

# I

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## “Our Compatriots Are Vagrants”

*Work, Morality, and the Shaping of a New Povo, 1845–1880*

The rude populace does not admit reason, commits crimes  
left and right, for which motive we should do what is best  
for the people, but not what the people want.

*João Machado de Bitencourt, Domingos Roiz Ribas,  
Bernardo dos Santos Menezes, and Alexandre de Abreu Valle,  
11 February 1828*

IN 1845, as they pondered the reconstruction of their province after a decade of civil war, elites in Porto Alegre faced the same tough, practical questions that had confronted their counterparts after other regional revolts flared up across Brazil in the 1817–45 period—indeed, the same questions that plagued the country’s still-young national government when the final major rebellion (the *Praieira*) was quelled in Pernambuco just three years later. How could they restore production on plantations and ranches, many of which had been devastated in Rio Grande do Sul’s *Farrroupilha* Revolution and other violent regional uprisings? How could they protect or even strengthen social hierarchies when tens of thousands of plebeians had stepped outside old relationships of dependence—and many perhaps retained the dreams, and even the arms, of their rebellions? What sort of political arrangement would result from the central government’s triumph over challenges from the provinces?

These problems did not allow for easy or definitive answers. Indeed, the new peace suffered nagging tensions after midcentury, despite the undeniable victory that the imperial state had achieved in Brazil—and the firm hold that planters and merchants of the Center-South had established over that state by the later 1840s. This was true in provinces such as Pará and Bahia, where uprisings had threatened to break out into generalized revolution through the 1830s, and held even more clearly in Rio Grande do Sul, where antigovernment rebels had generally maintained control over their plebeian followers. The comparatively weak threat from below in Rio Grande do Sul, as José Honório Rodrigues has pointed out, meant that the “pacification” of the Farroupilha carried with it little of the vindictive brutality often implied by the term in Brazil and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, in Porto Alegre, the chief of imperial forces, Luiz Alves de Lima e Silva (then Baron, later Count and then Duke of Caxias), used the “natural” language of the family to proclaim in 1845 not only the end of the Farroupilha but also the dawning of a stronger national union: “The brothers against whom we fought rejoice with us today and already obey the legitimate government of the Brazilian Empire. His Majesty the Emperor has ordered . . . that we forget the past, and very positively recommended in the same decree that those Brazilians not be juridically or in another manner persecuted for the acts that they may have committed during the time of revolution. . . . From this day forward, may unity and tranquility be our banner!”<sup>2</sup> Even as Caxias welcomed his wayward “brothers” back into the national family, however, resentments simmered on, in Porto Alegre as throughout the Empire.<sup>3</sup>

The political centralization that accompanied national consolidation fueled some of the lingering bitterness, as provincial elite factions fought among themselves and against the Court (as the imperial capital of Rio de Janeiro was known) for greater influence and resources. The Gaúcho Liberal politician Félix Xavier da Cunha expressed such sentiments when he denounced the Empire’s behavior toward his province as verging on the scandalous: “I say with all frankness . . . that, in relation to the Court, the province of Rio Grande do Sul can be considered a bastard son, to whom is denied a share in the social benefits that, if they are scarce for other provinces, are even more so for our own. . . . And yet we are happy . . . because at least they leave us, in compensation (because they cannot take it away from us), the glory of being the heroic bulwark of the Brazilian nationality.”<sup>4</sup> Da Cunha’s

words exemplify the specific rhetoric that Gaúchos employed in their claims—based on the “tribute of blood”—that their province, strategically located on the frontier with Argentina, had paid historically.<sup>5</sup> Beyond that, though, they also suggest that not all regional elites were satisfied with the place allotted them in the imperial family as it was reconstituted under the national patriarch, Emperor Dom Pedro II, in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>6</sup>

Other threads of discourse in the post-1845 years hint at anxieties not about centralizing elite factions in Rio de Janeiro but about other, much humbler, sectors within the province. While working out the details of the new peace, elites in Porto Alegre and across Brazil also strove to implement projects to refashion their society’s plebeians—“the last class of society,” as Caxias described them—into a populace more to their own liking.<sup>7</sup> Like their peers in the rest of Brazil, Gaúcho elites evaluated the character and potential of their regional *povo* according to European standards—and found their compatriots wanting. Indeed, given the existence of flourishing colonies of German and other European immigrants just upriver from Porto Alegre, these Gaúchos could reasonably hope for an influx of European immigrants who might improve, if not entirely supplant, the less worthy Africans and Brazilians then forming the popular classes of society. This is not to say, however, that elites neglected the non-European majority. On the contrary, much like elites throughout the Empire, Gaúcho leaders devoted significant time and energy to questions involving such so-called national workers. Throughout the period from 1845 to 1880, elites in Porto Alegre, in fact, debated a series of measures designed to turn the plebeians they had into a people that was, as legislator Dr. João Pereira da Silva Borges Fortes described it in 1851, “well-behaved [*morigerado*], hardworking, industrious, respectful of the laws and of the authorities charged with enforcing their execution.”<sup>8</sup>

This ideal people would not, it must be noted, form a body of politically active individuals; the redeemed popular sectors would remain a *povo* (or perhaps, *povão*, with the greater sense of rudeness that the augmentative adds in the Portuguese) of dependent plebeians, and not a Tocquevillean, democratic “people.” After all, Borges Fortes’s list of attributes to be cultivated among the “national” poor stressed, more than anything else, compliance with the demands of employers and officials. At most, as historian Angela Alonso has observed of the Second Empire generally, ruling groups might entertain the

fiction that common men's "political representation was made through the *paterfamilias*" (with women and the enslaved lacking even this ostensible voice).<sup>9</sup> For all except the *paterfamilias*, then, little remained—or should remain, in the dominant view—except dependence; resisting this status or merely trying to make it a negotiable relationship, from an elite perspective, amounted to "vagrancy." This "ideology of vagrancy" (*ideologia da vadiagem*), as such scholars as Laura de Mello e Souza and Lúcio Kowarick have labeled elite attitudes toward their social inferiors, gave elites a language with which to address the troubling initiatives of slaves and free workers who refused to take their places in a seigneurial idyll.<sup>10</sup>

Only sporadically, however, did elite efforts to build new tools of "moralization" have tangible results. In Porto Alegre as in the rest of the country, politicians' lofty schemes for systems of schools, churches, agricultural and military colonies, and new police corps produced at best slow and uneven growth of such institutions.<sup>11</sup> One of the topics that brought forth some of the most heated and at the same time most thoughtful debates in the Gaúcho capital was precisely a failed plan to both help and refashion the *povo*. The Beggars' Asylum (Asilo de Mendicidade) project of 1857 was not the most sweeping reform proposed in these years; it simply called for the construction of a charitable establishment to care for the beggars of Porto Alegre.<sup>12</sup> As the newspaper *Correio do Sul* noted, however, the project achieved remarkable prominence in the political discourse of the day: "The galleries [of the Provincial Assembly] fill up and follow assiduously the debates that portray social life in all its aspects, all of its folds, all of its mysteries, now discovering the plague that infects it, . . . now the means that science has imagined to combat [the illness]." The nature of the discourse led the debates far beyond the issue of the Asylum itself; describing the addresses in the Assembly, the *Correio*'s editor marveled at "the persistence with which the generally young [deputies] . . . descend carefully to all the details of social arithmetic, to look for a possible solution to those great questions attached to the current state of civilization."<sup>13</sup> The Asylum provided, that is, an opportunity for political elites in Porto Alegre to expound upon their broad visions of society and its component classes. The Asylum debates will therefore serve us here as a window into more general elite positions. In order to understand the dominant elite attitudes toward the *povo*, we will examine the sets of questions with

which the discussions of the Asylum resonated most strongly—regarding slavery and vagrancy—after a brief look at the political, social, and economic setting of reform initiatives in midcentury Rio Grande do Sul.

