

## Notes for research on the press and the abolition of slavery in Parahyba do Norte



<https://doi.org/10.56238/interdiinovationscresce-062>

**Simone Bezerril Guedes Cardozo**

Doctoral student – UFPE

### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to outline considerations about the abolitionist press in the Province of Parahyba do Norte, in the mid-1880s. To this end, some periodicals in circulation at the time were listed,

which raised the debate in favor of the liberation of the enslaved. The idea is to contribute, in a summary way, with the historiography that addresses the theme, demonstrating the existence of potential sources for research focused on the approach in question.

**Keywords:** Press, Historical research, Parahyba, Abolition.

### 1 INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

The purpose of this article is to outline some considerations about the abolitionist press of the Province of Parahyba do Norte, in the mid-1880s. The idea is to contribute to the historiography that addresses this theme, demonstrating the existence of potential sources of research. To this end, a table will be drawn of the main newspapers that defended, in their pages, the abolition of slavery, and, with that, fed the public debate by circulating notions around the importance and necessity of the liberation of the enslaved for society.

It is essential to emphasize, first of all, that journals were not created with the intention of becoming future sources for researchers (Cruz; Peixoto, 2007), because its dynamics have their own reasons for existing, framed by sociocultural and technological aspects, historically situated. It is up to the men of the historiographical *métier* to process the transformation of this type of material into a historical document in order to submit them to efficient methodological procedures. And, from this perspective, one must consider the nature of journalistic print, their potential to reconstruct and name social facts, a condition that makes them active subjects in the environment in which they are inserted, or rather, ingredients of the world they represent (Darnton, 1996).

Thus, it is not possible to choose the journalistic prints as the central sources of a study without considering them as objects of the research itself. It is necessary to bear in mind that news "reconstructs events through language and is written based on narrative forms, symbols, stereotypes, phrases,

<sup>1</sup> Part of the considerations outlined in this work were presented at the "II Symposium on the History of Nineteenth-Century Maranhão: political disputes and power practices", in 2011. In this new version, the article has undergone some modifications by bringing more data on the subject addressed, better problematizing the press as an object of study and pointing out new journalistic sources for research.



metaphors and images, and interpellated by organizational constraints, political and economic pressures, among others (Amaral, 2003, p.71).

This implies that newspapers should be analyzed as a whole, that is, in terms of their structure, their titles, the way they organize and distribute the articles, the audience they aim for, the topics addressed, as well as the social relations established by their owners, because, as Tania Regina De Luca (2005) observes, When it comes to periodicals, there is nothing natural, everything has a meaning.

It is noteworthy that a more intense debate about the use of newspapers as sources of research for the writing of history would begin to take relevant steps from the last decades of the twentieth century. However, during the 1970s, according to Tania Regina de Luca (2008), there was still a resistance to writing history with journalistic prints as central documents. because they are considered representatives of ideologies and political interests. Only gradually would an awareness of the need to develop adequate methodologies to deal with the complexity of journals gain strength.

## 2 ON THE TRAIL OF PARAÍBA PRINTED MATTER

Following in the footsteps of Ana Luiza Martins and Tania Regina de Luca (2008), it is impossible not to link the history of the press in Brazil to the political and social transformations that have taken place in the country over time. With specific regard to the issue presented here, the authors highlight the relevance of the abolitionist campaign initiated by the press: "at each line of action, emancipationist or abolitionist, and at each liberating society or abolitionist club, a newspaper was rehearsed and/or edited" (Martins; De Luca, 2008, p.75).

Of the 12 newspapers dating from the 1880s onwards, existing in the collection of the Historical and Geographical Institute of Paraíba (IHGP), four are *corpus* of this article, mainly due to their better state of conservation and possibility of handling. They are: *The Publisher (1885)*, *The Emancipator (1883)*, <sup>2</sup>*The Areiense (1888)* and *Parahyban Herald*<sup>3</sup> ( <sup>4</sup> 1888). <sup>5</sup>

It was found in the journals examined that there was an inclination in favor of the abolition of the enslaved in Brazil. Based on editorials and articles, the featured newspapers, which were based in the city of Parahyba, the capital of the province, except *for O Areiense*, acted with the aim of forming a public opinion favorable to the end of captivity. The justification that slavery was a condition that tarnished Brazil's image, in addition to being a delay to its progress, had been constantly aired from 1880 onwards.

---

<sup>2</sup> One of the longest-lived newspapers in Imperial Paraíba. Its first issue circulated in 1862 and was published until 1886.

