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# The City of Minas: The Founding of Belo Horizonte, Brazil and Modernity in the First Republic, 1889-1897

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THE CITY OF MINAS: THE FOUNDING OF BELO HORIZONTE, BRAZIL AND  
MODERNITY IN THE FIRST REPUBLIC, 1889-1897

A Thesis Presented

by

DANIEL L. MCDONALD

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THE CITY OF MINAS: THE FOUNDING OF BELO HORIZONTE, BRAZIL AND  
MODERNITY IN THE FIRST REPUBLIC, 1889-1897

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By  
Daniel L. McDonald

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## ABSTRACT

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MAY 2014

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The foundation of Belo Horizonte in the state of Minas Gerais in 1897 represents a pivotal moment in urban planning and the search for modernity in Brazil. This thesis argues that the decision to move the capital of Minas Gerais at the outset of the First Republic and the designing of the new city encompassed an evolving vision of modernity that helped establish the planned city as a means to transport Brazil into the future. It also situates the effort to build Belo Horizonte within the wider theoretical discourse on modernity and the development of urban spaces in Brazil. The politicians in favor of the move, *mudancistas*, responded to the unique geopolitical situation of Minas Gerais to craft a vision of the city that embraced railroads and industry and rejected Ouro Preto for its association with the colonial past. They envisioned a white space with little room for Brazil's majority population of color that would embody the republicanism of Brazil's future. After the decision to move the capital, Chief Engineer Aarão Reis added significant elements of Positivist thought to the vision of modernity surrounding the creation of the new capital city, Belo Horizonte. Reis sought to build a city based on mathematic rationality that would bring order to society. He echoed politicians' rejection of Ouro Preto in his emphasis on sanitation and the prevention of unregulated development. Moreover, he intended for Belo Horizonte to be a performance of modernity that would be studied around the world.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Brazilian Empire ended with a whimper on November 15, 1889 when a group of military officers declared a republic in the nation's capital Rio de Janeiro. The Empire collapsed after the social bases for the monarchy had eroded with the abolition of slavery a year previous in 1888 and through the widespread sense that the institution had simply run its course. Amidst these momentous changes, a small group of dedicated republicans in the state of Minas Gerais began to plot their state's future within the uncertain politics of the nascent First Republic. They desired to bring Minas Gerais and its people into the future and create a modern state within a country long associated with backwardness. These republicans conceived of a new capital city for their state that would construct modernity in their midst. Largely completed in 1897, this city bore the name Belo Horizonte.

The idea of moving the capital from Ouro Preto possessed a long history but republicans in 1889 saw an opportunity to construct a city that was inherently scientific, republican and therefore, modern. For these politicians, Ouro Preto represented the colonial past, monarchy, religious superstition, slavery and all the conditions that held Minas Gerais and all of Brazil in a state of backwardness. The political debate over whether to move the capital commenced immediately with the declaration of the republic in 1889 and never ceased throughout the construction of the city. Nonetheless, the political discourse from 1889-1891 fundamentally shaped the vision of modernity that would inform the design of urban spaces within the new city. *Mineiro* ("of Minas Gerais") politicians looked abroad to the United States, France and Argentina in order to fulfill their desire to create an inherently republican city. Strategic concerns over the

relative backwardness of Minas Gerais in comparison to its neighbors São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro lent urgency to the project of the new capital, which they hoped would lift the state out of its lamentable condition. These politicians spoke of how they hoped their new city would attract white European immigrants to the state. Like their symbolic rejection of the colonial and imperial capital Ouro Preto, the mixed race and Afro-Brazilian population had an association with barbarism and backwardness that mineiro politicians wished to relegate to the past.

After the decision to move the capital at the Constituent Congress of 1891, the *Congresso Mineiro* (“Congress of Minas Gerais”) convened the *Comissão d’Estudo das Localidades Indicadas para a Nova Capital* (“the Commission for the Study of the Indicated Locals for the New Capital”) headed by Chief Engineer Aarão Reis shortly thereafter. This commission studied six localities for their potential as sites for the new capital city, then known as the *Cidade de Minas* (“the City of Minas”). In this period, the political vision and its technocratic counterpart espoused by Reis came to influence one another and set the parameters by which the city would be designed and executed. Reis brought to the project a Positivist ideology derived from his training as an engineer in Rio de Janeiro and extensive congress with French ideas on urban planning and the social sciences. He introduced a scientific emphasis to the discourse surrounding the new city that politicians in favor of the move embraced. Nonetheless, Reis concerned himself more with construction a modernist utopia and less with the strategic concerns of politicians over the backwardness of Minas Gerais in comparison to its neighbors.

The selection of Belo Horizonte as the site of the new capital by an extraordinary session of the *Congresso Mineiro* in 1893 also commissioned the formation of the

*Comissão Construtora da Nova Capital* (“Construction Commission of the New Capital”) again headed by engineer Aarão Reis. Reis’s design of the Belo Horizonte emphasized a rationalization of urban space predicated on mathematical principles. The rigid triangular street grid ignored the local topography and the division of the city into zones represented the desire of Reis to create a new kind of modern space in which inhabitants would themselves become more modern. His design privileged the place of government but also strove to associate it with the most modern technologies and with the symbol of industrialism, railroads. Drawing from urban designers such as Pierre Charles L’Enfant and Georges-Eugene Haussmann, Reis wrote into the design of the city a symbolic rejection of Ouro Preto and Brazil’s past. This combined with his emphasis on sanitation to encompass the overriding purpose of the city to attract white immigrants and leave Brazil’s race problems in the past. Moreover, Reis intended the city to be a performance as well as a construction of modernity. His production of documents such as the *Revista Geral dos Trabalhos da Comissão Construtora da Nova Capital* (“General Review of the Works of the Construction Commission of the New Capital”) and its accompanying photo album belie his attempt to magnify the influence of his modernizing project.

This thesis subscribes to the notion that modernity results from an endogenous process and that in Latin America as elsewhere multiple modernities can coexist. As Laurence Whitehead writes, the Latin American countryside is littered with models of modernity, each of which crystallized a tangible and substantive result before being supplanted and cast aside.<sup>1</sup> The vision of modernity crafted in the creation of Belo

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<sup>1</sup> Laurence Whitehead, *Latin America: A New Interpretation* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2006), 23-24.

Horizonte shared with other Latin American modernization projects the characteristic that many of its inspirations – L’Enfant’s design of Washington D.C. and positivism more broadly – came from abroad. Whether, as Whitehead suggests, these projects represent a “search for a place” within Western civilization matters less than the historical value of analyzing the specific case of Belo Horizonte and its more immediate repercussions.<sup>2</sup> That is to say, Belo Horizonte represents a unique case in Whitehead’s terms because the vision that surrounded the project left a lasting mark on the Brazilian search for modernity. The city of Aarão Reis is not another abandoned relic of its time; the lived experience of its citizens alone has carried its modernity to the present. Moreover its echoes can be found from Brasília to Palmas, Tocantins and to the modern mining towns in the mineiro hinterland.<sup>3</sup>

In many cases, the terms “modernity” and “modernization” are used interchangeably. Analyzing the discourse of modernity in the case of Belo Horizonte allows the historian to dissect the program of economic and political development pursued by the mineiro political elite in the opening years of the First Republic. In a sense, modernity can only exist in the perspective of history; its achievement always existed in the future for contemporaries and rarely if ever did they see it come to fruition in their lifetimes.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, for the purposes of this discussion modernity and modernization refer to the political, economic, social and cultural program of the elites at the helm of the project to move and construct a new capital for Minas Gerais. In their

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<sup>2</sup> Whitehead, *Latin America: A New Interpretation*, 33.

<sup>3</sup> Whitehead acknowledges the potential uniqueness of Belo Horizonte to a degree as a predecessor for Belo Horizonte in its precedent of designing a capital “*de raiz*.” See *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>4</sup> This conception of modernity is expressed in José de Souza Martins, “The Hesitations of the Modern and the Contradictions of Modernity in Brazil,” in *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, edited by Vivian Schelling (London: Verso, 2000), 250.

eyes, modernity closely correlated with the idea of progress, both material and metaphysical.

The contradictions of the Belo Horizonte modernization project resulted from both the inherent contradictions of many modernizing projects in Latin America but also from the particularities of the situation of Minas Gerais in the 1890s. Numerous authors have noted the potential pitfalls of discussing modernization in its Latin American context. Modernity is a vacuous and shifting state but in Latin America it found one of its clearer articulations in the positivist dichotomy between a rationalized future and a traditionalist past.<sup>5</sup> This work discusses the parameters of the vision of modernity crafted by the mineiro elites but rejects their framing of the project in such dichotomous terms. Rather, its specific contradictions comprised a critical part of the actual program designed to bring about modernity and thus are of lasting significance to the historical legacy of the construction of Belo Horizonte. As Martins notes, at the heart of these contradictions lay the discarding of progress, in all its material and metaphysical senses, for order.<sup>6</sup> This essay will seek to articulate how exactly this came to be over the course of the planning and construction of the city.

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<sup>5</sup> Ruben George Oliven, "Brazil: The Modern in the Tropics," in *Through the Kaleidoscope: The Experience of Modernity in Latin America*, edited by Vivian Schelling (London: Verso, 2000), 56. The Brazilian elite viewed positivism as an ideology that foreshadowed modernity and which advocated an authoritarian way of achieving it.

<sup>6</sup> Martins, "The Hesitations of the Modern and the Contradictions of Modernity in Brazil," 254.

## CHAPTER 1

### MUDANCISTAS: THE POLITICAL DEBATE OVER MOVING THE CAPITAL 1889-1891

The effort to move the capital of Minas Gerais in the early years of the First Republic (1889-1930) was a project aimed at achieving a particular kind of modernity. As a planned city, Belo Horizonte shares the modernizing impulses that drove the creation of Brasília (1961) and even Palmas, Tocantins (1990). Anthropologist James Holston in *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasília* writes, “Brasília was built to be more than merely the symbol of this new age. Rather, its design and construction were intended as means to *create* it by transforming Brazilian society.”<sup>7</sup> This chapter contends that the decision to move the capital of Minas Gerais in 1891 and the construction of Belo Horizonte in 1897 were two related processes and so part of a concerted effort by a group of mineiro elites to symbolize and bring about ‘modernity’ in their midst. The political debate from 1889-1893 surrounding the idea of moving the capital from Ouro Preto shaped the discourse over how a new capital city would modernize Minas Gerais. While many factions of geographic and ideological origin participated, a coalition of republicans including João Pinheiro da Silva, Chrispim Jacques Bias Fortes and Afonso Pena articulated the vision that would become enshrined in Belo Horizonte’s design and construction. This chapter refers to proponents of moving the capital as *mudancistas* or, alternately *mudancista-republicanos* and to their opponents as *anti-mudancistas*. This section discusses the contours of the mudancista vision within the political process that shaped it.

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<sup>7</sup> James Holsten, *The Modernist City: An Anthropological Critique of Brasília* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3-4.

The vision articulated by the mudancista elite contributed to the larger dialogue that informed government policy and political thought in the twentieth century about how Brazil might modernize, in all senses of the term.<sup>8</sup> The final abolition of slavery in 1888 and the fall of the Empire in 1889 left Brazil with an uncertain future. Republicans in particular saw an opportunity to modernize Brazil now that the two principal shackles of the past, slavery and the monarchy, had collapsed. Mudancistas in Minas Gerais believed that a new capital city would help their state modernize on par with their neighbors Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. To these politicians, economic modernity meant industry based on factory production and most importantly, railroads. For mudancistas such as João Pinheiro, their ideal capital city would serve as a national rail hub, in some ways a contradiction of the dominant agro-export model predicated on coffee utilized in industrialization in São Paulo. By situating the capital in a lightly populated zone of the center, these mudancistas also tapped into the enduring belief that Brazil must settle its interior to tap into its full potential by transforming space into place. In their interior capital, the modernity of the new city would formulate a new sense of *mineiridade* or sense of Minas Gerais identity. Their symbolic rejection of Ouro Preto as a symbol of monarchy and slavery dovetailed with a belief that a new capital city would modernize Minas Gerais by whitening it through attracting European immigrants. Their vision was also inherently politically conservative, the new city would serve political elites first; the

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<sup>8</sup> For an introduction to works addressing the Brazilian search for modernity, see also Todd Diacon, *Stringing Together a Nation: Cândido Mariano da Silva Rondon and the Construction of a Modern Brazil, 1906-1930* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), Greg Grandin, *Fordlandia: The Rise and Fall of Henry Ford's Forgotten Jungle City* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), Thomas E Skidmore, *Brazil: Five Centuries of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), and Joel Wolfe, *Autos and Progress: The Brazilian Search for Modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). For how Rio de Janeiro dealt with modernizing its urban spaces during the First Republic, see Amy Chazkel, *Laws of Chance: Brazil's Clandestine Lottery and the Making of Urban Public Life* (Durham N.C.: Duke University, 2011).

rest of the population would achieve mineiridade and modernity through participation in the political and economic systems dictated by the elite.



Figure 1.1 Minas Gerais highlighted in red on a map of modern Brazil. Photo courtesy of the Secretaria de Estado de Turismo de Minas Gerais.

While the historiography has addressed how mudancistas believed the new capital would unite Minas Gerais administratively and economically, it has neglected the critical national political scene and the way in which mineiro elites interpreted modernity and republicanism from abroad.<sup>9</sup> The best connected mudancistas viewed moving the capital as a necessary state security measure if Minas Gerais was to compete with its more modern neighbors on the national level and prevent any dissolution of its territory. As fierce defenders of federalism, they viewed the new city as critical to strengthening the state government of Minas Gerais even though that would reduce the sub-regional autonomy they previously enjoyed. The project to move the capital also demonstrates how mineiro elites of this time period were more interested in republicanism because of

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<sup>9</sup> For classical takes on the founding of Belo Horizonte, see Joaquim Nabuco Linhares, *Mudança da capital, "Ouro Preto-Belo Horizonte"* (Belo Horizonte: Conselho da Medalha da Inconfidência, 1957), Abílio Barreto, *Bello Horizonte: memória histórica and descritiva história media* (Bello Horizonte: Edições da Livraria Rex, 1936) and Abílio Barreto, *Bello Horizonte: memoria histórica and descritiva história antiga* (Bello Horizonte: Edições da Livraria Rex, 1936).



its association with modernity rather than any particular belief in democracy. The debate waged in newspapers and in the various congresses between 1889-1893 showed that mudancistas and anti-mudancistas alike borrowed extensively from abroad while trying to articulate what a republican Minas Gerais would look like. This extended to their vision of the ideal ‘republican city.’ Moreover, they believed that this ideal city would make mineiros more modern by their proximity to industrial modes of production, in a sense creating an identity of *mineiridade* where modernity, republicanism, whiteness and industrialism comprised critical components.

Three broad currents dominate discussion the transfer of the mineiro capital from Ouro Preto. The first centers on the economic bases of a clash between the vibrant coffee-producing regions in the south of Minas Gerais, the Sul and the Zona da Mata, and the declining metallurgical zone in the Centro (“Center”) around Ouro Preto.



Figure 1.2 Map of Regions of Minas Gerais, Brazil. Photo courtesy of the Secretaria de Estado de Turismo de Minas Gerais.