### *The Context of Reform Projects, 1845–1880*

Porto Alegre and its province were undergoing massive changes by the middle of the nineteenth century, so much so that the city could seem “entirely new” to a Belgian noblewoman visiting in 1857.<sup>14</sup> From a Portuguese colonial outpost against the threat of Spanish encroachment from the Río de la Plata region in the south, Rio Grande do Sul became in the early nineteenth century one of the fastest-growing economic regions in Brazil.<sup>15</sup> In both its formative and mature stages, Rio Grande do Sul was in essence a secondary economy within Brazil, mainly producing goods for consumption in the export agricultural centers of the Northeast and Center-South regions.<sup>16</sup> In the early eighteenth century, this activity had centered on raising mules and livestock that were sold for use on the plantations of the Center-South and especially in the then-booming mines of Minas Gerais.<sup>17</sup> The trail that snaked its way from Gaúcho pastures over the *serra* (highlands) into Santa Catarina and finally up to the market town of Sorocaba, São Paulo, was one of the marks of the integration the mining economy fostered across most of colonial Brazil. By the second half of the eighteenth century, with the mining economy in decay, Rio Grande do Sul would have to find other products to export to Brazilian markets. At a time of a general boom in commercial agriculture across Brazil—and spurred by the imperial government’s introduction of Azorean colonists—wheat became a key crop for Gaúchos, making the province the “breadbasket” (*celeiro*) of Brazil before imports from the United States, along with the political uncertainty of the era, crushed Gaúcho wheat production.<sup>18</sup>

As wheat production fell off, that of *charque* (dried beef) and other pastoral goods emerged as the great economic motor of Rio Grande do Sul. Purchased mostly to feed slaves in plantation zones in Brazil and abroad, *charque* transformed the province.<sup>19</sup> Although always vulnerable to competition from rival producers in Buenos Aires and the Estado Oriental (present-day Uruguay), its production cemented the dominance of the extensive latifundia in much of the province and led to the rise of the cities of Rio

Grande and Pelotas, focal points of *charqueadas* (*charque*-producing plants) and commerce, as the economic centers of Rio Grande do Sul.<sup>20</sup> The wealth from *charque* and derived goods—the trade especially lucrative when internecine wars in Argentina or Uruguay cut those countries' exports—would create what geographer Stephen Bell has called a “tallow aristocracy,” as well as a large slave-labor force serving that class, in Pelotas.<sup>21</sup> Despite the sandbar that made transportation from its docks a risky proposition, Rio Grande would in turn blossom as the gateway for pastoral exports from and manufactured imports to Pelotas; Rio Grande, in the enthusiastic words of one provincial president, served as “the emporium of all commerce in the province.”<sup>22</sup>

It was the awkward position of the cattle and *charque* elites that ultimately pulled the province into the regional revolt of the Farroupilha. Emerging as a dominant class in the southern tip of Brazil, the ranchers and *charqueadores* (owners of *charqueadas*) of the *campanha* (rolling cattle lands, or pampa) and southern littoral of Rio Grande do Sul were frustrated by the greater power of other elites in the newly independent Empire. By the early 1830s, powerful planters and merchants from sugar- and coffee-exporting provinces had proved unsympathetic to the demands of their Gaúcho colleagues. Tensions escalated over a number of issues that were vitally important to the pastoral elites in the South, from tariffs on the imported salt used in *charqueadas* to duties to protect domestic *charque* from the cheaper products of Argentine and Uruguayan competitors. Although *charqueadores* and ranchers would not form a united rebel front—most of the former chose to side with the government—enough of these pastoral elites would rise up with their dependents and other armed supporters to create a serious threat to Brazilian territorial integrity.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast with the pastoral zones of the province, the economic might of Porto Alegre, which had been tied to cereal agriculture, declined in the first decades after Brazilian Independence. Impressive gains awaited the close of civil war in 1845.<sup>24</sup> This development grew largely in relation to the emergence of the so-called colonial (i.e., immigrant- or *colono*-based) economy of the highland region of the province. Although navigation between Porto Alegre and the ocean was complicated by the natural obstructions at Rio Grande, the provincial capital enjoyed a good transportation system in the network of rivers that fanned out from the city up into the highlands.<sup>25</sup> Its location often inspired observers like provincial president João Lins Cansansão

Sinimbú to enthusiastic forecasts of prosperity: “When I contemplate the situation of this beautiful City located at the mouth of the majestic rivers before it, when, following their course, I see the good lands that border on them in the valleys they form, when at a greater distance I discover those great highlands, which are a true treasure, I find reunited the three principal conditions for the life and progress of agricultural colonies: productive lands, easy and cheap transportation, and a certain market.”<sup>26</sup> Beginning with a colony of German immigrants the imperial government established at São Leopoldo in 1824, this zone received thousands of European immigrants throughout the rest of the century. From the last year of the Farroupilha until 1863, a total of 13,167 Germans arrived in the region. This ethnic group would maintain its predominance until the mid-1870s, after which point Italians formed the largest component of immigrants to the province.

What was critical for the Porto Alegre economy was that the communities of Europeans and the small to medium-sized farms outside them moved from subsistence agriculture to the production of surplus for markets in Porto Alegre and elsewhere by the 1850s. In fact, the war years of 1835–45 gave an important early impetus to this trade; with the capital often cut off from other suppliers, the colonists of São Leopoldo found in Porto Alegre eager buyers of whatever foodstuffs they might take there.<sup>27</sup> In the decades after the war, colonists and their descendants moved into other forms of production, and again the provincial capital would benefit from their dynamism. Porto Alegre remained the center of trade for artisanry and simple manufactures, as well as agricultural goods, from the colonies. In 1863, in fact, one Porto Alegre newspaper lamented only that the colonists could not produce enough to build up export trade to other nations.<sup>28</sup> To meet demand from the capital, the opening of new transportation systems between Porto Alegre and major colonies tightened the links between the city and its hinterlands after midcentury. Even small-scale commerce by canoe had been a profitable venture for enterprising individuals through midcentury (and would continue on for decades); now, the introduction of steamship routes (in 1852) and rail lines between the capital and the highlands (in 1874, between Porto Alegre and São Leopoldo, extended to Novo Hamburgo in 1876) vastly expanded the possibilities of profitable trade in the subregion.<sup>29</sup>

As it grew, the urban economy also diversified; soon it had its own substantial sector of artisans and small-scale manufacturers. At the onset of

the Paraguayan War (1865–70), one of several international disputes that touched Rio Grande do Sul over the course of the century, the city of Porto Alegre proper housed some 81 *fábricas* (factories), with another 480 in surrounding districts. Despite their small size (they averaged just 3.5 workers each), these establishments reflected the emergence of a more complex urban economy.<sup>30</sup> The conflict that ranged briefly onto Gaúcho soil—with the Paraguayan invasion of the western part of the province in 1865—gave further impetus to primitive manufacturing, most notably with the expansion of the workshops of Porto Alegre’s War Arsenal, which would come to employ well over two hundred men by 1867.<sup>31</sup>

Even though it could not overcome the dominance of cattle and *charque* at the regional level, the colony-based economy thus refashioned Porto Alegre. In 1858, the traveler Robert Avé-Lallemant captured the importance of the colonies to the capital’s expanding economic might when he wrote, “Everywhere you hear it said, from Brazilians and from Germans: ‘What would Porto Alegre be without São Leopoldo?’”<sup>32</sup> With the immigrant colonies, Porto Alegre became a bustling metropolis from midcentury on. Its major downtown streets and plazas teemed with local residents and visitors doing business; other roads were extended out of the old city to link the farms and commercial enterprises springing up on the outskirts of the urban center.<sup>33</sup> The economic activity burgeoning in and around the city nearly matched the political clout concentrated in the Praça da Matriz, the central plaza lined by the symbols of established power—the city council, the Provincial Assembly, the palace of the provincial president, and the cathedral—along with a sign of the increasingly cosmopolitan self-image of the Porto Alegre elite, the Teatro São Pedro.

Economic growth and immigration also had obvious effects on the population of Porto Alegre. At the turn of the century, Porto Alegre had been just one of several small cities in a diplomatically strategic but sparsely colonized corner of Brazil. Porto Alegre appears in an 1803 census with a population of 3,927, overshadowed by the city of Rio Grande’s 8,390 and not much larger than towns like Rio Pardo (3,739), Triunfo (3,037), and Cachoeira (3,283). After midcentury, however, Porto Alegre began to outpace these cities, a tendency that would only become more accentuated by the end of the Empire in 1889. The census of 1890 reported populations of 52,421 for Porto Alegre; 41,591 for Pelotas; and just 24,653 for Rio Grande.<sup>34</sup>

## I Population of Porto Alegre and Its Province

Year (source)	Porto Alegre	Rio Grande do Sul
1803 (a)	3,927	59,142
1808 (b)	6,035	
1814 (a)	6,111	70,656
1846 (a)	12,355*	149,363
1856 (c)	17,226	
1858 (a)	16,313	285,444
1858 (d)	29,723	282,547
1862 (e)		370,446
1863 (e)		392,725
1872 (f)	43,998	446,962
1890 (g)	52,421	897,453
1900 (h)	73,674	

Sources:

(a) FEE, *De Província*, 49–51, 60, 66, 79–83.

(b) Magalhães, “Almanak,” 69.

(c) “Quadro Estatístico da Cidade de Porto Alegre, Capital da Província de S. Pedro, organizado no mes de abril de 1856 pelo Chefe de Polícia interino da mesma província, Dr. Luiz Alves Leite de Oliveira Bello, Estatística,” m. 2, l. 532, AHRS.

(d) RS, Pres., *Relatorio* (1859), 76 and annexo.

(e) Camargo, *Quadro Estatístico e Geographico*, 75.

(f) *Recenseamento da população . . . 1872*, 17: 205–6.

(g) *Synopse do recenseamento*, 103, 107.

