The white invention of black freedom: The dominant narrative of abolition in Porto Alegre

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to deconstruct the dominant narrative of abolition in Porto Alegre, so as to emphasize what I call the white invention of black freedom. I argue that a selective narrative of abolition was constructed by political leaders and abolitionists gathered at the Abolitionist Center in Porto Alegre, through speeches in the local press and by means of public ceremonies and symbols produced to commemorate the "liberation" of slaves. I suggest that regional elites' abolitionist discourse appropriated the rhetoric of Riograndenses' glorious past of libertarian traditions to legitimate regional political elites' strategy of conditional manumissions and to invent a freedom that was at the same time present and absent, since it was not immediate and complete, but conditional to ex-slaves services to their ex-masters, during a certain period of time, not exceeding seven years, a social status called *contratado*.

Keywords: Social memory. Abolition. Afro-riograndenses abolitionists.

A invenção branca da liberdade negra: a narrativa dominante sobre a abolição em Porto Alegre

RESUMO

O objetivo deste estudo é desconstruir a narrativa dominante sobre a abolição em Porto Alegre, no sentido de destacar o que chamo da invenção branca da liberdade negra. Proponho que uma narrativa seletiva da abolição foi construída pelas lideranças políticas e pelos abolicionistas do Centro Abolicionista de Porto Alegre, através de discursos na imprensa local e de cerimônias públicas e símbolos criados para comemorar a "libertação" dos escravos. Sugiro que o discurso regional abolicionista apropriou-se da retórica de um passado glorioso de tradições libertárias para legitimar a estratégia política das elites políticas regionais de manumissão condicional e para inventar uma liberdade que era ao mesmo tempo presente e ausente, uma vez que não era imediata e completa, mas condicional à prestação de serviços dos ex-escravos aos seus ex-senhores, durante um período de tempo não superior a sete anos, um status social chamado de contratado.

Palavras-chave: Memória Social. Abolição. Abolicionistas afro-rio-grandenses.

This study investigates how a social memory of abolition was constructed by regional political elites in Porto Alegre, during the "liberation" of slaves on the 7th of September of 1884, on the same date of the national independence and almost four years before the national abolition. I argue that a selective, white narrative of abolition was

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constructed by political leaders and abolitionists gathered at the Abolitionist Center in Porto Alegre, through speeches in the local press and by means of public ceremonies and symbols produced to commemorate the "liberation" of slaves. I suggest that regional elites' abolitionist discourse appropriated the rhetoric of Riograndenses' glorious past of libertarian traditions to legitimate political leaders and abolitionists' strategy of conditional manumissions and to assure a peaceful transition from slaves to *contratados*, an intermediate social condition between slave and free. The dominant narrative of abolition in Porto Alegre was possibly a narrative of social cohesion to legitimate regional political elites' strategy of conditional manumissions and of inventing a freedom, that was at the same time present and absent, since it was not immediate and complete, but conditional to ex-slaves services to their slave owners, during a certain period of time, not exceeding 7 years. Jacques Le Goff (1990), points out that authority over memory is another form of power and by explaining the past and constructing a memory, those in power justify their dominion. The creation of a flag, an anthem and a "golden book" by the Abolitionist Center of Porto Alegre was a good example of what Jacques Le Goff called a "document/monument" produced to perpetuate to future generations a winner version of the events, in this case, the historical memory of abolition in Porto Alegre. Despite the evidence of different versions of abolitionist discourses in Porto Alegre, particularly, among Conservatives, Liberals, and Republicans, I agree with Helga Piccolo (1988) that it was in regional elites' common interests to avoid social disruption and to assure social control over the freed people, and rather than emphasizing the diversity of representations resulting from different locations in telling stories, I argue for the similarity of political leaders and urban abolitionists' representations in the construction of a social memory of abolition in the province. In fact, most of them manifested similar cultural representations about slaves and freed people as prone to idleness and criminality who they believed would not work unless coerced. Besides, it is notorious the absence of slaves and freed persons perspectives of freedom in regional elites' abolitionist discourse. David Blight (1994) asserts that the study of historical memory might be defined as the study of cultural struggle, of contested truth or texts in history that presented rival versions of the past which are put to the service of the present. The author goes even further to say that it is historians' task to confront the traditional historiography about slavery and race and to account for black voices. In this study, I take as a challenge to criticize the dominant narrative of abolition in Porto Alegre, particularly its silence about afro-descendents role in the abolition of slavery in Porto Alegre. In the proceedings of the Abolitionist Center, the regional abolitionist discourse omitted the participation of black abolitionist societies such as: Society Esperança e Caridade (Hope and Charity), The black lay brotherhood *Nossa Senhora do Rosário (*Our Lady of Rosary) and Society Floresta Aurora (Down Forest Society). Nevertheless, the confraternity *Nossa Senhora do Rosário* purchased the freedom of several slaves and donated the letters of manumission during the Mess in the Church of Rosário. In the same direction, Society *Floresta Aurora*, a black society founded in 1872 and still active, use to participate with its orchestra in public abolitionist meetings.[1] Nevertheless, Floresta Aurora's participation in the abolitionist events was

