3

BANDEIRANTES OF FREEDOM

The day after the column left Paraguay and crossed back into Brazil, Miguel Costa gave a speech intended to motivate his troops. On the heels of an arduous trek across the southern states of Brazil, and finding themselves farther north than most of the rebels had ever been, Costa needed to boost morale. Ten months removed from the initial São Paulo revolt and over half a year since the gaúcho uprising, the rebel leadership sought to justify both the duration and the path of the revolution. As the column began marching toward uncertain horizons in Brazil's interior, the tenentes developed a rhetoric that reframed their direction.

While camped near a Jacarei farm on May 3, Costa addressed the troops: "The Revolution, in its new military phase, will trace a new trajectory of victory in the fight for freedom. . . . Soldiers! Never forget that you are all the bandeirantes of freedom (*bandeirantes da liberdade*) and that the greatness of Brazil depends on your courage, your strength, and your dedication."[1] This proclamation stands as the first example in the historical record of the rebels using the phrase *bandeirantes of freedom*, and its invocation here reflects the column's new orientation. At precisely the moment when

the column began to turn to the northern interior, the bandeiras stood as a powerful figure to legitimize their previously unintended path.

For the next three chapters, the term *bandeirantes of freedom* will serve as a discursive and imaginative backdrop for understanding how the column, in real time, sought to redefine its march into Brazil's interior. Both the original phrase (*bandeirantes*) and the column's adaptation (*bandeirantes of freedom*) offer key insights into the sensibilities of the rebel leadership, and ultimately, into the way in which Brazil's interior served as an enduring symbol to be invoked for political gain.

In the seventeenth century, colonists from the region of São Paulo led slaving expeditions into Brazil's interior, known as *bandeiras*, from the Portuguese word for *flag*.[2] On these inland excursions—originally targeting Indigenous people and, later, runaway enslaved Africans—the bandeira would be carried as an emblem of society's venture into the backlands. Through the chronicles of their exploits, the bandeirantes helped to stigmatize Brazil's interior as a destitute space inhabited by enslaved people who had escaped their bondage, savage Indians, backwater peasants, and bandits. But, in a sign of how the interior came to embody a range of themes and aspirations, the legend of the bandeirantes also constructed the idea of a *civilização do planalto*: the notion that São Paulo's location away from the tropical coastline thus made it a more authentically Brazilian region. Within bandeirante lore, the status of a noncoastal region depended on who held the power to project meaning onto particular spaces at particular moments in time. Over the centuries, whenever groups ventured inland, whether to recapture formerly enslaved people, extract natural resources, or imagine a national future, the bandeiras stood as a testament to the image of rugged settlers in pursuit of glory and the "true" center of Brazilian nationhood.

This chapter will explore how the phrase *bandeirantes of freedom* was developed as an on-the-fly discourse to meet the changing needs of the rebellion. The use of bandeirante imagery can be understood as the tenentes needing to depict their inland march as a strategic choice. If they were seen as failed rebels forced to wander the backlands, the column would likely lose its public support—and perhaps lead to even more of its soldiers deserting. But, if seen as modern-day bandeirantes, the rebels could march through the backlands with a perceived sense of purpose and bravery as agents of the modern nation. The chosen nickname mirrored an emerging trend in the 1920s, particularly in São Paulo, when a wave of "bandeirologista" scholarship, literature, and public artwork sought to rehabilitate the image of the bandeirante.[3] Ana Lúcia Teixeira describes this push to reclaim the figure of