Afonso Arinos de Mello Franco presents the battle over the capital in dichotomous terms. The move occurred as the result of the rise of the coffee producing south attempting to assert control over the Centro and northern Minas Gerais.<sup>10</sup> Franco also frames the clash in terms of a modernizing, republican class of politicians from the south winning the confrontation by having the capital moved but conceding to the traditionalist politicians of the center by having the capital located in that zone. Hélio Lobo concurs that republican politicians from the south led the effort to move the capital and points specifically to a particular group centered in Juiz de Fora, regional hub of the Zona da Mata.<sup>11</sup> Vera Cardoso Silva provides a different take on sectional politics; she argues that the move of the capital resulted from the Sul allying with the Centro rather than its coffee-producing peer the Zona de Mata. Indeed, Silva finds that whom the Sul allied with determined the contours of mineiro politics throughout the First Republic.<sup>12</sup>

In a historiographic essay, Cláudia Maria Ribeiro Viscardi argues that historians have thus far ignored the critical role elite interest in municipal autonomy and the distribution of municipal incomes played in the political debate to move the capital. Nonetheless, she depicts the debate as one between the economically ascendant south and the decadent center and north, where the former desired to keep its coffee incomes from being distributed across the state.<sup>13</sup> Viscardi has also outlined the national significance of internal mineiro politics. She posits that the oscillating alliance between the Sul-Centro or the Sul-Zona da Mata also determined the focus of the alliance between São Paulo and

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<sup>10</sup> Afonso Arino de Melo Franco, *Um estadista da república* (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editôra, 1955), 230.

<sup>11</sup> Helio Lobo, *Um varão da república* (São Paulo: Companhia editora nacional, 1937), 45-53.

<sup>12</sup> Vera Alice Cardoso Silva, "O significado da participação dos mineiros na política nacional durante a Primeira República," presented at the V Seminário de Estudos Mineiros: A República Velha em Minas, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 1982.

<sup>13</sup> Cláudia Maria Riberio Viscardi, "A capital controversa," *Revista do Arquivo Público Mineiro* (July/Dec. 2007), 35.

Minas Gerais known as the “política do café com leite” (“politics of coffee and milk”) that dominated the First Republic from 1889 until its collapse in 1930. A Sul-Zona da Mata alliance fervently defended the interests of coffee producers while a Centro-Sul combination incorporated a more diverse set of interests.<sup>14</sup>

The second grouping focuses on the new capital as being a means for uniting the disparate regions of the state and conciliating its diverse array of political factions. Maria Efigênia Resende follows the political debate in the crucial years between the fall of the Empire in 1889 and the official declaration of Belo Horizonte as the site of the new capital. She emphasizes the regional bases of the debate, like other works this pits the coffee-producing south against the declining metallurgical Centro and the north. She also identifies groups in the state’s center that recognized Ouro Preto’s deficiencies as capital that viewed the new capital as a means to unite the sub-regional tensions consuming Minas Gerais.<sup>15</sup> John Wirth likewise ties the need to confer economic and political unity to the efforts of mudancistas. In particular, he cites the threats of secession by the Sul and the Zona da Mata until the official inauguration of Belo Horizonte in 1897 and the long-held desire by state elites to make Minas Gerais a viable political and economic unit.<sup>16</sup>

Paul Singer writes that elites viewed the capital as a means of creating state identity, *mineiridade*, to prevent the tensions caused by the state’s economic fragmentation from causing the dissolution of the state. Singer constructs regional identity, in this case only seemingly applied to elites, as aligned to the economic function

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<sup>14</sup> For her thesis, see Cláudia Maria Ribeiro Viscardi, “Elites políticas em Minas Gerais na primeira república,” *Estudos Históricos* 8.15 (1995), 41-42.

<sup>15</sup> See, Maria Efigênia Resende, “Uma interpretação sobre a fundação de Belo Horizonte,” *Revista brasileira de estudos políticos* 29 (1974), 130-131. Resende cites the critical role of Afonso Pena, a politician from the Zona da Mata, in bridging the gap between the two regional groupings.

<sup>16</sup> John Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation 1889-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1977), 26-31. Wirth traces the idea of creating a new capital back to the Inconfidência Mineira and traces it forward to the construction of Brasília by mineiro Juscelino Kubitschek.

of the area in particular. The new capital would thus create a unified economy in the state.<sup>17</sup> In a similar sense, Peter Blasenheim argues that the capital was a compromise between the Centro on the one hand, and the Sul and the Zona de Mata on the other. While the capital was removed from Ouro Preto as the coffee-producing regions desired, the Centro also played host to the new capital at Belo Horizonte.<sup>18</sup> Focusing on the Constituent Congress of 1891 charged with drafting a republican constitution for Minas Gerais, Francisco Iglésias et al. argue that the decision to move the capital resulted not from conciliation but from the victory of the modernist republican south over the traditionalist north. The authors present Belo Horizonte as primarily a political project, one that owed much of its content to the politicking of Afonso Pena.<sup>19</sup>

The third current in the historiography focuses on the intellectual bases of the effort to move the capital and the manner of its design, though often with significant attention paid to the sectional politics. Moema Miranda de Siqueira linked the stance of the anti-mudancistas to a defense of traditional mineiro culture, one that was hostile to the modernizing agenda of southern republicans. In particular, mineiros from the countryside viewed big cities like São Paulo as corrupting dens of sin and avarice.<sup>20</sup> More recently, authors have delved into how the political architects and actual designers of Belo Horizonte wrote conceptions of modernity into the design and construction of the city. Helena Bomeny writes that the new capital represented a new, modern economic center whose location denoted the victory of the traditional elites of the north and Centro

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Singer, *Desenvolvimento econômico e evolução urbana: análise da evolução econômica de São Paulo, Blumenau, Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte e Recife* (São Paulo: Nacional, 1977), 213-234.

<sup>18</sup> See Peter Blasenheim, "A Regional History of Zona da Mata in Minas Gerais-Brazil: 1870/1906" (PhD Diss., Stanford University, 1982).

<sup>19</sup> Francisco Iglésias et al., "A Constituinte Mineira de 1891," *Revista brasileira de estudos políticos* 71 (1990), 219.

<sup>20</sup> Moema Miranda de Siqueira, "Mudança da capital de Minas: Uma questão ideológica," *Revista brasileira de estudos políticos* 33 (1972), 95-96.

over those of the Sul and the Mata. Bomeny separates the process of deciding to move the capital and its construction; Belo Horizonte's design and construction demonstrated how its planners intended the city to serve as a point of political unification and as an intellectual, cultural center.<sup>21</sup> Most importantly, however, Belo Horizonte represented the first *republican* space in all of Brazil.<sup>22</sup> Beatriz de Almeida Magalhães offers a similar assertion, adding that from the beginning the process of the creation of Belo Horizonte progressed in a different direction than the traditional Brazilian city. Rather than being irregular and spontaneous, Belo Horizonte represented a new way of thinking about urban space in an 'ordered' and 'scientific' manner.<sup>23</sup>

### **Debating the *mudança*: The Press Debates a Modern Minas Gerais, 1889-1891**

In the lead-up to the Constituent Congress of 1891, mudancistas and anti-mudancistas waged a battle in the state's newspapers over the future of Minas Gerais. The fall of the Empire caught the state's small cadre of Republicans off guard leading to an uncertain political situation in Minas Gerais and the country as a whole. Mudancistas therefore had to contend with a difficult socio-political situation as they began to lay out their vision for a democratic Minas Gerais. While defenders of Ouro Preto appealed to their city's central place in mineiro history and potential reform, mudancista-republicanos such as Alexandre Stockler, João Pinheiro and Augusto de Lima began to articulate the benefits of a modern capital city. They refuted Ouro Preto as a symbol of the sins of old

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<sup>21</sup> Helena Bomeny, *Guardiães da Razão: Modernistas mineiros* (Rio de Janeiro: Editora da Universidade Federal de Rio de Janeiro, 1994), 41-45.

<sup>22</sup> Bomeny, *Guardiães da Razão*, 49. For a more in-depth discussion of Bomeny's critique of spaciality in early republican Belo Horizonte, see Section 4 "Designing Modernity and Republicanism."

<sup>23</sup> Beatriz de Almeida Magalhães and Rodrigo Ferreira Andrade, *Belo Horizonte: um espaço para a república* (Belo Horizonte: Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 1989), 129-132.

Brazil, backwardness, slavery, and colonialism. As an agent of modernity, their new city would become an industrial hub and a symbol of a new age for Minas Gerais.

Mineiro elites faced a number of distinct challenges at the end of the Empire. As a political entity, their state lacked economic and cultural cohesion. Minas Gerais was a transitional zone between the more developed Center-South and the poverty-stricken Northeast, even if it identified with the former. Mineiro elites were well aware that the state's constituent regions lacked economic ties with one another, making a statewide developmental program difficult if not impossible. In fact, their separate historical trajectories had long troubled the government in Ouro Preto. Northern Minas, a cattle region, was administered from Salvador in Bahia until 1750 and its exports flowed through that port until well into the twentieth century. The coffee-growing Mata zone had strong ties to Rio de Janeiro. To the west and southwest, parts of the Sul and Triângulo functioned as extensions of the São Paulo hinterland to the extent that the Sul was juridically linked to São Paulo until 1816. The West belonged to the ranching culture of the colonial frontier that predominated from the hinterlands of Bahia to Goiás.<sup>24</sup> The Center, with the old colonial and imperial capital of Ouro Preto, had yet to emerge from the long slump induced by the decline of its mines over the course of the nineteenth century. As an administrative and economic center, it had little integration with the other regions of the state.<sup>25</sup>

The press campaign in favor of moving the capital constructed one discourse of modernity that in turn informed the political debate at the critical Constituent Congress of 1891, where representatives mandated the move in the new state constitution. Prior to the

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<sup>24</sup> Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

declaration of a republic, Minas Gerais already possessed republican newspapers in nearly every major city of the state since the positive response to the Republican Manifesto of 1870. They grew in influence after 1889 as many of their contributors held positions within the provisional government or attended the Constituent Congress of 1891.<sup>26</sup> João Pinheiro da Silva, briefly president of the provisional government in 1890 and prominent mudancista-republican, founded *O Movimento* and used it to advocate for his political agenda.<sup>27</sup> Newspapers from Ouro Preto, *A Ordem* chief among them, railed against the proposed move from the declaration of the republic through the actual building of Belo Horizonte five years later. Their counterparts across Minas Gerais rebutted those arguments and framed their discussion in terms of the benefits a new capital would bring to the state.

Proponents of keeping the capital in Ouro Preto and movements towards secession threatened the stability of the state before Minas Gerais even had a functioning state constitution. Mudancistas in all parts of the state argued that Ouro Preto was incapable of holding its disparate regions together. Proponents of keeping the capital in Ouro Preto, mostly residents of that city, fought a fierce rearguard action even after the provision had been written into the state constitution. They argued that Ouro Preto, admittedly with some reform, could serve as the capital of a republican Minas Gerais.<sup>28</sup> Symbolically, they pointed to the Inconfidência Mineira and the pride its conspirators felt in Ouro Preto as proof that the old imperial city was compatible with the new democratic future on the horizon. Ironically, the leaders of the Inconfidência Mineira had moving the

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<sup>26</sup> José Oiliam, *A propaganda republicana em Minas* (Belo Horizonte: Faculdade de Direito da Universidade de Minas Gerais, 1960), 33.

<sup>27</sup> Pinheiro wrote on a broad array of issues related to creating a republican Minas Gerais. See *O Movimento* 21 April 1890 and *O Movimento* 8 August 1890.

<sup>28</sup> *A Ordem* 4 December 1889. See also, *O Jornal de Minas* 5 January 1890.

capital as one of the actions their government would undertake should the revolt have succeeded.<sup>29</sup> Over the course of 1890, anti-mudancistas attempted to have Ouro Preto reaffirmed as the capital of newly republican Minas Gerais. One newspaper noted that should they succeed the Zona de Mata would likely look to separate again after having considered doing so shortly after the November 15 coup against the monarchy.<sup>30</sup>

Although anti-mudancistas remained a distinct minority from 1889-1891, press organs friendly to their position debated these issues even after the new capital was under construction.

Alexandre Stockler and João Pinheiro led the mudancistas in the press leading up to the Constituent Congress. As a republican propagandist, Stockler stood foremost among the ideological wing of a party whose membership consisted largely of “11<sup>th</sup> hour” republicans and opportunists. He relentlessly pressured those in government to move the capital out of Ouro Preto. His frequent calls for the move made the provisional head of government from the declaration of the republic, Dr. César Alvim, uncomfortable from the first. At a dinner of mineiros living in São Paulo in November of 1890, Alvim made a speech where he referenced the many parties in Minas Gerais already demanding a new seat for the government. Stockler promptly responded that only he, Alvim, possessed the necessary qualities to solve the dispute. In characteristic fashion, Alvim demurred at that dinner and continued to do so until transferring the government to Stockler’s co-propagandist, João Pinheiro.<sup>31</sup> Beyond his editorials, Stockler’s post as a federal deputy led him and the rest of the mineiro delegation to

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<sup>29</sup> Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation*, 26-27.

<sup>30</sup> *Gazeta de Oliveira* 9 November 1890.

<sup>31</sup> Linhares, *Mudança da capital*, 41-42.



realize the necessity of a strong administrative and economic capital in light of the power struggles of the nascent First Republic.

João Pinheiro played a critical role in articulating a version of the necessity to create a modern capital as a matter of both achieving modernization and to compete with neighbors São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. His work in the national government and extensive correspondence allowed him a broader view of the evolving politics of the Brazilian Federation than many of his colleagues possessed.<sup>32</sup> Though one of the chief *mudancistas*, he called for the mineiro political class to unite in his editorial “Aos mineiros” (“to the people of Minas Gerais”) regardless of whether they were former monarchists and anti-*mudancistas*.<sup>33</sup> He believed that Minas Gerais could take advantage of their relative numbers to exert an influence beyond what their otherwise fractured political scene and struggling economy would suggest. Of course, mineiro politicians would enter the arrangement with São Paulo whereby the two states would alternate control of the presidency, an arrangement popularly known as “a política do café com leite”. These politicians led by João Pinheiro thus viewed the new capital as an integral part of Minas Gerais’s national political strategy.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, the state government under the leadership of *mudancista-republicanos* made little effort to hide its chosen site for a new capital: the hamlet known as Curral d’el Rei. A decree outlining the government’s reasoning for moving the capital and its unilateral selection of the Curral d’el Rei, renamed Belo Horizonte on 12 April 1890,

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<sup>32</sup> Francisco Iglésias, “Política Economia do Estado de Minas Gerais (1890-1930),” presented at V Seminário de Estudos Mineiros: A República Velha em Minas, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 1982.

<sup>33</sup> *O Movimento*, 29 April 1890.

<sup>34</sup> Cláudia Maria Riberio Viscardi, *O teatro das oligarquias: uma revisão da “política do café com leite”* (Belo Horizonte: Editora C/Arte, 2001), 42-43.

leaked to the press in April of 1891.<sup>35</sup> The decree summarized the objections mudancista-republicans had to Ouro Preto and previewed the mudancista position prior to the Constituent Congress. In this decree, President Augusto de Lima cites Ouro Preto's physical limitations, barriers to population growth, and economic unproductiveness. Ouro Preto's steep, winding colonial streets offered striking vistas of the encircling hills but made building larger structures all but impossible. This inhibited the growth of the kind of industrial enterprises sought by mudancista-republicans. The terrain also prevented Ouro Preto from gaining population, in part due to lack of space for residences.<sup>36</sup> The *Zona Metalurgica* ("Metalurgical Zone") of the state had rendered the entire region economically moribund even as the coffee producing regions of the state surged.<sup>37</sup> Mudancistas in particular were eager to leave behind the colonial mining economy centered on Ouro Preto for a new age of industrialism.