<sup>3</sup> Founded by Father João do Rego Moura.

<sup>4</sup> It began to circulate in 1887, with headquarters in the city of Areia.

<sup>5</sup> Abolitionist periodical. Sixteen copies of this newspaper are available from the IHGP, with dates from 1888 onwards. This periodical was called "Litterario, Noticioso e Abolitionista". After abolition, it began to deal with various topics.



In an editorial on June 28, 1883, the weekly newspaper *O Emancipador* pointed out, on its front page, that "slavery, a disgraceful and degrading state, causes shame and backwardness and contributes to the corruption of the peoples who admit it." With this publication, the newspaper aimed to convince society that the slave system should be eliminated in the country.

In another edition of the same printed matter, on July 7, 1883, the news entitled *New abolitionist society of Parahybanos was printed*, which reported on the growth of the abolitionist movement in the Brazilian territory. Thus, it was propagated through the vehicle: "Abolitionist propaganda moves every day, so to speak, new negotiations are organized in all parts of the Empire [...] The abolitionist sentiment was born in the hearts of Brazilians."

Slavery was a theme present throughout the newspaper *O Emancipador*, not only in editorials or articles but also in the news, which dealt with any type of event or manifestation in favor of abolition. As an example, we can mention that, still in the edition of July 7, 1883, the aforementioned printed published a news item about the holding of a conference on abolition that took place in the city of Areia, located in the region of Brejo Paraíba, whose title was *Abolitionist Conference*.

Another abolitionist periodical that circulated in the capital of Paraíba was *O Publicador*. Linked to the Liberal Party and with daily publications, this newspaper followed the debates that were being held in the political sphere about the slave system. In an editorial published on April 24, 1885, with the title *The Question of the Servile Element in the State*, the newspaper denounced slavery as the result of violence and tolerance of the laws in force in the country.

The speeches delivered in the life-life chamber offer yet another no less interesting face. Considering the question of slavery from a historical and philosophical point of view, many masters have opined that slave property is not founded on natural law, but is a [...] child of violence and abuse tolerated and sanctioned by the laws and the country (*The Publisher*, April 24, 1885).

In its publication of April 30, 1885, the aforementioned press organ continued to give prominence, on the front page, to the issue of the liberation of slaves. In that edition, the newspaper would reproduce, in the text entitled *Still on the servile element*, the speech of Senator José Bonifácio, through which the parliamentarian was against the abolition of captivity conditioned on the appeal of compensation.

If it were not necessary to reconcile interests of other kinds, the indispensable peace to be brought to the transformation of work, and all classes the security of the prudent transaction between the conservative and progressive elements, it was they who had the right to come and ask this House for the indemnity of a whole life which can only bring to the regions of freedom the weariness of the years and the reminiscence of captivity (*The Publisher*, April 30, 1885).

The campaign in defense of the abolition of slavery was also present in the newspaper *O Areiense*, published in the city of Areia, in the Brejo region of Paraíba. In the editorial published on



April 7, 1888, the newspaper, with a weekly circulation, openly declared itself as an abolitionist organ. As a matter of fact, in all the editions of the aforementioned periodical researched in the IHGP, published in the year in which the Golden Law was declared, it is possible to verify, in its pages, articles of a favorable nature to the extinction of captivity.

We stand in solidarity with the drafters of the "Truth" in the sense of the propagation of free ideas, a principal part of our program, as an evolutionary organ, which has since its first days of life striven for the legitimacy of the rights of the less favored classes. We cannot, therefore, be indifferent to the great movement that is taking place in the province of which we are children, nor can we deny our weak support for the nascent enterprise of "Truth", an organ of the enormous and invincible abolitionist idea, which is now generally accepted (*O Areiense*, April 7, 1888).

It is essential to highlight here the importance of the newspaper *Verdade* (1888-1895), whose collection is in the Átila Almeida Library, located at the State University of Paraíba (UEPB), in Campina Grande, in the process of struggle for the liberation of the enslaved, as well as the work of its founder in favor of this cause, the journalist and pharmacist Manuel da Silva.<sup>6</sup>

Among the sheets examined, the *Truth* gains greater notoriety, not only for having been created with the intention of waging a symbolic struggle through the printed words, around abolition, but also for the mission it took in the struggle so that the liberation of the captives would be accepted in fact, after the Golden Law was decreed. in 1888. The newspaper printed on its pages denunciations of cases of former slave masters who did not admit the new reality of the newly freed.