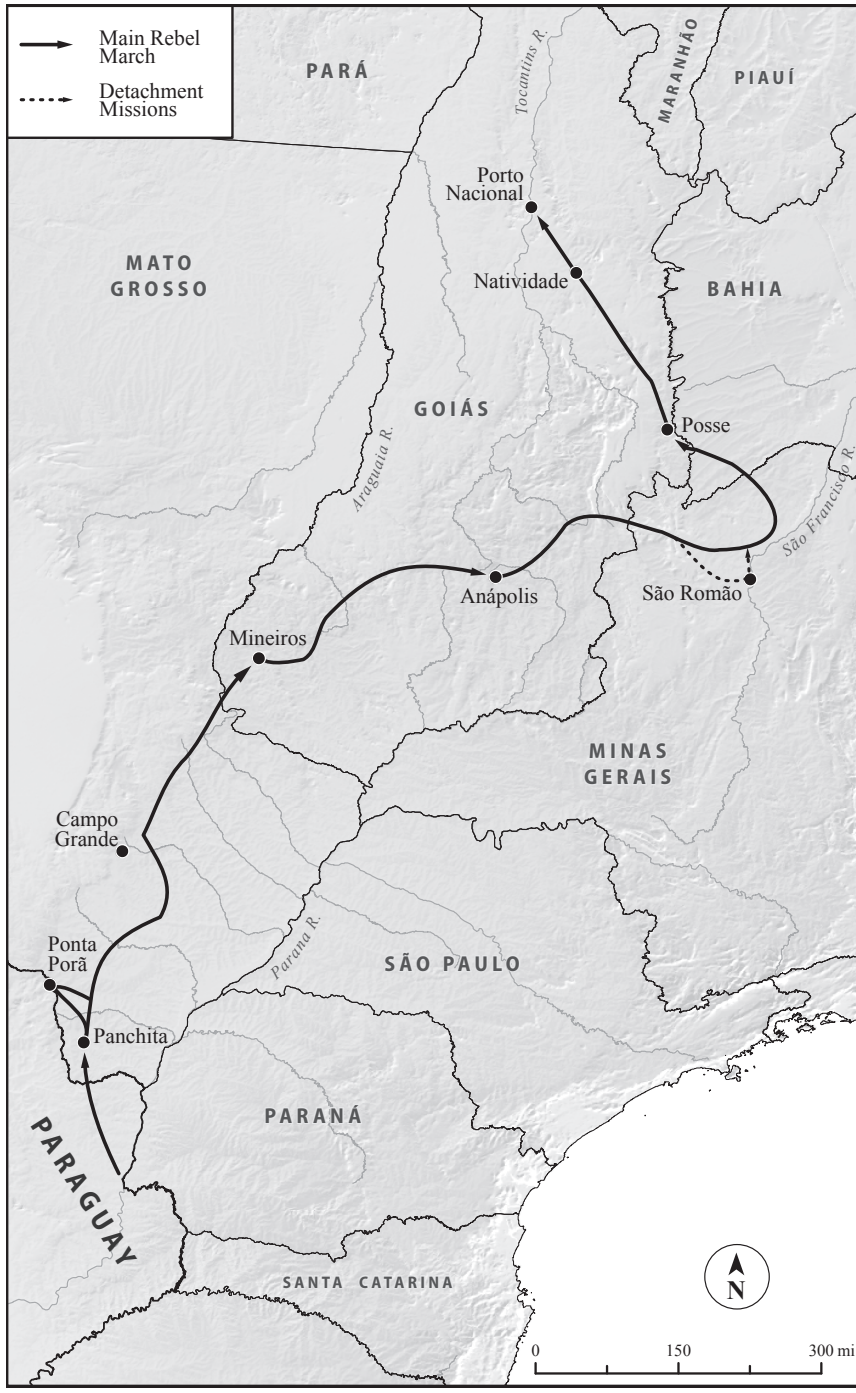
the bandeirante as "dedicated to nothing less than the reconstruction and rediscovery of the nation."[4] The seemingly oxymoronic fusing of bandeirantes (a slaving term) and freedom embodied the contradictory core of Brazilian national identity. Long-standing notions of frontier exploration thus merged with the political expediency of the 1920s. Unlike the colonial bandeirantes for whom conquest meant the capture of interior bodies and resources, the Prestes Column began presenting itself as fighting against the injustices of life in the Brazilian interior. In the column's reframing of the bandeiras, the rebels depicted themselves not simply as frontiersmen, but as liberators.

Similar Terrain, New Path

Leaving Paraguay behind, the rebels enjoyed reentering a familiar Brazilian landscape (map 3.1). Moreira Lima wrote that Mato Grosso was a "marvelous grasslands, that unfolded like a sea of unbroken green, beneath a sky forever blue, and that spring-time climate renewed the souls of our column, after so many days of suffering."[5] João Alberto likewise recalled the passage across southern Mato Grosso as "easy. Horses and cattle were everywhere. Things were abundant again. We could again fight in the gaúcho style."[6]

The rebels marched north toward Ponta Porã, a border outpost with a single street separating it from the Paraguayan town of Pedro Juan Caballero to the west. A long-standing distrust of the federal government made the region a potential site of revolt: the US consul noted that the column's arrival in Mato Grosso was of "greater concern [for the Bernardes regime] than has been experienced since the retreat of the rebels from São Paulo." Moreover, the consul observed that "Mato Grosso has a large class of civilians that have all the characteristics of the 'Wild West' settler—recklessness [and] fearlessness. . . . There are persistent rumors that the miners (*garimpeiros*) of the 'Cassanunga' district, 10,000 in number, have joined the rebels. These reports are not confirmed. But should the 'garimpeiros' . . . decide to do so, a dangerous and efficient regiment of desperate fighters would be added to the hostile forces."[7] Fearful that townspeople would join the rebel cause, the army abandoned the town.[8]

With no enemy forces to overcome, the rebel detachments of João Alberto and Siqueira Campos easily entered Ponta Porã on the morning of May 10. With no enemy in sight, Alberto's men proceeded to enjoy themselves in a manner that did not align with the image of the virtuous bandeirantes of freedom that Miguel Costa had impressed on them the previous week. João Alberto observed that, "among my men, there was great excitement at the



MAP 3.1. Prestes Column, May–October 1925. Courtesy of Gabe Moss.

possibility of a fun night. Since the start of the revolution at the end of October, they had forgotten what such a thing was." The rebel troops made quick haste to the *jiroquis* (small outdoor bars) that dotted the town's main avenue, and, despite having no money to pay for their beverages, the men drank heavily. It did not take long for conflict to break out. Fueled by cachaça, the rebels got involved in several fistfights that escalated into shootouts, leaving three people dead and a dozen injured. The following day, João Alberto decided to move out with his men: "I thought it would be crazy for us to stay another night."[9] Despite maintaining the plan to eventually reroute down to Rio de Janeiro, the column's path through Mato Grosso tilted evermore toward the northern hinterlands of Brazil's interior. With Brazil's *sertões* looming as an almost inevitable destination, and concerned that the soldiers' behavior could siphon off support both nationally (through newspaper reports) and locally (townspeople refusing to hand over food and supplies), column leaders made renewed efforts to present themselves as the virtuous liberators of the nation.

