

POSTMODERN ETHNOGRAPHER
IN THE BACKLANDS:
An Imperial Bureaucrat's Perceptions of
Post-Independence Brazil*

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Fertil campo florescente
Junto de montes coroados
D'arvoredos: verdes prados
Bordando mansa corrente:
Canais, por arte da gente
Saem de um, e de outro lado
Vê um e outro povoado
No meio alegre verdura:
Eis esta fiel pintura
é do Brejo do Salgado.

Flourishing fertile fields
Alongside mountains crowned
with arbors; green meadows
Bordered by gentle streams:
Canals of our own making
Emerge in every direction.
Settlements visible in the midst
of this exuberant greenness,
This portrait faithful and true
is of Brejo do Salgado.

José Ignacio do Couto Moreno

In 1819 José Ignacio do Couto Moreno composed this sentimental poem about his adopted hometown, a small river port in the interior of Minas Gerais.¹ He felt compelled to write it after suffering considerable ribbing by his colleagues during a festive occasion in Rio de Janeiro. Couto Moreno was homesick, and his fellow partygoers could not resist teasing him for demonstrating nostalgia for home and hearth. They challenged him incredulously, "What possible attraction could such distant and brutish backlands hold?"

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1. All translations are mine. Unless otherwise stated, all primary documentation cited here is located in the Arquivo Público Mineiro in Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, Brazil (hereafter abbreviated as APM). APM, Seção da Província (SP), Presidente da Província (PP) 1/10, caixa 15, p. 3, household census of Brejo do Salgado, 1838. The census contained a separate page that included the poem, the circumstances behind its creation in 1819, and an illustrated map.

Couto Moreno responded with this verse seeking to defend his chosen place of residence and thereby challenged metropolitan notions of the interior. His *sertão* was not dry and harsh. It could have been mistaken for one of the lush sugar-producing regions along the northeastern coast of Brazil. The region he depicted was blessed by nature, yet tamed and improved by man's industry. Handcrafted irrigation systems and densely settled rural estates clustered around the church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário.² In Couto Moreno's eyes, the village with the unlikely name of Brejo do Salgado (Brackish Swamp) was well worth defending.

This poem was found not in a diary but on the bottom margin of a household census commissioned by the provincial government of Minas Gerais in the late 1830s. For reasons known only to himself, Couto Moreno sought to personalize an official document by transcribing his verse and including the date of its composition and the reasons behind it.³ His words evoke a Brazilian intellectual tradition dating back to the early eighteenth century, that of nativist praise of Brazil's exuberant natural resources.⁴ Yet Couto Moreno was not Brazilian-born but a Portuguese military officer who had migrated to Brazil and settled in northern Minas Gerais in the early nineteenth century.⁵

As a Portuguese immigrant of high status who actively chose to settle in a rural backwater, Couto Moreno was somewhat atypical. His region of influence, the *comarca* of Rio São Francisco, consisted of the three municipalities of Januária, Montes Claros, and São Romão. The *comarca's* territory was larger than the province of Rio de Janeiro. This semi-arid environment was crisscrossed by mountain ranges and rivers and was devoted largely to livestock ranching. Communities in river valleys raised more diversified crops. The São Francisco–Montes Claros region had proportionately fewer slaves than any other region in Minas Gerais during the nineteenth century.⁶ Brejo do Salgado, Couto Moreno's home district

2. The religious brotherhood of Nossa Senhora do Rosário drew its membership from blacks, free and slave alike. It provided mutual aid to members as well as a legitimate forum for assembling and practicing their religious faith. For two different interpretations of the brotherhoods in Minas Gerais, see A. J. R. Russell-Wood, *The Black Man in Slavery and Freedom in Colonial Brazil* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982); and Elizabeth Kiddy, "The Congados of Minas Gerais: Living Tradition in Brazil," paper presented at the 1995 meeting of the American Folklore Society, Lafayette, La., 11–15 October.

3. For a discussion of the potential biases inherent in "empirical" census data, see Lutz Berkner, "The Use and Misuse of Census Data for the Historical Analysis of Family Structure," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, no. 5 (Spring 1975):721–38.

4. E. Bradford Burns, *Nationalism in Brazil: A Historical Survey* (New York: Praeger, 1968), chap. 2; and Burns, "The Intellectuals as Agents of Change," in *From Colony to Nation: Essays on the Independence of Brazil*, edited by A. J. R. Russell-Wood (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 211–46.

5. Couto Moreno's eldest living son from his first marriage was born in 1808. His eldest living daughter from his second marriage was born in 1828. APM, SP PP 1/10, caixa 15, p. 3.

6. The growth of the mineiro slave population during a period of contraction of the export

in the municipality of Januária, produced sugar and a variety of food-stuffs that were marketed in the Brazilian interior.⁷ The central government of the Brazilian Empire considered the region economically marginal and geographically isolated because it lay a thousand kilometers from the coastal cities of Salvador da Bahia and Rio de Janeiro.

During his administrative career in Minas Gerais, Couto Moreno left a documentary trail of thousands of written pages spanning nearly forty years.⁸ His ethnic identity as an outsider accounts for the clarity of his observation of social life in an interior community. Although Couto Moreno insistently maintained his loyalty to Brazil and his desire to be accepted as a Brazilian, his own accounts reveal that many members of his community considered him to be an outsider, an untrustworthy Portuguese interloper. It is precisely this social and cultural alienation that made him such a valuable observer. Like present-day ethnographers, Couto Moreno experienced a divide between self and other. He attempted to deal with this sense of cultural dissonance not by ignoring it or denying it but by documenting local customs that he found strange, frightening, immoral, unseemly, or even repugnant. In describing a society that at times he found primitive, Couto Moreno did not adopt the voice of an omniscient narrator. Rather, he included himself and his conflictual relationship with others in his writings.⁹ Unlike most native members of the elite, he highlighted subtleties of race, class, and culture that would have been natural and unremarkable to anyone born in Brazil.

economy has been studied in depth by Douglas Cole Libby. See Libby, *Transformação e trabalho em uma economia escravista: Minas Gerais no século XIX* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1988). See also Robert Slenes, "Os múltiplos de porcos e diamantes: A economia escrava de Minas Gerais no século XIX," *Estudos Econômicos* 18, no. 3 (Sept.-Dec. 1988):449–96; Roberto B. Martins, "Growing in Silence: The Slave Economy of Nineteenth-Century Minas Gerais, Brazil," Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1980; and Roberto B. Martins and Amílcar Martins Filho, "Slavery in a Non-Export Economy: Nineteenth-Century Minas Gerais Revisited," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (Aug. 1983):569–90. On northern Minas (to which Januária belonged), see the fine thesis by Tarcísio Rodrigues Botelho, "Famílias e escravarias: Demografia e família escrava no Norte de Minas Gerais no século XIX," M.A. thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, 1994.

7. On the economic history of imperial Minas Gerais, see Libby, *Transformação e trabalho*. On the *sertão mineiro*, a study based largely on travel narratives is Bernardo Mata Machado, *História do sertão noroeste de Minas Gerais, 1690–1930* (Belo Horizonte: Imprensa Oficial, 1990). No history of Januária exists except for the centennial commemorative volume, *Album comemorativo do primeiro centenário* (Januária: Prefeitura Municipal de Januária, 1969).

8. Most of Couto Moreno's correspondence is contained in the collection *Presidente da Província, Seção da Província* in the Arquivo Público Mineiro, Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais in the following subseries and boxes: PP SP 1/15, caixas 13–14; 1/16, caixas 42–43; 1/18, caixas 118–19; 1/26, caixa 01; 1/33, caixas 103–9; 1/41, caixas 02; 1/45, caixa 01. Other correspondence is scattered in the *códices* *Seção da Província*. A few documents also exist in the rare documents collection of the Biblioteca Nacional in Rio de Janeiro: II-36, 9, 19; s.l. 1813; II-36, 3, 7; s.d. circa 1820; II-36, 3, 20; 2 Feb. 1824; II-36, 3, 17; 18 Mar. 1842.

9. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, edited by James Clifford and

By drawing selectively on Couto Moreno's writings, I hope to demonstrate how official documentation written by municipal bureaucrats can be used by social historians to reconstruct the particulars of race relations, political culture, ethnic differentiation, and contestation over the meaning of "being Brazilian." To these ends, I will present a textual analysis of three documents left by José Ignacio do Couto Moreno. The first is a household census of Brejo do Salgado compiled in 1838. The second is a bundle of some sixty pages of bound documents written in 1831 that describe an aborted nativist conspiracy against the Portuguese residents of Januária led by the Brazilian-born planter elite. The third item is a pamphlet written in epistolary style to a godson in Rio de Janeiro, published in 1821.

I selected these three documents out of the hundreds left by Couto Moreno because they illustrate social attitudes that were in flux in the post-independence and regency periods (1822–1840). During these years, Brazil was undergoing a complex political and cultural formation of identity that found expression in nativist movements and the emerging press. Tensions between Brazilians and the Portuguese-born have been examined from the perspectives of economic and political competition, but surprisingly little attention has been paid to the ethnic, cultural, and racial divisions separating these groups in urban and rural contexts.¹⁰ Although I am not suggesting that Couto Moreno's attitudes can be generalized to all of Brazil, his writings suggest avenues for further investigation on Brazilian cultural identity.

The population of the northern frontier of Minas Gerais constructed their cultural and ethnic identity according to multiple criteria. As opposed to the Portuguese Couto Moreno, they were Brazilian. But to coastal and urban Brazilians, these *mineiros* were not compatriots but *sertanejos*, people of the interior sertão possessing an untamed and dangerous ethnic identity forged by a harsh and unforgiving environment. To complicate matters further, members of the community of Brejo do Salgado also made fine distinctions according to several criteria: skin color, the circumstances of an individual's birth, and personal wealth and power expressed through ownership of land and slaves and through influence over dependents and kin.

George E. Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1986). See also the introduction by Sally Cole to the reissue of Ruth Landes's ethnographic account, *The City of Women* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

10. Several notable exceptions have reevaluated the ethnic, racial, and class makeup of participants in regional revolts. See John Charles Chasteen, "Cabanos and Farrapos: Brazilian Nativism in Regional Perspective, 1822–1850," *Locus* 7, no. 1 (Fall 1994):31–46; Hendrik Kraay, "As Terrifying as Unexpected: The Bahian Sabinada, 1837–1838," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (Nov. 1992):501–27; Marcus Joaquim Maciel de Carvalho, "Hegemony and Rebellion in Pernambuco (Brazil), 1821–1835," Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1989; and João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil: The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University, 1993).