The economic motives cited by the decree centered on creating a new industrial growth pole in Minas Gerais that would keep mineiro material wealth and human capital in the state. Belo Horizonte would transform "empty" space into a place of industry and urbanism in large part via its rail connections to São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and the interior. De Lima and others viewed railroads and transportation more generally as critical to the modernization of their state. Belo Horizonte would serve as a rail hub for both existent lines and those yet to be built. The site for the city sat astride the *Estrada de Ferro Central do Brasil* ("Central Railroad of Brazil") as well as being situated along the Rio das Velhas, a tributary of the Rio São Francisco. Immediately, this location would

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<sup>35</sup> For the renaming of Curral d'el Rei to Belo Horizonte, see Decreto n. 36 President João Pinheiro da Silva, Governo de Minas Geraes.

<sup>36</sup> See "Mensagem de 7 de abril de 1891" articles 5 and 6, apud Linhares, *Mudança da capital*, 102.

<sup>37</sup> Franco, *Um Estadista da República*, 230-232.

serve to connect the Norte to the Centro and to the Sul within the state. Moreover, the city would be located at the convergence of proposed railroads emanating from the western part of the state and from the neighboring state of Espírito Santo to the east.<sup>38</sup> Belo Horizonte offered mineiro leaders the dual opportunity of stitching together the state's tapestry of regions and to do so while promoting the expansion of the state's rail network to a place of national prominence.

Beyond its potential as a rail hub, the new capital had all of the assets necessary to become an industrial power in its own right. Belo Horizonte possessed none of the topographic deficiencies of Ouro Preto and could easily support a large population. The mountains surrounding Ouro Preto prevented movement in and out of the city as well as amongst its constituent parts. According to the commission led by engineer Dr. Domingos Rocha, the new site had a beneficent climate, sufficient potable water and land for expansion. Although hilly, the proposed location possessed ample land suitable for industrial enterprises. De Lima hoped that Belo Horizonte with its large population and vibrant economy would prevent the exodus of talented mineiros for São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.<sup>39</sup> As it stood, Minas Gerais had no metropolis capable of competing with either of the two aforementioned cities. Even Juiz de Fora, the most economically vibrant locale of the state, stood as a mere outpost in the coffee-growing hinterland of Rio de Janeiro. More ambitiously, the authors of the decree hoped that Belo Horizonte would be able to *reverse* the outflow of persons and instead draw talent from around Brazil to Minas Gerais.

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<sup>38</sup> See "Mensagem de 7 de abril de 1891" articles 17 and 18, apud Linhares, *Mudança da capital*, 102.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, article 7.

The mudancista-republicans also reiterated their argument that Minas Gerais needed a new capital for the modern era in the state's history brought on by the advent of the most modern of political systems, republicanism. As a symbol of the monarchy, Ouro Preto could not lead Minas Gerais in a democratic Brazil. Moreover, they wrote the state they most adhere to "...the ancient aspiration of the people of Minas Gerais, the removal of the capital for another local where it could be built a dignified city worthy of being the face of the first State of the Republic."<sup>40</sup> In citing Ouro Preto's economic backwardness, the decree espoused that Belo Horizonte symbolized the modern and vibrant future of Minas Gerais.<sup>41</sup> Implicit in de Lima's characterization of a "dignified city" is one that did not possess Ouro Preto's association with black slavery. According to de Lima, only the efforts of a few self-interested persons prevented this new future from being realized.

### **The Constituent Congress of 1891: Minas Gerais Legislates Modernity**

The Constituent Congress of 1891 represents the culminating moment in the articulation of a modernity discourse in terms of moving the capital. Debate over the issue, including fierce resistance by anti-mudancistas in Ouro Preto, continued even through the official inauguration of the capital in 1897. Nonetheless, mudancistas viewed a new, planned capital city as a means to achieve integration of the state, spur industrial development in the state's interior zones, fashion a national railroad hub and borrow the best modern, republican ideas in crafting their political system. Mudancistas argued that the project of the new capital would save it from dissolution or dismemberment by its more modern, economically powerful neighbors. Their vision of what the capital would

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., article 11.

<sup>41</sup> See Linhares, *Mudança da capital*, 103.

become articulated a different vision of achieving economic success by focusing the state's economy inwards. Mudancistas rejected Ouro Preto for its symbolism of colonial and imperial Brazil and considered the new capital necessary to usher Minas Gerais into a new, more modern age. This included setting aside Ouro Preto's association with slavery and Afro-Brazilians; mudancistas believed that a modern capital city would modernize Minas Gerais by whitening it. They also looked to the United States, Switzerland, France and Argentina to define what qualities a modern, republican city would have just as they looked to these places to design their new political system. While their vision was in some respects forward looking, it rested on conservative principles whereby most mineiros would become modern by design without any real agency on their parts.

The delegates at the Constituent Congress represented a wide array of political actors who shaped the discourse, both in relation to modernity and otherwise, that would surround the construction of Belo Horizonte from 1893-1897. Ironically, a majority of the delegates to the congress charged with writing a constitution for a democratic Minas Gerais were former members of the monarchist Liberal or Conservative parties or non-affiliated politically, certainly not committed republicans. As Cláudia Viscardi writes, three loose grouping attended: monarchists and "11<sup>th</sup> hour republicans" led by César Alvim who opposed moving the capital and who tended to be from poorer regions of the state, republicans from the coffee producing areas who supported moving the capital but could not agree on a location, and republicans led by João Pinheiro in favor of moving the capital to Belo Horizonte.<sup>42</sup> Nonetheless, while the Constituent Congress included committed republicans like Silviano Brandão, João Pinheiro and Afonso Pena it

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<sup>42</sup> Viscardi, "A capital controversa," 36. See also Linhares, *Mudança da capital*, 84 and Siqueira, "Mudança da capital de Minas," 97 for the leaders of the anti-mudancista faction at the Constituent Congress, Senators Camilo de Brito Costa Sena, José Pedro Xavier da Veiga, and Diogo de Vasconcelos.

contained a cross-section of the elite that represented more of a continuation than break with the dominant political class of the late Imperial period.<sup>43</sup>

Both the republicans of the Sul and the Zona de Mata and João Pinheiro's allies agreed that the project of the new capital was critical to the state's security despite Minas Gerais's financial difficulties at the time. They argued that Minas Gerais would continue to slide into "backwardness" and would lose sections of the state to its more modern neighbors or that the prosperous regions would secede to rid themselves of the backward areas of the state. Interestingly, delegates or newspaper did not frame the need for a new capital in terms of preventing urban unrest like many urban renewal projects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>44</sup> Early in the convention, Afonso Pena asserted the need for Minas Gerais to unite as a matter of state security in the face of competitive national politics in the still-evolving Brazilian Federation.<sup>45</sup> The new federal constitution allowed for states to be dismantled, a fear cited by mudancistas and anti-mudancistas alike.<sup>46</sup> Mudancistas considered the new capital critical to this situation. Fear of outside intervention, whether governmental or armed, presented a real threat to the delegates.<sup>47</sup> Ildefonso Alvim argued that Minas Gerais needed a new capital in the Centro that the state could easily defend in the event of war with other states or if central and southern Brazil went to war with the northeastern region of the country. He believed that

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<sup>43</sup> Iglésias et al., "A constituinte mineira de 1891," 182-183.

<sup>44</sup> This is particularly true of urban renewal projects of the Haussmann style. Rio de Janeiro underwent such a renovation during the Passos administration at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Chazkel, *Laws of Chance*, 21.

<sup>45</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte do estado de Minas Geraes, 1891* (Ouro Preto: Imprensa Official do Estado de Minas Geraes, 1896), 125.

<sup>46</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 197. See in particular the speech by A. Clementino. He states his fear that the Zona da Mata would join Espírito Santo or Rio de Janeiro, the Triângulo Mineiro would pass to São Paulo, and that the north would either rejoin with Bahia or form a new state with Espírito Santo.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 80. Augusto Clementino argues that the federal government cannot be allowed to intervene in Minas Gerais, even in terms of selling land or mineral wealth.

relocating the capital in the eastern part of the state in Rio Doce or in the far north would allow the state to better defend itself.<sup>48</sup> The legislative delegation from Minas Gerais in the nation's capital likewise implored the Constituent Congress to move the capital as a matter of state security.<sup>49</sup>

Some of the fiercest denunciations of secessionism amongst the regions of Minas Gerais came from mudancista ranks who saw the fragmentation of the state as a threat to the project of a new capital and therefore, to their entire modernizing project. That mudancistas pressed forward with the project despite the real threat of the disintegration of their state speaks to both their passion and to the realization by many that a new capital would ameliorate or even solve secessionist tendencies. The idea that a new capital would solve this problem had roots in the beliefs of many Inconfidentes, Tiradentes chief among them.<sup>50</sup> Minas Gerais faced a number of secessionist threats and movements even within the duration of the Congress.<sup>51</sup> The chief threat came republicans from the Sul and the Mata. The city of Campanha did eventually revolt in 1892 declaring a new state, “Minas do Sul,” and forcing federal troops to intervene.<sup>52</sup>

Besides the threat of secession, Minas Gerais had both weak public finances and a weak financial system. Defenders of Ouro Preto argued that the capital would cost more than the state could afford, even to the point of causing its dissolution. Anti-mudancista paper *A Ordem* called the capital a financial extravagance that no sensible government

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>49</sup> *Gazeta de Oliveira*, 19 April 1891. Reprinting of the message from Augusto de Lima to the Constituent Congress.

<sup>50</sup> For a discussion of the tradition of mineiro separatism, see Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation*, 26-27. In particular, the Sul, the Zona da Mata, and the Triângulo attempted independence or to join another state.

<sup>51</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 381-384.

<sup>52</sup> Alfredo Valladão, *Campanha da princeza volume II (1821-1909)* (Rio de Janeiro: Leuzinger S.A., 1940), 355-376.

would undertake. It also claimed that a majority of mineiros and the press agreed with their position.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, the majority of the delegates agreed that Minas needed a new capital despite the poor status of the state treasury. Indeed, proponents argued that because land in Belo Horizonte was so cheap that the government could sell plots at values equivalent to land in a city like Rio de Janeiro once the new capital had been constructed.<sup>54</sup> Proponents of the capital, mostly from coffee producing areas, were also aware that the majority of state revenues came from coffee sales.<sup>55</sup> Thus, anti-mudancistas' warnings had little effect on proponents of the move.

Mudancistas at the Congress presented a unique path to economic modernity that was new to Brazil and viewed the experiences of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro as incompatible with the unique circumstance of Minas Gerais. Like their counterparts in those states, these mineiros believed that factories and railroad would carry Minas Gerais to prosperity. They emphasized industry as integral to any modern capital of Minas Gerais, to the point where one exasperated defender of Ouro Preto attempted to argue that a capital of the state did not necessarily have to be an industrial center as well.<sup>56</sup> Afonso Pena argued that Ouro Preto did not have the capacity to support a large enough population for a great city, much less to support any sizable industrial workforce. In particular, he cited the impossibility of making Ouro Preto a railroad center or of being able to support trains to transport workers into the city center.<sup>57</sup> Other mudancistas took

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<sup>53</sup> *A Ordem* 24 July 1891.

<sup>54</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 171. The government did attempt this scheme but found few buyers willing to purchase the plots even after the government moved there in 1897.

<sup>55</sup> Viscardi, "Elites políticas," 44.

<sup>56</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 168-169.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 446.



the notion further. One delegate asserted that Belo Horizonte had the potential to become not only a regional hub for rail travel but a national one as well.<sup>58</sup>

This vision of the importance of railroads differed from the model utilized by São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in that it did not look to necessarily serve the agro-export trade by orienting the rail network towards a port. Anti-mudancistas argued that Minas Gerais could not hope to engineer a São Paulo in their midst when the area around Belo Horizonte in the Rio das Velhas had not developed on its own.<sup>59</sup> Rather, mudancistas hoped to turn the economic energies of their state inwards and away from the ports they viewed as robbing mineiro wealth and talent. This did not entail a rejection of coffee exportation per se, but rather a redistribution of the wealth that trade accrued. Resende argues that Afonso Pena looked more towards a scheme that would include the north in an agro-export scheme similar to that of the Mata and the Sul.<sup>60</sup> However, Pena also intended for the new capital to reorient profits from the coffee trade, and any other product such as cattle that Minas might look to export, so that they stayed in the state. One of the chief complaints of coffee growers at the Congress related to the taxes Rio de Janeiro levied on mineiro coffee that had to pass through on its way to international markets.<sup>61</sup> Only an equally strong city in the mineiro heartland could hope to counterbalance the economic weight of the national capital.

The delegates' coolness to a plan to annex or join with Espírito Santo demonstrates their ambivalence towards the notion that Minas Gerais needed access to the sea in order to modernize economically. Both sides of the capital debate

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 187.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>60</sup> Resende, "Uma interpretação sobre a fundação," 137.

<sup>61</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 456-457.

acknowledged that reliance on Rio de Janeiro presented a problem for their state.<sup>62</sup> While some anti-mudancistas proposed such a union in an effort to delay moving the capital, the idea had a surprising number of adherents. As a common thread, most supposed that union with Espírito Santo would provide mineiro products access to the sea without passing through the much more powerful Rio de Janeiro.<sup>63</sup> They argued that the Congress must study locations in the eastern region of Minas Gerais, Rio Doce, that would facilitate access to a seaport in Espírito Santo.<sup>64</sup> Camilo de Brito Costa de Sena, a prominent anti-mudancista, argued that with government investment that Ouro Preto could partner with the port of Mariana in a paring he compared to São Paulo and its outlet to the sea, Santos.<sup>65</sup> Others argued that if the union were Espírito Santo were to happen that Minas Gerais would need to move the capital to a location amenable to both states. In response to questions regarding the validity of the plan, one delegate reported that the delegation from Espírito Santo at the national assembly in Rio de Janeiro wished union. They had even agreed on a new name for the state, “Cruzeiro.”<sup>66</sup>

If a new republican capital would modernize Minas Gerais, mudancistas also believed that it would modernize mineiros and create a new sense of *mineiridade*. Their vision remained elite-focused, they were vague of how exactly the city would foster mineiridade among the populace. They argued that a new administrative capital would draw political elites from around the state and create a cohesive state-wide class of

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 442. C. Alvim compares the predicament of Minas Gerais to the choking effect that Turkish possession of the Dardanelles had on Russian trade to the Mediterranean Sea.

<sup>63</sup> For reiterations of this plan, see Ibid., 182, 358 and 439-441.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 454-455.

politician.<sup>67</sup> Opponents of the move tried to point to the example of La Plata in Buenos Aires Province as an example of a planned city that failed to attract elites away from the old capital.<sup>68</sup> One proponent, Gama Cerquiera also contested that their new city would become attractive enough so as to evade the constant drain of human talent to larger cities outside the state. This would weld them into a new intellectual, cultural, and distinctively mineiro elite in the model of the new city itself.<sup>69</sup>

On a symbolic level, mudancistas contended that Minas Gerais needed a new capital that would symbolize the modern, republican state they sought to build. Ouro Preto represented an age of backwardness that committed republicans and their new colleagues alike would rather relegate to the past. For many republicans of the coffee-producing south, Ouro Preto stood in the way of wresting control of the state away from the decadent mining zone of the state.<sup>70</sup> The appeal that Ouro Preto's defenders made to their city's place in the republican tradition did not fall on deaf ears. Even mudancistas were quick to express how mineiros would never forget the role that city played in the state's history, particularly in the *Inconfidência Mineira* of 1789.<sup>71</sup> Nonetheless, mudancistas argued that the location of the capital of the state could not be held hostage by sentimentalism centered on the martyrdom of Tiradentes.<sup>72</sup> A proposal to move the capital to the birthplace of Tiradentes to his ranch at Plombal in the Sul gained few

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<sup>67</sup> While the project of the capital was in many ways a centralizing force within the state, the delegates still favored a more federalized structure and fought over how much autonomy municipalities would have (and by extension how much of their income they would retain from the state government). For this debate, see *Ibid.*, 35-36, 148-149, 384.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170.