In late May, the column distributed a document among local populations that sought to dispel any rumors of rebel violence. The notice proclaimed: "You can remain calm as the liberating column approaches . . . because [our] soldiers are the Bandeirantes of Freedom, the men destined to commit their lives to this immortal conflict, whose motto is 'Freedom or death.'" As the bandeirantes of freedom, the document continued, the rebels were the only force capable of lifting "the nefarious shadow of Artur Bernardes" and "fighting the good fight for . . . a strong and united Brazil."[10] A draft of this proclamation, which is included in the archive of Juarez Távora, offers insight into how the bandeira myth was cultivated in real time. Although the original version was addressed "To the people of Mato Grosso," the drafted copy contains handwritten edits to replace the phrase with "To the people of Brazil." Previously, the rebels had addressed similar announcements to specific locations—for example, "To the people of São Paulo," "To the people of Santo Ângelo," and "To the people of the southern borders."[11] By directing their message to all Brazilians, the column aimed to present itself as a force of national integration, capable of uniting the historically fragmented regions of Brazil's interior. As they made their way toward the Mato Grosso-Goiás border, the rebels hoped that their projected image as bandeirantes of freedom would enable a smoother path.

As would be the case for most, but not all, phases of the column's march across Brazil, local populations often met the rebels with apprehension. The column required supplies, and, aside from occasionally seizing weapons and

food from enemy forces after a battle, the majority of the rebels' material needs were met either through furtive scouting parties knows as *potreados* that would sneak onto farms and into villages, or else through "requisitions" (*requisições*) made openly on local populations. When possible, particularly in the earlier phases of the rebellion, the column issued receipts to locals for the items "requested" to serve as proof of payment that could be reimbursed by the federal government once the revolution was successful, and a new regime had been installed. For instance, on May 23, the rebels provided an itemized and priced receipt to a Mr. Lopes Pacheco, of the Barra Branca farm in Mato Grosso, who gave the column two horses and several sacks of corn, rice, and sugar.[12]

While it is not possible to know Pacheco's feelings about his "donation" to the rebels, it is important to note that peaceful interactions were not the norm. Why should hesitant communities—mostly small farmers and merchants—give their food, money, and supplies to a wandering band of unknown southerners? Hesitancy toward the rebels was aided by government propaganda, often disseminated in regional and national newspapers, depicting the rebels as marauding bandits. As seen in figure 3.1, the rebels received copies of the news, keeping them keenly aware of their own narrative. Moreira Lima recalled that "our enemies, always wicked and infamous, spread stories that we committed widespread looting and the most reprehensible attacks against peaceful people. . . . We were [thus] often met with gunfire by inhabitants of the places we passed through, as if we were the enemies."[13] As would be the case throughout the rebellion, both sides labeled the other as bandits, using the terms *bandido* and *jagunço*, the latter a reference to contracted fighters who were hired to fight on behalf of the local strongmen *coronéis*. In this shared discursive strategy, the specter of Brazil's interior shaped the way coastal forces, whether southern rebels or the federal government, perceived local conditions. Although banditry was very much a part of the interior's history, it also stood as a trope through which to delegitimize one's enemies.

In a corrosive and self-fulfilling cycle, the unwillingness of locals to part with their belongings forced the column to acquire them by force, thereby fulfilling their negative image as bandits. One farmer in Campo Limpo wrote to the column leaders during their northward march in Mato Grosso: "I will remove my family from the farm because of the frightful news [I have heard]. Because of this I ask you, my friends, to not harm them."[14] Another local, Francisco Ferreira, recalled how his town fled in advance of the column: "Our family went into the forest and hundreds of other people [from our town] also went, before the column arrived. . . . Before they arrived, we

FIGURE 3.1. Lourenço Moreira Lima (*left*) and Lieutenant Fragoso read *O Globo*, likely in late 1925. CPDOC ILA photo 010.

heard news they were close. . . . So people stayed there in fear. . . . We stayed [hidden in the forest] for three days."[15] In these instances, the column's passage through the interior was not unlike the federal army's actions three decades earlier at Canudos, where the violence inflicted by coastal Brazilians might call into question who were the actual barriers to Brazil's destiny as a civilized nation.

In the initial stages of the column's march north, the rebel leadership attempted to investigate cases of violence that occurred in Mato Grosso. The first concerned the murder of two farmers during a scouting mission in late May.[16] The second took place ten days later, when a schoolteacher alleged that troops under the command of Juarez Távora looted the house on the nearby Desembarque farm.[17] In both instances, the rebel high command dispatched Moreira Lima—as the column's official scribe—to meet with witnesses and gather testimonies.

These efforts at maintaining a system of accountability did not always work. On June 4, for example, rebel soldiers staged a drunken rampage in the town of Jaraguari. Soon after their arrival, soldiers committed what Moreira Lima obliquely called "unfortunate disorder."[18] The memories of local townspeople provide far more clarity. In a 1993 interview with journalist Eliane Brum, a farmer named João Sabino Barbosa said that rebel soldiers had raped his wife.[19] The rebels' internal bulletin noted that, to avoid punishment

for their actions, the offending soldiers deserted the column the following morning. Despite having announced their arrival in Mato Grosso as virtuous bandeirantes who would liberate the people from the tyranny of President Bernardes, the rebel leaders were unable to keep their soldiers disciplined enough to match the projected narrative.