These documents also provide insight into broader processes of political change and modernization being experienced in the Brazilian rural interior. The literature on the political culture of imperial Brazil has assumed that political and ideological change in rural areas, especially in the unruly and isolated sertão, was negligible and that local bureaucrats were overwhelmingly self-serving. This article will demonstrate that such interpretations are too simple.

In the São Francisco region, Couto Moreno and other members of the elite dominating municipal government struggled with the transition between the authoritarianism of colonial rule and the liberal and representative constitutional monarchy that followed. Official correspondence left by the municipal elite after independence suggests profound changes in how these representatives thought about their relationship to the state. Municipal authorities who straddled the colonial and national periods initially envisioned a personalized relationship with government with few boundaries, one that invited musings about even the most intimate topics. Over time, they came to adopt a more bounded discourse more appropriate to professional bureaucrats dealing with an impersonal state. Couto Moreno is one such individual in transition. His documentation draws on multiple political ways of being, often in contradictory ways. He was not unique, however. It is to be hoped that this particular case will encourage other historians to explore similarly rich documentation produced elsewhere during this transitional era in order to arrive at a clearer understanding of changing political attitudes in rural Brazil.

THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY AT THE PERIPHERY

Couto Moreno's poem and his explanation of his feelings on writing it suggest that by 1819 he had become passionately attached to his adopted Brazilian backwater home. The allure of the civilized amenities of the coastal capital of Rio de Janeiro paled in comparison with his patch of isolated sertão. Extant documentation fails to reveal the date of Couto Moreno's arrival in Brazil. It seems probable that he arrived around the time that the Portuguese court moved to Brazil in 1808, when he was about forty. In his official correspondence, Couto Moreno staunchly insisted that he had become "*um brasileiro adoptivo*" through formal naturalization and also assimilation by marrying into the planter elite of Brejo do Salgado.¹¹ The first time, he had married the daughter of Pedro Antônio Correia Bittancourt, the commanding officer of his regiment. Existing

11. Extant documentation does not reveal the dates of Couto Moreno's two marriages. His eldest son living in Januária was born in 1808. Couto Moreno's first wife, the daughter of his commanding officer, Brigadier Pedro Antônio Correia Bittancourt, may or may not have been from the municipality of Januária. Bittancourt was born in Portugal.

sources do not confirm whether his wife was Portuguese-born or native to Januária. After her death, he married his second wife, a Brazilian who belonged to the Durães clan. From her, Couto Moreno acquired Ilha, a sugar mill large enough to appear on nineteenth-century maps. By the late 1830s, it was staffed by twenty slaves and a host of dependents.¹² Although modest by coastal standards, this estate qualified Couto Moreno as a rather prosperous member of the landholding and slaveholding class in Januária.

Couto Moreno is thus an intriguing example of a rural bureaucrat of the first generation following independence, with one foot planted in the colonial regime of the Terra de Santa Cruz¹³ (as Brazil was originally called) and the other foot in the world of the Brazilian constitutional monarchy. His lifetime (1777–1853) spanned a series of seminal events in the history of the late-colonial and imperial periods, including the Inconfidência Mineira of 1789, the flight of the Portuguese court to Rio de Janeiro in 1808, Dom Pedro I's declaration of independence in 1822, the Constitution of 1824, the turmoil of the Regency era, a host of regional revolts, and the cessation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade to Brazil.¹⁴

Prior to Brazilian independence in 1822, Couto Moreno filled multiple positions of authority. His military services to the crown garnered him the offices of first and second notary (*tabelião*) of Brejo do Salgado, granted by a royal decree (*alvará*) by Dom João VI.¹⁵ In Januária Couto Moreno served as lieutenant colonel of the Eleventh Cavalry Regiment of the second line of the Brazilian army.¹⁶ His extensive military experience included fighting on the government side against the Confederação do Equador in Pernambuco in 1824 and traveling the length of the Rio São Francisco on a military campaign.¹⁷ He also served as *procurador* of the comarca of Paracatú, to which Januária belonged prior to 1830.¹⁸

After Januária attained the status of *município* in 1830, Couto Moreno assumed many positions in the new administration. As the judicial and police bureaucracy of the empire expanded in the 1830s and 1840s, he also served in the new positions of justice of the peace, police delegate, and officer of the civilian Guarda Nacional. He was elected for

12. APM, SP PP 1/10, caixa 15, doc. 3, household census of Brejo do Salgado, 1838; SP PP 1/33, caixa 108, doc. 15, testimonial written by Couto Moreno, 25 Jan. 1847.

13. Couto Moreno's invocation of this colonial term appeared in a letter written thirty years after Brazil had gained its independence. APM, SP PP 1/45, caixa 1, doc. 25, Couto Moreno to Provincial President of Minas Gerais (hereafter PPMG), 27 Mar. 1852.

14. Couto Moreno died on 19 Mar. 1853 after a stroke, as reported in *O Bom Senso* (published in Ouro Preto), 15 Feb. 1855, p. 3.

15. APM, SP PP 1/45, caixa 1, doc. 25, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 27 Mar. 1852.

16. APM, SP PP 1/45, caixa 13, docs. 1 and 2.

17. APM SP PP 1/45, caixa 01, doc. 25, Couto Moreno to PPMG, "Exploração do Rio do São Francisco," 27 Mar. 1852.

18. Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro, Obras Raras, II-36, 3, 7, s.d. (circa 1820).

one term to the provincial assembly of Minas Gerais in 1844, with his primary goal being to have the municipal seat of Januária transferred to his district.¹⁹ In many ways, Couto Moreno's administrative career typifies those of other local bureaucrats in the interior of Minas Gerais who were active prior to 1850. During the early decades of the Brazilian Empire, most administrative posts in rural municipalities were not filled by professional full-time employees but circulated among the landed elite, local priests, and a few educated professionals.

Couto Moreno emerges from the documentation as a stern, occasionally benevolent patriarch who commanded an extended family, "black and white," which included kin, *agregados* (rural dependents), and slaves. He was autocratic, socially conservative, a member of the prestigious *Ordem do Cristo*, and a staunch defender of the virtues of hierarchical society, the Catholic faith, the monarchy, and the constitution. His stature beyond the community was sufficient to get him admitted as a corresponding member of the prestigious learned society of Rio de Janeiro, the *Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro*.²⁰

Through his official correspondence with various *presidentes da província* (royally appointed governors), Couto Moreno attempted to establish a dialogue between himself and the chosen representatives of the Emperor. These letters reveal a concept of government based on a paternal and intimate conception of the relationship between sovereign and vassal, not an impersonal exchange between an official and a modern state. Couto Moreno used these communications as a vehicle for self-identification and positive affirmation in order to cope with the feelings of cultural alienation and "otherness" that he experienced within the community of Brejo do Salgado.

Although Couto Moreno's anxiety about his cultural identity may have been somewhat extreme, his personalized style of communication was hardly unique.²¹ In the interior of Minas Gerais, many members of the first generation of the municipal-level administrative and political elite after independence did not separate bureaucratic duties or politics into distinct and professionalized compartments. Instead, municipal administrators used official correspondence written to provincial authorities as a venue for prattling about their families and their slaves, their own physical ailments, and the class conflicts that stimulated pervasive violence in the backlands.²² Single missives could include information about

19. "Governo de Minas Gerais," *Revista do Arquivo Público Mineiro* 1 (1896):3–96. See also *O Compilador* (Ouro Preto), 27 Apr. 1844, p. 4.

20. APM SP PP 1/45, caixa 1, doc. 25, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 27 Mar. 1852.

21. This essay is part of a work in progress on municipal government in imperial Minas Gerais Brazil, based on my dissertation. See Judy Bieber Freitas, "Marginal Elites: Power, Politics, and Patronage in the Backlands of Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1830–1889," Ph.D. diss., The Johns Hopkins University, 1994.

22. *Ibid.*, especially chap. 8.

the weather, the year's crop, conditions of trade, local gossip, drunken brawls, a murder or two, and who was sleeping with whom. This blurring of public and private extended even to the physical body. Couto Moreno began one missive to the provincial president by describing how a tick had embedded itself in his right testicle and had caused such swelling as to prevent him from riding a horse and carrying out his duties.²³ Similarly, the district judge of the comarca wrote to the provincial president about the discomfort and treatment of his syphilitic ulcers before launching into the details of municipal administration.²⁴

The inclusion of such intimate details in "official correspondence" could be lengthy. Reading them creates a sense of intimacy with the teller not commonly associated with official documentation. Their stories inspire both horror and laughter, much like the sixteenth-century French pardon tales conveyed by Natalie Zemon Davis.²⁵ The undifferentiated manner in which early-nineteenth-century rural officials communicated with their superiors thus offers an ideal but underutilized source for reconstructing the mentality of petty bureaucrats on the periphery of the centralized administration of imperial Brazil.²⁶

COUTO MORENO'S MAP AND CENSUS

The household census or *mapa de população* of Brejo do Salgado delineated by José Ignacio do Couto Moreno was literally both a map and a census. Social and demographic historians have long recognized the utility of censuses for sketching the rough outlines of the lives of the inarticulate. Perhaps this value is nowhere more evident than in the field of family history, in which the Cambridge school of demographic historians has emphasized the household as the unit of analysis.²⁷ Subsequent critiques

23. APM SP PP 1/15, caixa 13, p. 2, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 31 May 1831.

24. APM, SP 925, Jeronimo Máximo Oliveira e Castro to PPMG, 13 Mar. 1862.

25. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in the Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth-Century France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

26. On state centralization, see Emília Viotti da Costa, *The Brazilian Empire: Myths and Histories* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Roderick Barman, *Brazil: The Forging of a Nation, 1798–1852* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988); and Ilmar Rohloff de Mattos, *O Tempo Saquarema: A formação do estado imperial*, 2d ed. (São Paulo: Hucitec, 1990). For an excellent analysis of the development of imperial machine politics and electoral legislation, see Richard Graham, *Patronage and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1990). A study that examines state formation from the perspective of the local judiciary is Thomas Flory, *Judge and Jury in Imperial Brazil, 1808–1871* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

27. The household approach to family history was established by the Cambridge School of demographic historians led by Peter Laslett. See *Household and Family in Past Time*, edited by Peter Laslett and Richard Wall (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1972); and Laslett, "The Character of Familial History, Its Limitations, and the Conditions for Its Proper Pursuit," *Journal of Family History* 12 (1987):263–84. For critiques of the static nature of the

have pointed out that the quantitative nature of censuses does not render them unbiased and that the prejudices of the census taker must also be taken into account. Such attitudes typically remain hidden.

