state, responded by calling his uncle "senile" and "the Rasputin of Cuiabá."³⁴

Transitional Oligarchy

Whereas the traditional oligarchies of Mato Grosso were consolidated during the colonial period, transitional oligarchies were clearly identified with the empire and the first decades of the Old Republic.³⁵ An important distinction between these two types of oligarchy is that the transitional ones depended much more on control of the state in order to build and maintain their patrimonial fortunes and influence. To this extent, transitional oligarchies were much more closely tied to exogenous factors such as national politics and the international market. Whereas traditional oligarchs ruled politics because of their landed wealth and local social pedigree, transitional oligarchs ruled as a result of their guile, brute force, and control of sources of political patronage and economic resources, which were frequently linked to state-sanctioned monopolies. The marriage of political and economic opportunism finds its highest expression in a transitional oligarchy.

Economic growth and rapid social change, combined with entrenched forms of traditional patrimonialism, exacerbated structural contradictions in Brazilian society during the early years of the twentieth century (Faria 1993, 232).³⁶ The lack of congruence between the Old Republic's modernizing rhetoric and seemingly modern institutions on the one hand

33. Estevão Alves Corrêa's education and political career are recounted in Alencar (n.d., 1:154–55).

34. Pedro Celestino Corrêa da Costa, APMT, *Mensagem à Assembléa Legislativa*, 1923, 87; and Mario Corrêa da Costa, APMT, *Mensagem à assembléa legislativa*, 1928, 6–7.

35. Perhaps this is the reason that Richard Graham seems to think that coronelismo and patrimonialism originated largely during the empire. The best known (or most notorious) coronelistic oligarchies are mainly members of this transitional group (see Graham 1990).

36. Faria (1993) referred to the "deliberate suppression of the frontier between public and private" in his list of the ethical lapses associated with Old Republican politics.

and the backwardness and violence of actual Brazilian society on the other has occasioned much comment.³⁷ Even so, for transitional oligarchs, the tumultuous period from the end of the empire to World War I can rightly be termed “a golden age.”

While the Corrêa da Costa family represents traditional oligarchy at its pinnacle, the Murtinho clan is the equivalent representative of transitional oligarchy. Perhaps because of their high degree of power at the national level, the Murtinhos have been the best-known of all the oligarchic groups in Mato Grosso. This familiarity, however, should not lead one to assume that the power of the Murtinhos was therefore traditional. In duration, the Murtinho dynasty was unmistakably transitional and transitory. Rising from rather modest origins as the sons of a Bahian army surgeon and a *cuiabana* mother, the nontraditional Murtinho brothers ascended to important positions in national politics.³⁸ Partly as a result of their national prestige, the Murtinhos managed to dominate Mato Grosso politics and a good portion of its economy from the late 1880s through 1911, when Joaquim Murtinho died.

Unlike the Corrêa da Costa oligarchy, the Murtinho fortune was not based on “old money.” Rather, it grew out of the lucrative business of government concessions and financial speculation particular to the last years of the empire and first years of the republic. Thus the building and safeguarding of the family fortune required sanction and protection from the state. Control or manipulation of the state apparatus was fundamental to expanding and sustaining the Murtinho empire.

The cornerstone of the Murtinhos’ political and economic power was the Mate Larangeiras Company, which Joaquim helped to consolidate in southern Mato Grosso in the 1880s. Although no precise data have been found on how much the Murtinho family profited from their association with the Mate Larangeiras Company, the company’s net profits in the years 1891 to 1899 of nine thousand contos indicates that a major shareholder like Joaquim must have become a rich man indeed (Faria 1993, 225–26).³⁹ Nor was Joaquim Murtinho’s wealth limited to stakes in monopoly concessions

37. Leal made this observation explicit (1975, 8).

38. Details on the family background of the Murtinhos in Mato Grosso are found in Corrêa Filho (1948). José Antônio Murtinho, an army surgeon educated in Rio de Janeiro, moved to Mato Grosso and married Rosa Laura de Campos Maciel in 1843. His political career was limited to one stint as provincial vice president in 1868.