[1] Cf. *Folha da Tarde* (May 12, 1888), 4.

reported by local press in a racist and pejorative style, indicating that public abolitionist gatherings were, first and foremost white. On the occasion of the *Parthenon Literário*' anniversary celebration at the *São Pedro* Theater, a journalist's account of the meeting registered:

> All that was seen were the multicolor flags, held by equally multicolor individuals who came to deliver their message in the Parthenon (...) How many little societies of dance sent in their representatives as if it were a choreographic feast (...) And yet the Parthenon must have corks ready to shut the mouth of those maniacs, since it is no receptacle of pranksters. Now what is the meaning of a few *Florestas Auroras* and *quejandas* laying their eggs to honor a literary association so gifted in credits?[2]

What is clear in this account is that white abolitionist discourse prevented black abolitionist societies from being treated on equal terms with the white ones in Porto Alegre. I can say that regional elites' historical memory of abolition had rendered the black experience in the emancipationist campaign virtually unknown. Nevertheless, according to Achylles Porto Alegre the afro-descendent Soter Caio da Silva, who was born in Rio Grande in 1834, was a member of the Abolitionist Center in Porto Alegre and worked as a abolitionist lawyer:

> Following the emancipatory movement that shook the country, Soter Caio da Silva, immediate descendent of the unfortunate race [sic], resorted to his intelligence and modest purse to serve the humanitarian work that saw its glorious days with the Law of May 13th, 1888. As a lawyer, he did much on behalf of the slave, granting freedom for many slaves and provoking the satanic wrath of the "masters"… (PORTO ALEGRE, 1922, p.3)

Another important Afro-Riograndense abolitionist in Porto Alegre was Lieutenant Colonel Aurélio V. T. de Bittencourte, partner of the *Sociedade Floresta Aurora***,** several times president of the society *Dedicação e Progresso*, prior jubilated in the *Confraria de N.S. do Rosário*, member of the *Sociedade de Beneficência Porto-Alegrense* and who on May 13th, 1888, was the **"**spokesman of the first protesters which greeted the dawn of redemption, addressing in powerful speech, an inspired greeting to then president of the province."[3] It is plausible that there were other Afro-Riograndenses whose participation in the emancipationist campaign in the Porto Alegre still remains to be accounted for. Beatriz Loner (2007) pointed out that in the city of Pelotas afro-descendents participated in the abolition campaign through their own black association, The Ethiopic Center (Centro Ethiópico). The omission of black leaders in the social memory of abolition in Porto Alegre is rather different from the accounted experiences of Afro-Abolitionist in

[2]. Cf. *O Século* (June 24, 1883), 2.
[3]. Cf. *O Exemplo,* 13/05/1904.