In the census compiled by Couto Moreno, however, his social biases are made explicit. Unlike his administrative colleagues in other parishes, Couto Moreno did not limit himself to the dry yet useful data on age, sex, civil status, condition, race, and occupation.²⁸ Instead, he literally mapped out his social universe through extensive gratuitous comments in the margins and extraneous supplementary documents. Like many contemporary ethnographers, Couto Moreno viewed “the poetic and the political as inseparable.”²⁹ The census was not a mere document but a work of art, incorporating various genres of representation. Couto Moreno included in addition to his poem a hand-painted map of the district of Brejo do Salgado. Although not drawn to scale, the map shows the location of the main estates, sugar mills, rivers, canals, and even a little forest tinted green and brown.³⁰ He thus employed the map and census to construct an “imagined community” for an external audience in a uniquely personal way.³¹

This census is one of more than three hundred population *mapas de população* compiled by justices of the peace throughout Minas Gerais during one of several statistical studies initiated by the provincial government in the 1830s.³² The Brejo do Salgado census was among the most detailed. Couto Moreno enumerated the population according to sex, marital status, color (*qualidade*), and condition (slave, free, or *liberto*). He also provided information about the spatial distribution of households. For example, he indicated that 50 separate households containing 178 individuals were all located on a sugar estate called Santo Antonio do Boqueirão.

Brejo was a small community comprising 1,974 persons living in

household approach, see Tamara Harevan, “Cycles, Courses, and Cohorts: Reflections on Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Historical Study of Family Development,” *Journal of Social History*, no. 12 (Fall 1978):97–109; Harevan, “The Family as Process: The Historical Study of the Family Cycle,” *Journal of Social History*, no. 7 (Spring 1974):322–29; and Harevan, “Family History at the Crossroads: Linking Familial and Historical Change,” *Journal of Family History* 12 (1987):ix–xxiii. See also Glen H. Elder Jr., “Families and Lives: Some Developments in Life-Course Studies,” *Journal of Family History* 12 (1987):179–200.

28. Included in Couto Moreno’s list of occupations for children and slaves were *mamar* (breast-feeding) and *comer* (eating).

29. This phrase coined by James Clifford invokes a challenge to postmodern ethnographers, which in a methodological sense (although hardly a political one), Couto Moreno had met in the first half of the nineteenth century. See Clifford, “Introduction: Partial Truths,” *Writing Culture*, edited by Clifford and Marcus, 1–26, 2.

30. APM SP PP 1/10, caixa 15, doc. 3, household census of Brejo do Salgado, 1838.

31. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2d rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991), chap. 10, “Census, Map, Museum.”

32. Clotilde Andrade Paiva, “Engenhos e casas de negócios na Minas oitocentista,” *Sexto Seminário sobre a economia mineira* (Belo Horizonte: CEDEPLAR, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 1992), 29–52.

403 households, an average of about 5 per household. The urban center boasted 138 households, 42 percent of them headed by women.³³ Whites were a minority at 16.6 percent of the population, followed by *pretos* (blacks perceived to have no racial admixture) at 31.6 percent, and racially mixed *pardos* at 51 percent. Indians made up an insignificant 0.5 percent of the total. Slaves accounted for 32.3 percent and free people, 67.7 percent. Of the free population, 24.3 percent were white, 0.7 percent were Indian, 62.4 percent were *pardos*, and 12.5 percent were *pretos*. The slave population was 73 percent *preto* and 27 percent *pardo*.³⁴ Couto Moreno used this simplified racial shorthand to aggregate his findings at the end of the document, but within the census he only occasionally noted whether slaves were *africanos* (born in Africa) or *crioulos* (born in Brazil).³⁵

Couto Moreno provided information about spatial and social divisions in his district in his population “map.” By highlighting the foibles and deficiencies of others, he implicitly situated himself at the top of the social and moral pyramid. When describing the 21 female heads of household in town, he commented, “when it is said that a single woman lives by her own devices (*vive de suas agências*), it is *understood* what she is” (his emphasis). He noted which women had been abandoned by their husbands and targeted unfaithful spouses, including one of his own sons. Couto Moreno commented that the incompetent secretary of the town council held his post “only through the council’s special mercy.” In an-

33. These ratios are consistent with demographic studies of other communities throughout colonial and imperial Brazil. See Arlene J. Diaz and Jeff Stewart, “Occupational, Class, and Female-Headed Households in Santiago Maior do Iguape, Brazil, 1835,” *Journal of Family History* 16, no. 3 (1991):299–314; Donald Ramos, “Single and Married Women in Vila Rica, Brazil, 1754–1838,” *Journal of Family History* 16, no. 3 (1991):261–82; Francisco Vidal Luna, *Minas Gerais, escravos e senhores: Análise da estrutura populacional e econômica de alguns centros mineratórios, 1718–1804* (São Paulo: Instituto de Pesquisas Econômicas, 1981); and Elizabeth Kuznesof, *Household Economy and Urban Development: São Paulo, 1765–1836* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986). The demographic scholars at CEDEPLAR (Centro de Desenvolvimento e Planejamento Regional) at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, have used the household censuses of the 1830s to reconstruct slaveholding patterns and occupational structures. See Maria do Carmo Salazar Martins, “Revisitando a província: Comarcas, termos, distritos e população de Minas Gerais em 1833–35,” in *Anais do V. Seminário sobre a Economia Mineira*, 13–30 (Belo Horizonte: CEDEPLAR, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 1990); and Clotilde Andrade Paiva e Maria do Carmo S. Martins, “Minas Gerais in 1831: Notas sobre a estrutura ocupacional de alguns municípios,” in *Terceiro Seminário sobre a Economia Mineira, Diamantina*, (Belo Horizonte: CEDEPLAR, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 1986), 63–92; Clotilde A. Paiva and Luiz D. H. Arnaut, “Fontes para o estudo de Minas oitocentista: Listas nominativas,” *Anais do V. Seminário sobre a Economia Mineira*, 85–206; and Tarcísio Rodrigues Botelho, *Famílias e escravarias*.

34. Numerical totals were 328 whites, 10 Indians, 841 free and liberto *pardos*, 168 free *pretos*, 456 slave *pretos*, and 171 slave *pardos*.

35. Other officials also simplified complex racial classifications into the three categories of *branco*, *pardo*, and *preto* when compiling statistical data. For an example, see APM, SP PP 1/10, caixa 25, p. 38, “População da comarca do Rio São Francisco, 1835.”

other gratuitous comment, he revealed that Dona Ana Rocha resided on the local padre's *fazenda* Tatú because she was the widow of the priest's illegitimate son.

Couto Moreno limited his praise to those who conformed to his standards of morality and his work ethic, which was more compatible with an emerging capitalist mindset. He did not share the attitude commonly held in Brazilian slave society that associated manual labor with servile status.³⁶ Instead, he praised hard work. He congratulated middling sorts like Caetano de Almeida Leite and his brothers, who lived together and pooled their labor because they had no slaves. He also praised the widow Izadora Maria de Freitas, a *liberta* (manumitted slave). She, her late African husband, and their children had applied themselves so industriously in their rural labors that by 1838, they commanded twenty-eight dependent *agregados* (rural dependents residing as tenants or sharecroppers on their land). Couto Moreno also praised *agregados* who themselves managed to acquire slaves.

In this document, Couto Moreno demonstrates a mix of social values, traditional and modern. Although a member of the local elite, he was able to go beyond hierarchical social categories based on class, race, and birth to judge members of the community according to his own standards of morality, thrift, and industriousness. The capacity for hard work has been identified by Gladys Sabina Ribeiro as an ethnic marker that differentiated Portuguese immigrants from Brazilian workers in late-nineteenth-century Rio de Janeiro.³⁷ Perhaps this attitude shaped Couto Moreno's perceptions. His views may also reflect changing ideas about honor that emerged in Latin America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Couto Moreno's understanding of personal honor seems to have been grounded more in the concept of "honor as virtue" than "honor as status or precedence."³⁸

The Iberian notion of honor prevailing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was based primarily on lineage. Noble status, legitimate birth, racial purity, and unblemished Catholic antecedents constituted important elements of one's personal honor. Closely linked to honor

36. Both Kátia M. de Queirós Mattoso and Maria Odila Silva Dias have documented ownership of slaves by humble persons, including former slaves, in order to save themselves from performing manual labor, thereby increasing their own status. See Mattoso, *To Be a Slave in Brazil, 1550–1888* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986); and Dias, *Power and Everyday Life: The Lives of Working Women in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1995).

37. Gladys Sabina Ribeiro, *Mata galegos: Os portugueses e os conflitos do trabalho na República Velha* (São Paulo: Brasiliense, 1990).

38. Patricia Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey in Colonial Mexico: Conflicts over Marriage Choice, 1574–1821* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988); and "Marriage Promises and the Value of a Woman's Testimony in Colonial Mexico," *Signs* 13, no. 2 (Winter 1988):253–76. See also Susan Socolow, "Acceptable Partners: Marriage Choice in Colonial Argentina,

was one's "quality" (*calidad* or *qualidade*), which was defined according to status, wealth, occupation, civic status, nationality, and race.³⁹ Honor had to be safeguarded through virtuous conduct and could be compromised in different ways according to one's gender. Masculine honor consisted of personal courage, the refusal to bear insults, keeping one's word, and protecting the sexual virtue of the women in one's household. Women retained honor by guarding their sexual purity and fidelity once married. Ideally, they were to remain secluded within the household to protect them better from corrupting influences or malicious rumors.⁴⁰

Couto Moreno's comments diverged from these traditional Iberian concepts of honor. He not only praised hardworking peasants and rural tenants for their industry but even expressed admiration for the active contribution of *liberta* wives in augmenting the family income.⁴¹ In his mind, being born a slave, having African ancestry, and humble socioeconomic status did not impede the attainment of honor. His opinions may reflect broader changes in the definition of honor within Iberian societies consistent with the norms of an emergent capitalist society.⁴² Unfortunately, scholars know little as yet about how the non-elite adapted or adopted Iberian concepts of honor, especially nonwhites who were influenced by indigenous or African traditions.⁴³

1778–1810," in *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, edited by Asunción Lavrin (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 209–51; Muriel Nazzari, *The Disappearance of the Dowry: Women, Family, and Social Change in São Paulo, Brazil (1600–1900)* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991); and Ramón Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came, the Corn Mothers Went Away: Marriage, Sexuality, and Power in New Mexico, 1500–1846* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1992).

39. Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came*, 190–93.