39. As Faria pointed out, Joaquim Murtinho was president of the Banco Rio e Mato Grosso, which held 97 percent of the shares of the Companhia Mate Larangeira. In addition, Francisco Murtinho was “president” of the company itself. The family was thus in a controlling position to profit within the company. Moreover, the company depended on the political support of the Murtinhos at the national and state levels for perpetuating its monopoly lease contract with the state of Mato Grosso.

on the frontier. He sought with equal vigor to win monopoly concessions, hence profits, in Rio de Janeiro.⁴⁰

Living in the national capital rather than in Mato Grosso meant that the Murtinhos' control over state politics was almost always indirect—but nonetheless effective. The education and political career paths of Joaquim and Manoel Murtinho highlight some of the differences between traditional and transitional oligarchies. Although both brothers were born in Cuiabá and raised there through grammar school, they moved soon after to Rio de Janeiro, seldom if ever returning to their native state. Joaquim was born in 1848, educated at the Seminário Episcopal de Cuiabá, and sent to the national capital in 1861 on concluding his studies. He went on to earn the degrees of bachelor in civil engineering at the Escola Central (1870) and doctor of medicine (1873) at the Faculdade de Medicina, both in Rio.⁴¹

Joaquim Murtinho's political career did not get off to a promising start on the first try—or on the second, third, or fourth. In 1872, at the age of twenty-four, Joaquim sought the office of Deputado Geral for Mato Grosso. His bid as a conservative candidate failed. In 1876 and 1878, he sought the same position and lost. His bid to be Imperial Senator for Mato Grosso seemed ready to bear fruit when the empire fell in 1889. The difference between the nearly successful senate bid and the previous debacles was that by 1889, Joaquim Murtinho had become a wealthy and powerful man from his share in the Mate Larangeiras concern. The senate seat lost when the empire collapsed became his for the taking in 1890, as the new republican regime opened its doors to his rapid ascent to national power.⁴²

In all this time, Joaquim Murtinho never once set foot in his native state. Manoel, in contrast, spent a short time as provincial president (1889) and later as state president (1891–1892). Both brothers saw their political power peak in the high ranks of Brazil's new federal government. Joaquim was appointed Ministro da Viação (Public Works) (1896–1897) and then Ministro da Fazenda (Finance) (1898–1902), mainly in the Campos Sales regime. As finance minister, he helped put together a tough fiscal austerity package and the infamous "funding loan" with the house of Rothschild aimed at shoring up Brazil's shaky currency. Brother Manoel sat less famously on the Supremo Tribunal Federal. Both used their powerful positions to meddle in Mato Grosso politics and to protect or expand their eco-

40. Faria recounted how Murtinho tried to make a profit of 1,200 contos by selling over-valued shares in one phantom railway concession named, "A Carioca" to another called, "Light" (1993, 65–70).

41. Faria made a great deal out of Murtinho's homeopathy. This intriguing information and debate lie beyond the scope of this article, however. For Faria's detailed examination of Murtinho's medical beliefs and their supposed links to Murtinho's politics, see Faria (1993, chaps. 1–2).

42. This information on the life of Joaquim Murtinho is based on the excellent chronology in Faria (1993, 9–11).

conomic interests on the frontier. Yet as Lewin noted with respect to Paraíba, “national politicians remained dependent on the state assemblymen and local bosses for reelection. . . . [G]eographical isolation . . . did not fully insulate them from the economic interests of their oligarchical counterparts. . . .”⁴³ Therefore, the Murtinho oligarchy needed allies, both traditional and transitional, such as Generoso Ponce, Antônio Paes de Barros, or the Corrêa da Costa family.

Absenteeism had its price. The Murtinho oligarchy did not succeed in building lasting networks of parentela and patronage in Mato Grosso. In no case was I able to identify strategic marriages between Murtinho family members and other elite political families in Mato Grosso or evidence of the traditional oligarchic practice of endogamy. As a result, Joaquim Murtinho’s death in 1911 essentially signaled the end of the Murtinho oligarchy as well.

Transitional Oligarchy Revisited: Generoso Ponce

Second only to the Murtinho clan in national fame, the public figure Generoso Ponce represents transitional oligarchy at its most coronelistic and sanguinary. Ponce, more than any other oligarch, was responsible for the overthrow of State President Antônio Paes de Barros in 1906. This event, however, was far from his first foray into the business of armed intervention in state politics. Ponce took part in the upheavals of 1892 and 1898–1899 as well.