the Abolitionist Centers of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, where Luis Gama and José do Patrocínio were reported as active abolitionists. George Reid Andrews (2004) emphasized the participation of black abolitionists in Ceará, where former slaves Francisco do Nascimento e José Napoleão organized the abolitionist movement, and in Bahia, where the Afro-Brazilian physician Luis Anselmo da Fonseca organized networks of activists to circulate in the countryside urging slaves to runaway. Therefore, the dominant narrative of abolition in Porto Alegre might be called a "white invention of black freedom," since it was the product of an exclusive and selective white imagination of abolition, a collective imaginary that certainly had an important impact on the early historiography of abolition in Rio Grande do Sul.[4] Nevertheless, more recent contributions to the study of slavery and abolition in Rio Grande do Sul have provided a richer view of slaves and freed peoples' role in the process of slaves' emancipation in the Province.[5] Before analyzing the dominant abolitionist narrative in Porto Alegre, I will present a brief view of the emancipationist movement in Porto Alegre.

The abolitionist movement in the Province was intensified in the decade of 1880, following the chronology of the abolitionist movement in Rio de Janeiro. Between 1883 and 1884, during the so-called "abolitionist biennial," the abolitionist propaganda was publicly discussed in the local press, in *Jornal do Comércio* (of the Centro Abolicionista), *A Reforma* (of the Liberal Party), *A Federação* (of the Republican Party), *O Mercantil* and *O Século*. The 1880s in Porto Alegre were also marked by the emergence of new emancipationist societies, such as the Sociedade Emancipadora Rio Branco (1881), the Seção Abolicionista do Partenon Literário (May 1883), the Sociedade Esperança e Caridade (June 1883), the Libertadora Mercantil (March 1883) and the Centro Abolicionista of Porto Alegre (September 1883). In the interior of the Province, local abolitionist societies organized the emancipationist movement in several cities, at the same time as the abolitionist movement in the capital. Until 1883, all major parties in the Province, Conservatives, Liberals and Republicans, recognized the need to abolish "the evil institution," but they disagreed on the way to carry it out. By that time, the liberal leader Silveira Martins started to defend abolition through contracts of service with the ex-slaves owner. The Conservatives through their partisan newspaper, *O Conservador*, attacked the abolitionist position of Liberals and charged them of threatening the social order and provoke the "the eruption of the volcano." To most Conservatives it was enough to await the effects of the Free Womb Law and private, voluntary emancipations. The Riograndense Republican Party (PRP), under the leadership of Júlio de Castilhos, despite its more radical position, defending immediate freedom without indemnification, ended up supporting the Liberals' politic strategy of conditional abolition with clauses of service. The Abolitionist

[4] For an analysis of Rio Grande do Sul' abolitionist process, see the works by Cardoso, Fernando Henrique. *Capitalismo e Escravidão* (1978), Bakos, Margaret. *Escravismo e Abolição* (1982), Verônica Monti, *O Abolicionismo* (1985), LAYTANO, Dante. "*A Abolição da Escravatura no Rio Grande do Sul*" (1989).

[5] Cf. BAKOS, Margaret. "Repensando o processo abolicionista no sul-rio-grandense" (1988); BAKOS, Margaret. "Trajetórias de Afro-descendentes no Brasil: abordagens e perspectivas" (2002); MOREIRA, Paulo Roberto Staudt. "Os cativos e os homens de bem" (2003); LONER, Beatriz, "Organização Negra em Pelotas: características e evolução (1870-1950)" (2007).