As mentioned earlier, some fifty women had set off with the column—over the course of the rebellion, that number eventually dwindled to only ten.[20] The few historical sources that mention women suggest that, on the whole, their time in the column was very similar to that of the men: they marched the same distances, fought in many of the same battles, and suffered through the same hardships of a fifteen-thousand-mile march through Brazil's interior, including dying in battle, being captured by the army, and succumbing to illness. Despite this shared experience, most rebel leaders saw the women primarily as followers, not as members of the rebellion in their own right. In his memoir, Moreira Lima wrote that "the simple and naive soul of these women is formed in the sacrifices and martyrdom for the men to whom they dedicate themselves. This is the soul that makes a vivandeira."[21] Among the rebel memoirs, an exception is that of Captain João Silva—though, unfortunately for the historical recognition of the women, his memoir is arguably the least well known of the various rebel accounts. In his often overlooked chronicle, Silva lavished praise on the women: "Our beloved and brave vivandeiras were shoulder-to-shoulder with the [men]. . . . So many vivandeiras crossed the line of fire to bring back wounded soldiers, tearing off their clothing to bandage up the wounded! So many vivandeiras fell prisoner and were killed at the bloodied hands of a barbaric and cowardly enemy! Alas, our heroic and beloved vivandeiras! . . . We must give them at least some recognition in our stories, they are so deserving of it. . . . It is a shame that we do not remember all of the names of [these] heroines."[22]

Of the fifty women, we only know the names of a dozen. These women were all from Rio Grande do Sul and São Paulo, leaving it unclear whether any women joined the column after it began marching north. Most frequently, the women whose names appear in the historical record were remarked upon for either their fighting skills or their physical attributes. Of the women who fought in battle, two were known by nicknames that reflected the gendered and racial prejudices of the column. The first was a mixed-race woman known as Onça (meaning *jaguar*), and the second was called Monkey Face (Cara de Macaca), who was remarked on by Italo Landucci for dressing in leather and carrying a rifle.[23] These nicknames simultaneously acknowledged the women's contributions (e.g., showing tenacity in battle and

wearing the traditional clothes of gaucho cowboys) while denigrating them at the same time. The efforts of other women were framed in similar language, often in relation to race. Tia Maria, an older Black woman who cooked for the troops, was known primarily as the Black sorceress (*a preta feiticeira*), a name that likely mimicked representations of the northeastern *cangaceiro* bandits, which often included references to a Black priestess.[24] Race could also have an inverse connotation—for example, with a nurse named Hermínia, whose bravery on the front lines was couched in a reference to her Austrian (meaning European and light-skinned) heritage.[25]

Not all rebels welcomed the presence of vivandeiras. João Alberto faulted one woman named Elza—whom he described as "a cute, blond German"—with the death of her husband, saying that he was so preoccupied setting up her tent that he did not hear an oncoming enemy attack.[26] For his part, Antônio Siqueira Campos sought to prohibit his troops from having any interaction with the women. But, in a subtle act of vivandeira resistance, the women took to mocking Siqueira Campos by calling him "Cat Eye" and "Scraggly Beard" behind his back.[27] The vivandeiras could invent nicknames, too.

For the women, their participation was a point of pride, both at the time and in the decades since. Vitalina Torres, one of the women who joined the rebellion at its inception in Santo Ângelo, marched through the very end to exile in Bolivia. In an interview in the 1990s, Torres's daughter recalled how her mother, "in a deep, manly voice, always liked to tell stories about those times, when she was almost not a woman. She had to cut her hair short and dress like a man. But when she got pregnant, she couldn't hide anymore. She always got sad when talking about my brother, who was born and died during the march."[28] Along with reflecting the gendered lens that framed her participation in the rebellion, this quotation indicates an additional challenge for women in the column: several women gave birth along the march, which meant that they had to care for themselves and their infant children in very challenging conditions. As with the son of Vitalina Torres, not all of the newborns survived. Whether in battle as fighters or in the mess tent as cooks, as well as in their roles as mothers, nurses, and partners, the women of the Prestes Column were key contributors to the rebellion.

Another Reorganization and a Surprise in Central Brazil

While camped on the Cilada farm in Mato Grosso on June 10, the rebel leadership reorganized the column. Only two months after dividing into the Paulista and Rio Grande brigades, this dual system became untenable for reasons

of size (the gaúchos outnumbered the paulistas) and cohesion, as rivalries grew between the two. Now, the gaúchos and paulistas were combined within the same units. The two brigades were replaced by four detachments that mixed together all soldiers and were led, respectively, by Cordeiro de Farias, João Alberto, Siqueira Campos, and Djalma Dutra.[29] Costa remained the commanding general, but Prestes was the unquestioned, if unofficial, leader.[30]