40. See the classic essay by Julian Pitt-Rivers, "Honour and Social Status," in *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, edited by J. G. Peristiany (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 19–78. In the case of Brazil, a dichotomy between the honorable private house and the dishonorable public street has been posited by Roberto da Matta in *Carnavais, malandros e heróis: Para uma sociologia do dilema brasileiro*, 2d ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1981). More recent analyses of the impact of the dichotomy between house and street from the perspective of nineteenth-century women include Dias, *Power and Everyday Life*, and Sandra Lauderdale Graham, *House and Street: The Domestic World of Servants and Masters in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

41. Couto Moreno adopted a different yardstick of honor for elite women, as will be shown.

42. Over time in Spanish America, honoring a verbal pledge became less important than maximizing one's financial interest. Honor was increasingly measured more according to financial status in the eighteenth century. Racial status also became more important with the publication of the Pragmática Real of 1776, which stipulated that marriage should be contracted by equals in terms of race and socioeconomic status. See Seed, *To Love, Honor, and Obey*, 95–147; 200–226; and Gutiérrez, *When Jesus Came*, especially chaps. 5 and 7. Also see Susan Socolow, "Acceptable Partners: Marriage Choice in Colonial Argentina, 1778–1810," in Lavrin, *Sexuality and Marriage in Colonial Latin America*, 209–51.

43. Two recent studies that address concepts of honor among the non-elite are Ana María Alonso's study of Chihuahuan peasants on the frontier, *Thread of Blood: Colonization, Revolution and Gender on Mexico's Northern Frontier* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1995); and

NATIVISM AND NATION: ANTI-PORTUGUESE BACKLASH
IN THE SERTÃO MINEIRO

In the decades following Brazilian independence, the Brazilian rural elite experienced rapid political and social changes that touched even the most remote municipalities. During the reign of Dom Pedro I (1822–1831) and the Regency (1831–1840), the emerging Brazilian state decentralized government at the provincial level while centralizing control over municipal administration. The *lei dos municípios* of 1828 eliminated many of the autonomous prerogatives that municipalities had enjoyed during the colonial period. This law was followed by the Ato Adicional of 1834 requiring that all municipal laws, initiatives, and spending be ratified by the provincial assembly on a case-by-case basis. The military also underwent reform. Local militias were replaced by a locally organized and elected civilian Guarda Nacional in 1831, and the military was subsequently downsized.⁴⁴

Counterreforms of the 1840s gradually brought municipal institutions under centralized control by substituting appointment for local election or nomination as the basis for holding municipal office. Locally elected justices of the peace lost many of their powers to appointed police *delegados* and *subdelegados* and to *juizes de direito* (magistrates at the comarca level) in 1841. Selection of officers of the Guarda Nacional and *juizes municipais* was also brought under central control. Social and economic changes occasioned by these institutional reforms led to several regional revolts that culminated in the Praieira Revolt of 1849.

A number of these revolts had nativist content that manifested itself in conflicts between Brazilian-born citizens and naturalized Portuguese residents. Strife between the two groups was often rooted in economic and political competition. Dom Pedro I's policy of favoring the Portuguese-born in appointments to cabinet posts and the Conselho do Estado fueled this rivalry. When Pedro I abdicated the throne in 1831 to return to Portugal, Brazilians' responses were divided. His supporters formed a restorationist party, while agitators fomented unsuccessful armed rebellions in 1833 in Barbacena, Minas Gerais, and in the Cabanos Revolt in Pernambuco between 1831 and 1834.⁴⁵ The restorationist threat ended when Pedro I died in Portugal in 1834.

Sandra Lauderdale Graham's essay "Honor among Slaves" in *The Faces of Honor: Essays on Colonial Latin America*, edited by Lyman Johnson and Sonya Lipsett Rivera (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, forthcoming).

44. See Jeanne Berrance de Castro, "As milicias nacionais," *Revista de História* (Apr.-June 1968):377–89; Fernando Uricoechea, *The Patrimonial Foundations of the Brazilian Bureaucratic State* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980); and Maria Auxiliadora Faria, "A Guarda Nacional em Minas, 1831–1873," M.A. thesis, Universidade de Paraná, Curitiba, 1977.

45. Manoel Correia de Andrade, "The Social and Ethnic Significance of the War of the Ca-

Manoel Correia de Andrade, a historian of the Cabanos Revolt, has identified the abdication of Dom Pedro I in 1831 as a critical moment in which pro-Portuguese sentiment was the exception rather than the rule: "For the great majority of Brazilians, the gesture of abdication signified the nationalization of the government, the expulsion of the Portuguese and of the absolutists from key posts and from political offices. Political instability and difficult economic conditions led the people to desperation."⁴⁶ Rich and poor formed temporary alliances created by anti-Portuguese sentiment. In Salvador, resentment of Portuguese merchants helped fuel the Sabinada revolt of 1837–1838.⁴⁷ Popular protest against Portuguese favoritism also found expression among racially mixed caboclos of Pará in the Cabanagem Rebellion of 1835–1840.⁴⁸

In 1831 the Brazilian-born population of Januária, free and slave, took part in this broader pattern of unrest. They became embroiled in a conspiracy to remove the Portuguese from government positions following the abdication of Dom Pedro I. Their colleagues in the neighboring municipalities of Montes Claros, Grão Mogol, and São Romão joined them. News of a massacre of Portuguese residents across the border in Bahia had touched off corresponding anti-Portuguese sentiment in Northern Minas. In São Romão, Manoel Alves Pamplona, a "revolutionary" from Xique-Xique, Bahia, gathered a group of armed thugs and slaves to harass one long-term Portuguese resident, his Brazilian wife, and their children. Rumors circulated in neighboring Montes Claros that the justice of the peace, José Pinheiro Neves, had concealed government orders to kill all Portuguese-born residents.⁴⁹

In 1831 Couto Moreno submitted more than sixty pages of documentation to the provincial president (including footnotes explaining regional vocabulary), describing a drama played out between the Brazilian-born and the Portuguese-born of Januária.⁵⁰ He provided a richly detailed account of nativist conflict featuring an extensive cast of characters. Al-

banos," in *Protest and Rebellion in Angola and Brazil*, edited by Ronald Chilcote (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), 91–107; and *A guerra dos cabanos* (Rio de Janeiro: Conquista, 1965). See also Carvalho, *Hegemony and Rebellion in Pernambuco*.

46. Manoel Correia de Andrade, "Social and Ethnic Significance," 95.

47. Hendrik Kraay, "As Terrifying as Unexpected."

48. John Charles Chasteen, "Cabanos and Farrapos"; and John Hemming, *Amazon Frontier: The Defeat of the Brazilian Indians* (London: Macmillan, 1987), chap. 12.

49. APM SP PP 1/18, caixa 138, doc. 3, Lourenço Vieira de Azevedo Coutinho to PPMG, 8 Aug. 1831; doc. 4, justice of the peace of Grão Mogol to PPMG, 31 Aug. 1831; doc. 6, Lourenço Vieira de Azevedo Coutinho to PPMG, 16 Feb. 1832. SP PP 1/18, caixa 196, doc. 1, justice of the peace of São Romão to PPMG, 6 Aug. 1832; SP PP 1/18, caixa 196, doc. 16, Pedro Antonio Correia Bittancourt to PPMG, 2 June 1833; SP PP 1/41, doc. 2, João Pereira da Costa to Luiz de Vasconcelos Parada e Souza, 2 Apr. 1832.

50. APM, SP PP 1/15, caixa 13, doc. 1, José Ignacio do Couto Moreno to Colonel Bittancourt, 19 May 1831, 25 May 1831, and 26 May 1831; Couto Moreno to PPMG, 28 May 1831, and incomplete fragment, n.d.; doc. 2, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 31 May 1831; Tomás Anto-

though his rambling style was often repetitive and melodramatic to the verge of histrionics, Couto Moreno differed from his long-winded contemporaries in providing tantalizing insights about persons of color and Afro-Brazilian customs. Being Portuguese-born, he had not internalized Afro-Brazilian customs into his everyday life and noticed them in a way that his Brazilian-born colleagues could not.

Although Couto Moreno claimed to be Brazilian in his loyalty to the Brazilian Empire, his cultural values and aspirations remained European, making him a quintessential Latin American liberal, as defined by Bradford Burns.⁵¹ In this set of documents, Couto Moreno defined himself in opposition to the Brazilian-born elite on moral grounds but also in terms of cultural differences. His comments reveal considerable ethnic friction based on competition for official positions in the nascent imperial government in the São Francisco region, comparable to rivalries elsewhere in Brazil at the time. Brazilians in Brejo do Salgado perceived that the Portuguese-born enjoyed preferential status, which heightened animosity among members of the elite despite commonalities of race and class.

Conflict between Portuguese and Brazilians was hardly a new development in Minas Gerais. The earliest well-documented case dates back to the war of the *emboabas* between the mestiço Paulista backwoodsmen and Portuguese immigrants in 1708–1709.⁵² *Emboaba* (“tenderfoot”) was a scornful term applied to the booted, citified Portuguese by the hairy-legged, barefoot Paulistas. A decade later in 1720, a group of land-owners in São Romão initiated a separatist movement in response to the arrival of overly zealous Portuguese tax collectors.⁵³ Brazilian miners revolted periodically against Portuguese restrictions, culminating in the Inconfidência Mineira in 1789.⁵⁴ In the nineteenth century, the Portuguese acquired a new nickname, *os pés-de-chumbo* (“leadfeet”).⁵⁵

Ethnic differentiation between Portuguese migrants and Brazilian-born inhabitants has received surprisingly little analysis by historians,

nio da Costa Alkmim to Couto Moreno, 24 Mar. 1831; doc 3, José Januário de Souza Osório to PPMG, 3 Oct. 1831; Antonio de Araujo Ferreira Júnior to PPMG, 11 Sept. 1831, Leopoldo Antonio Joaquim de Souza, 11 Sept. 1831, Francisco Paula Pereira Proença to PPMG, 25 Sept. 1831; doc. 4, Lieutenant Colonel Luiz Vasconcelos Parada e Souza to PPMG, 22 Oct. 1831.

51. E. Bradford Burns, *The Poverty of Progress: Latin America in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1983).

52. Charles Boxer, *The Golden Age of Brazil, 1695–1750: Growing Pains of a Colonial Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969).

53. Carla Maria Junho Anastácia, “Potentados e bandidos: Os motins do São Francisco,” *Revista do Departamento de História* 9 (1989):74–85 (published by the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais in Belo Horizonte).

54. A classic analysis of the Inconfidência Mineira is Kenneth Maxwell, *Conflicts and Conspiracies: Brazil and Portugal, 1750–1808* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

55. One of the anonymous reviewers of this article directed me to the work of Gladys Ribeiro, “‘Cabras’ e ‘pés-de-chumbo,’ os rolos do tempo: O antilusitanismo na cidade do Rio de Janeiro,” M.A. thesis, Universidade Federal Fluminense, Niterói, 1987.

even though political and economic competition between the two groups has been documented more fully.⁵⁶ In this essay, I am referring specifically to the cultural differences that divided the European Portuguese from American Brazilians, not antagonisms that developed over competition for resources. In the case of the economic and political elite of the colony and the Brazilian Empire, scholars have failed to address how Brazilians and Portuguese might have constituted distinct ethnic groups, perhaps because they have been perceived as having common class interests.