Center of Porto Alegre, founded in September of 1883, through the initiative of the Liberals Joaquim de Salles Torres Homem e Julio Cézar Leal, both from the abolitionist section of Partenon Literário, and under the presidency of colonel Joaquim Pedro Salgado, also a Liberal, took the leading role in the abolitionist campaign in Porto Alegre. Among the Abolitionist Center's main symbols was a red flag with the motto embroidered in it: "human freedom cannot be bought or sold,"[6] and yet the political compromise assumed between Liberals, Republicans and Conservative dissidents who joined the Abolitionist Center of Porto Alegre was conversely, "manumission through services," which privileged the idea of slaves as property through indemnification of their ex-slaves' personal services. At the cultural level, the justifications presented by the Abolitionist Center' for conditional abolition reveals their negative representations about slaves and freed persons, who they believed were not prepared for immediate abolition and would not worked unless coerced by their ex-masters: "The Abolitionist Center thinks that we should not release the slaves without controlling the great majority of freed who otherwise would fall into idleness and criminality (...) the true abolitionist opts for the immediate extinction of slavery, but cannot require that the freed be emancipated from all tutelage."[7]

In 1884, encouraged by abolitionists victories in the Provinces of Amazonas and Ceará, Riograndense abolitionists gathered in the Abolitionist Center organized the so-called "abolitionist week" ("jornada abolicionista") from August 12th through the 18th of 1884. The Abolitionist Center of Porto Alegre created liberating commissions to tour the districts and suburbs of the capital and went street-by-street, trooping from house to house, to persuade urban slave owners to free their slaves and to grant them letters of freedom. Apparently the liberating commissions met with little resistance since already by the first week of September, 1884, Porto Alegre was declared freed, almost four years before the national abolition. Liberals, Conservative dissidents and Republicans agreed on a political compromise to emancipate slaves in the province, granting them conditional emancipation. Slaves received their letters of manumission but with clauses of service during certain period of time, up to seven years (according to the forth article of the Rio Branco Law), which ideally would prevent freed people from engaging in *vadiagem* [i.e. idleness]) and would allow the slave owners to use the labor of their former slaves while declaring them nominally free. In what follows I would like to analyze the main features of the regional abolitionist discourse, its representations of freedom and slaves as well as the central arguments used to justify abolitionist elites' strategies of conditional manumission.

THE REGIONAL ABOLITIONIST DISCOURSE

One of the most striking features of the regional abolitionist discourse was the character of nationalism and patriotism ascribed to the concession of manumissions, which

[6] "A Liberdade Vitoriosa", *A Ordem*, (September 4, 1884), 2.
[7] *Jornal do Comércio* (October 2, 1884), 3.

corroborated the historical gauchos' patriotic vocation in the defense of the motherland since the colonial times. The discourse of the President of the Province, José Júlio de Albuquerque Barros to the President of the Abolitionist Center on the 7 of September of 1884 is illustrative: "What a great triumph – gentlemen from the Abolitionist Center! The work is consummated and the city, town and province are in gala. A new spectacle, surprising and indescribable, can only be explained by this passion for freedom which exalts the Riograndense patriotism..."[8]

According to Sandra Pesavento (1990), the *gauchos*' patriotic vocation emerged with the genesis of the *gaucho* regional identity and was constructed in the midst of continuous armed conflicts with Spanish colonists for the control of the Río de la Plata and over unresolved boundaries. For Pesavento, "the military-frontier origin of the gaucho society accounts, very early on, for a fundamental attribute: the region is defined from then on in terms of the option of nationality" (PESAVENTO, 1990, 386, p.386). Regional elites became the legitimate representation of the sentinels of the nation, vigilantes to defend the motherland of any foreign invasion. This notion of Riograndenses as the defenders of the motherland was appropriated by regional elites in the construction of the regional abolitionist discourse where Riograndense abolitionists' elites portrayed themselves as the ones who would defend the nation against the menace of slavery, which was an enemy within the nation. Moreover, the commemoration of city's abolition at the day of the national independence was not a coincidence but a symbolic strategy of reaffirming Riograndense elites' nationalist traditions. Republicans' perceptions in their newspaper *A Federação*, founded in 1884 by the Riograndense Republican Party (PRP) and under Julio de Castilho's' political leadership illustrates regional abolitionists elites appropriation of the discourse of Riograndenses' patriotic traditions in the construction of an abolitionist discourse: "It is imperative to proclaim that this province, which has been in all times the advanced sentinel of national dignity, does not allow to spring from its soil the black institution that threatens the motherland's honor more than the menace of foreign enemies".[9]