The record-keeping at this time also offers a first example of a rebel memoir reproducing curated selections of original documents. The new command structure was codified in bulletin no. 14 of the rebel high command, which opened with a section on "Imprisonment." Here, a pair of rebels were sentenced to two weeks confinement for their role in the previously mentioned looting of the Desembarque farm. This punishment is clearly evident in the archival record.[31] In the appendix of Moreira Lima's memoir, however, where the author includes over seventy original documents, the reproduced bulletin no. 14 omitted the section on the rebel violence.[32] To Moreira Lima's credit, he at least provided a long ellipsis to indicate a missing portion, yet his reader has no way of knowing what information—nefarious or otherwise—was removed. Given that this memoir has served as the central reference for later studies of the column, these sorts of archival redaction are significant. The same omission was reproduced in a key academic work: in Anita Prestes's 1990 book on the Prestes Column, the author includes a lengthy appendix with forty reproduced primary sources, thirty-one of which were taken from published sources, including Moreira Lima's memoir, with the remaining nine coming from her own archival research. Bulletin no. 14 is one of those nine sources that she cites directly from the archive.[33] So, despite having access to the full original version (housed at the same archive that I visited three decades after she did her research, in the 1980s), Anita Prestes also chose to leave out the details of the looting and subsequent punishment. Neither Moreira Lima nor Anita Prestes erase the rebel crimes entirely, as both authors discuss some of the violence the rebels committed. Yet the curation of these reproductions stands as a form of myth protection: presenting original documents in their unoriginal form is a subtle form of creating historical silences.

Less than a week after the column's reorganization, the rebels encountered an interior population that they seemed surprised to find in the center-west state of Mato Grosso. The demographics of each region along the column's path are difficult to assess, in no small part because Brazil's 1920 census omitted questions about skin color—instead we can examine the general perceptions of the era that informed the rebel views about race and region.[34]

Compared to their eventual passage through the North and the Northeast, the rebels did not expect to encounter many Afro-descendent populations in southern and central Brazil. Yet, on their march through Mato Grosso, Siqueira Campos's detachment came across the land of the Malaquias family, who had settled on the land in 1901, barely a generation removed from the abolition of slavery. By the time the rebels arrived, the family had ten different farms in the area.[35] When the rebel unit approached, Joaquim Malaquias rallied over a dozen men to defend the farms. In his memoir, Moreira Lima offers a contradictory summary of what took place on the Malaquias farm. While acknowledging that the rebels instigated the attack—"Siqueira Campos was in charge of hitting these people, which he did with his usual energy"—Moreira Lima also writes that the rebels were victims of "an ambush" that killed two rebel soldiers.[36] This disconnect is perhaps the result of Moreira Lima's prejudice, which might not have easily allowed him to see the Malaquias as capable fighters. Moreover, Moreira Lima seemed shocked that the female head of the family (a matriarch whose name is not mentioned) took part in fending off the rebel attack. For the Malaquias family, the racial dynamics at play became an enduring source of pride. In the 1990s, Tuarpa Malaquias, Joaquim's son, would recall that "they took everything, but not a single drop of our blood was spilled by the white rebels. No Malaquias died [that day]."[37] At the Malaquias farm, a refuge of freedom built and protected by descendants of enslaved people, the column was surprised by the unexpected diversity of life in Brazil's interior regions.

Although the rebels had ventured farther north than originally intended, their location at this point in central Mato Grosso still positioned them within relative striking distance of Rio de Janeiro. But ensuing battles continued to push them east and to the north, and, in a June 15 announcement of their new leadership structure, the column referred to itself as "the 1st Division of the Liberating Army Operating in Northeastern Brazil."[38] By identifying, however briefly, as the Army of the Northeast—despite still being in the central region of Mato Grosso—the rebels seem to recognize the useful symbolism of their "liberating" march toward the backlands. As the rebels crossed into the Brazilian hinterland, and with provisions running low, the interior held the promise of bodies and supplies. Conditioned by the folklore of the bandeirantes, the backlands represented the ultimate landscape to prove—to themselves, to locals, and to audiences farther south—their self-ascribed worth as liberators.

Having steadily veered northward over the previous months, the column now embarked on its resolute march toward the sertões. As Miguel Costa

observed after a battle near the border between Mato Grosso and Goiás, "we proceeded, at first daylight, on our march to the Northeast."[39] With their path now leading deeper into Brazil's interior, the rebels attempted to build an alliance with a local power broker named José Morbeck. This represented the column's first encounter with a coronel, the notorious political bosses who commanded rural militias known as patriotic battalions (*batalhões patrióticos*). Morbeck had waged a fight for many years against the state government of Mato Grosso, wanting to protect the autonomy and land claims of the local diamond miners. Prior to the column's arrival in the region, Morbeck had announced his sympathy for the rebel cause, but when Moreira Lima went to meet personally with Morbeck on June 20, it did not lead to any collaboration—as Moreira Lima reported, "Morbeck gave me some truly idiotic excuses for why he couldn't join us."[40] As they marched farther north, as we will see, the rebels came across more coronéis, all of whom rejected the column's entreaties and joined the loyalist campaign to fight against the column.

The Prestes Column left Mato Grosso and crossed into the state of Goiás on June 23. Nearly one year after the start of the São Paulo revolt, the rebellion plodded along toward an uncertain horizon. In terms of supplies, only one thousand rebel soldiers possessed a rifle, and the column no longer possessed any heavy artillery, mortars, or grenades, having shed most of these bulkier weapons during their march across Paraguay. The column began its march through Goiás at a safe distance from its pursuers. While the loyalist forces had to travel in cars and trucks over the poorly maintained and circuitous roads of southern Goiás, the rebels marched through the Serra do Baús hills. The column's vanguard unit under João Alberto arrived in the town of Mineiros on June 26, and the following day the bulk of the rebels followed suit.