This tendency may have been exacerbated by biases inherent in the myth of racial democracy. Since the publication of Gilberto Freyre's *Casa grande e senzala*, many scholars of Brazilian history have upheld the notion that the Portuguese were a peculiarly adaptable people with a seemingly infinite capacity for miscegenation, racial tolerance, and acculturation.⁵⁷ Yet this propensity of Portuguese men to engage in sexual relations with African, Asian, and indigenous women throughout the Portuguese Empire in the absence of white women does not necessarily imply that cultural syncretism automatically took place as well. In recent decades, the myth of racial democracy has been refuted by various studies offering ample historical evidence of socioeconomic discrimination against people of color in Brazil.⁵⁸ But the cultural corollary to this myth has not been challenged. The extent to which Brazilians and Africans may have resisted the absorption of the Portuguese and Portuguese norms in Brazil has received little attention.⁵⁹ And as the instance of José Ignacio do Couto

56. See note 10 for references.

57. Gilberto Freyre popularized this view in *The Masters and the Slaves*, translated by Samuel Putnam (New York: Knopf, 1944). For a discussion of race relations in the Portuguese Empire, see Charles Boxer, *Portuguese Society in the Tropics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965). On cultural adaptation, see A. J. R. Russell-Wood, *A World on the Move: The Portuguese in Africa, Asia, and America, 1415–1808* (New York: St. Martin's, 1992).

58. On the harshness of Brazilian slavery, see Robert Conrad, *Children of God's Fire: A Documentary History of Slavery in Brazil* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Conrad, *Worlds of Sorrow: The African Slave Trade to Brazil* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1986); Mary Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society, Bahia, 1500–1835* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); and Matoso, *To Be a Slave in Brazil*. Works that address racial ideology and discrimination in twentieth-century Brazil include Thomas E. Skidmore, *Black into White: Race and Nationality in Brazilian Thought*, 2d ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993); Carl N. Degler, *Neither Black nor White: Slavery and Race Relations in Brazil and the United States* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); Florestan Fernandes, *Branços e negros em São Paulo: Ensaio sociológico sobre aspectos da formação, manifestações atuais e efeitos do preconceito de cor na sociedade paulistana*, 2d ed. (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1959); and Fernandes, *A integração do negro na sociedade de classes*, 2 vols. (São Paulo: Dominus, 1965). George Reid Andrews has built on the foundation laid by Fernandes but has also challenged some of his assumptions in *Blacks and Whites in São Paulo, 1888–1988* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).

59. As an exception, A. J. R. Russell-Wood's research in progress suggests several ways in which Africans and their descendants may have actively rejected Portuguese culture.

Moreno will demonstrate, at least some Portuguese migrants proved unwilling or unable to adopt Brazilian ways.

The ways in which Portuguese migrants and Brazilians defined themselves ethnically also deserves further elaboration. Borrowing from Ana María Alonso's study of honor and gender in a Mexican frontier region, I define ethnicity as "a subjective belief in . . . common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration."⁶⁰ Brazilian-born residents of Brejo do Salgado shared a subjective collective ethnic identity not only as Brazilians but as sertanejos, people of the interior who differed from Couto Moreno's continental sensibilities. The multiple ways in which they conceptualized themselves as sertanejos varied according to class, birth, racial category, and political stance.

Since colonial times, the sertão has been the subject of ambiguous but predominantly pejorative cultural constructions formulated by outsiders. The Portuguese originally used the term *sertão* to signify undeveloped lands on the European continent, in West Central Africa, and in Brazil. In the New World portion of the Portuguese Empire, it became associated with a semi-arid, sparsely populated cattle range, a place of danger and possible mineral wealth.⁶¹ Because of the Brazilian sertão's environmental constraints and isolation from coastal markets, few Portuguese settled in the sertão during the first two centuries of colonial occupation. But the discovery of substantial alluvial gold deposits in Minas Gerais at the turn of the eighteenth century spurred the development of extensive ranching and intensified trade throughout the Northeast to provision the booming mines.

The unpredictability of the sertão environment was believed to have a deleterious effect on its inhabitants. Colonialist A. J. R. Russell-Wood has aptly characterized the sertão as a psychological frontier that represented a potentially hostile space inhabited by marginal types that included Indians, *bandeirante* adventurers, cowboys, criminals, fugitives, deserters, and quasi-feudal lords. He elaborated, "It was barbarous, chaotic, unchristian, uncivilized, and hostile to those values and tenets—justice, Christianity, orderliness, stability, good governance—which the Portuguese held dear. It was a region forsaken by God and unknown to civilized man. In short, civilization and orthodoxy stopped where the *sertão* began. The concept was essentially ethnocentric, the conceit of colo-

60. This definition comes from Max Weber, *Economy and Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 389, as cited by Alonso in *Thread of Blood*.

61. Warren Dean, "The Frontier in Brazil," in *Frontier in Comparative Perspective: The United States and Brazil*, Wilson Center Latin American Program Working Paper no. 188 (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 1990), 15–27; Anthony L. Hall, *Drought and Irrigation in Northeast Brazil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Manuel Correia de Andrade, *The Land and People of Northeast Brazil*, translated by Dennis V. Johnson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1980), esp. 6–40 and 141–77.

nial administrators, Catholic missionaries, and colonists who prided themselves as representatives of civilization as understood by the Portuguese."⁶²

Prejudice against the sertão continued into the nineteenth century and was subtly transformed according to the Europeanizing rhetoric of modernization. Most Brazilian intellectuals and authorities as well as foreign travelers portrayed sertanejos in unflattering terms. Their environment supposedly engendered personal vices and economic mismanagement. Sertanejos embodied all ills that retarded economic growth and progress: lazy, shiftless, imprudent spendthrifts who preferred the idle pleasures of fishing and hunting to the labor of the plow, they frittered away their meager earnings on drink, women, and gambling instead of accumulating capital. Most inhabitants of the interior were racially mixed, a fact frequently invoked as an explanatory factor for frontier backwardness.⁶³

The sertão was denigrated by imperial statesmen as a retrograde region capable of neither intelligent political behavior nor economic productivity. The Brazilian Minister of Justice claimed in 1841 that the sertão "constitutes a part of society separate from our coast and many of our districts and villages, and is characterized principally by barbaric customs, ferocious acts, and horrible crimes."⁶⁴ A dichotomy was drawn between coast and interior, urban and rural, civilized and uncivilized. This attitude persisted during the República Velha (1889–1930), finding its most articulate and forceful expression in the works of Euclides da Cunha.⁶⁵ Many historians of the Brazilian Empire have accepted these biases uncritically in assuming that the sertanejo population was incapable of participating in politics in any meaningful way other than strict opportunism.⁶⁶

Coastal stereotypes of the interior were not completely inaccurate. In an analysis of the free poor of the interior of the state of São Paulo,

62. A. J. R. Russell-Wood, "Frontiers in Colonial Brazil: Reality, Myth and Metaphor," *Society and Government in Colonial Brazil, 1500–1822*, edited by Russell-Wood, Variorum Collected Studies Series (Hampshire, Engl.: Ashgate, 1992), 36–37.

63. In the early twentieth century, hygienists began to link the perceived laziness of the interior to disease rather than race. This transformation was embodied in the fictional backwoods character Jeca Tatú, who evolved from a racial degenerate to a frontiersman suffering from malnutrition, parasites, and disease. See Skidmore, *Black into White*: 2d ed., 271; Nancy Leys Stepan, "The Hour of Eugenics": *Race, Gender, and Nation in Latin America* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 157; and Dain Borges, "'Puffy, Ugly, Slothful, and Inert': Degeneration in Brazilian Social Thought, 1880–1940," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 25, pt. 2 (May 1993):235–47.

64. Paulino José Soares de Sousa, *Relatório do Ministro da Justiça, 1841*, 19, cited in Ilmar Rohloff de Mattos, *O Tempo Saquarema*, 34.

65. Euclides da Cunha, *Rebellion in the Backlands*, translated by Samuel Putnam (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1944).

66. Stuart B. Schwartz, "Elite Politics and the Growth of a Peasantry in Late Colonial Brazil," in Russell-Wood, *From Colony to Nation*, 145; Flory, *Judge and Jury*, 11; Maria Isaura Pereira Queiroz, *O mandonismo na vida política brasileira* (São Paulo: Alfa-Omega, 1976); Oliviera Vianna, *O ocaso do Império*, 3d ed. (Rio de Janeiro: José Olympio, 1959), 19.

Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco has argued that the formal liberal norms of the constitutional monarchy had little meaning within the “*código do sertão*,” a custom-based ethic grounded in legitimized violence.⁶⁷ The code of the sertão demanded that men constantly assert their valor through their personal courage, willingness to fight, and refusal to bear personal insults. To resolve disputes, sertanejos preferred immediate violent solutions over ponderous institutional mechanisms. Such attitudes were not limited to São Paulo, flourishing also in the sertão mineiro, as regional police records attest.⁶⁸

Not everyone accepted such negative images, but praise for sertanejos’ intelligence, robust health, and capacity for hard work was the exception rather than the rule.⁶⁹ Officials from the mineiro north occasionally expressed pride in the horsemanship, fighting abilities, and endurance of the local inhabitants.⁷⁰ I have shown elsewhere that during the Brazilian Empire, inhabitants of the sertão mineiro sought actively to counteract coastal assumptions of barbarism, primitivism, violence, and political inertia. For the few local politicians with progressive ambitions for this region, securing resources from the provincial government required recasting of the sertão’s backward image. They sought to combat the views of urban politicians who justified the sertão’s political and economic marginalization by characterizing the region as the antithesis of order and progress.

In this regard, Couto Moreno was not entirely consistent. Despite his professed love of Brejo do Salgado, he found much to criticize. In documents sent to provincial authorities, he provided ample testimony that the local population, especially members of its administrative and political elite, led anything but an orderly and civilized existence. Couto Moreno informed on voters who failed to take their duties seriously by not voting in elections or making a mockery of voting procedures.⁷¹ He ques-

67. Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco, *Homens livres no ordem escravocrata* (São Paulo: Atica, 1972).

68. Bieber Freitas, “Marginal Elites” chap. 6.

69. Otávio Barboza Carneiro, *De Pirapora a Joazeiro pelo Rio São Francisco: Conferência lida na Sociedade Nacional de Agricultura, no dia 23 de agosto de 1921* (Belo Horizonte: Imprensa Oficial, 1921), 17.