(h) Hahner, *Poverty and Politics*, 7.

\*Includes free persons only.

Along with this growth came a richer ethnic mixture in the capital. Many Germans and Italians stayed in Porto Alegre rather than trekking up into colonies in the interior; later on, many more immigrants and their descendants migrated down to the city in search of brighter economic prospects.<sup>35</sup> The foreign observers who remarked approvingly that Porto Alegre seemed “in a manner a German settlement,” however, overstated matters.<sup>36</sup> Despite the region’s subsequent image as racially “whiter” than the rest of Brazil, Porto Alegre’s population exhibited tremendous ethnic and racial diversity.<sup>37</sup> The imperial census of 1872, for example, reported that 54.8 percent of the population was *branco* (white), 25.9 percent *pardo* (Afro-Brazilian), 16.9 percent *preto* (black, a term usually reserved for slaves and

ex-slaves), and 2.3 percent *caboclo* (of mixed Amerindian-European race).<sup>38</sup> Africans and Afro-Brazilians thus represented significant elements of the city's populace. Indeed, the percentage of the population that consisted of the enslaved was comparable to that of the more famously Afro-Brazilian cities of Rio de Janeiro and Salvador. To a great extent, the members of such groups maintained separate ethnic identities. Not only Africans and their descendants but also Germans, Portuguese, and other groups formed social and cultural associations based on ethnic identities. This diverse populace thus had lines of ethnic and racial division running through it.<sup>39</sup>

These distinctions among members of the *povo* should not, however, keep us from seeing the features they shared in the experience of their daily lives, as well as in broader terms of social power. Immigrants, free and enslaved Afro-Brazilians, and other plebeians inhabited the same tenements (called *cortiços*, or "beehives") on the same dirty city streets and alleyways. Slaves often worked outside their master's home or business, rented out by their *senhor* to work in a particular place (as an *escravo de aluguel*) or seeking temporary employment on their own (as an *escravo de ganho*). Whether *de aluguel* or *de ganho*, such slaves would remit part or all of the wages they received to their *senhor*.<sup>40</sup> The range of jobs that slaves performed was vast. A visitor to Porto Alegre in this period would have seen slaves working as porters at the docks; as domestic servants in the houses of the better-off; as agricultural workers on the *chácaras* (small truck farms) that dotted the edges of the city; or as sailors, street vendors, or in any number of other occupations. In 1872, by far the greatest number of the city's enslaved inhabitants (8,155 in total) toiled as domestic servants (2,978), with an almost equal number performing miscellaneous forms of labor (with 2,117 listed as "without profession" and 853 as servants and day laborers) and some 1,498 engaged in agriculture.<sup>41</sup> Much of their work put them side by side with free laborers. This was especially true of work in artisans' shops, where slaves frequently served in the less noble trades, such as shoe repair and tailoring. So great was the number of slaves in artisanry, in fact, that in 1850 one German promoter of colonization felt compelled to advise potential immigrants that "metalworkers . . . manage good earnings, because their job is one of the few in which slaves are almost not employed."<sup>42</sup>

The 1864 survey of *fábricas* referred to above attests not only to the rise of artisanry and simple manufacture but also to the mixing of ethnicities in the workplace. Of the total of 1,944 workers in the ceramic and other work-

## 2 Slave Population of Porto Alegre and Its Province

Year (source)	Porto Alegre		Rio Grande do Sul	
	Slaves	Percentage	Slaves	Percentage
1814 (a)	2,312	37.8		
1856 (b)	5,146	29.9		
1858 (c, d)	4,443	27.2	70,880	25.1
1872 (e)	8,155	18.5	67,791	15.6
1883 (d)			62,138	8.9
1884 (f)	5,790	14.5		

Sources:

(a) FEE, *De Província*, 50.

(b) “Quadro Estatístico da Cidade de Porto Alegre, Capital da Província de S. Pedro, organizado no mes de abril de 1856 pelo Chefe de Polícia interino da mesma província Dr. Luiz Alves Leite de Oliveira Bello, Estatística,” m. 2, l. 532, AHRS. This census lists an additional 2,664 residents of the outlying areas (*subúrbios*) of the city but does not break that figure down by legal status.

(c) “População da província no fim do anno de 1858, segundo o mappa tirado pelas listas de famílias,” Estatística, m. 1, l. 531, AHRS.

(d) Bakos, *RS: Escravidão e abolição*, 18.

(e) *Recenseamento da população . . . 1872*, 17: 205–6.

(f) Monti, *O abolicionismo*, 156.

shops surveyed, 27 percent (526) were free Brazilians, 10 percent free foreign-born, and 63 percent slaves.<sup>43</sup> In fact, within Rio Grande do Sul, the *charque* plants were the only large-scale export production centers that relied centrally on slave labor.<sup>44</sup> Elsewhere, on the cattle ranches of the southern plains and in cities like Porto Alegre, slavery was a constant presence, but nowhere near the economic pillar that it was in the coffee- and sugar-plantation regions of the country. In Porto Alegre, slaves represented just one distinct element in a heterogeneous urban working class; the enslaved and free poor, as Thomas Holloway has argued for Rio de Janeiro in the same years, “were considered by the coercive arm of the emerging state to be in a similarly hostile relationship with the dominant class.”<sup>45</sup> They fell, that is, on the same side of what one Gaúcho military man identified in 1859 as the fundamental division between a “class . . . of well-off citizens” and a “class of those less favored by fortune.”<sup>46</sup>

The seigneurial Liberal political culture that these groups made and remade together was, as noted earlier, elitist and exclusionary. The politics of

## 3 Slave Populations in Other Brazilian Cities

City	Year (source)	Slaves	Total	Percentage
Salvador	1835 (a)	27,500	65,500	42.0
	1855 (b)			27.5
	1872 (c)	16,468	129,109	12.8
Rio de Janeiro	1838 (d)	37,137	97,162	38.2
	1849 (d)	78,855	205,906	38.3
	1872 (e)	48,939	274,972	17.8

Sources:

- (a) Reis, *Slave Rebellion*, 6
- (b) Andrade, *A mão de obra escrava*, 29
- (c) *Recenseamento da população . . . 1872*, 3: 508–12
- (d) Karasch, *Slave Life*, 65–66
- (e) *Recenseamento da população . . . 1872*, 19: 1–2.

those legally included in the nation came to be dominated by Liberalism not only in its general ideological orientation but also in a more particular, partisan sense. (The political culture of the officially excluded will be examined in chapter 3.) Except for the ultimate hegemony of the Liberal Party, developments in Porto Alegre generally paralleled those at the more exalted levels of imperial politics in the period of relative partisan peace that followed the Farroupilha. In the regional as well as the national capital, that is, the year 1852 began a decade or so of declared cooperation between the Liberal and Conservative Parties that had taken shape over the course of the 1840s. In Porto Alegre, however, the situation involved, as it often did from Independence to the end of the nineteenth century, somewhat more internal conflict. While leaders of the local Conservative and Liberal Parties—namely Pedro Rodrigues Fernandes Chaves (Baron of Quaraim) and Israel Rodrigues Barcelos—had joined together in the Liga (League), supposedly so that the province could present a stronger, more unified voice in national debates, a Contra-Liga (Counter-League) sprang up almost immediately to oppose the abuses of patronage that “Liguistas” were allegedly committing. At the same time, the Counter-League, most of whose members soon re-formed as the Partido Liberal Progressista (Progressive Liberal Party), engaged in its own

personalist politics under the leadership of Manoel Marques de Souza (Baron of Porto Alegre). Finally, by 1863, Félix Xavier da Cunha, together with the two men who would dominate the Liberal Party in Rio Grande do Sul for decades (Gaspar Silveira Martins and Manuel Luís Osório), felt compelled to call for a more exact, and ideological, definition of parties; foreshadowing the appeals that the Positivist Republicans would issue in the 1880s, da Cunha and others demanded a new “politics of ideas.” Although a similar split was occurring nationally, unlike their counterparts in Rio, the Gaúcho Liberals behind da Cunha and his allies insisted their followers proclaim exclusive loyalty to their new “Historical” Liberal Party.<sup>47</sup>

By instilling a strong sense of party discipline and harping on the injustices that Rio Grande do Sul suffered at the hands of the central government, these new Liberals managed to construct a formidable partisan machine. They could not always overcome the obstacles that the Empire’s centralized system erected, but they were able to win elections in their province and its capital even when Conservatives held the reins in Parliament—a sign of the unusual support they had built up in their province, since the party that dominated Parliament also enjoyed tremendous control over electoral mechanisms in the Empire.<sup>48</sup> Gaúcho Liberals held on to their power through profound changes in Rio Grande do Sul, from the early 1860s up to the challenges of the new politics that took shape in the 1880s and 1890s.