At this point, Prestes was in a strong position to make a move on Rio de Janeiro. If Prestes were to take a path directly east from Mineiros, he would arrive in southern Minas Gerais, where the column would be within relative reach of Rio. There were no major natural obstacles on this potential route such as mountains or river crossings, and, although there were a series of federal and state garrisons along the way, the column had been successful so far in maneuvering around loyalist forces.[41] But a decisive defeat the following week at the Zeca Lopes farm drained the column of important supplies and pushed its path farther north. Since leaving Ponta Porã in mid-May, the rebels had gone in a steady northeasterly arc—keeping open the possibility of marching on Rio de Janeiro—but after Zeca Lopes they made an abrupt ninety-degree turn and marched due north for almost a week. The loss at

Zeca Lopes further emphasized the extremely tenuous nature of the column's supplies. Without a new cache of weapons or sufficient allies to help make use of them, the rebellion would not persist for much longer.

After their northerly march from Zeca Lopes, the column arrived in the Goías town of Rio Bonito on July 5, the one-year anniversary of the rebellion. On the outskirts of Rio Bonito, the rebels attacked family farms in search of horses, and, according to a local farmer named Manoel Zacarias, several houses were set on fire and two men killed.[42] Perhaps unaware of the rebel violence outside of town, the local priests in Rio Bonito gave the column a warm welcome. With the entire rebel force in attendance, Father José Cenabre San Roman presided over a celebratory mass in honor of July 5, and several commanding officers gave speeches. The town's second priest, Father Manuel de Macedo, even joined the rebellion, leaving with the column the next day and marching with the rebels for most of the following year. Neither the rebel memoirs nor the archival record indicates Macedo's reason for joining the rebels.[43] This was the first local leader who volunteered to fight with the column—one of only a few such examples during the entire march.

While in Rio Bonito, the column corresponded with political allies in Rio de Janeiro. Miguel Costa sent a detailed summary of the rebel's recent progression to João Batista Luzardo, the gaúcho federal deputy and the column's most outspoken ally.[44] The communication with Luzardo was a key avenue for transmitting news of the column to wider audiences. With censorship making it difficult to print certain stories, the rebels maintained a clandestine system: messengers took letters to telegraph outposts that were relayed to the central telegraph station in Rio de Janeiro, where workers sympathetic to the rebellion, in the middle of the night, retrieved the dispatch before officials arrived the next morning.[45] These reports were delivered to Luzardo, who shared them in speeches on the senate floor. Because all proceedings were published in Congress's official news organ, the *Diário Oficial da União*, Luzardo's speeches circumvented government censorship.

The rebels also wrote a lengthy proclamation about the current state of the rebellion: a de facto open letter to the Brazilian people. It is unclear whether or not this document was successfully distributed, though it shows how the column sought to portray itself at the one-year mark of the revolution. To counter the not-unfounded rumors of looting and frustration among the rebel ranks, the bulletin affirmed that "not only do our troops have magnificent morale and wellbeing, but we also are lacking for nothing." The rebels continued to present themselves as valiant bandeirantes of freedom: "We have behaved with the same norms that have always guided us, inscribing

the pages of the Revolution with new and positive examples of order, valor and discipline." And, in contrast to the reality of the column's recent string of defeats, the declaration stated that, "after a march filled with victories across the vast territories of . . . Goiás, [we have] reached the heart of the country, in whose backlands we will decide the fate of [Brazil]."[46] In their bandeirante framing, the rebels continued to develop their new narrative of a purposeful inland march—now in the heart of Brazil, the column portrayed the interior as a platform for national change.

From Rio Bonito, the Prestes Column marched northeast across the central plains of Goiás. Along this route, the rebels hoped to cross into the state of Bahia, where Prestes aimed to fortify his ranks with new recruits and supplies, most notably those that General Isidoro had pledged to arrange. The plan was to dip briefly into the state of Minas Gerais to find a suitable place for crossing the São Francisco River into Bahia. During the remaining month-long journey through Goiás, the column marched relatively close to the cities of both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Barely six hundred miles from the center of Brazilian politics, Prestes and his fellow officers may have felt tempted to cast a glance south, over their right shoulders, contemplating whether to change their strategy and make a direct move on the federal government. Marching this close to the Bernardes regime also posed risks: the column had to avoid the major transportation hubs that ran through central Goiás, and Prestes was careful to march his troops north of Silvánia and Pirapora, railroad towns that linked directly to São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Proximity to loyalist forces was far from the column's most pressing concern. If Prestes could not get more supplies, the rebels' exact location would become almost irrelevant.

The column's provisions dwindled further when a captain in Djalma Dutra's detachment persuaded a handful of his unit to abandon the rebellion. A total of six people deserted, taking with them significant stores of weapons. Dutra reported this unfortunate turn in a letter to Prestes, writing that the captain in question had "convinced my soldiers that they were wrong [to believe in the revolution] and that the benefits for loyalist soldiers were far greater."[47] Here we see some of the material underpinnings that shaped how soldiers decided their loyalties. Having fought for the past year on a combination of dedication to the rebel cause and the promise of deferred salary once the revolution was successful, switching sides must have been an appealing option. If a rebel soldier were to desert and rejoin the government army, they would not only be absolved of their current sedition but they would also start receiving their normal military salary. Without a central ideology uniting the

rebels—and with the original goal of overthrowing Bernardes increasingly unlikely—soldiers had to weigh their personal reasons for fighting.