Regional elites' abolitionist discourse also produced the idea of a pioneering emancipation. The argument was that Rio Grande's abolition had taken place before national abolition although the states of Ceará and Amazonas were freed before the Province of Rio Grande do Sul. On the level of the discourse, Rio Grande was the glorious" one because of the great numbers of slaves involved in the manumission process which corresponded to the slaves' greater economic importance in Rio Grande do Sul than in other provinces. "Rio Grande will be third in the order of emancipated provinces but the most glorious among them for none of the others freed as many slaves as this Province [which] counted more than 68,703 slaves on the occasion of the 1884 abolition, almost three times as many as the other freed provinces, Ceará and Amazonas".[10]

Moreover, to reinforce the idea of Rio Grande's pioneering emancipation, regional abolitionists resorted to Rio Grande's historical libertarian traditions, which they dated back

[8] *A Reforma* (1884).
[9] "Avante," *A Federação*, (August 8, 1884), 1.
[10] "Porto Alegre Livre," *A Ordem*, (September 12, 1884), 4.

to 1835, on the occasion of the so-called Farroupilha Revolution (1835-1845), the longest civil during the Empire. The political treaty which ended the Farroupilha Revolution, called Paz de Poncho Verde (March 1st, 1845), included among its clauses the liberation of Riograndense slave-soldiers. However, the outcome of the war for Riograndense slave-soldiers was much bitter than the treaty had suggested (LEITMAN, 1985).

The second event appropriated by the regional abolitionist discourse to create the image of Rio Grande's pioneering emancipation was the liberation of slave children by the literary society "Parthenon Literary," which had publicly assumed an abolitionist stand since 1869, with the creation of an anti-slavery society.[11] Therefore, on the level of regional abolitionist discourse, Rio Grande was said to be the pioneer of abolition because of its "liberal and libertarian" tradition. Within the Regional abolitionist discourse, Rio Grande would set the example for Brazil as Porto Alegre did for the other towns of the Province. As we read in a1884 editorial of the liberal newspaper *Jornal do Comércio*, commenting the abolition in Porto Alegre:

> The civilized capital of Rio Grande do Sul is setting the example for other towns of the Province and of the Empire which have not yet emancipated [their slaves] (...) The opportunity has arrived for everyone. Porto Alegre was to do even more than other towns of the Empire because it was here rather than elsewhere, at the banks of the majestic Guaíba River, under these heavens that freedom was definitely accomplished in Brazil.[12]

The reference to the geographical location of abolition, "at the banks of the majestic Guaíba river" was a clear allusion to the proclamation of Brazilian Independence, "at the banks of the Ipiranga river," and a regional recreation of the nation's solemn account of its origins. Another feature of the regional abolitionist discourse was the image of a peaceful abolition, emphasizing party harmony, and the absence of social conflicts, therefore maintaining the bonds between "protectors" and "dependents" after abolition. The reconciling tone and the accent on social and political harmony matches well the purpose of harmonizing conflicts inherent to all festivities. The editorials of the *Jornal do Comércio* could thus assert: "We are all men and brothers; we belong to one and the same family, and therefore share the same rights and natural faculties..."[13]

The notion of a benevolent paternalism in the Riograndense slave society, frequent in foreign travelers' narratives was articulated in the regional abolitionist ideas of a generous manumission so as to stress masters' generosity and slaves' gratitude. The speech of the president of the Province, Rodrigo de Azambuja Villanova, in 1888, was in this sense instructive:

[11] The literary society "Partenon Literário" was founded on June 18th, 1868, in Porto Alegre, gathering the intellectual elite of the Province, among them José Antônio do Vale Caldre e Fião, Apolinário Porto Alegre, Carlos Von Koseritz, Achilles Porto Alegre, Graciano Alves de Azambuja, Joaquim Gonçalves Chaves, Júlio Prates de Castilhos, and Carlos Thompson Flores.
[12] *Jornal do Comércio*, Porto Alegre, (August 18, 1884),
[13] *Jornal do Comércio*, Porto Alegre, (August 18, 1884).