### *The Asylum Project: Beggars False and True*

As could be expected of legislative debates on a proposed social program, the arguments over the Beggars’ Asylum touched on both partisan and logistical matters. From the beginning, however, the august figures on both sides of the question elevated their rhetoric to the level of social critique. With a systematic logic unusual in Provincial Assembly oratory, they attempted to define the nature of the poor, the means by which their misery might be diminished, and the relations that should prevail between rich and poor in Gaúcho society. As we shall see, their analyses of such questions formed part of elites’ general approach to the *povo* in the period under study here. At its most basic, this approach boiled down to the intent to repress the larger share of the *povo* while retraining whatever small fraction elites deemed to be

“salvageable.” By that means a new *povo*, one that would more readily accept a dependent position in this seigneurial society, might emerge.

The lofty tone and general thematic structure of the Asylum debates became apparent in an early exchange between Félix Xavier da Cunha and José Antonio do Vale Caldre e Fião. Da Cunha expressed sympathy for the unfortunate members of society; after researching the plan for the Beggars’ Asylum, however, he warned his colleagues in the Provincial Assembly not to be “seduced by the religious feelings of charity.” Based on a careful morphology of beggars, he argued, the only rational option was to oppose the Asylum. In his explication of this position, da Cunha divided the potential recipients of charity into three categories. First, he pointed to the class of the “able-bodied beggars” (*mendigos válidos*), which he defined as those “who, desiring to put into use their active faculties, wishing to live nobly by the product of their efforts and industry, cannot satisfy this desire because of the . . . impediments that civilization itself brings them.” In other words, *mendigos válidos* had the will and capacity for labor but through no fault of their own were not able to procure employment. This class, he averred, did not exist in Brazil; it was, rather, a product of large-scale industrialization such as had been taking place in Europe. The introduction of mechanized industries of the type that “generate pauperism” in France and England had not yet occurred in Brazil. Next, he defined the group of the able-bodied poor who, in spite of their ability to work, refused to seek out gainful employment. Much to its detriment, he explained, Brazil had this class in excess. Finally, he described the third category, that of the “invalid beggars” (*mendigos inválidos*), as consisting of poor persons who “because of the state of their health cannot seek the means of providing for their own subsistence.”

The conclusions that da Cunha drew from this classification of possible Asylum beneficiaries were harsh. In his estimation, the first type of able-bodied poor, those who actively sought to work, was absent. The second class, physically able but unwilling workers, he deemed unworthy of charity. If they refused to work for a living, da Cunha asserted, they must be persuaded to change their minds, and the government should not spare force in accomplishing this. He argued that it would be more “convenient” for military recruitment to target “those individuals who do not want to work” than “to remove useful hands from agriculture or other industries”; the latter option would only hurt production and families at the state’s expense. The in-

valid poor, finally, would not in da Cunha's view benefit from the Asylum. Taking them away from their families and placing them to vegetate in such an institution would instead do them harm. If they required official assistance, he concluded, they should receive help in their own homes.<sup>49</sup>

Other speakers would soon respond to da Cunha's stinging criticism of the Asylum and the people it might serve; several would provide fireworks of their own. Caldre e Fião, a physician, novelist, and early abolitionist, emerged as one of da Cunha's principal rivals. Caldre e Fião's analysis was much more generous than that of his opponent, but it also centered on preserving the social order through improvement of the poor. He agreed with da Cunha that society was suffering from the growing numbers of poor infesting the streets; Caldre e Fião even specified "slaves abandoned by their masters" as a particularly troublesome group. Like da Cunha, he recognized further that among this population existed a class of "false beggars," those "vagrants . . . who, able to acquire means of subsistence through their labor, do not do so," those who sought charity only because they wished to avoid work. These observations led Caldre e Fião, however, to point to the Asylum as the great answer to the social problem at hand. He declared, first of all, that the province already had the police corps, recruitment, and other means to take care of the most disobedient vagrants. Taking issue with da Cunha's classification, Caldre e Fião went on to assert that not all of the able-bodied beggars were to blame for their condition; the province, he argued, had its share of "honest poverty"—the poverty of those families who persistently sought work, even the lowliest, most menial jobs, but were unable to get by. Like the physically incapacitated, these workers not only needed but deserved official aid. Indeed, he argued that the Asylum could also become useful with regard to common vagrants. Residents of the Asylum would, he explained, be put to work; the recalcitrant and the infirm alike would perform whatever tasks their physical abilities allowed. In this way, Caldre e Fião supported the creation of an institution that would combine charity with vocational training—more a workhouse than a shelter.<sup>50</sup> In his conception, the Beggars' Asylum would thus include not only humanitarian care for the unfortunate but also a program to put all available bodies to work.

Over the course of the debates, other voices would join in. Whether taking sides with da Cunha or with Caldre e Fião, these speakers would share with those representatives a profound concern with social order, a sense that the poor were threatening that order, and the feeling that the *povo* must be

altered to keep the social peace and further the material and moral progress of their province. Running through the speeches by such legislators as Felipe Neri, José Cândido Gomes, and Dr. Manoel Pereira da Silva Ubatuba was a horror at the refusal to work—or to work in a properly obedient way—on the part of many members of the lower classes of Gaúcho society. Indeed, for much of the debates this side of the question overwhelmed any consideration of the issue of charity; the problem of vagrancy, so obviously central to the analyses of da Cunha and Caldre e Fião, would dominate discussions of the Asylum. Plebeians' unwillingness to remain dependent—a phenomenon elites derided as a lack of "love of work"—blew the real *povo* up into a force that threatened to become a "black cloud" over the Empire.<sup>51</sup> The signal importance of the Asylum idea for the elite debaters of 1857 was the potential (or lack thereof) the project held for effectively addressing what seemed to these legislators to be the problem of the *povo*.

### *Slavery and Abolition*

In elite considerations of what they thought of as an essentially vagrant *povo*, slaves and the prospect of abolition held a restricted but privileged place. The assessments elite politicians made of the end of slavery—and the problems such a development might entail—linked abolition very closely to the issue of vagrancy. Like vagrancy in general, slavery and abolition raised fears among the elites of a possible breakdown of social hierarchies; as with the broader issue, their preferred responses to the disorderly potential of slavery's decline combined careful elite control of plebeians with reeducation projects to turn some of them into productive and loyal subordinates.

To begin with, one type of freedperson figured in the definitions of potential beneficiaries of the Beggars' Asylum. Caldre e Fião was far from the only Assembly member to point to ex-slaves as a significant portion of the province's indigent population, but he was the strongest champion of the Asylum as a means to help needy freedpersons. This institution would have no higher purpose, he argued, than to care for "the man who . . . [had] passed his entire life in slavery, often serving a barbarous man who calls himself master and abandons him at the end of his days, when because of his dedication, his zeal, his love, he could rightly hope for other recompense."<sup>52</sup> Neri shared this sympathy for the miserable ex-slave but felt compelled to pardon

many of the masters who had rid themselves of the expense of maintaining an elderly and unproductive slave. Families who had purchased slaves in periods of affluence but then watched their fortunes decay, he explained, often faced a bitter choice—whether “to let themselves or their slave die of hunger.” Even as he thus disputed the barbarity of the *senhores* who sent their slaves into a free life of begging, however, Neri agreed that the government had to address the problem of these “invalids.”<sup>53</sup> Despite their minor disagreements, these and other speakers thus treated a specific type of former slave as part of the formula by which to identify the population that deserved official charity.

Slavery also entered into the broader concerns of the Asylum debates and, indeed, of other elite discussions in midcentury Porto Alegre. Elderly ex-slaves reduced to begging worried Caldre e Fião and his colleagues not just as charity cases but also as symbols of the difficulties of the transition from slavery to free labor. The discussion of these freedpersons, for example, led Neri and several other of the Assembly representatives to speak out in favor of legislation to regulate emancipation in the province. Ubatuba looked at the fate of the infirm former slaves and pondered how his society might achieve a just emancipation; “I do not want,” he declared, “liberty just in words or writing, I want liberty in practice.” This relatively bold statement was a call not for immediate abolition but for a strengthening of the paternalistic strain of master-slave relations. The emancipation of slaves too old to support themselves by their labors was for Ubatuba an illegitimate form of liberation, because it represented a simple abandonment of former dependents by their patrons. Proud of his treatment of his own slaves, he wondered how the province might ensure that all masters show similar responsibility toward the slaves they held and those whom they were going to liberate. The question thus involved not only taking care of unfortunate freedpersons but reinforcing a proper paternalism.<sup>54</sup>