Among the three categories of oligarchies established from 1870 to 1937, Ponce most closely approximates the transitional type, as outlined in discussing the Murtinho family. He amassed his fortune, social status, and political power in his own lifetime. The Ponce family was not registered among the leading traditional families of colonial Mato Grosso. Generoso’s ancestors appear to have been an older family of middling fortune.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Ponce fortune derived from commerce, not from traditional sources like slaves, land, and sugar plantations. Ponce owned land, but the size and location of his holdings were unlike traditional Mato Grosso elite holdings. As of 1911, state land-tax data registered three Ponce holdings totaling 3,655 hectares, over 3,000 of them in the municípios of Diamantino and Rosário and thus clearly linked to the rubber extraction and export

43. For a discussion of absentee national politicians in another context, see Lewin (1987, 118).

44. Ponce himself appears in Alencar’s *Roteiro genealógico*, but only as a godparent or associate of various members of Mato Grosso’s traditional families. His son, Generoso Ponce Filho, provided an inflated version of the family history in his biography (1952, 6–10). There Ponce Filho endeavored to link the Ponce clan to none other than Ponce de León. More likely (also according to Ponce Filho), the Ponce family originated from Paulista bandeirantes who immigrated to Mato Grosso during the eighteenth century.

business.⁴⁵ Of the twelve members of the legislative classes of 1875–1889 for which land data are available, the median land holding was 3,311 hectares, suggesting that Ponce was at most a middling landowner in his political generation.⁴⁶ Commerce, particularly the dry goods business and the rubber trade, formed the basis of Ponce's considerable personal fortune. Like the Murtinho family's holdings, his wealth was linked to international markets and long-distance trade of frontier commodities.

The close connection between business and politics in transitional oligarchies was demonstrated time and again in the career of Ponce. For instance, the original falling out with the Murtinho clan in 1898 resulted from a conflict over presidential succession. Ponce favored the son of his business partner Joaquim Azevedo, while the Murtinho brothers favored José Maria Metello, a large landholder. In the ensuing election, Azevedo won by a five to one margin, only to see his mandate annulled under threat of an armed force led by Antônio Paes de Barros. After a series of skirmishes, Ponce was forced to retreat to Paraguay and later Corumbá, where he refurbished his finances by speculating in the import-export business.⁴⁷

Again in 1906, rather than seek power through the elective process, Ponce led a rebellion against the state government, now controlled by his archenemy, Paes de Barros. The breach between Paes de Barros and the Murtinho family in Rio de Janeiro opened the door for Ponce and his new allies, the Corrêa da Costa family, to retake state power by force. These two incidents, added to his part in the armed fighting of 1892, clearly demonstrate Ponce's willingness to use violence for political purposes. Ponce derived his political power from a combination of commerce-based wealth and a personalistic and violent style of leadership. This combination contrasted with the general *modus operandi* of traditional oligarchies. Even though they used violent means at times to obtain political power, they did not as a rule rely on bald force but on an abundance of traditional social and economic capital that made violence and personalistic rule less necessary for their political success. In contrast, Ponce often resembled more a particularly violent and successful coronel than the leader of an oligarchy.

Generoso Ponce's early education differed little from other elite politicians in that he graduated from the Lyceu Cuiabano, the only secondary school in Mato Grosso in the nineteenth century. But unlike most

45. Land-tax data from my database of all registered landowners in the state of Mato Grosso, circa 1910. Original documents found in APMT, *Gazeta Oficial*, 1911, various months.

46. Just twelve politicians were still living and registered in the 1911 land-tax data. The twelve holdings averaged about twelve thousand hectares. Ponce held 1,779 hectares in Diamantino, 1794 in Rosario, and 82 in Cuiabá.

47. Ponce made money in the lucrative rubber trade during this time. Unfortunately, I found no data on Ponce's commercial activities until 1910, when his trading company, Ponce, Azevedo & Co., exported over ten tons of rubber. Export data reported in *Album gráfico do Estado de Mato Grosso* (1914, 248).

oligarchic or coronelistic leaders from 1800 onward, Ponce received no formal education beyond the Lyceu. He evidently entered the dry goods business and state politics at around the same time, about 1882.