> Most freed persons [in this province] will prefer to accompany their ancient benefactors, for slavery in Rio Grande do Sul was always a family institution, the slave participating in all the advantages of their masters, to whom they must be today bound through the bonds of gratitude [and] whose intelligence and experience they cannot live without.[14]

Moreover, this image of the "protector" master and of the "grateful, dependent slave" would certainly insure the maintenance of servile relations and assure a "peaceful transition" from slavery to freedom in the Province. If Riograndense slaveholders were represented as generous, slaves were represented as victims in regional abolitionist discourse. They were incapable of recognizing and struggling for their interests and needed to be protected either by their charitable masters or by abolitionists who saw themselves as the "natural agents" in the defense of the slaves' interests. The editorial of the abolitionist newspaper *A Discussão*, of the town of Pelotas, clearly illustrates the idea of the "mandate of abolitionists" in favor of the slaves:

> In the midst of these innumerable slave quarters that constitute the great force of Brazil's populations, we can hear a groan and a cry...We hear these voices and have come to transmit them to the Brazilian people... We want to be the transmitting echo of the feelings of our brothers, who await in dirty slave quarters a voice that will comfort them and appease their pain with the balm of hope...[15]

The notions of *Gaucho* pioneering and peaceful abolition were also singled out to integrate the Abolitionist Anthem, composed by Achylles Porto Alegre, local chronicler, journalist and a member of the literary association Parthenon Literário and of the Abolitionist Center. The aspect of virile crusade assigned to the abolitionist movement in the lyrics of the anthem also reveals that the official abolitionist discourse was constructed as a male discourse:

> Onward, combatants
> Of the virile crusade,
> May our example be eternal
> For the glory of Brazil!
> Redeem the captive,
> Without gun fire,
> Before blood stains
> Our august pavilion! [16]

[14] RS, Pres. Relatório, Rodrigo de Azambuja Villanova , August 9, 1888.
[15] "A Discussão," *O Século*, (January 23, 1881),
[16] "Hino Abolicionista," *O Século*, (September 7, 1884),

Other traces of the regional abolitionist discourse were the interpretation of the act of manumission as ex-slave owners' generosity, and the absence of onerous manumissions in the movement for the liberation of Porto Alegre's slaves. Urban slave owners were generous because their acts of manumitting were interpreted as charity. The newspaper *A Federação* proclaimed: "Honor to the people of Rio Grande, which by forgetting party dissensions, moved by reflection, and freed its slaves without haste and without receiving money in exchange for human creatures, without waiting for the intervention of legislative bodies and without disorganizing labor".[17]

This quote associates the idea of Riograndenses' generosity with two other notions, namely, that of a nonpartisan movement and that of Rio Grande's autonomy in decision-making, taking measures regardless of the central government and so recreating the idea of the libertarian *Gaucho*. Highlighting Riograndense slave owners' generosity in the abolition of slavery, the Liberal newspaper *A Reforma* reported about Porto Alegre's emancipation: "A large city which had more than 2,000 slaves freed them in about one week. A few manumissions depended on some indemnification. There was no violence; everything was accomplished freely and spontaneously. The noble example of the Capital will be imitated by the entire province..."[18]