70. APMSP PP 1/18, caixa 196, doc. 16, Pedro Antonio Correia Bittancourt to PPMG, 2 June 1833. SP PP 1/33, caixa 289, p. 33, Council of São Romão to PPMG, 1 Dec. 1840. John Chasteen has documented similar aspects of regional identity in the frontier area between Uruguay and Brazil in *Heroes on Horseback: A Life and Times of the Last Gaucho Caudillo* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995). See also Alonso’s discussion of images of frontier *norteño* fighters in Chihuahua in *Thread of Blood*.

71. In one letter, Couto Moreno criticized voters by raising a series of ironic and presumably rhetorical questions about protocol, including “Was it appropriate that voters get up, sit down, walk around, leave the room, come in or gossip as the mood struck them?” APM, SP PP 1/11, p. 47, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 11 Nov. 1828.

tioned whether or not the local population had the capacity to comprehend the meaning of the constitution.⁷² He also reported on corruption and electoral violence,⁷³ relayed petty intrigues between rival districts,⁷⁴ and criticized negligent and immoral priests.⁷⁵

In his outsider's account of the nativist revolt, Couto Moreno did not uphold the pretense of disinterested observer seeking the truth but placed the uprising within the context of a family feud between himself and his in-laws from his first marriage, including his father-in-law, Colonel Bittancourt, and his Brazilian brothers-in-law, Captain Silva Gomes and Captain Francisco Proença (who was also the justice of the peace). In 1831, while he was away on a trip to Ouro Preto, the provincial capital, Couto Moreno's brothers-in-law tried to turn Colonel Bittancourt against him. Rivalry over military promotions and an acrimonious land dispute fanned smoldering jealousy into flames. Proença and Silva Gomes had purchased a parcel of supposedly unoccupied land that actually belonged to Couto Moreno's second mother-in-law. Enmity between the two factions developed not only because of the land itself but because the mother-in-law's honor had been compromised due to the "indiscreet act of obliging a widow more than sixty years old to appear in a public hearing."⁷⁶

On Couto Moreno's return, he was received coldly by his commanding officer and father-in-law, Colonel Bittancourt. His brothers-in-law had begun to circulate rumors that Couto Moreno had orders from the capital to enslave Brazilian-born people of color, a majority of the population of Januária. Proença claimed to have orders from the central government to arrest Portuguese residents. Free blacks began to associate possible enslavement with "pés de chumbo" and mobilized against the local Portuguese population. A bold slave even voiced his opinion at a gathering at Proença's house: "Senhores, it is you who are guilty for allowing the pés-de-chumbo to govern us, because for a long time, as my senhor has said, you should have removed them from government and put an end to them!!!!"⁷⁷

The conflict quickly escalated into a community drama that pitted Portuguese-born residents against Brazilians. Couto Moreno's defenders included some of his own troops, the Portuguese-born town vicar, and his fellow "adopted Brazilians." In the Proença camp were the entire Silva Gomes clan, numerous other kin who occupied high places in municipal

72. APM SP PP 1/11, caixa 146, p. 31, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 23 Feb. 1828, and p. 47, 11 Nov. 1828.

73. AN, AP07, caixa 8, pac. 1, no. 1: copy of letter by Ignacio José do Couto Moreno to PPMG, 26 Jan. 1849.

74. APM, SP PP 1/18, caixa 306, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 1 Aug. 1835; SP PP 1/33, caixa 103, p. 9, 2 June 1834; SP PP 1/33, caixa 104, p. 2, 23 Feb. 1836.

75. APM SP PP 1/45 caixa 1, p. 25, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 27 Mar. 1852.

76. APM, SP PP 1/15, caixa 13, doc. 1, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 28 May 1831.

77. *Ibid.*

government, a “quack doctor,” a priest with dubious credentials, and a motley crew that included Proença’s cowboys and several professional hit men, one nicknamed “Bonaparte.” The supporting cast consisted of a chorus of free people of color, including an unnamed woman of color who supervised the black community’s religious festivals in the church of Nossa Senhora do Rosário, assorted soldiers, a group of slave and freedmen gamblers and rioters, slave messengers, and gossiping laundresses.

Trouble began one night in May of 1831, when Proença, Silva Gomes, and some of their henchmen attacked Portuguese-born Captain José Luiz da Costa Araujo Arcos in his home shouting, “Long live Dom Pedro II and death to the scoundrel Portuguese.” The frightened Arcos was forced to flee his house in his slippers and was unable to enlist the aid of Colonel Bittancourt. A Portuguese merchant, José Joaquim Loredó, suffered a similar attack at the hands of two thugs, both allegedly under the protection of Colonel Bittancourt. The criminals, some soldiers, and Proença arrived in a drunken and noisy throng and demanded that Loredó dance the *batuque* (a sensual and energetic African dance often identified as the precursor to samba). The poor man had no knowledge of the Afro-Brazilian dance, but some of the more inebriated intruders paired off and insisted that he dance with them. Amidst gunshots aimed at his feet, Proença and Silva Gomes mocked him, “Joaquim, you devil! You dance the *batuque* better than I do.”⁷⁸

During the week before a celebration scheduled to commemorate the succession of Brazilian-born Dom Pedro II, the townspeople, led by Francisco Proença and Silva Gomes, took to the street, singing, dancing, and shouting “death to the *pés-de-chumbo*, death to these devils, long live the Brazilians.” Anti-Portuguese sentiment extended to all Europeans, including two Azoreans and an Englishman named Carlos Ashley who was married to a Brazilian woman. Two locals stole a quarter of beef from Ashley, claiming that stealing from *pés-de-chumbo* was no crime. They then protected themselves by turning over part of the stolen meat to the justice of the peace, the rebellious Francisco Proença.

The conspirators planned a massacre of the Portuguese to take place during the celebration of Espírito Santo and the acclamation of Dom Pedro II. Knowledge of the event was widespread. Even rural washerwomen gossiped about the upcoming attack. Despite his fears, Couto Moreno felt compelled to attend the festivities, not wanting it to be said that he refused to attend because he was a *pé-de-chumbo*. The patriotic Couto Moreno staunchly affirmed that he would not turn his back on the country that he had voluntarily chosen, and if necessary, he would die as a true citizen in defense of his rights guaranteed by the constitution. Musing over the causes of his persecution, he speculated, “By chance, is it be-

78. Ibid.

cause of the esteem I feel for Dom Pedro I? . . . Could it be for shouting vivas to the constitution?! I am frank by nature, education, and profession. Therefore I affirm that I loved and still love D. Pedro as my sovereign. I love him as an unfortunate and ill-advised monarch. I love him because he is the father of D. Pedro II, my present august monarch, as I love my revered superiors. If this be a punishable crime, I confess that I cannot change. I am old and a creature of habit; have patience with me."⁷⁹

Couto Moreno still felt a personal attachment to the autocratic Portuguese-born ruler in exile. Yet by swearing allegiance to his Brazilian-born son, Couto Moreno affirmed his willingness to adhere to the precepts of the Brazilian Constitution. It is unclear whether the local community viewed him as an absolutist or not. In any event, the buildup of this elaborate social drama ended in an anticlimactic conclusion. The general massacre of non-Brazilians did not take place on the day of the festival. Couto Moreno remained unharmed. Only twenty-six Europeans (most but not all of them Portuguese) lived in the municipality, spread over a territory extending hundreds of square kilometers.⁸⁰ Some of these individuals were harassed, threatened, or beaten, but none were killed. One vicar was attacked for preaching tolerance for Europeans in the pulpit.

Retelling this account is more significant than dredging up a little-known episode of nativist sentiment in the sertão mineiro. It serves to illustrate how locally generated bureaucratic sources can permit re-creation of some of the subtleties of ethnic identity and political culture at the community level. In reporting this incident, Couto Moreno graphically demonstrated the importance of kinship in shaping personal alliances and animosities. In a community where everyone seemed to be interrelated to some degree, kinship was invoked selectively according to personal and political self-interest.⁸¹ Couto Moreno's account reveals subtleties of social competition and cooperation that cut across categories of race, class, and culture.

Most Januarenses seem to have supported Dom Pedro II as a Brazilian monarch and voiced suspicions of Portuguese settlers who might favor the return of the absolutist Pedro I, distinctly a product of Portugal. Two years later, during the revolt of Barbacena in 1833, a local commander offered to help fight the rebels, exclaiming with pride, "If the nation needs volunteers, we have them and they couldn't be tougher for they are robust sertanejos!"⁸² Sertanejo identification with the five-year-old blond and blue-eyed emperor-to-be was no stranger than the contention expressed

79. APM, SP PP 1/15, caixa 13, p. 1, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 28 May 1831.

80. Europeans included immigrants from Portugal, the Azores, Germany, and Great Britain.

81. For an excellent discussion of the complexities of defining kinship in the Brazilian interior, see Linda Lewin, *Politics and Parentela in Paraíba: A Case Study of Family-Based Oligarchy in Brazil* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987).

82. APM SP PP 1/18, caixa 196, doc. 16, P. A. C. Bittancourt to PPMG, 2 June 1833.

by one Bahian mulatto that Dom Pedro II was “cabra como nós” (black like us). Stuart Schwartz’s essay “The Formation of Colonial Identity in Brazil” draws attention to this anonymous mulatto’s words to suggest a notion of race based on Brazilian birth and socialization, not on the color of one’s skin.⁸³

The racial and cultural mix of northern Minas contained strong African infusions that contributed to construction of a distinctive regional identity at odds with imported European norms. Couto Moreno revealed that some members of the Brazilian-born elite classified as whites enjoyed a degree of social intimacy with low-status blacks. Proença and his family allegedly liked to gamble with freed blacks (*forros*) but also with their own slaves. On the estate owned by Silva Gomes, *senhores* as well as slaves indulged in the *jogo de búzios*, a Yoruba-based form of divination using cowry shells. Slaves and freed blacks attended political meetings, socialized, danced, drank, gambled, and fought with members of elite families. Slaves were also entrusted with messages requiring lengthy unsupervised journeys.

Although slaves, the free poor, and planters had differing degrees of access to political power and economic resources, affective distance seems to have been minimal.⁸⁴ The fact that the economic divide between rich and poor in this region was narrower than in the wealthier coastal regions may have contributed to this closeness but does not fully explain it. In some isolated frontier regions, ethnic differentiation and separation can be even more accentuated if the hold of “civilization” seems precarious.⁸⁵ This situation does not seem to have been the case in Brejo do Salgado, where social intimacy allowed for cultural interchange between those of African and Portuguese descent.