The focus in these 1857 debates on an orderly and paternalistic emancipation, which ran through elite discussions to the end of the 1870s (and beyond, as we shall see in chapter 4), was at once a product of nationwide developments of the 1850s and of provincial conditions. Before midcentury, elite criticisms of slavery and projects for abolition had appeared in Rio Grande do Sul, but they had come from individual and exceptional voices. Perhaps the most forceful abolitionist appeal was that of Antonio José Gonçalves Chaves, whose 1823 *Memórias ecônomo-políticas sobre a administração pública no Brasil* damned slavery as a multifaceted evil in Brazilian society.<sup>55</sup> Necessarily in-

efficient, since “the slave, who can by no means expect a reward for his labor, interests himself in consuming without working,” slave labor in Gonçalves Chaves’s view also held back the Brazilian economy in other ways and poisoned the institutions of family and government. With agriculture turned over to slave labor and foreign imports restraining the development of industry in Brazil, he argued, a large part of the free population fell into “softness, cowardice, ineptitude, and other vices that are fatal to nations.”<sup>56</sup> At the same time, the position of slaves in the economy and the immoral spectacle of captivity also prevented the immigration of Europeans who might, with the families and capital they would bring, contribute to the progress of the Empire. The horrible treatment that *senhores* gave their slaves, moreover, could only serve as an unhealthy example for the children of the slave-owning class; out of such a milieu, only a people educated to live in despotism could arise.<sup>57</sup> To stem the damage slavery had inflicted, Gonçalves Chaves concluded, Brazil needed to reduce and ultimately remove slavery itself. No radical, he proposed simply that the government ban the further introduction of slaves into the Empire and regulate public sales of slaves. Given the slave population’s inability to reproduce itself, these measures would lead to a gradual and careful diminution of slavery in Brazil. With further caution, the state would also promote voluntary emancipation of slaves by philanthropic associations “when we are certain that our force exceeds that of the black race.” Anticipating the “whitening” ideal that would emerge among racial theorists of later generations, he hoped miscegenation would wash away the vices he associated with the enslaved Africans and their surviving progeny.<sup>58</sup>

Despite such determined arguments, projects like that of Gonçalves Chaves held little sway in Rio Grande do Sul until the 1850s.<sup>59</sup> Events at midcentury forced revision of elite attitudes, pulling the abolition of slavery toward the center of political discourse. Key to the sea change in attitudes was the termination of the slave trade with Africa. Most notably in 1831, authorities had previously signed international agreements to end this trade. Until 1850 or so, however, antislave trade legislation had been almost entirely *para inglês ver*—just for show, or literally, “for the English to see.” When pressure from England became more than merely diplomatic in the 1840s and 1850s, with British ships chasing slavers into Brazilian waters, the Brazilian government at last pursued effective enforcement of these treaties.<sup>60</sup> Particularly since it came at a time when the expansion of the coffee economy in

the Center-South region was creating new demands for slave labor, the end of the slave trade in the early 1850s spurred more serious consideration of the institution of slavery itself. Brazil's was "a naturally decreasing slave population" that depended on the influx of enslaved Africans to maintain its numbers.<sup>61</sup> By shutting off the entrance of new slave workers, the abolition of the African trade forced many Brazilian elites to ponder the ultimate destruction of the entire system of captive labor that was to a great extent the basis of their wealth and status. In 1850, Joaquim José Rodrigues Torres, a leading Conservative politician from the province of Rio de Janeiro, demonstrated such concern when he warned his fellow members of the dominant class that "if we do not take some measure to protect the interests of agriculture, the only industry of Brazil, we will quickly be reduced to the proletarian class."<sup>62</sup> Albeit with variation among regions, elites across Brazil shared Rodrigues Torres's anxiety; the abolition of the African trade was so monumental an event that it spread fear throughout the Empire's ruling classes about preserving social hierarchies.

Gaúcho elites participated in national discussions of slavery and the transition to some as yet undefined system of free labor, but their interest in the matter reflected local circumstances as well as national-level currents of thought. Both the Asylum debates themselves and related discourse in the period after the Farroupilha showed that elites in Porto Alegre worried about the possibly unsettling elimination of slavery. In Rio Grande do Sul and elsewhere outside the economically booming coffee zones, elites may have felt more deeply the possibility that slavery's elimination was now inevitable. As Robert Slenes has demonstrated, the interprovincial slave trade that intensified in the wake of the African trade's abolition did not produce an immediate and massive shift of the slave population within the Empire; still, the new Brazilian trade "constituted a substantial and constant drain of the slave labor force" out of the northeastern, northern, and southern regions.<sup>63</sup> Dominant groups in Rio Grande do Sul thus had to confront the dilution of their slave population. As we have seen earlier, even without a growing slave-based economic sector, the region around Porto Alegre relied heavily enough on slaves for this development to present elites with the prospect of unsettling change. It was for this reason that Neri argued in 1854 for measures to transfer the remaining slaves out of urban occupations and into agriculture, where he felt the need for their labor was more pronounced.<sup>64</sup> Out of a similar concern,

Ubatuba warned in 1851, "It is imperative that we occupy ourselves with the substitution of African hands, which from one day to the next are disappearing among us, and if we do not attend conveniently to this necessity, we will soon have to see the province in a truly lamentable state and will have to suffer the censure of unforgivable lack of foresight."<sup>65</sup> More involved discussions of the implications of the end of the African trade followed Ubatuba's 1852 presentation of a bill that called for a steeper duty on slaves being sold out of the province; the income from this tax was to be used to subsidize the importation of European colonists. His idea met resistance in the Provincial Assembly, but even opponents agreed that elites had to plan carefully for the transformation of the workforce on which their wealth depended. Reacting to his critics, Ubatuba insisted that, while he had no wish to deny the "thought of the century," he was convinced that elites had to preserve their slave force until a new labor system was firmly established. To do otherwise, he averred, would be to "plunge a dagger into our industry, tear up the sources of wealth in our nation."<sup>66</sup> This exchange, then, demonstrated even more vividly than the Asylum debates elites' concern over the apparently inevitable end of slavery. Differences over plans like Ubatuba's did not go beyond divergences of method; elites in Porto Alegre agreed overwhelmingly on the core aim of moving in an orderly fashion away from captive labor.

Cementing elite consensus on this goal was a second local circumstance that shaped attitudes toward slavery in the province (and that will be examined in detail in chapter 3): plebeians' attempts to put their own interpretations of social relations into effect. Although discussed only obliquely in the Asylum debates, the consistent appearance of plebeian resistance provided a backdrop to elite discussions throughout the period. Elite consideration of popular initiative was undeniably most direct and obvious in the actions elites took and the comments they made in response to slave rebellions and other dramatic instances of plebeian unruliness. Discussions of slavery in the Provincial Assembly, newspapers, and other public forums tended to skip over slaves' actions and focus on the economic and, to a lesser extent, moral aspects of the question. Even in such rhetoric, however, elites in Porto Alegre revealed their concern with slaves' initiatives.

Most often this concern took the form of moral denunciations of slaves as vice ridden. At its core, elite antislavery feeling in this period focused on the poor performance of slaves as laborers. For elites in Porto Alegre, this

was as much a moral as an economic matter. Some trained their eye on the financial side of the question. One 1853 editorial held, for instance, that slave labor contributed to the backwardness of Brazilian agriculture by tying up capital that could be otherwise applied and by providing only the poor services of “slaves [who were] unintelligent and enemies of work.”<sup>67</sup> This last quality—opposition to labor—was for most commentators of the period the principal moral damage that slavery inflicted on Brazil. In explaining why he had opposed the importing of new slaves, Ubatuba made this stance explicit; previously, he related in 1852, many Gaúchos had bought slaves in large numbers, only to see many of them “become lazy in the province, highly immoral workers.”<sup>68</sup> As they turned to European immigrants as their preferred substitutes for slave laborers, Gaúcho elites sought to prevent slaves’ immoral antagonism toward work from poisoning these new hands. An 1848 proposal to establish a colony near Pelotas, for example, stipulated not only that the *colonos* not bring slaves into their settlement but also that their lands never be cultivated by slave hands.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the first article of Provincial Law 183 in 1850 prohibited “the introduction of slaves into territory marked for existing colonies and those formed in the future in the Province.”<sup>70</sup> Indeed, as we shall see later (in chapter 2), moral qualities like dedication and “love of labor” that elites in Porto Alegre attributed to European workers were part of the appeal of immigration. This moral discourse provided a language with which elites could discuss slaves’ resistance. Rather than going into the many forms of troublesome initiatives emanating in the slave population, that is, elites treated the entire issue of resistance as a generalized moral flaw; the spectacular as well as the mundane forms of resistance within popular political culture became in this way reduced to slaves’ laziness and lack of affection for their work.