<sup>70</sup> Resende, "Uma interpretação sobre a fundação," 138.

<sup>71</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 165-166. One delegate grandiloquently compared the place of Ouro Preto in mineiro history to that of Jerusalem in Christianity.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-170. "Tiradentes" meaning literally "teeth puller" was a name given to one of the executed leaders, Joaquim José da Silva Xavier, of that failed conspiracy against Portuguese rule.

adherents. The proposal did however garner a movement to appropriate funds to build a memorial on the site.<sup>73</sup>

More importantly, Ouro Preto represented the stain of slavery, an institution loathed by many republicans because of its association with Brazil's colonial past rather than because of any moral or ideological objection. Many mudancistas believed that a new capital would both symbolize and help usher in a more modern, and thus whiter age for Minas Gerais. The near-silence of the delegates of the Constituent Congress and in other official documents of the period regarding what to do with Minas Gerais's large Afro-Brazilian population is telling. That the majority of the mudancistas came from coffee-producing areas of the state where most of the recently freed slaves still resided is not a coincidence as well. The delegates intended for the new capital of Minas Gerais to be an explicitly *white* space.<sup>74</sup> Mineiro politicians believed that whiteness helped spur modernization in São Paulo.<sup>75</sup> Coffee growing elites in Minas Gerais whose slaves had gained emancipation only in 1888 had similar notions of replacing Afro-Brazilian labor with Europeans to work on their plantations.<sup>76</sup>

Mudancistas believed their new city could accomplish this chiefly by attracting European immigrants to their state. Minas Gerais in the 1890s attracted few immigrants compared to São Paulo and to a lesser extent Rio de Janeiro. Unlike São Paulo, Minas

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 418-419.

<sup>74</sup> For further discussion of Belo Horizonte as a white space, see Chapter 3 of this thesis.

<sup>75</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 373. One report on Varzea de Marçal, favored site for the capital of many mudancistas from the coffee producing regions, reiterated the argument from an article in the *Gazeta Mineira* that the future of Minas Gerais lay in immigration. It stated that foreign blood had made São Paulo strong. For how newspapers including *Gazeta Mineira* in São João del-Rei discussed race, immigration and manual labor, see Flávio Raimundo Giarola, "Raça e Mão-de-obra em São João del-Rei: A Penetração das Idéias Raciais no Interior Mineiro," presented at V Congresso Internacional de História, Universidade Estadual de Maringá, Maringá, Brazil, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Robert Conrad, *The Destruction of Brazilian Slavery 1850-1888* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 34-36.

Gerais had a backwards reputation within Brazil and did not have any urban center that could support the kinds of industrial activity attractive to immigrant labor.<sup>77</sup> Mineiro elites, especially those from the coffee-producing regions, believed that Afro-Brazilians held Minas Gerais in a state of backwardness economically as well as socially. Slaves were of the utmost importance to the coffee economy of the Mata during the Empire and Minas Gerais had one of the largest concentrations of freedmen in Brazil after abolition in 1888.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, mudancista paper *O Pharol* from the coffee-growing Zona da Mata expressed the widely-held sentiment that European workers were superior to their Afro-Brazilian counterparts.<sup>79</sup>

The delegates at the Constituent Congress looked abroad when defining what a republican Minas Gerais would entail.<sup>80</sup> They associated republicanism with modernity and building a new capital, a ‘republican city,’ much as they associated the Empire with backwardness and Ouro Preto. As will be discussed in later sections, mineiro elites looked to Washington D.C. in the United States and to La Plata, Argentina as examples of modern, republican cities even before contemplating the design of the new mineiro capital.<sup>81</sup> Siqueira writes that those two cities appealed to mineiros in part because of

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<sup>77</sup> See Jeffrey Lesser, *Immigration, Ethnicity, and National Identity in Brazil* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 23-27 for his discussion of how Brazilian elites in the nineteenth century, including Emperor Dom Pedro I, viewed immigration as means of both modernizing and whitening Brazil.

<sup>78</sup> For the importance of slaves to the coffee economy of the Zona da Mata, see João Heraldo Lima, *Café e indústria em Minas Gerais 1870-1920* (Petrópolis: Vozes, 1981), 20-22. For the impact of abolition on Minas Gerais, see Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation*, 12. Of the estimated 723, 000 Brazilian slaves freed in 1888, some 192,000 or nearly 27% were from Minas Gerais.

<sup>79</sup> *O Pharol* 14 August 1891. See also, Jeffrey Adelman, “Urban Planning and Reality in Republican Brazil: Belo Horizonte, 1890-1930” (PhD Diss., Indiana University, 1974), 24.

<sup>80</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 238. They considered numerous forms of republican government including the charter of the Swiss Federation, the various constitutions of the French republics of the early nineteenth century and the United States Constitution. For a proposal to split Minas Gerais into Swiss-style cantons, see *Ibid.*, 357.

<sup>81</sup> *O Pharol*, January 15 & 16 1890. Mineiro politicians and the designers of Belo Horizonte drew much inspiration from both those cities for the way they conceived of and designed their new republican utopia. While Washington D.C. was founded in 1790, La Plata, founded in 1882, like Belo Horizonte drew

their intention for the new capital of Minas Gerais to serve as a primarily political-administrative seat.<sup>82</sup> Indeed mudancistas at the Congress associated a new political capital with good governance. One delegate pointed toward the example of the state of California in the United States. He believed that the 2/3 majority required of California's state legislature to move the capital to Sacramento demonstrated the kind of consensus that their mineiro counterparts should possess in relation to their own capital.<sup>83</sup>

The delegates at the Constituent Congress espoused a version of modernity that was profoundly conservative in many respects, particularly in the political sphere. Even the committed republicans like João Pinheiro, who embraced republicanism as the most enlightened and 'modern' political philosophy, believed that the levers of power should remain in the hands of the current political elite.<sup>84</sup> In their wide-ranging discussion of foreign political systems, the delegates never suggested extended suffrage or allowing for political participation of the vast majority of Minas Gerais' people, whatever their skin color.<sup>85</sup> Despite political and regional differences, the mineiro political elite constituted a remarkably homogenous group and this lent a level of consensus to all their dealings at

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inspiration from the United States capital but also provided a more potent example in the minds of delegates. See also, Rogério Pereira de Arruda, "Cidades-capitais imaginadas pela fotografia: La Plata (Argentina) e Belo Horizonte (Brasil), 1880-1897" (Phd Diss. Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2011), Eleonora Santa Rosa etd., *Bello Horizonte: bilhete postal Coleção Otávio Dias Filho* (Belo Horizonte: Centro de Estudos Históricos e Culturais Fundação João Pinheiro, 1997), Arturo Almandoz etd., *Planning Latin America's Capital Cities, 1850-1950* (London: Routledge, 2002), Helianna Angotti Salgueiro, *Engenheiro Aarão Reis: o progresso como missão* (Belo Horizonte: Centro de Estudos Históricos e Culturais Fundação João Pinheiro, 1997), and Leonardo Barci Castriota org., *Aquitetura da modernidade* (Belo Horizonte: Editora da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 1998).

<sup>82</sup> Siqueira, "Mudança da capital," 92.

<sup>83</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 171.

<sup>84</sup> "Ao povo mineiro" in *Minas Gerais*, 2 December 1906 reprinted in Francisco de Assis Barbosa org., *Idéias políticas de João Pinheiro* (Brasília: Senado Federal, 1980), 177-197. Pinheiro stresses that mineiros will live in liberty and order. Ironically, he states that no oligarchies have formed in Minas Gerais but does not mention extending suffrage to the vast majority of the population.

<sup>85</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 138. For delegates' discussion of the ideas of John Stuart Mill see *Ibid.*, 162.

the Constituent Congress and elsewhere.<sup>86</sup> While economic activity would transform mineiros into modern citizens, the delegates clearly intended their new capital city to serve the interests of the political and economic elites. Mudancistas and anti-mudancistas alike believed the success of the city depended on its ability to attract elites, both from Minas Gerais and from elsewhere in Brazil.<sup>87</sup> Anti-mudancistas attempted to paint mudancistas as political radicals of a leftist persuasion; even likening the movement of the capital from Ouro Preto as equivalent to the destruction of the city of Lyons by the government of Robespierre during the French Revolution.<sup>88</sup>

Though mudancistas articulated a consistent vision of how their capital would achieve modernity and prosperity for Minas Gerais, the decision to move the capital and its location were undeniably products of a deliberative political process. Mudancistas succeeded in including a provision in the constitution mandating moving the capital, Article 121.<sup>89</sup> Nonetheless, João Pinheiro and his allies could not persuade enough of the mudancistas to agree on their preferred location, Belo Horizonte. Afonso Pena acquiesced to demands that locations other than Belo Horizonte be studied, particularly that of Várzea de Marçal in the Sul.<sup>90</sup> That location had significant support among those from the southern zones of the state. However, even supporters of Várzea de Marçal

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<sup>86</sup> See Amílcar Vianna Martins Filho, “The White Collar Republic Patronage and Interest Representation in Minas Gerais, Brazil, 1889-1930,” (Doctoral thesis, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, 1987) for a discussion of the mineiro political elite as a homogenous class.

<sup>87</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 94. In one debate, delegates argued over whether the new capital would be attractive enough to attract investors actually reside there. See also, *O Jornal de Minas* O 20 November 1890 for anti-mudancista opinion on how a new capital would fail to attract elites just like La Plata in Argentina had failed to do so.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 453.

<sup>89</sup> *Constituição Mineira de 1891*.

<sup>90</sup> *Annaes do Congresso Constituinte*, 446-447. For other motions to include more locations, see *Ibid.*, 421-424 and 428. The next session of the paper will discuss the five final locations studied in the *Revista da Comissão d’estudo das localidades indicadas para a nova capital* (Rio de Janeiro, Imprensa Nacional, 1893). Those were Belo Horizonte, Várzea de Marçal, Barbacena, Juiz de Fora and Paraúna.

articulated the same vision of economic change and modernity that surrounded Belo Horizonte.<sup>91</sup> At the final tally, the mudancistas won by a single vote, 35-34.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 371-373. A report prepared about Várzea de Marçal contended that the city would become a significant rail hub with good connections to the west and to the Leopoldina line that served the Zona da Mata and Rio de Janeiro. It would also be located along the route from the population centers on the coast to the proposed site of the new Brazilian nation capital (that was never constructed).

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 458.



## CHAPTER 2

### THE LOCALIDADES COMMISSION AND FINDING SPACE FOR MODERNITY

The vision of modernity surrounding the new capital of Minas Gerais underwent further elaborations in the period of time between the decision to move the capital in 1891 and the formation of the commission to build the city in 1894. During this time period state politicians and the press still played an important role in the formation of the new capital as an idea and as a physical reality. However, with the formation of the *Comissão de Estudo das Cinco Localidades Indicadas para a Construção da Futura Capital de Minas Gerais* in December of 1892, technocratic engineers began to both shape the image of and construct modernity through their new city, originally named “the City of Minas.”<sup>93</sup> In particular, Rio de Janeiro-based engineer Aarão Reis shaped the process more than any other individual while he served as chief engineer of both the *Localidades* Commission and the *Comissão Construtora da Nova Capital*.

This chapter details both the political and technical aspects of the process of selecting a location for the new capital and describes how it further shaped the vision of modernity and the program of modernization associated with the capital project of Minas Gerais. This part of the process saw significant mixing of political and technocratic priorities in shaping the capital city as a project and vision of modernity. Despite the later impact he would have on the design of the city, the parameters dictated to Aarão Reis by the state government during the *Localidades* Commission shaped the application of his ideals regarding urban planning. Reis attempted to introduce scientific elements to the vision of modernity and of the new capital city crafted solely by politicians up to the

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<sup>93</sup> “Diretrizes à Comissão de Estudo das Cinco Localidades Indicadas para a Construção da Futura Capital de Minas Gerais,” 9 December 1892, O Governo de Minas Geraes, Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto.

1891 Constituent Congress. Reis did not possess the strategic fears of the mudancistas and of many anti-mudancistas regarding Minas Gerais's backwardness in comparison to its neighbors. Nor did he have the latitude to suggest additional sites and his final recommendation ran afoul of sectional politics leading to its rejection.

The historiography focusing on the periods of operation of the two commissions headed by Reis from 1892-1897 captures the idea that the selection of a site represented more than finding a space in a convenient geographic location with the minimally requisite resources to support a larger population. In *Aarão Reis: o progresso como missão*, Heliana Angotti Salgueiro argues that the report of the Localidades Commission is one of the most neglected documents in the history of Brazilian urbanism. She writes: "The systematic...comparison established about the inequalities among the localities is exceptional in a country that, at the end of the nineteenth century, lacked the descriptive memories of the Enlightenment, so common in France."<sup>94</sup> Both of the commissions headed by Reis put him in the position of a narrator of modernity as he tried to describe everything as new in the production of the respective reports and of the collection of photographs in the *Albúm de vistas da Comissão Construtora*.<sup>95</sup>

Likewise, Beatriz de Almeida Magalhães and Rodrigo Ferreira Andrade in *Belo Horizonte: um espaço para a república* represent the effort to find a location and to construct the city as an action directed at turning space into place in addition to being in an abstract representation of modernity. The authors ask, "Would it be [the city itself],

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<sup>94</sup> Heliana Angotti Salgueiro, *Engenheiro Aarão Reis: o progresso como missão*, (Belo Horizonte: Fundação João Pinheiro, 1997), 150.

<sup>95</sup> Salgueiro, *Engenheiro Aarão Reis*, 177.

truly, new, audacious, or, to the contrary, as conservative as the political project which created it?”<sup>96</sup>

### **Aarão Reis: An International Intellect with a Brazilian Mind**

Aarão Reis more than any other individual involved with the process of bringing the project of moving and creating a new capital left his personal mark on the new city. As a performance of constructing modernity, the selection of a site for the capital and its subsequent design borrowed heavily from Reis’s intellectual activity prior to his selection as head of the capital project. To answer Magalhães and Andrade’s query, Reis conceived of and later enacted a spatial vision of the city that was quite revolutionary for Brazil, though it served the conservative ends of order, hierarchy and privilege. He believed the city could itself create public order if designed correctly. Moreover, Reis envisioned that space could be fundamentally imbued with modernity and reason. Though an abolitionist, the engineer also believed that Brazil’s future was white, his ideal society left little room for the mixed race or African-descended. His vision would match well with that of the mudancista politicians pushing for the creation of a new capital, though he did not share their strategic interests regarding the relative backwardness of Minas Gerais.

Aarão Reis was a career engineer whose intellectual life spanned numerous disciplines from engineering to the social sciences. Professionally, his career followed the classic trajectory of Saint-Simon inspired engineers in France: he received a polytechnic education, published pamphlets and other treatises and generally engaged with the grand questions surrounding progress and the common good.<sup>97</sup> Reis studied in Rio de Janeiro at

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<sup>96</sup> Magalhães and Andrade, *Belo Horizonte: um espaço para a república*, 36.