Founded in 1888, the aforementioned newspaper would also engage in the struggle for the Proclamation of the Republic. Originally called "Abolitionist and News Organ", it would be defined as "Progressive and News Organ" at the beginning of 1889, that is, at the beginning of the republican regime.

The *Parahyban Herald*, with a weekly circulation, would also stand out for the publications it has been published for a long time, depending on the theme in focus. The collection of the aforementioned news organ, existing in the IHGP, dates from 1888. To get an idea of how the newspaper in question mobilized the abolitionist cause, a week after the declaration of the Golden Law, the newspaper brought a special edition about the event. The cover of the *Parahyban Herald* featured the following phrase, which, by the way, takes over the entire page: "Homage of the Parahyban Herald to free Brazil". Underneath it was written: "Hail! May 13th!"

In that same commemorative edition, the *Herald* would conclude his editorial by expressing the feeling of duty accomplished: "We, weak soldiers of abolitionism, feel full of joy and indescribable pleasure as we contemplate the banner of the increasing Goddess of Liberty [...] Let these be the last words on abolitionism."

---

<sup>6</sup> Printed from the city of Areia.



It is evident that the printed materials analyzed were clearly in favor of the abolition of slavery. Although it is impossible to specify how the contents and positions regarding the liberation of captives were effective in the constitution of an abolitionist ideology in the minds of the reading public, it cannot be denied that these newspapers were able to at least introduce debates about the liberation of the enslaved in various sectors of society.

However, it should be noted that the enslaved themselves played a fundamental role in the process that culminated in the extinction of the slave system. Authors such as Sidney Chalhoub (1990), João José Reis and Eduardo Silva (1989) have carried out studies that prove, through research in primary sources, the dynamics of negotiation that was established within captivity, highlighting how blacks developed different ways of living, at least better, within that imperious structure, or even how they sought, on many occasions, tactics to get rid of the slave quarters. These historians explain that the institution of slavery was not so rigid that it did not allow the existence of loopholes, allowing the captive to create spaces for negotiation with his masters. According to the authors, the constant pressures on the part of the enslaved, in a way, would have contributed to the end of slavery.

### 3 FINAL THOUGHTS

Newspapers can be considered, at the same time, records for history and active agents in the configuration of history itself. In this way, they make a relevant contribution to historiography, due to the fact that they promote an expansion of the thematic field, enabling the development of various approaches, thus benefiting the expansion of historical knowledge. However, it is a *sine qua non matter to* understand that newspapers must always be analyzed in the light of their time, that is, in historicity, as well as to keep in mind that such supports move, in their contexts, a network of relations and meanings that incorporate and determine their ways of being and acting.



## REFERENCES

- AMARAL, Luiz. *Jornalismo matéria de primeira página*. 3 ed. Rio de Janeiro – Fortaleza: Universidade Federal do Ceará, 1982.
- CHALHOUB, Sidney. *Visões da Liberdade*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1990.
- CRUZ, Heloisa de Faria; PEIXOTO, Maria do Rosário Cunha. *Na oficina do historiador: conversas sobre história e imprensa*. Projeto História, São Paulo, PUC, n. 35, p. 253-270. Disponível em: <https://revistas.pucsp.br/index.php/revph/article/view/2221>. Acesso em 17 de julho de 2023.
- DARNTON, Robert; ROCHE, Daniel (orgs.). *Revolução Impressa: A imprensa na França, 1775-1800*. São Paulo: Editora Universidade de São Paulo, 1996.
- LUCA, Tania Regina. A grande imprensa na primeira metade do século XX. In: MARTINS, Ana Luiza; LUCA, Tania Regina. *História da imprensa no Brasil*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2008, 149-175.
- LUCA, Tania. Regina. História dos, nos e por meio dos periódicos. In: PINSKY, C. B. (org.) *Fontes Históricas*. São Paulo; Contexto, 2005, p. 111-153.
- MARTINS, Ana Luiza; LUCA, Tania Regina. *História da imprensa no Brasil*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2008.
- REIS, João José; SILVA, Eduardo. *Negociações e Conflito: a resistência negra no Brasil escravista*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1989.



## SOURCES

O Publicador, Cidade da Parahyba, 1885.

O Emancipador, Cidade da Parahyba, 1883.

O Areiense, Areia, 1888.

Arauto Parahybano. Cidade da Parahyba, 1888.

Verdade. Areia, 1888.