Ponce's political career centered on state political power to a much greater degree than those of the main transitional oligarchy, the Murtinho clan. In the first phase, Ponce held office in the provincial legislature (1882–1889) and then in the state assembly (1891, 1898–1899). Ponce twice rose to the office of state president, first in 1892, for just two months, then in 1907–1908. Finally, Ponce was a senator for Mato Grosso from 1894 to 1902.⁴⁸

Before moving on to the rise of new oligarchies in Mato Grosso, it is instructive to examine a case of extreme political instability and violence during the halcyon years of transitional oligarchic power: the revolt against Antônio Paes de Barros and his assassination. The tensions in the complex web of economic, political, and personal interests underlying the revolt of 1906 reveal how complicated oligarchic politics were at that time. The revolt can begin to be explained fully only when family relationships are included in the analysis.

The economic motives behind Paes de Barros's overthrow were manifold. First, his own sugar usina, the largest and most efficient in the state, posed a threat to other traditional elite families, such as the Corrêa da Costas. Second, financing of the usina had been provided in large part by one of Mato Grosso's dominant commercial families, the Almeidas.⁴⁹ The Almeida clan, however, was tied by marriage to First Vice President Pedro Leite Osório, who played a critical role in the plot to overthrow Paes de Barros (Alencar n.d., 1:33). Thus it appears that Paes de Barros's economically motivated enemies included the Corrêa da Costa oligarchy, the Almeida family, and (indirectly) his second-in-command, Osório, who was also a big player in Mato Grosso's commercial elite.

On the political side, Paes de Barros faced the violent animus of Generoso Ponce, the oligarch with whom he had clashed in 1899 during the feuding between Ponce and the Murtinhos. Ironically, the Murtinho family reconstituted its alliance with Ponce, apparently deciding that Paes de Barros was proving too independent-minded in faraway Mato Grosso. Thus the embattled president found himself in conflict with the dominant traditional oligarchy in Mato Grosso and the two most powerful transitional oligarchic factions. To make matters worse, the price of sugar sank in 1906 to the lowest level in a decade. When Paes de Barros confronted the forces conspiring against him, he found himself friendless and short on revenue.

48. For a complete listing of Ponce's federal career and those of other Mato Grosso politicians, see Corrêa Filho (1994, anexos, n.p.). Information on state offices is found in APMT in various *latas*.

49. The Almeidas' financing of Paes de Barros's usina is noted in Alencar (n.d., 2:35).

The assassination of a sitting president was unprecedented, even in Mato Grosso's violent political history. But the mere overthrow of Paes de Barros would not have placed Mato Grosso's most productive sugar usina in the hands of the Almeida family. He may therefore have been liquidated. The Corrêa da Costa clan's interests were also served as the usina fell into the hands of their political allies. When sugar prices remained depressed, however, the usina fell into disrepair and eventual abandonment under the Almeida receivership.⁵⁰ The most suggestive piece of evidence of the complicity of the Almeida family in the assassination of Paes de Barros was recorded in a 1927 court settlement, in which the Almeida family agreed to indemnify Paes de Barros's survivors with a settlement of four hundred contos—a fortune at the time.⁵¹

Two other facts beyond economic interests point to the Corrêa da Costa oligarchy's intimate involvement in the plot to overthrow and kill Paes de Barros. First, the legal and administrative justifications for deposing the president were provided by members of the Corrêa da Costa parentela. Acting as public prosecutor, Antônio de Paula Corrêa (a blood relation of Pedro Celestino) provided the legal indictment against Paes de Barros in 1906 (noted in Alencar n.d., 1:34). After the death of Paes de Barros, special treasury auditor Manoel Escolástico Virgínio (tied via his sister to Paula Corrêa) provided a partisan verdict of corruption against Paes de Barros regarding the state's coffers.⁵²

New Oligarchy

From 1889 to 1937, social, economic, technological, and political changes gradually moved Mato Grosso from relative isolation toward integration, from general backwardness toward modernity. The frontier economy became more integrated with the national economy and with São Paulo, Brazil's dynamic center, in particular. New technologies of communication and transport shrank differences of time and space. Frontier society grew in numbers and in diversity. One consequence of these long-term patterns of change gave rise to a new type of oligarchy.