<sup>97</sup> Salgueiro, *Engenheiro Aarão Reis*, 28.

the *Escola Central*, later the *Escola Politécnica do Rio de Janeiro* (“Polytechnic School of Rio de Janeiro”) from 1869 to 1874. As a student, he espoused republican reviews and even founded a short-lived republican newspaper *O Centro Acadêmico*.<sup>98</sup> His thesis completed in 1880 evinced the belief that mathematics and engineering could produce normative outcomes.<sup>99</sup> As a professor of mathematics and geography, and later of accounting, navigation and other subjects, Reis organized in 1884 the First Congress of the Railroads of Brazil for the Club of Engineering.<sup>100</sup>

Reis wrote a treatise *Economia política, finanças e contabilidade* that demonstrated how his political views shifted from a more socialistic ideal to a more recognizably positivist one. He believed that a positivist utopia would cure societal ills but that socialism would lead to anarchy. Interestingly, he contrasted his scientific utopia with that of an “anarchist utopia” or a “conservative utopia” such as that of Prussian Germany.<sup>101</sup> In more than one way, Reis represented the perfect choice to bring to fruition the mudancista’s ideal of a modern, democratic and rational capital city. As Salgueiro notes, in *Economia política* he tied his entire conception of political economy to urban design that in turn drew its inspiration from the writings of French Saint-Simonism and secondly from Comte.<sup>102</sup>

Reis’s views on race and slavery rested firmly within the positivist world-view he developed as a student, engineer and professor. In 1881, he completed the translation of the marquis de Condorcet’s *Réflexions sur l’esclavage des nègres* (“Reflections on Negro-Slavery”) into Portuguese. The introduction to this document that Reis composed

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 35. His thesis focused on “moral statistics” and probability.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 168-169.

provides a glance at the attitudes that he developed towards African descended Brazilians and their place within Brazilian society. Reis hoped that the document would aid the Brazilian abolitionist movement and the uninitiated in refuting the arguments of pro-slavery proponents.<sup>103</sup> Regarding his own part in the abolition movement, Reis reflected, "...[this] obliges me to never lose the point of view that the principal duty of a man is-*to instruct oneself and their peers.*"<sup>104</sup>

Reis framed the struggle for abolition as a necessary stage of the evolution of society towards modernity. He celebrated Condorcet as a model of positivism and lauded his and others' work as sweeping away the old world and its backwardness.<sup>105</sup> He believed that Condorcet's reflections on the abolition of slavery in the French sugar and indigo islands possessed direct relevance to Brazil's situation in the 1880s. He praised Condorcet for possessing the foresight to suggest policies of gradual emancipation including abolition of the slave trade and the freeing of the children of slaves, the so-called *emancipação do ventre* or "emancipation of the womb."<sup>106</sup> Nonetheless, Reis stridently attacked slavery and its proponents, even declaring that the hatred of pro-slavery advocates was compensation enough for translating Condorcet's work.<sup>107</sup> Brazil ended the slave trade in 1850, second to last only to Cuba in the Western Hemisphere. Abolition came only in 1888 and Brazil enacted a free-womb law in 1871, well after Condorcet's France abolished slavery entirely in 1848.<sup>108</sup> His forceful denunciation of slavery did not include what he thought Brazil should do with its emancipated ex-slaves.

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<sup>103</sup> Aarão Reis, trans, *A Escravidão dos Negros (Reflexões)* (Rio de Janeiro, 1883), xii.

<sup>104</sup> Reis, *A Escravidão dos Negros*, x. Emphasis by author.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

<sup>108</sup> Baronov, *The Abolition of Slavery in Brazil*, 119. See Table 4.1. Years of Ending Slave Trade/Abolition across the Americas.

Even while Reis began to apply his positivist and scientific vision to the search for a suitable location for the capital political events at the state and national level increased state politicians' desire for order and a final settlement of the capital question. The projections of disorder postulated by many politicians at the state at the Constituent Congress of 1891 seemed to come to fruition in 1892 but mudancistas remained committed to the project. Just as Reis believed in the abilities of city design to bring order to Brazilian society so did politicians believe that Reis and his commission could bring order to their political situation. The political context surrounding the creation of the Localidades Commission demonstrates that the mudancistas desired order as much as Reis.

### **The Revolt of Campanha and the Instability of the First Republic**

In January of 1892, only two months after the Constituent Congress decided to move the capital, the city of Campanha in the Sul region announced its secession from Minas Gerais as part of the independent state "Minas do Sul."<sup>109</sup> The struggle to bring Campanha back into the state took place against the backdrop of the increasingly unstable position left by the departure of the national government of Manuel Deodoro da Fonseca, the first president and coup-leader against the deposed Emperor Pedro II. After finding himself on the brink of civil war, Fonseca resigned the presidency on 23 November 1891 and turned the country over to his vice-president and political rival, Floriano Peixoto.<sup>110</sup> In 1892, national politics came home for the mineiro elite in the form of federal troops.

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<sup>109</sup> Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation*, 28.

<sup>110</sup> Franco, *Um estadista da república*, 215-217.

The revolt of Campanha shook the political establishment in Minas Gerais and perhaps most importantly forced the federal government to intervene to defeat the secessionists. Elites in Minas Gerais felt unhappy with the instability of the national scene before Campanha revolted in January of 1892. They felt unhappy with the arbitrary policies of the Fonseca government and the lack of control over the individual government ministries.<sup>111</sup> Tied to this unhappiness, the troubled state government of Césario Alvim found itself in increasing difficulty. Deodoro appointed Alvim governor of Minas Gerais in November of 1891 after he had assumed power. Alvim opposed moving the capital of his state and was an “11<sup>th</sup> hour republican” but nonetheless remained friends with João Pinheiro whom he appointed to his new government as an advisor.<sup>112</sup> Having held posts under the Fonseca government, Alvim had a keen interest in national affairs and worked towards order on the national stage, an orientation that irritated many mineiro politicians. Indeed, Alvim like his friend Pinheiro had a concern for national issues that served to isolate them to a degree within mineiro politics.<sup>113</sup>

The Campanha revolt made real the fears of mudancistas such as João Pinheiro who had derided the secessionist tendencies of the different regions of Minas Gerais. Secessionist sympathy had found its way into numerous regional newspapers since the declaration of the republic in 1889. In particular, leaders such as Antonio Olint of Diamantina and the eventual leaders of the Campanha secessionist movement had troubled the state government leaders in Ouro Preto since the fall of the Empire in

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<sup>111</sup> *A Ordem*, 9 January 1892. See editorial titled “O que se diz de nós” for one author’s unhappiness with the national political scene.

<sup>112</sup> Franco, *Um estadista da república*, 195. Césario Alvim nominated Pinheiro for the post of “secretaria do govêrno”.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 200-201.

1889.<sup>114</sup> The secessionist movement cut across party lines. Historical Republicans led the Campanha revolt including the director of the republican newspaper *O Colombo*, Manoel de Oliveira Andrade.<sup>115</sup>

However, the revolt compelled the state elite to close ranks, thus strengthening the government's hand in moving the capital. In part, anti-mudancistas lent their support to the state government in opposition to the secessionists. Senator Silviano Brandão, anti-mudancista leader in the Congresso Mineiro and leader from the Sul, telegraphed Ouro Preto to denounce the rebellion of Campanha and its creation of the breakaway state of Minas do Sul. This telegram also went to the major newspapers in Rio de Janeiro.<sup>116</sup> Indeed, the Campanha revolt received almost no support in its region, no other cities jumped to join the breakaway state.<sup>117</sup> Nonetheless, the state government did not have the strength to put down the revolt and the federal government decided to intervene.

The intervention of federal troops shocked a number of mineiro politicians into greater concern with events outside their state. Moreover, it made the argument of the mudancistas that a new modern capital was necessary for state security seem particularly prescient. In late February and early March, the state marshaled its forces in Ouro Preto while Campanha's pleas for assistance failed to rally the rest of the Sul.<sup>118</sup> In early March, federal troops from Rio de Janeiro met those state forces and ended the rebellion

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<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>115</sup> For an account of the 1892 Campanha Secession see Fábio Francisco de Almeida Castilho, "O Movimento Separatista Sul-Mineiro de 1892: enfrentamento político regional no processo de consolidação republicana," paper presented at XXVI Simpósio Nacional de História, Natal, Rio Grande do Norte, Brazil, July 22-26, 2013, 4-5.

<sup>116</sup> *A Ordem*, 5 March 1892.

<sup>117</sup> For a detailed history of Campanha including the 1892 revolt, see Alfredo Valadão, *Campanha da princesa volume II (1821-1909)* (Rio de Janeiro: Leuzinger S.A., 1940), 165-175 and 335-376.

<sup>118</sup> *A Ordem*, 27 February 1892.



with little contestation.<sup>119</sup> The mineiro press reflected the political elite when it stated that Minas Gerais needed to never give the federal government cause to intervene within its borders again.<sup>120</sup> Amidst this chaos, Reis embarked on his mission to bring scientific order to the backwards spaces of Minas Gerais.

### **The *Localidades* Commission and the Intersection of Politics and Technocracy**

The report of the Comissão d'Estudo das Cinco Localidades Indicadas para a Construção da Nova Capital demonstrates that the new capital was to become an industrial center via railroads, boast a large population, be a “European” city and be founded upon “scientific” methods. The report introduced emphases on hygiene and science into the discourse of modernity surrounding the new capital city. The mineiro government charged Reis with surveying the five locations selected by the Congresso Mineiro as potential locations. The list included Belo Horizonte, Várzea de Marçal, Paraúna, Barbacena, and Juiz de Fora. Of these, Belo Horizonte in the Center zone and Várzea de Marçal in the Sul had significant political support, largely from their respective regions.<sup>121</sup> The Commission began work in 1892 and gave its final report to the Congresso Mineiro at the 1893 Extraordinary Session held in Barbacena due to fears of violence in Ouro Preto over the final decision on where to move the capital.<sup>122</sup>

The categories selected by the Commission belie Reis’s desire to conduct the site studies with the utmost precision and scientific integrity. They also demonstrate the

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<sup>119</sup> *A Ordem*, 5 March 1892.

<sup>120</sup> *A Ordem*, 12 March 1892.

<sup>121</sup> *Gazeta de Oliveira*, 24 November 1889. The municipality of São João d’el Rei, near Varzea de Marçal, petitioned the government almost immediately after the fall of the Empire for the capital to be moved to their municipality.

<sup>122</sup> Luiz Fernandes de Assis, “A mudança da capital: sessão extraordinária do Congresso Mineiro – Barbacena/1893,” *Cadernos da Escola do Legislativo Belo Horizonte* 3.6 (July/Dec. 1997), 155.

priorities of the Commission in establishing a capital: hygiene, transportation and population. The Commission assessed natural health of the sites' respective environments, their geographic and topographic characteristics, the quality of soil and subterranean water, the potential for supporting water and sewer system and the availability of local materials to assist in construction. They also analyzed the ability of the site to support a large population and the potential of each site in terms of transportation, specifically railroads.<sup>123</sup> The Commission desired a site that could support 200,000 inhabitants as the upper range for the projected size of the new capital.

Reis organized the Commission's activities and conduct along scientific lines with clear rules for how the engineers working beneath him would conduct their respective studies. The Commission had a hierarchy that reported to the Chief Engineer, Reis, and allowed him significant latitude in how he conducted the studies. Reis appointed the engineers responsible for surveying each site, they all held similar views to his own and drew inspiration from Saint-Simon, Haussmann and positivism more generally. The *Localidades* Commission applied a pay scale that mirrored Reis's desire for order and rationality: the Chief Engineer received 2,000,000 reis while each of the engineers received 1,000,000 reis each. Reis determined the salaries of local laborers employed in the Commission's activities. They received a set pay for each day of labor completed.<sup>124</sup>

Reis came away impressed with the potential of Belo Horizonte as the location of the new capital city though he eventually decided to recommend Várzea do Marçal as the best location. Of Belo Horizonte, he wrote "This beautiful amphitheater offers beneath the form of a dodecagon 1,900 hectares and enough [land], therefore, for the

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<sup>123</sup> "Diretrizes á Comissão de Estudo das Cinco Localidades Indicadas para a Construção da Futura Capital de Minas Gerais" 9 December 1892, O Governo de Minas Geraes, Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto, 1.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 5

establishment of a population of 190,000 inhabitants, with 100m<sup>2</sup> for each inhabitant.”<sup>125</sup> Nonetheless, Reis believed that Varzea do Marçal offered better conditions for the growth of a large city, a victory for those from the Sul that wished for the capital in their region. He wrote, “From this exposition of the geographic and topographic conditions of the five indicated locations, [the Commission] concludes that...only Varzea do Marçal, Belo Horizonte and Juiz de Fora can bear an agglomeration of 150,000 to 200,000 inhabitants in good technical and hygienic conditions...” Reis reported that Paraúna could only support 90,000 inhabitants while Barbacena could only manage 50,000 or so. He concluded “Among the three primary sites studied, it is uncontestable the Varzea de Marçal should occupy the first spot, followed by Belo Horizonte and, after that, Juiz de Fora.”<sup>126</sup>

While Reis made his recommendation, mineiro politicians had the final say in the selection of the site for the new capital. Reis delivered his report to the *Sessão Extraordinária do Congresso Mineiro* (“Extraordinary Session of the Congresso Mineiro”) held in the southern city of Barbacena in November-December of 1893 after nearly a year of studying the different locales. The delegates, many of whom also participated in the Constituent Congress of 1891, continued to cite the instability of the national political scene in Brazil and the intervention of federal troops to put down the revolt in Campanha as reasons to either push forward or cease the process of moving the capital to a new city yet to be constructed. Anti-mudancista Camilo de Brito argued that the instability provided reason for caution and for slowing the process. Interestingly, he tied the rash of decisions by the national and state governments to create new capitals to

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<sup>125</sup> Aarão Reis, *Revista da Comissão d’Estudo das Cinco Localidades Indicadas para a Construção da Futura Capital de Minas Gerais* (Rio de Janeiro: Imprensa Nacional, 1893), 20-21.

<sup>126</sup> Reis, *Revista da Comissão d’Estudo das Cinco Localidades*, 25.

this instability. The new Federal Constitution of Brazil mandated moving the capital to a site some 14,400 kilometers inland in the Center Plateau.<sup>127</sup> Meanwhile, Bahia wrote a provision into its constitution moving their capital to an inland site while Rio de Janeiro decided to move the state capital to Teresópolis, neither of which ever occurred. De Brito surmised that the new capital of Minas Gerais was a paper city like those of Brazil, Bahia and Rio de Janeiro and that it should remain so.<sup>128</sup>

The specter of further federal intervention haunted the Congresso through the form of possible federal involvement in the weak state finances of Minas Gerais. In the 1890s, the state government embarked on an ambitious program of railroad building and promoting European immigration in conjunction with constructing a new capital city. As Wirth notes, the state tried to finance its projects with domestic loans and expanding coffee revenues.<sup>129</sup> State politicians desired above all to operate independently of the Brazilian Federation in financial matters, a policy that the loose nature of the union permitted. At the Sessão Extraordinário this manifested itself in the politicians' worries about regional financing schemes that might make federal intervention in mineiro affairs possible. The self-sufficient strategy worked until 1897 when a global drop in coffee prices dampened the enthusiasm of mineiro politicians forcing them to look abroad for financing and railroad loans.

Though Reis recommended Varzea de Marçal as the best location for the new capital, Belo Horizonte triumphed on the third ballot by a vote of 30-28. This close vote belied the significant support Varzea de Marçal possessed, the populous Sul region

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<sup>127</sup> See Articles 3 and 4 of the *Constituição da República dos Estados Unidos do Brasil*, 24 February 1891. The Constitution also stipulated that the new city would form a federal district separate from any state.

<sup>128</sup> *Anais da Sessão Extraordinária do Congresso Mineiro*, Barbacena, Minas Gerais November-December 1893, 23-26.

<sup>129</sup> Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation*, 181-182.

provided many delegates in the Congresso. The newspaper *A Pátria Mineira* of the town São João Del-Rei near Várzea do Marçal bemoaned, “What confluence of causes could have occurred for such a surprise outcome?”<sup>130</sup> Nonetheless, the vote was final and the Additional Law n°3 passed on 17 December 1893 declared that the capital would be constructed in Belo Horizonte. State President Bias Fortes mandated that Reis and his team finish building the capital within four years so that the capital would officially be inaugurated in 1897.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> *A Pátria Mineira*, 21 December 1893.