The Enduring Question of Discipline

Over the previous months, Prestes had sought to instigate more discipline by investigating accused soldiers and keeping in confinement those found guilty. But events in Goiás became so extreme that Prestes evidently felt the need to make a bold example. On August 7, the rebel high command ordered the execution by firing squad of four of their own soldiers, the first for raping a woman and the other three for deserting the rebellion, taking their rifles and supplies with them. As part of these disciplinary proceedings, the column distributed among all commanding officers a set of guidelines on how the rebels should compose themselves. Referencing the recent wave of punishments, including the execution of their own men, the note explained that "we do not have the right to fold our arms, indifferent, in the face of certain abuses, which are morally and materially compromising the fate of the Revolution." The document also outlined a series of rules: soldiers were not to disrespect women, get drunk, or shoot civilians, and only authorized commanders could enter homes and seize belongings.[48] At least for the next phase of the march, the firmness of these guidelines, accentuated by the punishment by firing squad, seems to have had its intended effect: the rebel soldiers mostly followed orders until the column's retreat across Bahia seven months later, at which point their actions spiraled into violent frustration.

The cultivation of the column's virtuous mythology took place on multiple timescales. This occurred in real time, as seen in the open letter from early July, in newspaper coverage that would soon expand across the country, and also in the rebel memoirs written afterward. The documentation of events in early August serves as this chapter's second example of memoir omission. The punishments and guidelines were stipulated in bulletin no. 16 of the rebel high command—a document that Moreira Lima, the column's official scribe, reproduced in the appendix of his memoir.[49] While Moreira Lima does include the full record of the decreed guidelines, he provides merely a glimpse into the behavior that pushed Prestes to enact the new rules. The reproduced document mentions only that column leaders ordered the dishonorable discharge of two soldiers, one for looting a local house and another for attempting to kill a civilian. The memoir removes all mention of the execution by firing squad for the four soldiers found guilty of rape and looting. Comparing the curated memoir reproduction with the original document demonstrates

that Moreira Lima was willing to show a certain amount of disorder within the rebel ranks—particularly because he had to contextualize the new disciplinary rules. But completely undermining the image of the column, either through instances of rape (which shows a grave lack of morality) or desertion (which shows a lack of commitment to the cause), could have damaged the image of the rebellion. With so much of the column's legitimacy drawing from its supposed virtue in the backlands, memoirs served as platforms to disseminate these narratives from one generation to the next.

With new disciplinary rules in place, Prestes marched the column toward Bahia. The rebels had to cross the São Francisco River, the fourth largest in Brazil and the longest, which runs completely within Brazilian territory. The São Francisco stands as a fluvial border running across the western edge of Bahia, and Prestes had to choose how, and where, to attempt the river crossing. From the current position in eastern Goiás, Prestes proceeded through the northern corner of Minas Gerais and briefly south toward the São Francisco. The column left Goiás on August 11 and embarked on a ten-day journey across Minas Gerais. Prestes was determined to cross into Bahia, with its imagined promise of new recruits, supplies, and the mystic potential of fighting in Brazil's most emblematic interior. As Moreira Lima would later recall in his memoir, Bahia represented a land of rejuvenation and adventure: "We counted on being able to enlist volunteers in that state, not only because of the influence of the sectors there that were said to be revolutionary, but also because of the bellicose spirit of its population. Additionally, Bahia offered us the advantage of being a region of inexhaustible resources, where we could prolong the struggle for a long time."[50]

Bahia on the Horizon

As the rebels made their push toward Bahia, newspapers began to play an increasingly central role in both constructing and amplifying the column's public image. Censorship still remained in place, meaning that even if government censors approved a submitted article, it could take upward of a month for the news to be published.[51] This censorship often affected the major dailies in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo more than smaller, regional papers. With less oversight from federal censors, regional newspapers provided relatively close coverage of the column as it moved into Brazil's interior. At least initially, much of this local coverage supported the column. An August 19 article in Maranhão's *Folha do Povo*, for example, reprinted in full an article from a Pernambuco paper, *Da Noite*, seeking to dispel the negative

rumors about Prestes and his men: "Are they just vulgar adventurers running through the interior? No, if so they would have given up the fight by now; they have plenty of money, and could easily leave the country. . . . So why do they do it? They are driven by a higher ideal, that compels them forward, toward victory or death."[52] Yet, as we will see, local newspapers became increasingly hostile as the column ventured closer to Bahia.

The rebels followed an uncontested descent from the plateaus of Goiás through the state of Minas Gerais, and, on August 19, João Alberto's vanguard detachment arrived in São Romão, a small town on the western banks of the São Francisco River. The scouting unit found a steamship and two smaller boats, but they belonged to a battalion of state police from Bahia. Seeking to commandeer the boats, the column attempted an ambush the following morning. The rebels set up an attack point high on the forested cliffs above the river and opened fire, but the Bahians sailed out of firing range and continued down the river.[53] Despite this failure, Prestes did not yet abandon the goal of crossing the São Francisco. A few days later, Djalma Dutra's unit was sent to conduct a final reconnaissance of the area and marched thirty miles north to the city of São Francisco.[54] Again, this venture yielded no results.