50. Either way, the Corrêa da Costa clan won. First, the usina no longer provided the economic base for a rival traditional oligarchic faction. Second, when it fell into disrepair, the usina no longer competed with their own.

51. This settlement was struck between the Almeida and Paes de Barros families as a direct result of a lawsuit brought by the latter. The Paes de Barros family claimed that the Almeidas had unlawfully confiscated the sugar usina in the aftermath of the 1906 rebellion. Legal document, "Tribunal da relação," found in APMT, 3d cartório, caixa 5, esp. p. 490.

52. Manoel Escolástico Virgínio's sister, Francelina Virgínia da Silva, lived with but did not marry Francisco Paula Corrêa, to whom she bore seven children. Manoel's denunciation of irregularities in the Paes de Barros treasury are found in the special report prepared for him by Augusto de Araújo, which he forwarded to First Vice President Osório. See APMT, lata B, 1906, "Comissão de Exame da Escripuração do Thesouro em Cuiabá," 25 Aug. 1906.

The rise of urban middle groups has been an important theme in discussions of Brazil's nation building and its transition to a bourgeois democracy or corporatist Estado Novo.⁵³ The new oligarchic leaders came predominantly from the ranks of urban professionals. Yet my research into the structure of Mato Grosso's social classes over time leads to the conclusion that the new oligarchy on the frontier did not necessarily represent the growing political power of an autochthonous middle class in Cuiabá.⁵⁴ Instead, all indications point to a policy on the part of the self-consciously modernizing Vargas regime to replace traditional oligarchies in various state governments with younger, more technocratic appointees who were little tainted by support for or participation in the old regime.

Whether or not these individuals are called "middle-class" or "middle-group" in their origins, they represented a break with past oligarchic practice. Whereas the Corrêa da Costa and Murtinho families laid claim to wealth first and political power second, the new oligarchies operated differently. Their continued political power had less to do with maintaining their private interests through political manipulation than with control of a transformed and more powerful state apparatus. By the 1920s and 1930s, the state in Mato Grosso might have grown in scope and complexity beyond the point where armed coronéis could hope to capture it through violence.⁵⁵ Control of frontier politics shifted in part from the warriors to the bureaucrats.

The primary example of this new type of oligarchy in Mato Grosso is the Müller family. They were important at the state level but also nationally. Filinto Müller served as Getúlio Vargas's chief of police in Rio de Janeiro, a post that obviously wielded great power in the Estado Novo. While Filinto reigned in Rio de Janeiro, his brothers Fenelon and Júlio took turns as federal interventor in Mato Grosso.

53. At least one important Brazilian scholar has interpreted the political transformation from empire to republic as the equivalent of a "bourgeois revolution," which ushered in (in Marxist terms) the legal and political structures necessary for the capitalist phase of Brazil's history. For a summary of his argument, see Saes (1990, 344–48). It includes the claim that "the middle class was the driving force behind the [bourgeois] transformation" (1990, 346). As Saes noted, others have placed the date of Brazil's bourgeois revolution as late as 1930. Burns, for example, urged that historians abstain from referring to an urban middle class until the 1930s, suggesting instead the more modest term *urban middle groups* (Burns 1993, 361).

54. Analysis of 507 probate records for Cuiabá on the period 1889–1937 showed that the concentration of wealth at the top of frontier society remained virtually unchanged. Breaking the data into two periods, I found that from 1889 to 1913, the top 6 percent of fortunes accounted for 58 percent of the wealth. From 1914 to 1937, the top 5 percent of fortunes accounted for 63 percent of the wealth. Middling fortunes remained static at 15 percent of wealth in the earlier years and 11 percent in the later years. This finding suggests that the middle class probably did not push new oligarchies to power on the basis of rising status in Mato Grosso. Probate data found in APMT, inventários, cartórios 1–4.

55. On the shift from statewide to local coronelistic violence, see Corrêa (1995, 176).

In contrast to the families analyzed as representing traditional and transitional oligarchies, the Müller clan was rather undistinguished before the Revolution of 1930. Júlio Sr. had been elected to various lower-echelon posts, including five terms in the state legislature.⁵⁶ He was not, however, an important figure in Mato Grosso politics. His main claim to distinction was his relationship through marriage to a lesser branch of the Corrêa da Costa clan.⁵⁷ Otherwise, this son of a German doctor had no traditional connections to political power.