<sup>131</sup> Assis, “A Mudança da capital: Sessão Extraordinária do Congresso Mineiro-Barbaena/1893,” 159.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE COMISSÃO CONSTRUTORA: DESIGNING BELO HORIZONTE AND CONSTRUCTING MODERNITY

Reis developed an overall conception of the city that attempted to rationalize its urban spaces and convert its people into parts in a well-functioning machine. This chapter discusses the vision of modernity as constructed by Reis in the documents related to the design and construction of the new capital, Belo Horizonte. This describes the contours of that vision as they interacted with the vision continuously under development in the mineiro press and in the political sphere. First, Reis attempted to rationalize the urban spaces of Belo Horizonte through infusing the street design with mathematical principles and the division of the city into productive spheres based on Positivist thought. However, while previous authors have correctly emphasized the centrality of government and its celebration to the city design they have neglected the integral role railroads played in shaping the city's urban spaces and in complementing the political vision of the city. Indeed, the celebration of government cannot be separated from the emphasis of technology and railroads. Like other city planners of his time, Reis combined an emphasis on sanitation with a symbolic rejection of Brazil's colonial and imperial past in an implicit effort to create a modern and therefore white space.<sup>132</sup> The production of textual and photographic evidence by Reis demonstrates the aspect of the city as a performance of modernity that commenced with its first designs and which Reis intended to continue so long as the city existed.

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<sup>132</sup> Reis's adulthood home, Rio de Janeiro, embodied this idea. See, Teresa A. Meade, *"Civilizing" Rio: Reform and Resistance in a Brazilian City, 1889-1930* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 75-102.

The Congresso Mineiro convened the Comissão Construtora da Nova Capital by Decree n.º 680 issued February 14 and considered active on March 1 of 1894. The Comissão Construtora convened engineers, scientists, meteorologists, and photographers among others in the effort to construct an entire city in the space of three years prior to the planned inauguration in 1897.<sup>133</sup> The commission included many of the same personal as the Localidades Commission, including most prominently Aarão Reis himself.

This chapter concurs with the current in the historiography that Belo Horizonte represented an elite project predicated on instilling order from above but considers the project in its entirety as the culmination of successive modernities. Bomeny argued that the guiding principle of the design of Belo Horizonte is order. She writes that Reis created the city as a spectacle, a real modern city amidst the chaos and irrationality that characterized Ouro Preto and the favelas. For this, many called the city a “sonha da razão” or a “dream of reason.” Bomeny quotes Sylvio de Vasconcelos:

Against the spontaneous organization of insurmountable complexity that was Ouro Preto, a new capital of the state translated the contrary aspiration of absolute clarity: a quadrangular grid of streets, serving one another, with avenues crossing diagonally. Belo Horizonte was the first city with such a rigorous layout in Brazil.<sup>134</sup>

Magalhães and Andrade likewise concur with Bomeny in that the formal aspects of the project are aimed at creating spectacle although it adhered to the positivist ideals of functionality and utilitarianism. The authors note that the grid design lacks functionality as many streets end in *praças* or plazas, in which government or other important

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<sup>133</sup> Francisco Bicalho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital* (Rio de Janeiro: H. Lombaerts, 1896), 7.

<sup>134</sup> Bomeny, *Guardiães da Razão*, 42.

buildings stood. The focus of the city design centers on these praças, in which government ministries stood.<sup>135</sup>

### **A City of Numbers: The Mathematical and Rational Basis of Belo Horizonte**

The urban center of Reis's design demonstrated how he based his city on rigid mathematical principals intended to induce rationality into the fabrics of the city's spaces and the lives of its inhabitants. Reis split the city into three zones: urban, suburban and rural. For each zone, he designated a specific area:

Table 3.1 Zones of Belo Horizonte by Area<sup>136</sup>

Zone	Area (m <sup>2</sup> )
Urban	8,815,382
Suburban	24,930,803
Rural	17,474,619

Reis utilized a triangulation map compiled by teams of engineers that provided the geodesic basis of the urban zone. His city rested on mathematic principle to the point where the street-grid of the urban center ignored local topography, causing difficulty of circulation for vehicles and people. The report of the Comissão Construtora features large sections of the calculations of these triangulations that radiate out from important points in the design of the city.<sup>137</sup> These points connected to one another and formed the base for the street grid. Indeed, Reis considered the geodesic design of such importance that one of the chief administrative units concerned itself with its design in addition to the soil and the topography.<sup>138</sup> The framework upon which Reis built his city rejected the

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<sup>135</sup> Magalhães and Andrade, *Belo Horizonte: um espaço para a república*, 125.

<sup>136</sup> Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 14.

<sup>137</sup> For a detailed technical and mathematical explanation of the triangulations processes utilized, see *Ibid.*, 109-132.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.



physical and human geography that underpinned the organic growth of Brazil's previous urban spaces.



Figure 3.1 “Bello Horizonte – Geodesic, Topographic and Cadastral Map of Area Studied.” This map displays the triangulations upon which Reis would base his street grid. Notably, his design ignores the topographic elements contained here. Hermillo Alves, engineer and B. Zickler, designer. 1895. Photo courtesy of the Arquivo Público Mineiro.

Upon this framework, the urban zone of 8,815,382 m<sup>2</sup> was divided into blocks of 120m x 120m with streets that crossed at “straight” angles and avenues that crossed at 45-degree angles. The streets were more than 20 meters wide in order to support tree cover, subterranean water works, and free circulation of vehicles, rail traffic and horses. The avenues were larger than 35m in order to support even greater tree cover and population.<sup>139</sup> The *Avenida do Contorno* separated the urban and suburban zones and Reis believed it would facilitate distribution of local taxes and become one of the most

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 59.

beautiful parts of the city. The suburban zone consisted of irregular lots where the roads conformed more to the local topography.<sup>140</sup>



Figure 3.2 “General Plan of the City of Minas.” This early design displays the urban and suburban zones. The zones created by the triangulations are denoted in Roman numerals. 1894-1895. Photo courtesy of the Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto.

Reis’s planned city would play host to a population whose distribution he designed with the same care as the street grid. These people would provide the energy and motion to Reis’s city, staff the government, and push Belo Horizonte to become an industrial power. He provided specific locations for the first 30,000 inhabitants in the urban and suburban zones with an indeterminate number to reside in the rural farming area. He wrote to the government that they should determine a process for placing

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 60.

additional people up to the desired population of 200,000.<sup>141</sup> Neither Reis nor his successor Francisco Bicalho devised any plan on what to do should the city population exceed that mark.<sup>142</sup> Nonetheless, 200,000 represented a significant population by mineiro or even Brazilian standards. Brazil's largest cities all possessed fewer than 200,000 people. Ouro Preto possessed 59,249 people while Barbacena and Juiz de Fora had 57,850 and 74,136, respectively.<sup>143</sup> As of 1890, Recife had a population of 111,556 and São Paulo had only 64,934.<sup>144</sup>

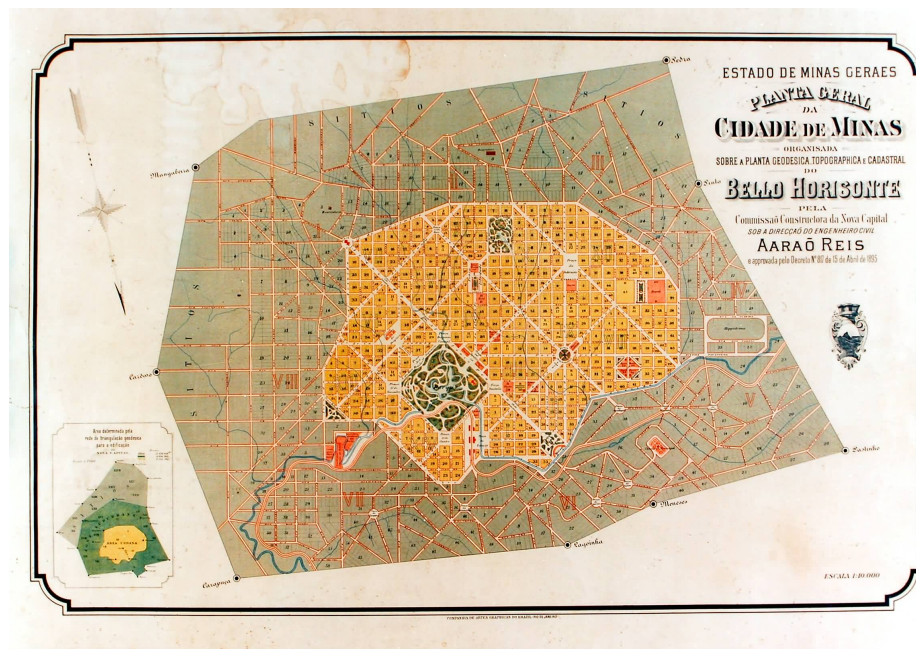


Figure 3.3 “General Plan of the City of Minas.” The urban zone is in yellow, the suburban in dark green. The park is visible in the lower left corner of the urban

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 19. This planning is best seen in the pipe grid laid by the 5<sup>th</sup> Administrative Unit of the Comissão Construtora. The actual system put into place served up to 30,000 people while the engineers left plans to expand that to serve 200,000 once the population expanded.

<sup>143</sup> See “Synopsis do Recenseamento de 31 de Dezembro de 1890” (Rio de Janeiro: Oficina da estatística: 1898), 47-71.

<sup>144</sup> For the population of Recife, see Paul Singer, *Desenvolvimento econômico e evolução urbana: análise da evolução econômica de São Paulo, Blumenau, Pôrto Alegre, Belo Horizonte e Recife* (São Paulo: Companhia Editora Nacional/Editôra da Universidade de São Paulo, 1968), 302. For the population of São Paulo throughout the First Republic, see Table 1.5 “Growth of São Paulo City’s population, 1872-1940” in Joseph Love, *São Paulo in the Brazilian Federation, 1889-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1980), 26.

zone. Aarão Reis, engineer. 1895. Photo courtesy of the Arquivo Público da Cidade de Belo Horizonte.

Into that rational framework Reis assiduously planned where specific populations would live to complete ordained functions. Reis's plan reserved lots for four populations: former inhabitants Currail de'l Rei, people who owned state related property in Ouro Preto, public functionaries and workers associated with the railroads. However, moving the current population of Currail d'El Rei to make way for Belo Horizonte posed a problem for Reis. Many did not want to leave their homes. Reis's team had to coerce many to leave despite the government promising them lots in the new city.<sup>145</sup> However, the Comissão Construtora only had license and enough funds to buy out inhabitants in what would become the urban and suburban zones of the original design.

Reis's desired populations would occupy most of the urban core. One of the most prestigious areas of the city center earned the name *Funcionários*, after the large number of government workers that resided in it.<sup>146</sup> Indeed, Reis had his engineers create six distinct designs for housing public functionaries in the city center.<sup>147</sup> Housing for the other priority population, railroad engineers and their workers, occupied one of the largest portions of the Comissão Construtora's budget.

Table 3.2 Budget of the Comissão Construtora, 1895<sup>148</sup>

Project	Cost
Railroad and Related Projects	2.115:307\$945
Sewage and Water Systems	977:849\$024
Presidential Police	537:423\$656

<sup>145</sup> Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 11.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. The currency is denoted in contos, which consists of 1,000 milréis (written 1:000\$000). Contos were the largest unit of currency until the currency was changed in 1942. For US dollar equivalents, see Appendix C in Love, *São Paulo in the Brazilian Federation*, 300-307.

Church and Chapel	471:940\$176
Park, Garden and Trees	1.000:000\$000
David Campista Bridge	32:350\$580
Palace of the Congress	1.157:911\$450
Secretary of Agriculture	230:923\$316
Secretary of Finances	230:923\$316
Secretary of the Interior	272:513\$610
State Press	120:428\$900
Palace of Justice (Judiciary)	805:045\$470
Total Costs:	7.952:616\$413

### **Modernity as the Celebration of Government, Industry and Technology**

The historiography on the foundation of Belo Horizonte has described the city as devoted to government in function and as a baroque pageantry of power. Nonetheless, the importance of the railroad in addition to the celebration of the central place of government to the overall conception of city enhances our understanding of the development of its urban spaces. It remained central to the political and strategic vision of mineiro elites. Reis's baroque vision complemented that of the politicians who likewise envisioned Belo Horizonte as foremost a government city. However, the railroad represented the means for that power to project outwards and transform Minas Gerais while altering the political economy of Brazil in the state's favor. Salgueiro points towards Reis's intellectual conformity with the development of French thought on urban design in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Reis evinced a spatial hierarchy amongst systems of railroad communication that borrowed from his admiration for Saint-Simon and from the ideas of

Michel Chevalier, whom he cited frequently in his dissertation.<sup>149</sup> Indeed, Reis followed the example of Haussmann in Paris and emulated the style pursued by nearly all of the engineers of the *École Polytechnique*. In its design, Belo Horizonte possessed an organic body of skilled persons, each with a function organized beneath a system of divisions and subdivisions.<sup>150</sup> She also highlights the values Reis placed on education by setting aside land for education in his plan for Belo Horizonte.<sup>151</sup>

Magalhães and Andrade emphasize the baroque aspect of the design in that Belo Horizonte. They conclude, “In sum, the Belo Horizonte of Aarão Reis is the embodiment of the State’s desire for supremacy over all the segments of society... assuring on the part of the traditional powers groups their continued dominance.”<sup>152</sup> This conservative vision manifested itself in Reis’s conceptualization of the natural, urban, suburban and rural zones of the city and their progression as a Positivist trilogy. The parks contained Nature, organic yet fetishized as an ideal zone within Reis’s urban utopia and represented the distant past of humanity. The urban space represented the scientific, geometric, secular, civic-virtue and the preeminence of the state. The suburban and rural zone lacked order yet represented the Positivist ideal of the division of classes.<sup>153</sup>

The design of Belo Horizonte certainly embodied the Positivist ideal of spatial order, separation of classes, and the progress of man from nature to urban utopia. The design of its important buildings likewise emphasized the preeminence of the state but also the arrival of modernity in the attention paid to buildings associated with either railroads or technology. Moreover, the railroad system represents a point of convergence

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<sup>149</sup> Salgueiro, *Engenheiro Aarão Reis*, 53.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-55.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-52.

<sup>152</sup> Magalhães and Andrade, *Belo Horizonte: um espaço para a república*, 147.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-146.

between the political vision of the city and that of Reis. Railroads spanned all of the spaces Reis envisioned and he situated their terminals in the urban center. For politicians, the railroads represented the means by which Reis's modern urban utopia would instruct the state and draw people and wealth from around Brazil to Minas Gerais. It would also place them in a stronger position with regards to competitors São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

The Comissão Construtora placed a significant emphasis on celebrating government and making its presence a spectacle that dominated the city spatially. The designers constructed a *Palacio Presidencial* (“Presidential Palace”) and palaces for the Secretary of State and the state press. They also planned for a *Palacio do Congresso* (“Palace of the Congress”) to house the legislative branch and a *Palacio da Justiça* to house the judiciary.<sup>154</sup> All of the buildings possessed a simplified Baroque architecture that featured straight lines and selective ornamentation. Their design announces the rationality and thus modernity of the government.