Shaped by the difficulty of maintaining their slave population and the persistence of slave resistance, elite attitudes became ever more critical of the institution of slavery in the 1850s–70s. Increasingly, elites in Porto Alegre were moving toward reformist emancipationist positions, arguing that they had to find mechanisms to exterminate slavery gradually and without endangering the social order. This growing antislavery feeling was clear even in the 1850s and 1860s. Even as they argued that slavery was a necessary evil, elites like Ubatuba clearly recognized its negative characteristics. In 1851, Ubatuba himself proclaimed the need “to take measures to extirpate the

canker of Brazilian society, slavery.”<sup>71</sup> The later 1860s and early 1870s would introduce new elements into the rhetoric on the evils of slavery. The first innovation of the late 1860s consisted of more explicit projects for abolition. In 1869, for example, a reinvigorated Liberal Party issued a manifesto calling for a series of reforms. Although it had no “intimate relation to the principal object of the program,” emancipation was, the manifesto asserted, “a great question of the day, an imperious and urgent necessity of civilization since all States have abolished slavery, and Brazil is the only Christian nation that preserves it.” Part of the “mission of the Liberal Party” was in fact “the reclamation of the liberty of so many thousands of men who live in oppression and humiliation.” The means proposed to achieve abolition were essentially those that the Conservative Rio Branco cabinet would adopt and pass into law two years later—namely, that all children subsequently born to slave mothers would be free.<sup>72</sup> Other voices would rise before 1871 to support these mechanisms and afterward to criticize their poor implementation.<sup>73</sup> Although somewhat less concrete, calls for voluntary abolition by private citizens also became a common part of antislavery discourse in these years. Newspapers and clubs were eager to praise those *senhores* and organizations that took it upon themselves to grant liberty to slaves. In 1869, for example, *A Reforma* heralded the noble act of a citizen who had honored his wife’s birthday by freeing a slave, writing: “Our congratulations to those friends for such beautiful conduct. May they find imitators, and the practical difficulties against which the generous idea of emancipation fights will be dispelled.”<sup>74</sup>

The second new thread of antislavery rhetoric that appeared in the late 1860s and 1870s was a more emotional type of appeal. Some of the antislavery positions in these years included condemnations of slavery’s influence on the morality of free Brazilians, recalling Gonçalves Chaves’s earlier criticisms.<sup>75</sup> The period’s sentimental attacks on slavery’s effects on the enslaved were, by contrast, unprecedented. Concern over the conditions of ex-slaves had, as we have seen, appeared in the Asylum debates in 1857. It was only in the late 1860s, however, that elites in Porto Alegre made the harm that slavery did to slaves a pillar of their proemancipation arguments. When they decried the “degradation of man” that slavery inflicted, elites now often meant the “enslaved martyrs.”<sup>76</sup> Foreshadowing the 1883–84 abolitionist campaign in the city, Caldre e Fião and other elites used private organizations to express their disgust with the suffering captivity inflicted on slaves. Caldre e

Fião, who had been an eager voice for the abolition of the slave trade in Rio de Janeiro before moving back to his home city of Porto Alegre, published an example of this position in the *Revista do Parthenon Litterario*, the journal of one of the organizations that were pushing for gradual emancipation. His poem “O escravo brasileiro” (The Brazilian Slave) not only pointed out the barbarities that slaves endured but also looked forward to a future when such injustice might cease:

When did I say that I was not free,  
That my country I would not defend,  
.....

They deny me all, my brothers in this nation,  
Even the forum of civil rights,  
Honor, pride, noble sentiments,  
That lofty inhabit Brazilian chests.

But be you unjust—even though I  
Pay you with this brotherly heart;  
In industry and arts, in progress together,  
I will be with you in communion most holy.

Writing in the years of the Paraguayan War, a national effort in which thousands of slaves or ex-slaves served, Caldre e Fião attributed to the slave “noble sentiments”—first of patriotism, honor, and pride but also of forgiveness; the slave would be willing to pardon previous crimes against his valorous nature.<sup>77</sup> By portraying the slave in this way, “O escravo brasileiro” provides an extraordinarily strong example of the sentimental emancipationism that marked this period.

The poem’s mention of a “communion most holy” of both free and ex-slave Brazilians makes it, however, something of an anomaly in the debates of the period; this element most likely reflects the perceived need for social harmony during the Paraguayan War. Generally, discussions of slavery made almost no mention of a place in society for the new group of freedpersons that abolition, even in its most cautious and gradual form, would necessarily create. In fact, until the end of the 1860s and beginning of the 1870s, elites

offered little hope that ex-slaves would be incorporated into society. Caldre e Fião, on the other hand, spoke explicitly of slaves' joining their freeborn compatriots one day in a social "communion." We should not, however, confuse this more inclusionary stance toward slaves and former slaves with a nonhierarchical vision of social relations. Caldre e Fião may have been willing to accept into society certain ex-slaves, but only on the condition that they become obedient and productive members of the working classes. Caldre e Fião's main goal in this poem was to make the idea of emancipation palatable to his elite audience. To achieve this, he portrayed the slave as not only a harmless but also a potentially model plebeian.<sup>78</sup> In doing so, the author suggested further that ex-slaves could be worthy of uniting with freeborn citizens in a new social union, one that would center on the patriotic feelings the former slaves supposedly shared with their free compatriots and on the labor the two groups would perform in the pursuit of progress. Popular classes with the loyalty and productivity posited in the poem would be ideal from an elite point of view, for they would work hard and mind their place in society. By depicting slaves as capable of joining this kind of peaceful union, Caldre e Fião might thus have assuaged the fears of elites anxious about releasing Afro-Brazilians from the bonds of slavery. Rather than acting as a simple vision of liberation for the enslaved, the poem worked more as an assurance to elites that they would be able to manage the process of emancipation to meet their own interests. To slaves (neither his intended nor his likely readership), Caldre e Fião offered only the chance to mold themselves to elite desires and gain acceptance as a new kind of subordinate.

Outside of "O escravo brasileiro," few other elite voices proposed the inclusion of persons coming out of slavery. Rather than freedpersons, however, these other projects focused on the free children born to slave mothers after the Rio Branco (Free Womb) Law of 1871. The aim behind these plans was similar to that of Caldre e Fião's verse—to incorporate the productive segments of the slave population, or here, their descendants. Rather than assuming that these children would have the qualities that would make them useful free workers, however, such projects argued for the establishment of "asylums of liberty" (*asilos de liberdade*) in which the new generation would receive training to forge them into acceptable plebeians. An 1872 article in the journal of the Parthenon Litterario, for example, proposed the creation of such asylums to give slaves' offspring "the education of labor." Rather

than abandoning such children to the “education of the slave quarters and to servilism” until they reached the age of twenty one, the state would do much better to place them in “houses of moral education and vocational training in agriculture or industry.”<sup>79</sup> Such an education, the author believed, would turn slaves’ children into “agricultural or industrial workers to plow vacant lands or establish shops or factories.” From the shame of slavery, that is, the state could create “honest working citizen[s].”<sup>80</sup>

A similar project discussed by the Sociedade Libertadora (Liberation Society) of Porto Alegre was described in the Liberal Party organ *A Reforma* at the end of 1871. With the vehemence of a party that had seen its own emancipationist plan co-opted by its political enemies, the editors of *A Reforma* attacked the Rio Branco Law as incomplete. Although this legislation was essentially a version of the ideas Liberals had been championing, the paper condemned the law for neglecting the free children of slaves (*ingênuos*); the provisions of the law handed the *ingênuo* over either “to charity or to the avarice [*cobiça*] of the *senhor*. Both of these cases give rise to vices that it is necessary not to encourage. . . . Depravity [*hediondez*], crime, [and] sin according to Christian philosophy will be the result of the law’s lack of foresight.” To correct this flaw, society needed institutions like the one the Sociedade Libertadora was planning that would oversee the education of the children of slaves. If city governments would copy this idea, *asilos de liberdade* in the province would produce “the regeneration of an extensive class of men moralized by work and by the severity of their directors.” Thus we see once more in this project the hope that training in labor would salvage “a perfected worker, a citizen who participates neither in vices nor in the immoral qualities of his predecessors.” From a society based on slavery, an immoral institution that led a large part of the population into laziness and other bad habits, the province might thus move to a society whose lower levels were inhabited by productive and “moralized” plebeians.<sup>81</sup>

What was missing from the Beggars’ Asylum proposals, of course, was a clear notion of the destiny of those who had been born slaves. Aside from “O escravo brasileiro” and its vision of a rather limited communion between freed and freeborn persons, this exclusion of the majority of the enslaved was the rule in elite thought in the post-Farroupilha years. It is as though Gaúcho elites, while coming to an agreement on the desirability of emancipation, hoped it would rid them not only of the institution of slavery but of

the enslaved themselves. While the end of slavery would remove a large portion of the province's labor force, rather than worrying about incorporating previously captive workers into society, elites concentrated on saving only the *ingênuos*. Elites held few if any hopes that they might turn these children's parents, whether enslaved in Africa or born as slaves in Brazil, into acceptable free plebeians. As they gained their emancipation, such freedpersons would have the freedom mainly to get out of the way of progress.