As for family fortune, the Müllers' modest patrimony had little in common with the traditional oligarchy. They owned no major agricultural establishments, nor did they participate in commerce in any significant way. Most of their wealth seems to have come from a moderately profitable rubber concession on the right bank of the Mamoré River, won by Júlio Sr. in 1900.⁵⁸ When he died intestate in 1930, probate records indicate that the family patriarch left a modest fortune to his sons.⁵⁹ As late as 1930, the only Müller brother listed as a landowner on the Cuiabá tax rolls was Fenelon, with less than a thousand hectares.⁶⁰

The education of the Müller brothers probably mirrored that of many urban middle-group families during the Old Republic. An advanced formal education was not just for show but to provide a livelihood as well as increased social prestige. Fenelon, the eldest son, earned a civil engineering degree in São Paulo. He worked in the 1920s on the Estrada de Ferro Noroeste rail line, which originated in São Paulo and ran through the southern portion of Mato Grosso as far as the city of Corumbá. Júlio, the second son, completed a bachelor of arts, finding work first as a school teacher in the provincial town of Poconé. Filinto, the youngest, was educated to be a lawyer.⁶¹

Unlike their father and his modicum of success at the ballot box, the Müller brothers rose to their highest political positions by appointment during the Vargas years. The brothers held a range of lower- and mid-level political positions before ascending to the top rank of political power in

56. Legislative office data in Ferreira (1997, 119–21).

57. Júlio Müller married Rita T. Corrêa da Costa, the daughter of Francisco and Elvira Corrêa da Costa, in 1885 (Alencar n.d., 1:189).

58. This concession is registered in APMT, Repartição de Terras, Quadros Demonstrativos, quadro 4, "Das concessões para exploração de productos vegetaes," unnumbered, lata C, 1900.

59. The value of the entire Júlio Müller estate was estimated at 85 contos, nearly 50 of them in urban property and 23 in financial investments. Rural holdings were a distant third. At her death in 1876, Maria da Conceição, matriarch of the traditional Corrêa da Costa dynasty, left behind 68 contos, worth approximately 350 contos in 1930. For Müller records, see APMT, 2d cartório, caixa 3. For the probate record on Maria da Conceição probate record, see note 24.

60. Land tax records found in APMT, Coletoria Cuiabá, 1930.

61. Details of the professional education of the Müller brothers are found in Alencar (n.d.): on Fenelon (2:190), on Júlio (2:192), and on Filinto (2:197).

Mato Grosso. For instance, Felelon was elected mayor of Três Lagoas, a town in southern Mato Grosso along the railway line. In 1930 he briefly held the post of mayor of Cuiabá, the state capital. Júlio first entered politics in 1930 when he was nominated mayor of Cuiabá, following the successful revolution led by Getúlio Vargas in October of that year. He went on to hold the positions of chief of police in Cuiabá (1932), state legislator (1933), secretary general (1935, in his brother Felelon's administration), and finally federal interventor during the Estado Novo. All three Müller brothers' career paths were a mixture of appointed and elected posts that combined political positions in the legislature and executive branches of government with administrative posts. The political career paths of the Müller brothers differed from previous oligarchic leaders in that they eventually rose to the pinnacle of power as political appointees. Felelon was appointed federal interventor for Mato Grosso in 1935. Two years later, Júlio obtained the same post, which he held until 1945, when the Estado Novo ended. Meanwhile, Filinto worked in Rio de Janeiro as Vargas's chief of police.⁶²

Family structure and marriage strategies also distinguish the Müllers from a traditional oligarchy like their nominal relations, the Corrêa da Costas. Filinto married a Spanish woman named Consuela instead of marrying into another local oligarchic family.⁶³ Neither Felelon nor Júlio married into the most important local families, even though their mother was a member of the traditional Corrêa da Costa family oligarchy.⁶⁴ Júlio's marriage to Maria de Arruda represented a connection to the mid-level elite family Ponce de Arruda. Maria's godfather was none other than Antônio Paes de Barros, the assassinated state president, a connection indicating her relatively high social standing.⁶⁵ Similarly, Felelon's marriage to Alzita de Matos linked him to the wealthy Deschamps Cavalcanti family of Cáceres,

62. For details on elected and appointed political and administrative posts, see the same pages cited in Alencar (n.d., 190, 192, 197), and Ferreira (1997, 92–93, 113–17).