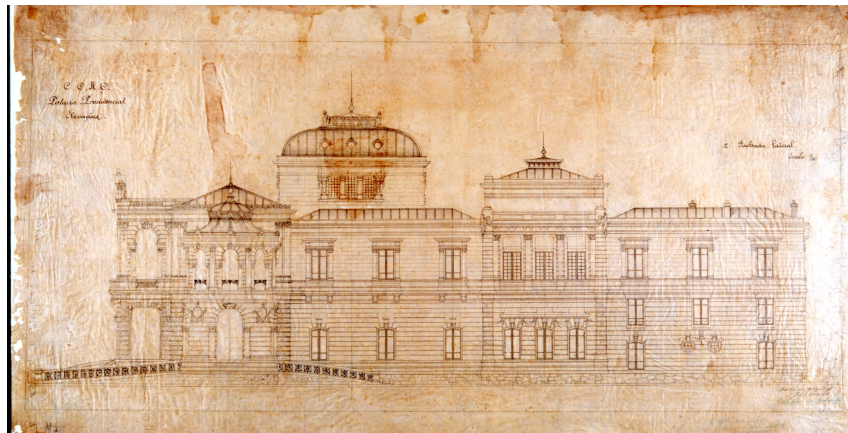


Figure 3.4 “Presidential Palace.” José de Magalhães, engineer and architect. 29 May 1896. Photo courtesy of the Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto.

<sup>154</sup> Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 15.



Figure 3.5 “Palace of the Congresso Mineiro – Lateral Cut of Interior.” João Salles. 1894-1895. Photo courtesy of the Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto.

The location of government buildings created the spectacle Reis desired, they sat within the praças that dominated the street grid of Belo Horizonte. In many cases, the government ministries sat in the middle of the praças themselves. As Magalhães and Andrade write, this represented a classic tenant of baroque architecture as it delineates between those who exercise power and those who do not.<sup>155</sup> Nonetheless, Reis planned for a wide variety of buildings that would surround these nexuses of governmental power that celebrated technology. This plan included buildings for water utilities and for electricity, a recent introduction to Brazil. Besides buildings devoted to railroads, he planned for places of worship, a hospital, a cemetery, a park, a zoo, a slaughterhouse, a market, a police office, a theater, a firehouse and school buildings.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>155</sup> Magalhães and Andrade, *Belo Horizonte: um espaço para a república*, 70-71.

<sup>156</sup> Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 14.



Nonetheless, the railroads commanded a significant portion of the budget delineated by the Congresso Mineiro to the Comissão Construtora and represented a majority of the buildings designed by Reis. Nearly half of the 23 contracts issued by Reis directly related to supporting railroads or their infrastructure.<sup>157</sup> This fit with the larger trend of the Minas Gerais state government along with private entities spending significant amounts on railroad construction across the state.<sup>158</sup> On studies alone, Reis spent 17,487,385 on locating the lines and 19,194,406 on the location of the Estação Central.<sup>159</sup> Of the twenty-three contracts issued by Reis, nearly half went to projects related to the railroads.<sup>160</sup>

Along with government buildings, they received the most attention from Reis's architectural team and continued the unity and performance of their Baroque architecture. Dr. José de Magalhães, chief of the section in charge of architecture for important buildings, planned the *Estação Central* ("Central Station") with warehouses, covered platforms and an ornate interior. He designed the building to be triangular in shape, with sui-generis architecture and residences for agents, railroads, and workers who maintained the rail lines.<sup>161</sup> The report states:

Much as the Estação Central will be raised like a portico, in the new capital, I have sought, no sumptuousness misplaced, nor any dispensable artistic luxury but all the elegance, comfort, and commodities, whose absence would be inexcusable in the Estação Central of a city that will be constructed at the opening of the twentieth century.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>158</sup> Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation*, 58.

<sup>159</sup> Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 26.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 26. Italics mine.

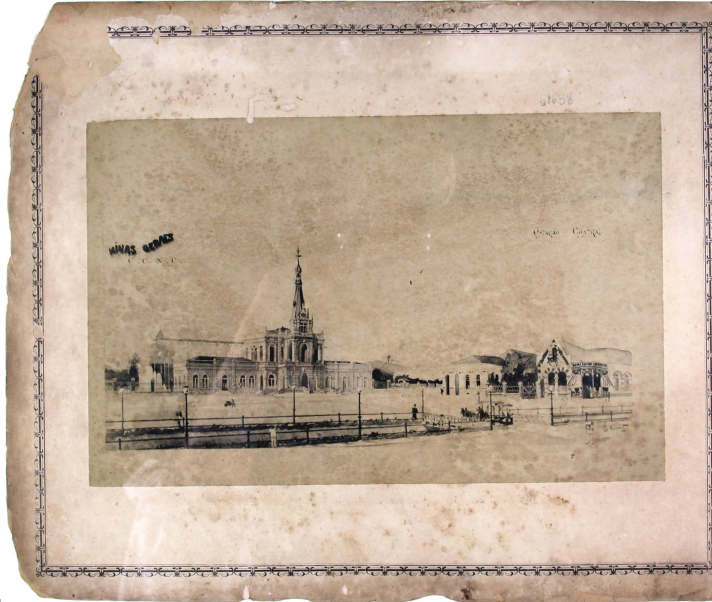


Figure 3.6 “Central Station.” Image of the principal railroad station in Belo Horizonte. 1894-1895. Photo courtesy of the Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto.

Reis’s design accommodated the politician’s desire for Belo Horizonte to become a central rail hub although this was not necessarily one of Reis’s foremost priorities intellectually. The Comissão Constructora planned for the city to connect to the Estrada Ferro Central do Brazil via its own byway.<sup>163</sup> The Estrada Ferro Central do Brazil was a government owned rail line that ran from Rio de Janeiro through Minas Gerais near to the site of the new capital.<sup>164</sup> Reis’s administration, in addition to the extensive studies, contracted the Companhia Industrial Sebarense to prepare the land for the rail lines, construct a junction station, supply any necessary wood, and construct a facility for repairs. The company also supplied a telegraph line to the construction site that facilitated ordering of materials, typically from Rio de Janeiro.<sup>165</sup> Nonetheless, Reis’s focus in his expository documents and in the material he personally included in the report of the

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<sup>163</sup> Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 24.

<sup>164</sup> William Summerhill, *Order Against Progress: Government, Foreign Investment, and Railroads in Brazil, 1854-1913* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 164.

<sup>165</sup> Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 27.

Comissão Construtora focused on the geodesic design of the city rather than its potential as a railroad hub. Ironically, for all of the city design's emphasis on accommodating railroads and rationalizing the flow of people in vehicles in the urban core Reis and his contemporaries did not anticipate the car.<sup>166</sup>

### **Sanitation, Race and the Rejection of Brazil's Past**

Attitudes towards race played a central role in the planning and construction of Belo Horizonte. This section ties Reis's scientific prescriptions, the desire of the Comissão Construtora and mineiro politicians to whiten Minas Gerais, the symbolic rejection of Ouro Preto with the modernization project of Belo Horizonte. While Reis borrowed from French thought in designing his city, he and mineiro politicians intended for the city to modernize and therefore whiten Minas Gerais. Like other urban planners of the time, Reis placed a premium on sanitation as evidenced by the implementation of an extensive water and sewer system. This emphasis on sanitation extended to a desire to thwart the kind of chaotic settlements that characterized many Brazilian cities including Ouro Preto. Indeed, the Comissão Construtora's sanitary mission parallels its symbolic rejection of Ouro Preto and old Brazil, which also entailed a rejection of Brazil's African heritage. Reis and others felt that Ouro Preto and Brazil's colonial cities represented barbarism and backwardness in addition to being vectors for disease and filth. In contrast, Reis ran the Comissão Construtora in a scientific manner that epitomized the kind of skilled, technocratic and white space he sought to create.

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<sup>166</sup> Newton Silva and Antônio Augusto d'Aguiar, *Belo Horizonte: a cidade revelada* (Belo Horizonte: Odebrecht, 1989), 71. Joel Wolfe notes that Belo Horizonte did at least have smooth paved roads that did not wreak havoc on automobiles. See Wolfe, *Autos and Progress*, 24.

Moreover, this section contends that the discourse surrounding sanitation and the symbolic rejection of Ouro Preto directly informed the modern spaces that Reis sought to create. Sanitation was one of the key ways in which Reis would prevent another Ouro Preto. Magalhães and Andrade likewise emphasize the spatial transformation undertaken by Reis and mudancistas as they sought to do away with the old Brazil. However, the relationship between the modernist discourse of Reis and mineiro politicians more directly informed the spaces constructed in Belo Horizonte than they identify. The authors posit that the form and make of the city did not contradict its function but rather demonstrated a clear exposition of the desires of its designers. They argue that scholars should not confuse the discourse surrounding the city or its explicit symbology with its concrete material spatial prescription.<sup>167</sup> The renaming of Curral d'El Rei to Belo Horizonte indicates the need for a new qualification of space, which they contend represented a qualitative change of space and not simply a symbolic attribution. The change made concrete the new republican horizon signifying a redistribution of power and a new order of natural space in that place.<sup>168</sup>

French ideas on urban planning, sanitation and hygiene played influential roles in shaping urban spaces in turn of the twentieth century Brazil. In *Laws of Chance: Brazil's Clandestine Lottery and the Making of Urban Public Life*, Amy Chazkel describes how the *jogo de bicho*, a popular lottery game, and the prosecution of its players by the state helped shape urban spaces in early twentieth century Rio de Janeiro. Her analysis of the clandestine networks engaged in playing the *jogo de bicho* detailed the “urban enclosure” of public spaces in Rio de Janeiro, the criminalization of daily life in Brazil and Latin

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<sup>167</sup> Magalhães and Andrade, *Belo Horizonte: um espaço para a república*, 36.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

America, and the suppression of the popular classes that accompanied the pursuit of urban modernity everywhere in Latin America.<sup>169</sup> Brazilian elites found Louis Napoleon and Eugene Haussmann's reordering of Paris to prevent working class manifestations an appealing antidote for the relative chaos of Brazil's cities and the potential threat of its large, illiterate under-classes.<sup>170</sup> The creation of Belo Horizonte emulated all of these trends, perhaps unsurprising given Aarão Reis's roots in Rio de Janeiro.

Reis and the Comissão Construtora continued the emphasis on sanitation from the Localidades Commission as part of the overall scientific effort of the project. The pipe system primarily served the urban core, the most modern section of the city. Reis and his engineers spent considerable energy in creating an efficient sewage network that would mirror the street grid above.<sup>171</sup> The level of detail extended to the amount of runoff tanks could hold up to a population of 30,000. The city would have extensive canalization to direct water resources to the city and waste out of it for maximum sanitary effect. The street network would also incorporate manholes at distances of no less than 250 meters apart.<sup>172</sup> The creation of the water and sewer system also included extensive testing of the water quality and the minerals contained therein.<sup>173</sup>

Part of the commissions sanitary efforts included preventing the development of unregulated settlements in the city center. The overall design of the city center was intended to push population towards the periphery, in contrast to the jumbled center of Ouro Preto. In addition to shaping the city center into a rational and therefore modern space, the width of the streets and avenues had the effect of preventing the

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<sup>169</sup> Chazkel, *Laws of Chance*, 7-9.

<sup>170</sup> Bomeny, *Guardiães da Razão*, 54.

<sup>171</sup> Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 235.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

characteristically narrow streets in Brazilian cities, including in Reis’s native Rio de Janeiro.<sup>174</sup> Indeed, Reis brought this approach to Belo Horizonte a decade prior to its implementation in Rio de Janeiro. This physical rejection of traditional Brazil dovetailed with action as well.

The third administrative unit of the Comissão Construtora oversaw the architecture of the entire city. It also designed new crests for the new city and for the state suggesting a unity of purpose that shaped the spatial dynamic of the city from physical and symbolic standpoints.<sup>175</sup> The city seal in particular bore the suggestive imagery of a sun cresting the mountain, indicative of the eventual name of the city Belo Horizonte, or “Good Horizons.”

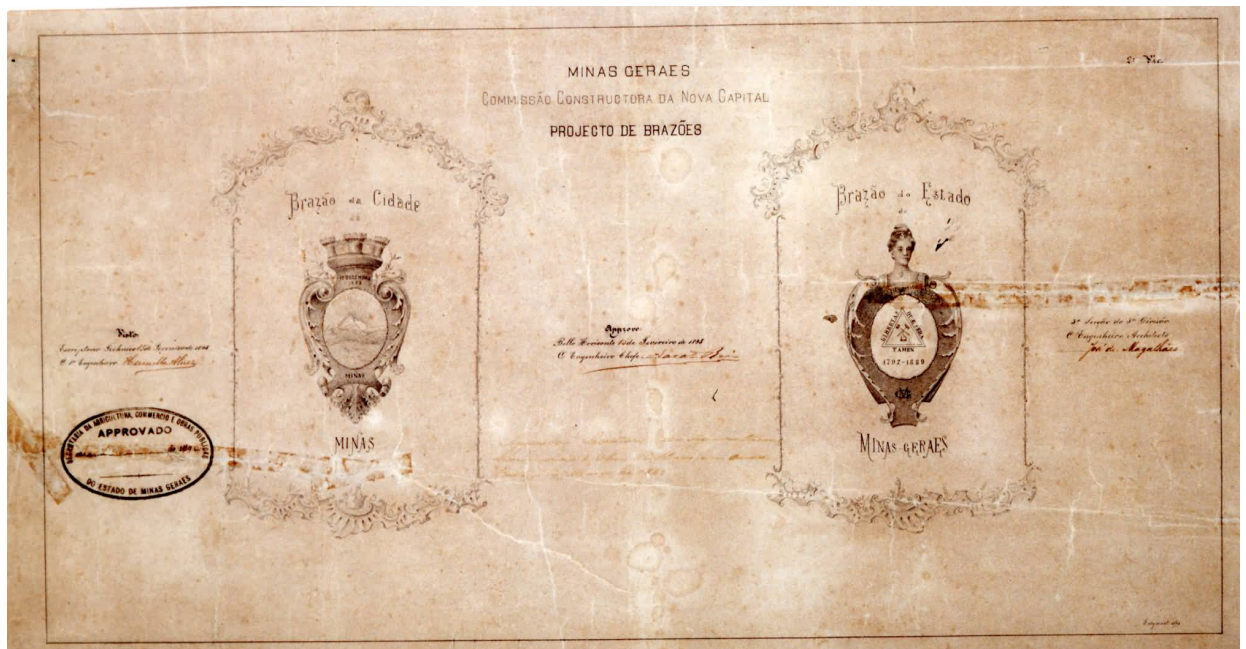


Figure 3.7 “Project of the Crests of the State and the Crest of the City.” From left to right, technical designs for the new crests of Belo Horizonte and Minas Gerais. José de Magalhães, engineer and architect. 15 February 1895. Photo courtesy of the Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 15.

Reis's desire to avoid these kinds of settlement took on a kind of irony during the construction of the city. In *Guardiães da Razão*, Bomeny describes the role Reis and his commission's disdain for Brazil's African descended population played in the creation of the city. The Comissão Construtora attempted to attract European labor to construct Belo Horizonte, considering them superior to native-born Brazilians. Reis provided these workers with poor habitations in areas that often possessed swamps or other less desirable conditions. Ironically, the same workers tasked with constructing his modern city formed its first favelas prior to its completion.<sup>176</sup> Likewise, Bomeny ties the schools of urban planning popular in Brazil during Reis's time as aimed at undercutting the "barbarism" of Brazil's African past and instituting European civilization.<sup>177</sup>



Figure 3.8 “Building of the Secretary of Education under construction.” Workers can be seen in the foreground of the photograph. Raimundo Alves Pinto, photographer. 7 August 1894–November 1896. Photo courtesy of the Arquivo Público Mineiro.

<sup>176</sup> Bomeny, *Guardiães da Razão*, 39.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

That Belo Horizonte drew inspiration from the designs of Washington D.C. and of La Plata, Argentina has been well-established in the historiography. The former city had particular relevance as the last city from which Reis sought to draw inspiration for designing Belo Horizonte and one that possessed significant traction in the mineiro imagination as well.<sup>178</sup> Mineiros looked to La Plata as an example of the kind of rational, modern urban planning practiced in France brought to bear within a Latin American context.<sup>179</sup> Nonetheless, Europe remained the chief source of inspiration. Even the city's cadastre as designed by Reis cited Modena, Italy's law of 2 February 1884 as a model.<sup>180</sup>



Figure 3.9 “Group of the Comissão Construtora da Nova Capital.” The chief engineers and technicians of the Comissão Construtora. Aarão Reis can be seen sitting at center in front holding a large copy of the general plan of Belo Horizonte. Aldo Borgatti, author. 1894-1895. Photo courtesy of the Museu Abílio Barreto.