### *Vagrancy*

The Gaúcho society that elites envisioned emerging after midcentury would not, however, rest exclusively on a working population of carefully trained children of slaves. These *ingênuos* represented, rather, the small segment of slavery's human legacy that elites felt could productively and safely be educated into proper elements of the *povo*. A much larger portion of the *povo* that elites wanted to construct was to consist of nonslave national workers. As the dispute between Félix Xavier da Cunha and Caldre e Fião made clear, these free workers were far from unproblematic in elite eyes. Indeed, free, Brazilian-born plebeians seemed to be essentially vagrant and troublesome. In the Asylum debates and more generally, elite attitudes toward this free population resembled in most respects the position taken toward slaves and former slaves. As with the enslaved or freedpersons, elites regarded the free poor as marginal candidates for participation in the new *povo*; such plebeians required, as elites saw it, careful repression. With the application of new educational programs, some part of them might be transformed into workers sufficiently obedient and hardworking to be included in society. The differences between this approach and the one elites took toward slaves and *libertos* (freedpersons) consisted, as we shall see, of differing emphases within the same overall scheme.

As was also true with regard to slavery, changing conditions in the post-Farroupilha years gave elites in Porto Alegre good reason to reevaluate the question of the free national poor. With the slave population draining out of the province after the cessation of the international trade with Africa, and with remaining slaves continuing to press their own agendas, elites looked anxiously for new foundations upon which to build their *povo*. As we shall

see in the next chapter, elites usually pointed to European immigrants as the ideal replacements for slave workers. They could not, however, keep their gaze focused too serenely on Germany and Italy; the free poor, who made up the largest part of the local population, demanded attention. These plebeians' attempts to gain relative freedom in their lives, as we shall see, made them a troublesome presence in Rio Grande do Sul throughout the period under study. In the 1850s and then again during the Paraguayan War, the disruptions and destruction that warfare inflicted on the economy gave plebeians some greater room in which to pursue their interests, while also convincing elites that the province was entering a labor crisis.

It is essential to see the connections between these two phenomena—plebeians' initiatives and elites' complaints about labor—in order to make sense of an apparent paradox that marked elite rhetoric about the free working population in these years. It often seemed that elites were concerned by both a shortage and an excess of free workers. Declarations that a “lack of hands” (*falta de braços*) was impeding economic progress ran through the period but peaked during the 1850s and the Paraguayan War. The large-scale slaughter of livestock during the Farroupilha Revolution, together with the reappearance in the early 1850s of competition from Argentina and the Estado Oriental, had put the province's cattle-raising and *charque* industries in a difficult position. For many elites, one of the most daunting obstacles to the recovery of pastoral production was precisely an insufficient number of workers. Speaking particularly of *charqueadas*, for instance, the provincial president noted in 1858, “The lack of hands tends to break down the force of this industry.”<sup>82</sup> In 1864, another president asserted that the province was far from developing a manufacturing sector, since “labor and capital are still insufficient to satisfy the needs of the cultivation of the soil and other branches of agriculture.”<sup>83</sup> The war during the second half of the 1860s brought forth similar worries. The city council of Porto Alegre lamented the economic effects of the removal of men to the front. The production of manioc and manioc flour, the council reported in 1867, had fallen into a “somewhat decayed state, because of the shortage of workers, [the] sole foundation of its development.”<sup>84</sup> An earlier complaint, however, brings us to the other side of elite discontent with the free working population. On the eve of Brazil's entrance into the Paraguayan War, the Porto Alegre newspaper *O Mercantil* described the “contortions” the new provincial president would face in Rio Grande do

Sul. The hostilities then underway across the national border had already paralyzed the Gaúcho economy. The main threat, the author argued, was not that a “shortage of hands” would slow down an economic recovery but rather that the mobs of the newly unemployed might damage social hierarchies. The workers who had been used in agriculture, livestock raising, and commerce, “the poor landowners in the midst of wealth, that unoccupied and vagrant population, all are dangers, all are elements that the combustion in the neighboring country might reach.”<sup>85</sup> This sort of anxiety, which had also appeared during the 1850s, may suggest that the problem was merely one of employment.<sup>86</sup> When the province’s main industries prospered, they sought more workers than they could find, and complaints of labor shortages appeared. When production levels dropped, employers dismissed workers whom authorities then treated as threats to social order.

In fact, the question is more intriguing than that, for worries about dangers posed by the number of vagrants were not limited to periods of economic downturn. As Sandra Pesavento has argued, elite concern with vagrants and attempts to control this all too prevalent population of individuals characterized the entire period, from midcentury to final abolition in 1888. Elites’ repeated attempts to compel the vagrant, whom Pesavento aptly defines as any plebeian who “refused to enter the world of labor,” do not, however, contradict the image of a shortage of workers.<sup>87</sup> The two descriptions of the free *povo* were very much part of the same phenomenon. Especially (though not exclusively) during periods of warfare, elites in Porto Alegre worried about the availability of good workers. When they saw too few hands or too many members of a mob, they were looking at the same mass of free plebeians. It was the lack of plebeians willing to submit to an employer that caused both impressions. In the second case, elite observers merely felt a greater fear of what those plebeians might do while outside positions of dependence and submission. At times anxious about social threats, at others worried more immediately about their own wealth, Gaúcho elites thus developed their own version of the “ideology of vagrancy,” in which Brazilian elites branded as vagrants all those free poor who would not become passive and productive workers for elite patrons.

The conception of plebeians’ independence as vagrancy was central to Gaúcho elites’ approach to the issue of the free national poor from midcentury on. This found strong expression, for example, in the Asylum debates. Con-

trasting Brazilian-born workers with European immigrants, Ubatuba even offered the blanket statement that “our compatriots are vagrants.” Mariante seconded that observation with his claim that free national plebeians “do not have a love for work.”<sup>88</sup>

The ideology of vagrancy did not, however, rest on a belief that the national poor were irredeemably vagrant. This is not to say that elites did not impute congenital defects to such plebeians. The presumed racial inferiority of Africans and Afro-Brazilians, for example, was a major reason Gaúcho elites spoke so highly of European immigration. Discussing the necessity of establishing settlers over “the vastness of the empty lands” of the Empire in 1847, for instance, provincial president Manoel Antonio Galvão said, almost in passing, that the Assembly members “undoubtedly do not want to populate with blacks.”<sup>89</sup> When speaking of the free poor as a whole, however, elites more commonly supposed that plebeians’ unruliness and lack of “love of work” were the results of a flawed education. Here elites understood “education” in an extremely broad sense to include all of the processes by which members of the *povo* were socialized. Elites thus demonstrated ambiguity about the innate nature of the “flaw” of vagrancy. In any case, they believed the *povo* could be saved from that vice through education. What is most important about this view of vagrancy is that it left open the possibility of retraining the free national poor into a better *povo*.

Education for the *povo* was one of the causes that most attracted elite attention and reform proposals after the Farroupilha. To a great extent, this reflected Gaúcho elites’ use of western Europe and the United States as models of progress to be emulated. Marveling at the political, economic, and social development of these other regions, leaders in Porto Alegre focused on education as one of the chief pillars of European and North American civilization; although it represented an imposing deficiency, education might, with the proper reforms, be made to propel Rio Grande do Sul to North Atlantic levels of progress and cultural sophistication. In keeping with this tendency, elites frequently asserted the vital importance of improvements to the provincial educational system. In 1847, for example, the deputy Sá Britto declared in the Provincial Assembly that education was “the basis of the civilization and morality of a people.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, for many elite observers in the period, the “backwardness” (*atraso*) of Brazil’s educational institutions relative to those of Europe and the United States called for immediate action.<sup>91</sup>

By raising once again the issue of retraining the free poor, Caldre e Fião's fleeting reference to the Asylum returns us to the *povo* as a problem for elites in Porto Alegre. For while the instruction of the *povo* was part of a broader treatment of education as a step toward European-style civilization, it was in a narrower sense also a means of fashioning something useful out of the often troublesome free national workers in the region. Given plebeians' struggles for autonomy, such a reconstruction effort would not, of course, be easy; elites realized the need for forceful and persistent efforts in a variety of areas.<sup>92</sup> The instruction (again, broadly defined) required to salvage part of the free poor had to encompass various fields of action; depending on the context, elite observers disagreed on the primacy of one or another of these types of education. Some, like provincial president Tenente General Francisco José de Souza Soares de Andrea, in 1849, concentrated on religion as "the strongest guarantee of public order."<sup>93</sup> Others, like provincial vice president Luís Alves Leite de Oliveira Bello, in 1855, concentrated on the importance of the use of force against unruly plebeians; for Oliveira Bello, the only sure way to control the disorder common among the lower classes was "the certainty of punishment."<sup>94</sup> Increasingly, moreover, elite attentions came to focus on education for work as a central force for reshaping the free poor. Through both traditional schooling and training through cautiously overseen labor, "the diffusion of enlightenment," as one eager orator put it in 1862, would form useful and more civilized workers out of the province's free plebeians.<sup>95</sup> Most often, however, elites treated these distinct fields of popular training as intimately related efforts.