Although Dutra was unable to locate any boats, his troops did find a large stockpile of cachaça in a nearby farm, and they proceeded to drink heavily. According to the rebel memoirs, such instances of drunkenness consistently plagued the column. Moreira Lima wrote that drunk soldiers often had to be tied onto to their horses to keep them from falling off.[55] When the column entered a new town, an officer would often sweep through the stores and bars to pour out any alcohol, lest the soldiers get their hands on it. Dias Ferreira observed that attempts at prohibition became so effective that rebel soldiers started breaking into pharmacies to steal bottles of Elixir do Nogueira, a medicine that supposedly tasted like the Italian liquor fernet.[56] The raiding of local pharmacies also extended to other medicines. As remembered by a local named Joaquim de Souza Cavalcanti, when the rebels came to his town of Luís Gomes, they took all of the medication used to treat syphilis: "It was a huge loss. We didn't have any more medicine for syphilis in the whole town. The rebels were all sick with it and they spread the plague everywhere."[57]

On the heels of Dutra's unsuccessful and drunken scouting mission downriver, Prestes conceded that it was not possible to cross into Bahia. Moreover, Prestes could have correctly assumed that the failed ambush would spur more troops to the eastern shores of the São Francisco. Within a week of the column's dalliance along the river, the federal army sent additional

forces from state battalions in Bahia, Ceará, and Maranhão.[58] The government appeared intent on stopping the rebel march from proceeding into the Northeast. Prestes ordered the rebels northwest back into Goiás, where they hoped to swing through Maranhão and eventually back into Bahia.

It took nearly two weeks to march across Minas Gerais, since they had to proceed slowly through the São Domingos hills. On September 7, the rebels crossed back into Goiás. The V-shaped trajectory that the rebels took south toward Bahia and north again deposited them in a very different stretch of Goiás than they had left behind the previous month. Now entering the northern corners of the state, the rebels marveled at what seemed to them an isolated landscape: after a colonial-era gold rush, it looked like it had remained untouched for several centuries, evoking the uneven impacts of coastal society's excursions into the interior. João Alberto remembered that "we found ourselves in the rare moment, to calmly see the unknown Brazil and the grand remnants of its distant past. That whole region, so rich, had been plundered by the colonizers. [The ruins of] churches built of stone and prisons of strong metal showed what [the region] looked like in the 18th century."[59] Amid their self-projected march to modernize the country, these observations about "the unknown Brazil" served to justify the rebel claim of reawakening the interior and thus the nation as a whole.

The column arrived in Posse, Goiás, on September 12, the first town along its renewed march north. During a two-day rest, Prestes, Costa, and Távora wrote to General Isidoro and Deputy Luzardo. Along with summarizing the column's movements over the previous month, the letter expressed a willingness to negotiate a cease-fire with the Bernardes regime in exchange for amnesty. Through their statement, Prestes and his fellow officers wanted the Brazilian public to know that "we are not here on a mere whim of madness—nor for the ungrateful pleasure of spilling our countrymen's blood and turning the homes of our brothers into wakes—nor [are we] moved by the petty interests of personal ambition." What, then, might the rebels see as adequate conditions to end their campaign? The letter noted three demands: first, to revoke the press law (*lei da imprensa*) that sanctioned censorship; second, to adopt the secret ballot for Brazil's elections; and, third, to suspend the martial law, which President Bernardes had continuously renewed since the initial revolt of July 1924. As Prestes observed, these criteria could secure a peace that would be "honorable for the government and successful for the country."[60] As the column marched farther into Brazil's interior with decreasing supplies and tension within its own ranks, an amnesty could also bring the rebellion to a close.

After Posse, heavy rains and an increasingly arduous terrain slowed down the march. After advancing about thirty miles per day for most of the previous few months, the trek across Goiás over the next two months averaged a daily log as low as ten miles.[61] In the midst of this slow progression, the column received a letter from the Maranhão town of Arraias. Compared to most rebel correspondence, this letter was unique in that it was written at the behest of and signed exclusively by women residents of a local community.[62] While respectful toward the column—the letter was addressed to "the heroic Chiefs . . . of the glorious campaign"—the women asked the rebel leaders to "guarantee the honor, life, and property of our townspeople." By framing their letter around domestic issues such as health and hospitality, this form of political engagement from rural *nordestina* women seemed carefully crafted to remain within traditional gender norms.[63] As a justification for why Arraias would not be able to provide the column with supplies, the letter stated that the whole town was currently afflicted by a flu epidemic. This mention of contagion was likely also an attempt to dissuade the rebels from committing the abuses—sexual and otherwise—for which they were becoming notorious. And, as a further incentive to respect life and property, the Arraias women also stated that should the column peacefully visit the town, it would "enjoy a respite [for] those who have forgotten the luxuries of civilized cities in the sertões."[64]

Having seen their route change from an accidental march into a purposeful and symbolic inland route, the rebels kept their sights set northward. But, over the next phase of the march, as an initially positive time in Maranhão gave way to a contentious passage farther afield, the rebels would experience what they perceived to be entirely different interiors.