<sup>178</sup> Arruda, “Cidades-capitais imaginadas pela fotografia,” 94-95.

<sup>179</sup> *O Pharol* 16 January 1890, apud Arruda, “Cidades-capitais imaginadas pela fotografia,” 95.

<sup>180</sup> Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 125.



While the workers building the city found themselves in disorganized slums, the operation of the Comissão Construtora represented the scientific discipline Reis sought to bring to the new capital. Indeed, the commission in many ways comprised the first community to inhabit Belo Horizonte that Reis and his contemporaries would consider truly modern. Reis issued strict rules as to the operation of the Comissão Construtora from its daily activities to the staffing to the proper circulation of important papers.<sup>181</sup> All of the members of the commission possessed housing within the city, that of the engineers and those working of the railroad superior to the workers' slums cited by Bomeny. Indeed, Reis lamented the fact that he would have to include habitations for the former residents of Curraíl d'el Rei in the new city. These people he associated with the area's past who had to be included in its future only by political necessity.

### **The *Gabinete Fotografico* and Belo Horizonte as a Performance of Modernity**

Reis intended the construction of the city to serve as a “performance” of constructing modernity and desired that his experience be emulated and discussed in the future. This likewise fulfilled the desire of politicians to signal a decisive break from the past and a clean slate for the future of Minas Gerais. Indeed, the publicity effort comprised an integral part of the modernity of Belo Horizonte from the inception of the project. His publication of the *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital* and its associated album of photographs the *Albúm de vista locais e das obras projectadas para a edificação da nova cidade* (“Album of Local Views and of the Projected Works for the Edification of the New City”) represented an attempt to display modernity to a larger audience. This effort included incorporating politicians into its

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 64-72. This section also includes the legal action taken to secure Belo Horizonte as a separate municipality from Sabará, of which it was formerly a part.

pageantry and imagery as representations of the modernity that the city had already begun to engender and which it would produce in the future.

As an educator, it is perhaps unsurprising that Reis sought to document and display the search for the location of the new city and its construction so that other might learn from that experience. He beseeched state President Bias Fortes for the rights to publish the *Revista* of the Comissão Construtora so that it could be distributed to state and local libraries and educational institutions across Brazil.<sup>182</sup> Indeed, Reis hoped that he would become a recurring publication. The publisher would also sell the *Revista* commercially on the national and international market. Reis saw himself and his activities as part of the larger international discourse on modernization.

The inclusion of a photographic department in the Comissão Construtora and its stated purpose of constructing the city through imagery speak to a closer relationship between modernity and Belo Horizonte. As Salgueiro notes, both the *Localidades* report and that of the Comissão Construtora show Reis as the narrator of modernity in how he tried to describe everything as new: the design of the city, the streets, the building techniques and the materials. The *Albúm de Vistas*, she writes, demonstrates the metamorphoses taking place as Reis desired to show it.<sup>183</sup> Even more so, the photographic element of Reis's overall project represented the most modern form of city construction possible. Dr. Cicero Ferreira, head of the Gabinete Fotografico wrote of his unit's activities:

And one could not dispense with this, because today, in all of the civilized world, whichever commission, whatever secondary venture... does not posses a photographic department that brings to life the realized works...that [demonstrate] we happily are not savages, in the construction

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 8. Reis asked Bias Fortes for this right in his exposition presented on 23 May 1895.

<sup>183</sup> Salgueiro, *Engenheiro Aarão Reis*, 177.

of a city destined to become the Capital of a State – like that of Minas – we would not be able to defy these means of easy vulgarization...especially having certainty that it is necessary and fateful this advertisement that facilitates the rapid population of the new city. The *Gabinete Photographico*, therefore, when funds are not allocated for personal, not only merits it [financial support], but demands it.<sup>184</sup>

As Dr. Ferreira states, the commission needed the photographic department in order to attract the kinds of people Reis desired to populate his modern city. This effort included the publication and distribution of the *Albúm de Vistas* before the city had even been completed.<sup>185</sup> The department consumed a substantial amount of resources and produced a large numbers of proofs and heliographics. In a four month period alone, the Gabinete Photographico produced 1,584 prints worth 4,542,000 reis.<sup>186</sup> The department also gave 468 prints to the second administrative unit of the Comissão Construtora for sale as part of the publication *A Zouraria*.<sup>187</sup> The photographic department assisted in the production of a special map that Reis intended to use to sell lots in the city as well.<sup>188</sup>

Without the emphasis placed on photography, Belo Horizonte could not have achieved its status in Reis's mind as a modernist utopia. The documents discussed in this essay create a universe complete with origin myths, towering statesmen, and bold experiments in engineering. In particular, Reis made sure to include in his production of the *Revista* of the Comissão Construtora images of prominent mudancistas from all eras of mineiro history. The contemporary mudancistas included João Pinhero, David Campista, Affonso Pena, and Chrispim Bias Fortes. Past heroes included Padre Paraíso, a priest who had previously advocated for moving the capital during the Empire.

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<sup>184</sup> Bicalho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 36-37.

<sup>185</sup> Aarão Reis, org, *Albúm de vista locaes e das obras projectadas para a edificação da nova cidade*, 1895.

<sup>186</sup> Bicalho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 37.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.



PADRE PARAISO

que primeiro propoz á Assembléa Provincial da antiga Provincia de Minas Geraes a mudança da capital.

Figure 3.10 “Padre Paraíso: who was the first to propose to the Provincial Assembly of the old Province of Minas Geraes the movement of the capital.” 1896. *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 2.

The performative aspect of the construction of the city included bringing prominent politicians to visit the site and inviting reporters to cover the visit. On one such occasion in August 1894, Reis hosted state President Chrispim Bias Fortes, Afonso Pena, David Campista among others along with a reporter from *A Folha*, a newspaper from mudancista stronghold Barbacena. Notably he chose to include the reporter’s account, entitled “A Nova Capital”, in his publication of the *Revista* of the *Comissão Constructora*. What Reis chose to show the visitors illustrates how he intended the performance to unfold.

Of all the city’s attributes, Reis placed the most emphasis on its mathematical rationality. Tellingly, Reis took the delegation first to one of the posts manned by his engineers engaged in mapping the complex triangulation upon which they would base the

street grid. They then visited the construction of the Estação Central and the ongoing railroad work. The tour went on to include stops at the site of a future commercial neighborhood, the city cathedral, and the provisional cemetery. Throughout the process, the visitors remarked at how organized the process seemed, especially given that nearly all of the materials, including the furniture in Reis's house, had to be imported by rail from Rio de Janeiro.<sup>189</sup>

At dinner, the politicians again demonstrated how much emphasis they placed on the potential of Belo Horizonte as a rail hub without mentioning Reis's careful triangulations. Bias Fortes expressed his complete satisfaction with the activities of the Comissão Construtora. He offered a toast:

This visit – whose beneficial effects for the regular prosecution of this grand undertaking are obvious – constitutes a virtual consecration of the new mineiro capital, and whose date the 19<sup>th</sup> of August of 1894 could be considered the official foundation of the future city of Minas, that was placed on the crossing of the two most important railroads of Brazil – the Central and the Espírito Santo-Minas – [that] will be, within a few years, the major center of activity, of richness and comfort of the grand Brazilian plateau that, from nearly a thousand meters of altitude, dominates all of South America.<sup>190</sup>

This visit represented a high point in the lived experience of Reis's performance of constructing modernity though it was hardly the only occasion where journalists and politicians visited the construction site. The Comissão Construtora provided fifty commemorative medals to participants in a ceremony commemorating the official instigation of work on the new capital in 1895.<sup>191</sup> Railroads also figured heavily in the

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<sup>189</sup> *A Folha*, 31 August and 2 September 1894 “A Nova Capital” apud Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 257-258.

<sup>190</sup> *A Folha*, 31 August and 2 September 1894 “A Nova Capital” apud Bicálho, *Revista Geral da Comissão Constructora da Nova Capital*, 260.

<sup>191</sup> “Ofício do secretário da Agricultura ao engenheiro-chefe sobre envio de 50 medalhas comemorativas da inauguração dos trabalhos na nova capital” 19 September 1895, Secretário da Agricultura, O Governo de Minas Geraes, Arquivo Público Mineiro. Work had been ongoing on the capital since the previous year.

performative aspect of unveiling modernity to the world. Reis's successor who assumed control in March of 1895, Francisco Bicalho, invited politicians and journalists to a ceremony that celebrated the inauguration of the rail line and the laying of the foundation stone of the Presidential Palace. Not to be outdone, Bicalho also made sure to invite a priest to bless both of those endeavors.<sup>192</sup> The new capital was inaugurated on schedule in 1897 though construction persisted in places through to the new century.

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<sup>192</sup> Francisco Bicalho, "Carta do vigário ao engenheiro-chefe: manifestação de desejo de abençoar a inauguração do ramal férreo e o lançamento da pedra fundamental do Palácio Presidencial," 8 August 1895, Museu Histórico Abílio Barreto.

## CONCLUSION

By the end of the twentieth century, Belo Horizonte had exceeded the dreams of its creators; the city possessed nearly three million inhabitants. It had become the industrial growth pole its architects envisioned and forms the one corner of Brazil's industrial heartland along with São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. As Marshall Eakin writes, policy makers and technocrats in Minas Gerais must now grapple with how to reverse the intense centralization of industry and economic activity that Belo Horizonte has engendered.<sup>193</sup> Nonetheless, the city grew slowly in its first forty years; Belo Horizonte only became the largest industrial and population center in Minas Gerais in 1940. It did not become a railroad hub on the degree envisioned by João Pinheiro da Silva until later. Only its astounding growth after World War II raised it to the status of Brazil's "third-city."

However, the city succeeded quickly in providing political unity in Minas Gerais and perhaps in halting the loss of human talent. The political unity among the state elite facilitated by Belo Horizonte likely enhanced the ability of mineiro politicians to participate in the politics of the governor in the First Republic until the system's collapse in 1930. Belo Horizonte was a quintessentially bureaucratic city until the 1920s but it did draw in elites from around the state.<sup>194</sup> After its foundation, no major secessionist movements troubled the state though sub-regional tendencies remained strong.<sup>195</sup> By the first decade of the twentieth century, Belo Horizonte did succeed in significantly reducing the number of students leaving the state for higher education. At one graduation

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<sup>193</sup> Marshall Eakin, "Creating a Growth Pole: The Industrialization of Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 1897-1987," *The Americas* 47.4 (Apr., 1991), 383-386.

<sup>194</sup> Wirth, *Minas Gerais in the Brazilian Federation*, 147.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

in the city, a speaker extorted “Hail the intellectual autonomy of the State of Minas Gerais!”<sup>196</sup>

The vision of modernity constructed around the foundation of Belo Horizonte received contributions from a wide range of actors from politicians like Afonso de Pena to Chief Engineer Aarão Reis but it retained its vibrancy for future projects of its kind in Brazil. Many authors have made the connection between Belo Horizonte and Brasília. The first to write a comprehensive account of the development of Belo Horizonte, Marshall Eakin wrote of the city’s founding, “ Foreshadowing the construction of Brasilia six decades later, politicians and planners had transformed a rustic village...into an enormous construction project. As with Brasilia, those who promoted the move saw the new capital as a symbol and a catalyst.”<sup>197</sup> This essay sought to describe the vision of the creators of Belo Horizonte that would inspire the once mayor of that city and mineiro governor Juscelino Kubitschek to commission a city in the middle of Brazil.

The mudancistas active from the fall of the Empire in 1889 through the creation of the city desired a capital that would modernize Minas Gerais. Their version of modernity viewed railroads and industry as integral to their new capital’s identity. It contained a rejection of Ouro Preto and the colonial past along with its association with Brazil’s African heritage and Afro-Brazilian population. Their new city would mirror La Plata and Washington D.C. as capitals embodying the most modern of political ideologies, republicanism. After the creation of the Localidades Commission in 1891, Aarão Reis and his team of engineers added their own layer in their Positivist emphasis on scientific rigor.

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>197</sup> Eakin, “Creating a Growth Pole,” 383.



Their vision found its clearest expression in the planning documents contained in the *Revista Geral dos Trabalhos da Comissão Construtora*. Reis infused mathematic rationality into Belo Horizonte and this remained his proudest intellectual achievement. While a bureaucratic city, Reis's design made sure to associate government with most modern forms of technology and industry. His use of sanitation dovetailed with his rejection of Ouro Preto and the kind of spontaneous organic development that had characterized Brazilian cities to that point. Indeed, his efforts paralleled those of other cities in Brazil including Rio de Janeiro. Like Brasília, the designers intended the spatial organization of Belo Horizonte to initiate a performance of modernity that placed the state and industry together at the center. Reis's activities with the press and in promoting the publication of planning documents and photographs of the construction enshrined the creation of modernity as a performance accessible to anyone. Reis simply did not share the strategic concerns of mineiro politicians though he his design fulfilled them well enough.

Belo Horizonte undoubtedly represents one of Whitehead's monuments to the pursuit of modernity scattered across the Latin American countryside. This essay has sought to document the layers of modernity that comprise that monument from their inception in the minds of politicians and the press to their implementation in the hands of engineers. That vision remains accessible to anyone with access to the documentation utilized in this essay. However, contrary to Whitehead's framework the creators of Brasília and planned communities in Brazil created both before and after the national capital looked to the vision of modernity embodied in Belo Horizonte. The mineiro capital has played host to continual spatial innovations since its founding, from the design

of Pampulha to the controversial sequestering of the state government to the futuristic *Cidade Administrativa* (“Administrative City”) on the outskirts of the city, both designed by Oscar Niemeyer. This work does not consider the lived experience of modernity over the course of the twentieth century. However, it does ascertain the sum of modernities through the official inauguration of the city in 1997 that these later experiences would draw upon.



Figure 4.1 A Cidade Administrativa (“Administrative City”). The left image is the governor’s office. Partially visible behind the building is the helipad. The right image is one of two office buildings containing government ministries. 1 August 2013. Photos courtesy of Thamyris Almeida.

The experience of constructing modernity in Belo Horizonte from 1889-1897 hinged upon the political realities of the period as seen by mineiro politicians and the continual layering of how the capital city would express modernity by politicians and then the two commissions led by Aarão Reis. Modernity in 1889 to mudancistas such as João Pinheiro da Silva looked like São Paulo or the United States, that is to say white, industrial and republican. Without the unique strategic position of Minas Gerais vis a vis its neighbors, the impetus to create a new capital city to replace Ouro Preto would never have occurred. Nonetheless, the political vision of modernity in Minas Gerais always looked outside the state’s borders for inspiration even while a unique version rose in their

midst. Once the project of the capital left the hands of mudancistas, the team headed by Aarão Reis shared the ability to shape its narrative.

This suggests that within a monument to modernity such as Belo Horizonte multiple layers coexist and in some cases meld together depending on local conditions. Modernity in Belo Horizonte consists of many visions held together in the physical spaces of a city. For the study of modernity in Latin America this suggests that attention to specific voices within the discourse will enable scholars to discern a more complete understanding of that particular vision of modernity. It also points to a common thread in the efforts of Brazilian elites, both politicians and technocrats, to engineer modernity in Brazil through the manipulation of urban spaces. Belo Horizonte represents the first major foray in that effort and one that would provide a template for the twentieth century.

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