Although elites did not see the different areas of instruction as mutually exclusive, they came to focus their attentions on building up the apparatuses of repression and education. The first of these spheres of action, which has been studied at some length by Paulo Moreira, involved primarily the improvement of the various police corps that were charged with the enforcement of order in Porto Alegre.<sup>96</sup> As Moreira has noted, the period after the Farroupilha demonstrated "a growing preoccupation with police organization, seen by elites as a privileged strategy of intimidation and control of the plebeian classes." The years 1846 through 1878 saw, in fact, five new sets of regulations governing the provincial police (in 1857, 1860, 1866, 1869, and 1873), as well as numerous reforms of specific provisions of these rules.<sup>97</sup> Although they tended to be underfunded, inconsistently implemented, and

continually resisted by plebeians, these measures of reorganization revealed elites' desires to fashion the police force into an instrument with which they might "moralize" the free poor—turn them, that is, into more obedient workers in the region's new order.<sup>98</sup>

To do this, elites attempted to shore up the moral behavior of the police themselves, an effort that inevitably failed. The regulations of the police corps customarily expressed a preference for recruits to be men of "good conduct, not having committed a crime for which they suffered defaming punishment," and stipulated harsh penalties for crimes they might carry out while serving in the police.<sup>99</sup> These agents of order, however, frequently showed themselves to be a ubiquitous source of disorder in the streets of Porto Alegre. For one thing, both the police and the military drew their rank and file from the same popular segments they were supposed to be repressing. Second, even after receiving their uniforms, these plebeians continued to inhabit the same spaces they were charged with patrolling. Finally, elites' efforts to insert their agents into not only the streets and plazas but also the taverns, tenements, and other semipublic spaces of the city ensured that the police would intrude in areas plebeians considered their own. Together, these circumstances meant that the agents and the objects of repression maintained an intimate coexistence in which tensions could easily break out into violence. The number of such instances of conflict suggests that the police generally did not rise above what the elite saw as the *povo*'s moral misbehavior.<sup>100</sup>

However limited their success, the attempts to establish police control in "those dangerous places where are found only paths that lead to misery, degradation, and infamy" clearly represented a planned expansion of state power.<sup>101</sup> We should not, however, be too quick to assume that this intention meant an increase in government control at the expense of the power of individual elites. On paper, the police regulations and municipal codes that politicians legislated into being in the decades after the Farroupilha took over the punishment of plebeians' public behavior. Those who lived under the power of a *senhor*, however, continued to have their lives regulated by their master. As Thomas Holloway has asserted about Rio de Janeiro in the 1830s, "While punishment was reserved to the state, the master was still allowed and expected to exercise disciplinary control."<sup>102</sup> The apparent growth of the state's role in controlling plebeians did not, that is, necessarily imply any reduction of seigneurial power.

The second area on which elite projects of the post-Farrroupilha years concentrated was that of plebeian instruction. This could include formal, classroom education, like the classes on “calligraphy, reading, arithmetic, national grammar, geography, [and] drawing” that a Masonic lodge provided in 1875 for “poor boys and those whose daily labors only permit them to study at night.”<sup>103</sup> In general, however, it was another type of instruction, one that involved training for and through work, that elites had in mind when they planned the reeducation of the national poor into a more acceptable *povo*. In some conceptions, the need was for “industrial instruction,” teaching the methods of modern industrial manufacturing to worker and capitalist alike. By setting up establishments “where those dedicated to the industrial life go to receive enlightenment [receber luzes],” such plans could create what one plan referred to as “a beautiful native technological personnel.”<sup>104</sup>

These projects turned out to be exceptionally forward-looking, even utopian, given the lack of resources available to governments in Porto Alegre in the 1846–80 period. Speaking in the Provincial Assembly in 1854, Caldre e Fiação stuck to more immediately practical work instruction: agricultural training for the national poor. While many of his colleagues asserted that bringing in hardworking foreigners would be enough to transform Brazilians into efficient and obedient laborers, Caldre e Fiação argued, “Simply the example that we want to give of labor and the peaceful actions of the colonists will not be enough.” What was needed, he continued, was “to give an agricultural education to the people.” He urged his colleagues to set up a system of “internal colonization,” placing Brazilian-born plebeians on plots of land and founding “practical schools” to instruct these native colonists in the efficient use of the land. By doing so, he concluded, “we will improve the customs of our countrymen,” producing efficient farmers and at the same time cutting the incidence of crime among the *povo*.<sup>105</sup> Similar projects appeared proposing that colonies combine national and immigrant workers to create a “model *fazenda* [plantation]” to train “children of poor farmers or of people worthy of public assistance.”<sup>106</sup> Such colonies or plantations would instruct members of the national poor to be good workers, precisely by putting them to work in carefully controlled settings. Such was the faith that elites put in instruction in the rigors of labor that they suggested this vocational training would mold an orderly, as well as industrious, *povo*.

Forging a new and acceptable *povo* through an education in labor also

appeared, as the case of the Beggars' Asylum demonstrates, in elites' projects for charitable institutions in Porto Alegre. Caldre e Fiação and his supporters, it will be remembered, wanted to set former beggars to work in the Asylum; even the infirm would produce according to their abilities. Other houses of public assistance demonstrated a similar orientation. The Establishment of Minor Apprentices, attached to the national Army Arsenal in Porto Alegre, provides the most obvious evidence of this tendency. Created by the imperial government in 1846, this institution took in orphans and children of indigent parents and trained them to be manual laborers. "There they receive education in primary letters inside the Arsenal itself," the provincial president noted in 1853, "and in the workshops they learn the mechanical art for which they demonstrate the greatest aptitude."<sup>107</sup> In 1848, the provincial government followed the central government's example by setting up its own division of "minor apprentices" to supplement the imperial one. The provincial branch would provide unfortunate young boys with "an education as elevated as that which good fathers should give their children"; again, this paternalistic scheme involved carefully monitored training in artisanal trades.<sup>108</sup> In 1867, it was reported that twenty-two of the forty-two apprentices were learning carpentry, while another eleven were apprentice tailors, four were apprentice blacksmiths and gunsmiths, three were apprentice saddle-makers, and two were apprentice tinsmiths.<sup>109</sup>

In nineteenth-century Porto Alegre, such occupations were very much reserved for men. Other charitable institutions provided a very different working education for poor girls. Both the Asilo de Santa Leopoldina and the Colégio de Santa Tereza aimed to make "useful for society" the "orphan and exposed" girls under their care.<sup>110</sup> As the internal regulations for the former institution, drawn up at its founding in 1857, make explicit, elites thought poor girls' utility to be quite different from that of poor boys. The wards of the Santa Leopoldina were to receive "the education, the teaching of labor and domestic industry appropriate for women."<sup>111</sup> They would be put to work, but at tasks in keeping with the specific position of their gender in society—cleaning and organizing a household and carrying out "handiworks" such as embroidery and sewing.<sup>112</sup> Later on, as the state moved to expand the public school system, girls at the Santa Leopoldina and the Colégio de Santa Tereza were encouraged to study to become schoolteachers. Although the provincial government appreciated the proceeds from the sale of the girls' needlework,

officials continually stressed that the overriding aim of both establishments was “to create perfect mothers.”<sup>113</sup> Education in this womanly brand of work would achieve that goal. Elites’ projects for the retraining of the free poor were, therefore, based on gendered visions of the work plebeians should perform.

Whether male or female, however, these members of the popular classes would have to work in an orderly and obedient manner if they were to fit into elites’ plans for the province’s progress. In the various ways they sought to reshape a part of the existing populace, elite projects demonstrated a proactive character; elites’ failure to implement most of their proposals should, however, remind us that Porto Alegre in 1846–80 had not yet arrived at the more statist policies that would arise during the Old Republic (1889–1930).

As they debated projects to fashion a *povo* appropriate to their grand plans for the province, elites had to take into account the projects of the plebeians already around them. Whether as maids or farmhands, street vendors or artisans, the members of the real *povo* of Porto Alegre performed the work on which the city’s economy was based. As they went about their lives, these plebeians struggled in myriad ways to carve out some space of at least imperfect autonomy for themselves. Elite rhetoric effectively hid these initiatives from view by blurring them together as a troublesome moral failing on the part of the popular classes; elites conceived of the persistent creativity of plebeians, that is, as laziness or vagrancy that, in the best of circumstances, might be educated out of part of the working population. Through repression, religion, and other kinds of instruction, elites might thus be able to include a fraction of the national poor in the new Rio Grande do Sul. To be sure, this inclusion would not mean incorporation of popular elements into the politically active, ruling groups; rather, the redeemed national poor would be allowed to participate as an improved type of subordinates. The only plebeians who might take part in any more significant and political manner, as we shall see in the next chapter, were European immigrants. In this way, the threats that plebeians’ alleged “defects” represented for elites only reinforced the tendency for members of the dominant classes to look to Europe as a model and source of progress.<sup>114</sup>