The discovery that members of the rural elite adopted Afro-Brazilian customs is hardly novel. More than half a century has elapsed since Gilberto Freyre first drew attention to the ways in which Africans have contributed to Brazilian language, cuisine, and customs.⁸⁶ Although the scholarly bibliography dealing with African cultural contributions in the New World is extensive, most scholars have focused on syncretism in Afro-American communities, neglecting the process by which the “dominant society” absorbed non-European customs.⁸⁷

83. Stuart B. Schwartz, “The Formation of Colonial Identity in Brazil,” in *Colonial Identity in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, edited by Nicholas Canny and Anthony Pagden (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 15–50.

84. This pattern corresponds more to African conceptions of slavery. See Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, “Slavery as an Institution of Marginality,” in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, edited by Miers and Kopytoff (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 1–83.

85. Alonso, *Thread of Blood*.

86. Freyre, *Masters and the Slaves*.

87. For an example, see the essays in *Africa in Latin America*, edited by Manuel Moreno Frag-

The fact that some elite families in Januária had adopted customs of African origin might never have been revealed in the historical record had Couto Moreno, an outsider, not witnessed and recorded such behaviors. For these Brazilians, such practices were integrated into their own identity to such an extent that it merited no commentary at all. The Brazilian national political elite, however, later attacked such African-based manifestations of Brazilian identity as antithetical to modernization and international respectability. Toward the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, the Brazilian government began to outlaw Afro-Brazilian practices such as capoeira and samba.⁸⁸ Couto Moreno, whose idea of being Brazilian involved faithful adherence to the precepts of the constitutional monarchy, criticized his adversaries as transgressors of liberal government while drawing official attention to their active participation in non-European customs and activities, including the batuque and the jogo de búzios.⁸⁹ Couto Moreno's enemies, in contrast, claimed to be genuinely Brazilian, as opposed to the recently arrived Portuguese interlopers.

Although references to Afro-Brazilian behavior practiced by the *povo* (folk) were common, evidence of elite participation in such customs is comparatively rare. As late as 1888, ambitious local officials sought to discredit municipal police chiefs by reporting their sponsorship of Afro-Brazilian batuques and distribution of licenses to sell *aguardente* to the revelers.⁹⁰ Practicing customs of African origin did not necessarily translate into racial tolerance, however. Members of the Brazilian-born elite of Januária rigorously defended the social status that came with *limpeza de sangue* (racial purity). Francisco Proença indulged in batuques and the jogo de búzios in his leisure but opposed the upward mobility of racially mixed people. For example, he consistently sought to block the social ascension of his "brother-in-law," José dos Santos Pereira, by discrediting his credentials and racial origins.⁹¹

inals (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1984). Patricia Ann Aufderheide has used inquisition records to document examples of Portuguese settlers who illicitly consulted African ritual experts. See Aufderheide, "True Confessions: The Inquisition and Social Attitudes in Brazil at the Turn of the XVII Century," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 10, no. 2 (Winter 1973):208–40.

88. Thomas H. Holloway, "A Healthy Terror": Police Repression of *Capoeiras* in Nineteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 69, no. 4 (Nov. 1989):637–76; and Holloway, *Policing Rio de Janeiro: Repression and Resistance in a Nineteenth-Century City* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993).

89. APM SP PP 1/11, caixa 146, p. 31, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 23 Feb. 1828 and p. 47, 11 Nov. 1828; APM, SP PP 1/18, caixa 306, José Ignácio do Couto Moreno to PPMG, 1 Aug. 1835; SP PP 1/33, caixa 103, p. 9, 2 June 1834; SP PP 1/33, caixa 104, p. 2, 23 Feb. 1836. AN, AP07, caixa 8, pac. 1, no. 1: copy of letter by Ignácio José do Couto Moreno to PPMG, 26 Jan. 1849. APM SP PP 1/45 caixa 1, p. 25, Couto Moreno to PPMG, 27 Mar. 1852.

90. APM SP SeP 1/3, doc. 63, second substitute police delegate of São Francisco to PPMG, 31 Aug. 1888 and doc. 70, juiz de direito of São Francisco, 24 Sept. 1888.

91. APM, SP PP 1/33, caixa 103, doc. 19, P. A. C. Bittancourt to PPMG, 7 Sept. 1834.

Santos Pereira was the illegitimate son of a slave, Maria Crioula, and Sebastião da Silva Gomes, Proença's father-in-law. One of the wealthiest landowners of the district, Silva Gomes had freed his son at birth and acknowledged paternity. José dos Santos Pereira became embroiled in Proença's intrigues when the latter's cousin, José Lopes da Rocha, hired Pereira as a lawyer in a case against Proença. Proença alleged that Santos Pereira, in addition to suffering "deficiency of character" was no lawyer at all but a mere tailor. Proença claimed that Santos Pereira's only professional training had taken place at the "universities of the needle, thimble, iron, scissors, ruler and tape measure." Proença also tried to discredit Santos Pereira by identifying him with the restorationist party favoring the return of Dom Pedro I.⁹²

Despite his humble beginnings, José dos Santos Pereira was a talented man who was greatly sought after for official posts. In 1838, for example, he served concurrently as public schoolteacher, councilman, and interim secretary for nine months, illegally collecting two government salaries simultaneously. In 1842 Santos Pereira was again called on to fill two positions, this time as schoolteacher and postal agent.⁹³ In 1847 he was elected councilman concurrently with his brother, José da Silva Gomes. Proença questioned this appointment on the grounds of kinship incompatibility, observing that the Silva Gomes clan recognized Santos Pereira as the natural issue of the family patriarch. Proença had hoped to serve on the council but did not disqualify himself from the running even though Silva Gomes was his own brother-in-law. Although by definition they shared the same *parentela*, Proença accused only Santos Pereira of breaking the law, conveniently overlooking his own ties to the Silva Gomes clan through marriage. The council threw out Proença's complaint. Santos Pereira was sworn in and went on to serve numerous terms on the town council.⁹⁴

Proença's objections were not based solely on racial considerations. His illegitimate brother-in-law Santos Pereira was frequently chosen for administrative posts that Proença coveted. Objections to Santos Pereira, however, were not limited to the petty jealousy of his disgruntled "brother-in-law." When Pereira was nominated for the position of country prosecutor, he was accused of embezzling public funds and horse stealing. His free status was also questioned. One malcontent insulted Santos by calling him "*uma autoridade crioulo*" ("a nigger authority") so poor that he did not even own a home to live in. While many members of the local elite were classified as white, they probably contained some racial admixture. Few, however, were born of slave mothers or lacked ma-

92. APM SP PP 1/33, caixa 103, pp. 27 and 28, 14 Nov. and 18 Nov. 1834.

93. APM SP PP 1/33, caixa 105, doc. 36, 15 Oct. 1838; caixa 106, doc. 19, 26 Sept. 1840, doc. 47, 20 July 1840; caixa 107, doc. 26, 16 Apr. 1844.

94. APM, SP PP 1/33, caixa 108, doc. 7, 29 June 1847.

terial wealth. For many, adopting Afro-Brazilian customs and mingling socially with slaves and free blacks was acceptable, but welcoming former slaves into the ranks of the elite was not. Santos Pereira's whiter and wealthier kin thus sought to block his access to the "mulatto escape hatch," despite his being recognized by a powerful white father.⁹⁵

RACE AND CULTURE: A PORTUGUESE IMMIGRANT INTERPRETS MISCEGENATION IN BRAZIL

Couto Moreno's attitudes diverged from those of his Brazilian-born neighbors in that he seems to have judged individuals according to merit rather than race. His understanding of race was exceptional for his day in that he did not bind race to an immutable set of cultural characteristics. Couto Moreno composed an exceptionally powerful statement on race and culture in a pamphlet published in 1821. Although the essay is signed only with the initials J. I. do C. M., various clues within the text seem to confirm Couto Moreno as its author.⁹⁶ The pamphlet bears an unwieldy title that translates "Letter from a *compadre* [godparent] of São Francisco of the North, to his godson in Rio de Janeiro, which complains of the parallel drawn between Indians and horses, not conceding to black men more dignity than that of the Kings of the Rosary, and the assertion that Brazil even now is still crawling in its infancy." The text draws clear distinctions among race, social customs, and ability. According to the standards of the day, it was couched in the language of cultural relativism. The author stated, "I am a citizen of the world, because I consider it the *pátria* of all men, and these are all brothers. . . . [B]e they born in Asia, Europe, Africa, or America, they are all men and all have a single origin. All are equally capable of good or evil. Only education, example, temperament, and free will that was conferred on them by the Supreme Creator of Nature makes them vary in sentiment and customs. . . ." ⁹⁷

In this document, Couto Moreno identifies himself as white and Portuguese-born: "It is necessary to observe . . . that I am white, notwithstanding the fact that one of my *apelidos* [surnames] is Moreno; yet it doesn't hurt to pass a comb through my hair. . . ." This statement led one scholar,

95. The term *mulatto escape hatch* was coined by Carl Degler to describe the potential for racial mobility through wealth, higher education, or marrying a lighter spouse and thereby whitening one's children. See Degler, *Neither Black nor White*.

96. Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, Rio de Janeiro, obras raras: *Carta do Compadre do Rio de S. Francisco do Norte, ao filho do compadre do Rio de Janeiro, qual se lhe queixa deo paralelo, que faz dos índios com os cavallos, de não conceder aos homens pretos maior dignidade, que a de reis do Rozário, e de asseverar, que o Brasil ainda agora está engatinhado. E crê provar o contrário de tudo isso. Por J. I. do C. M. Rio de Janeiro: Na Impressão Nacional, 1821*. The author stated that he was born in Portugal, had the surname (*apelido*) Moreno, and lived 200 leagues from Rio. He also implied a military background.