63. The fact that Filinto married with no apparent oligarchic purpose and presumably for love lends support to Monica Raisa Schpun's argument that matchmaking and oligarchic politics receded during the 1920s, giving way to greater emphasis on affection between the prospective parties. See Schpun (1994, 43–45, 60). Mario Corrêa da Costa also married outside the ambit of oligarchic alliances, even living with his future spouse, Dulcina Marinho of Rio de Janeiro, before their marriage. For marriage information on Mario Corrêa, see Alencar (n.d., 1:143).

64. The Alves Corrêa family, unlike the Müllers, married endogamously within the Corrêa da Costa clan. This marriage pattern helps underscore the fact that the Alves Corrêas were a key part of the Corrêa da Costa parentela, while the Müllers were much less so.

65. The practice of linking elite political families via godparenting was carried out by the Müller family in at least one instance. Rita Corrêa Müller was godmother to João Corrêa da Costa (b. 1890), the son of her second cousin and future state president, Antônio Corrêa da Costa (noted in Alencar n.d., 1:143).

a town near Cuiabá.⁶⁶ Rita Müller Peixoto de Azevedo, sister of the three brothers, made the best match as marriage strategy when in 1919 she married Dr. Joaquim Amarante Peixoto de Azevedo, son of Generoso Ponce's business partner (Alencar n.d., 1:196).

In sum, new oligarchies like the Müllers sought to augment rather than to conserve status in their marriage alliances. In a sense, the Müllers were an outgrowth of the Corrêa da Costa traditional oligarchy. Yet they were also distinct, owing their political success to their relatively limited role in traditional oligarchic politics during the Old Republic. Untainted with overt associations with the Old Regime, they represented the perfect middle-group profile for success in the Vargas government. They were respectable enough for local tastes with their ties to the dominant traditional oligarchy, but they were also distant enough from tradition and vested interests to be entrusted by the Vargas regime with replacing and disciplining their traditional oligarchic cousins. Accordingly, traditional oligarchic leader Mario Corrêa da Costa was replaced after the proclamation of the Estado Novo by none other than Júlio Müller.

CONCLUSION

This article has focused on the historical role of political elites and oligarchies in the Brazilian Old Republic. Case studies have helped to define and distinguish among three specific types of oligarchies reigning during the period under study: traditional, transitional, and new. Sources of family fortunes, educational backgrounds, marriage strategies, and political career paths differed from one oligarchic family to the next, combining in each case to determine the nature and extent of their political power. At the same time, it is evident that external factors such as economic trends and national political crises allowed transitional oligarchies and later new ones the opportunity to exert uncharacteristically great influence on state politics in Mato Grosso. Traditional oligarchies were ever present, receding at times into the background or entering into alliances with transitional or new oligarchies.

Certain influential interpretations of the politics of the Old Republic are revised by the findings of this study, at least with respect to frontier regions such as Mato Grosso. I argue against the idea that the Old Republic represented either the culmination of traditional oligarchic power or a decadent "compromise" between public and private power in the form of coronelismo. My research suggests instead that the Old Republic in Mato Grosso was marked by an ongoing struggle for power among three distinct kinds of elite political families.

66. For information on the Müller brothers' marriages, see Alencar (n.d.): on Fenelon (2:190), on Júlio (2:192), and on Filinto (2:197).

The approach taken here to categorizing oligarchies calls into question whether generic definitions of oligarchic family types provide a coherent and realistic picture of the roles played by families in Old Republican politics. Synchronic categories of oligarchies were replaced in this study by a sequential scheme directly linked to case studies of different types of elite political families. Oligarchic politics and family structure are put back in motion with this approach. Synchronic definitions of oligarchy or generic concepts such as coronelismo, valuable as they are, freeze oligarchic family structure in time: all changes occur outside the family, in demographic increase, industrialization, and urbanization. In my view, family structures change over time, and new family types bring with them new forms of political power as they respond to social and economic conjunctures.

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