97. *Carta do Compadre*, 3–4.

who translated *apelido* as *nickname*, to conclude that the author was a racially mixed Brazilian, a *moreno* with light brown skin and straight black hair.⁹⁸ After establishing himself as a non-black, the author proceeded to defend people of color:

If many great men have not appeared among the blacks, it is because the servile condition in which they are placed among us does not allow it. In their country . . . how many heroes could they recount, had they known the prodigious art of transmitting their names to posterity . . . ? Without going further than our Brazil, there is Henrique Dias whom we all admire; was he not black? Did an accident of color impede him from achieving the greatest acts of fidelity, valor, and heroism during the reclamation of Pernambuco? And how many Henrique Diases would we have seen if their servile and miserable condition had not obstructed them? Many, certainly. Is the bold and valiant Corps of the King's Loyal Freedmen not made up of blacks? Did they not conduct themselves with honor and bravery in the war in the south? Do we not see among us members of military religious orders, black colonels and officers who fulfilled their duty and behaved with dignity? Do you not see very dignified *sacerdotes* and canons? Are the blacks less fit and apt for the Letters, Arts, and the mechanical trades? Certainly not, we have proof in abundance. Here and in Lisbon, we have witnessed black literary men and skillful artists. There, I knew among others, Dr. Padre Domingos, a lawyer of much worth and probity who has not been impeded by his dark color.⁹⁹

The pamphlet author's observations fit with the views that Couto Moreno expressed elsewhere in the 1830s. His yardstick of achievement for men of any race was based on European ideals. Military valor, professional accomplishments, manual skills, a willingness to work hard, and dignified and civilized comportment could be achieved by men of any race or culture. He was less sanguine about "going native" or preferring a more "primitive state." Yet in his remarks about Brazil's native inhabitants, Couto Moreno expresses a certain ambivalence. In response to the "compadre de Lisboa," he counters: "The Indians, your excellency says, don't take part in anything because they don't wish to. And why don't they want to take part? Because among them, the customs of their ancestors still prevail. Even more, the natural and spontaneous fertility of this very productive Brazil, in exchange for very little toil, meets their very modest natural requirements necessary for conserving their robust health, long lives, and precious and beloved freedoms; while our capricious inventions and extolled sciences consume and weaken us. . . ." ¹⁰⁰ Couto Moreno was speaking of Christianized Indians, however. He concluded in a more Eurocentric fashion that Indians were capable of mastering arts and letters and artisan trades and that population pressures would soon force the native Brazilians to take part in modern society.

98. Eduardo Silva, *Prince of the People: The Life and Times of a Brazilian Free Man of Color*, translated by Moyra Ashford (London: Verso, 1993), 144. I thank Silva for alerting me to the existence of this pamphlet in his book.

99. *Carta do Compadre*, 4–5.

100. *Ibid.*, 7–8.

In his discussion of Indians, Couto Moreno also criticized the racial intolerance espoused by some elite Brazilians:

When you debase the Indians, do you not also debase all of Brazil and the greater part of its inhabitants who by marriage or descent have something in common with these Indians? (Here my hair hurts.)¹⁰¹ With whom did the first Portuguese come together in their unions to propagate the race when they arrived in Brazil? Was it not with the affectionate and solicitous Indian women? It was, without a doubt; and from them descended many honored, noble, and illustrious families, without being any less honorable, noble, and illustrious than those who are or could be descended from the Romans, the Goths, and also the Moors and the Jews that according to my weak understanding are no less persons than any others of whom I made mention. . . .¹⁰²

Couto Moreno lived in a municipality that had been founded by mestiço Paulista bandeirante Matias Cardoso. A group of Indians still held title to a land grant given to them during the colonial era. Although the racial category of mestiço appeared only rarely in the household census, Couto Moreno's neighbors and in-laws probably had some indigenous admixture, and perhaps his children did as well.¹⁰³ The substantial slave population that worked in the small sugar mills of Brejo do Salgado also contributed to the municipality's racial mix. Couto Moreno was unusual in perceiving the potential worth of racially mixed people and judging them not by race but according to merit and culture (admittedly his own).

CONCLUSION: BEING BRAZILIAN IN THE SERTÃO MINEIRO

Documentation left by Couto Moreno reveals some of the subtleties of social and political life as experienced in one small town in the Brazilian interior. The meaning of "being Brazilian" was contested on multiple levels: ethnicity—Portuguese versus Brazilian-born; race—white, mulatto, black, or Indian; birth—free versus slave; and culture—modernizing and European versus traditional and Afro-Brazilian. His documents demonstrate how race and Afro-Brazilian customs could be used in attempts to discredit political aspirants in the municipal ambit. The crucial role of kinship in local politics also stands out.

The construction of these personalized documents reflects the exigencies of a broader political context. Men like Couto Moreno who came of age politically after independence told stories about themselves and their worlds to their superiors to legitimize their right to power. These personal narratives fulfilled personal as well as public purposes. The munic-

101. Presumably, Couto Moreno is alluding here to racially mixed relatives of his by marriage.

102. *Carta do Compadre*, 6.

103. Terms other than *mestiço* that might signify an indigenous and European mix, such as *caboclo* or *mameluco*, do not appear in the Brejo census or in other censuses taken in the municipality of Januária in the 1830s.

ipal elite, like the eighteenth century bourgeois Lamothe family of Bordeaux, used letters to define their own sense of personal status and reaffirm their place in society.¹⁰⁴ Self-presentation was a crucial part of political legitimization of emerging elites in newly formed states. Lester Seligman's essay on elite recruitment has emphasized the challenges faced by the political elite in rapidly emerging countries like imperial Brazil. Seligman argued that the emerging elite had to replace solidarity based on traditional loyalties with new values based on the concept of citizenship. These elites "incorporate the old virtues of family background and respected status plus the newer ones of education, skill, and heroic achievement on behalf of national liberation. The ruling class are emancipated children of the traditional social structure. While rejecting the old, they cannot help but embody it."¹⁰⁵

Members of the first generation of the imperial rural elite like Couto Moreno reflected this ambiguity in maintaining a mixture of colonial and imperial values. His letters reveal a premodern ethos that did not compartmentalize the public and private yet was overlaid with "modern" and "liberal" views such as "honor as virtue" and the terminology of constitutional government.¹⁰⁶ Couto Moreno achieved some ideological continuity between colony and nation by investing his loyalties in the person of the Brazilian monarch and the concepts of magisterial law and order. Although he invoked the personalized language of submissive vassal to paternal sovereign, he also imagined Brazil as a civilized and Europeanized country that embraced the principles of liberal government, pursued rational economic modernization, and eschewed "barbaric" customs. Like most members of the elite, his version of liberalism was economically and politically self-serving, emphasizing the right to private property and the maintenance of order rather than the extension of political participation to the popular classes.¹⁰⁷ But his vision clashed with that of his Brazilian-born neighbors, who transgressed European cultural norms associated with Latin American liberalism and incorporated Afro-Brazilian practices in their everyday life.

In *The Poverty of Progress*, intellectual historian Bradford Burns has argued that Europeanized notions of order and progress, although enthu-

104. Christine Adams, "Bourgeois Identity in Early Modern France: A Professional Family in Eighteenth-Century Bordeaux," Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1993.

105. Lester G. Seligman, "Elite Recruitment and Political Development," in *Political Development and Social Change*, edited by Jason L. Finkle and Richard W. Gable (New York: Wiley, 1971), 240–49.

106. When I use the terms *liberal* and *liberalism*, I am referring to political liberalism, or a system of government based on a constitution, division of powers, equal rights before the law, expanded civic rights, and limited suffrage. I am not referring to the Liberal and Conservative parties, which began to develop in Brazil only in the late 1830s and early 1840s.

107. Burns, *Poverty of Progress*, 8; and Viotti da Costa, *Brazilian Empire*.

siastically endorsed by the mainstream intellectual elite, met with stiff resistance from the rural sector in nineteenth-century Latin America. This opposition, Burns posited, came not only from “the folk” who resisted such misguided priorities through violence and support for traditional rural strongmen but also from the rural elite leaders’ “patriarchal preference” for maintaining a self-contained rural microcosm based on a pre-capitalist ethos. The absolute authority of estate owners was leavened by godparentage and racially mixed illegitimate children, providing links between social groups. Rural bosses shielded their dependents from modernization in exchange for ready access to occasional labor and (eventually) votes. This unequal reciprocity supposedly enabled a better quality of life than a “rational” division of land that absolutely excluded peasants.

Burns has offered an attractive reading of local self-determination for nineteenth-century Latin America that is plausible but difficult to document. His analysis was based largely on literary sources and political tracts. Sources written by municipal officials in the sertão mineiro over the course of the Brazilian Empire provide only suggestive hints of popular resistance to an increasingly centralized and intrusive state. Documentary evidence from the São Francisco region, however, provides some support for Burns’s hypothesis that at least some “traditional rural patriarchs” chose not to Europeanize their lives. The rural elite of the northern sertão was divided. Most officials did not endorse political, economic, or cultural alternatives to order and progress in any detail. But in their anxiety to prove their support for European values, such authorities elaborated on the culturally “deviant” ways of certain members of the rural elite whom they wished to discredit, thereby providing historical evidence of “resistance” to imported cultural norms. Couto Moreno was one such informant. Through his writings, readers learn that members of the rural elite like Francisco Proença and the Silva Gomes brothers practiced African customs and mixed socially with slaves and low-status blacks, much along the lines of Burn’s “patriarchal preference.”

Although Couto Moreno has been highlighted as a quintessential first-generation bureaucrat, he was not alone in his views or his propensity for expressing them. In neighboring Montes Claros, a number of public officials generated masses of official correspondence replete with unofficial details within a constitutional and liberal framework. They included Jeronimo Máximo de Oliveira e Castro, the juiz de direito of the comarca from the 1830s to the 1860s; Pedro José Versiani, model *fazendeiro* and commander of the Guarda Nacional; and Antonio Gonçalves Chaves Sr., priest and head of the Liberal party. Priests generally showed a heightened awareness of new intellectual trends, even if their formal academic training was minimal.¹⁰⁸

108. Bieber Freitas, “Marginal Elites,” esp. chaps. 5 and 6.

During the period from 1822 to 1850, the rural elite that came of age politically at the time of independence indulged in considerable introspection in seeking to assert their right to authority in a changing world. They drew on traditional categories of power and prestige as well as on new concepts of liberal government and modernity. In this process of self-affirmation, the municipal elite of the sertão mineiro debated issues that fell outside the confines of their bureaucratic offices and incorporated highly personal information to bolster their claims to moral and political legitimacy.

By 1850, the municipal elite that had assumed power during the transition from colony to nation had largely been supplanted by a new generation. This transfer of power coincided with consolidation of a centralized Brazilian state, which demanded an educated elite capable of forging alliances with emerging national political parties. Second-generation municipal politicians with no direct experience of the colonial era adopted a decidedly more professional and modern tone. Traditional patriarchs sent their sons to the coastal cities to acquire university degrees. These young men often adopted urban ways and became more "civilized" than their rustic fathers. The second generation made the mental transition from a local understanding of politics based on kinship and personal friendships to a more bureaucratic concept grounded in a national network of patronage and partisan affiliation. For them, members of the rural elite who were Afro-Brazilian in culture were an embarrassing reminder of the sertão's supposed "backwardness," a trait invoked only when trying to discredit political rivals. Regrettably for historians, the younger generation's correspondence, although more polished and direct, lacks the personal details that permit vivid reconstruction of rural mentalities and the intricacies of sertanejo social life.

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