The regional abolitionist discourse intention to preserve the image of a spontaneous, generous, philanthropic, and charitable abolition, made use of two linguistic artifices, namely, concealment and euphemism. According to James Scott (1990), concealment was widely utilized by the ruling elites in the public scene; they omitted in public contexts certain well known social facts which could compromise the good public image of the elites. Conditional manumissions were either not mentioned at all in the official abolitionist discourse or were minimized, and thus all seemed to take place as though the province had abolished slavery without indemnification. The idea of concealment was also elaborated by Piccolo: "Emancipation with contract of services sought to conceal the reality therein, that is, that the servile condition had not been abolished, and therefore authorities and politicians sought to defended the interests of those they represented" (PICCOLO, 1988, p.12). James Scott (1990) highlights the resource of euphemism or stigmatization employed by the elites to beautify aspects of power that cannot be denied or to obscure something valued negatively or embarrassing to declare. In this sense, the very motto of the Liberal President of the Province, José Julio de Albuquerque Barros, "suppress the slave, preserving the worker in Rio Grande do Sul" is quite revealing, for it masked the coercive aspects of the manumission under contract of services, giving the appearance of a cosmetic, neutral change. Hence the illustrative words of the President of the Province in his report of 1885:

[17] "Libertação de Porto Alegre," *A Federação*, (September 7, 1884),
[18] "Porto Alegre Livre," *A Reforma*, (September 12, 1884),

> I count myself fortunate that it was during my administration that this brilliant abolitionist movement took place in the Province of S. Pedro of Rio Grande do Sul (...) which applied in large scale the system of manumission with the clause of [contract of] service**,** which although less generous than the unconditional liberation, does not exclude it and allows for all to concur to emancipation insofar as they can...[19]

In this quote the President of the Province recognized that most freedoms granted during the abolitionist movement were conditional to slaves' services. From now on I would reconsider some of the official public ceremonies held with a view to celebrating and dramatizing cultural power on the occasion of Porto Alegre' liberation of slaves, the so called "abolitionist festival."

THE CELEBRATIONS OF FREEDOM IN PORTO ALEGRE (1884)

Early as the 1970s, Fernando Henrique Cardoso stressed the dramatization of *Gaucho* elites in the 1884 abolitionist celebrations and called it "whites' collective catharses ": "Porto Alegre' great liberation fete, on the 7th of September correspond to the dramatization of the ennobling behavior of whites, by some sort of collective catharsis that eliminated the guilty conscience."[20] However, Cardoso interpreted the abolitionist celebrations as mystifying language, as false appearance.[21] In the current analysis the public performance of regional abolitionist elites during the abolitionist fete is re-examined as a "collective theater, where the dominant elite's conduct frequently takes part in its own self-definition"(SCOTT,1990, p.51). According to Scott, in these circumstances a twofold culture is developed: an official culture, marked by euphemisms and silences, and a non-official culture that possesses its own history, but that cannot be introduced in public discourse (SCOTT, 1990, p.51). The festivity is thus considered the symbolic place where what must be forgotten is ritually separated from what must be remembered, so as to produce an explanation of the commemorative event. It also creates a special time, where everyday life is interrupted and dislocated to the streets, to the plazas, to the church (BRANDÃO, 1990, p.11). Porto Alegre' "abolition fête" lasted three days, from September 6th through 8th, "as determined in the program sponsored by the Abolitionist Center"[22] and by the Municipal Assembly, leaving to the participants the performance of the script. The selected military and civil authorities cited as the audience attending these celebrations left no doubts that it was organized from the top down, imposed by the hegemonic political power of the Municipal Assembly, perhaps to enhance its symbolic authority. The public present at the celebrations was a select group composed by the abolitionist elite gathered at the Abolitionist Center, the Municipal Assembly councilors,

[19] RS, Pres. Relatório, Júlio de Albuquerque Barros, 1885, 178.
[20] RS, Pres. Relatório, Júlio de Albuquerque Barros, 1885, 237.
[21] RS, Pres. Relatório, Júlio de Albuquerque Barros, 1885, 238.
[22] The president of the Abolitionist Center was the colonel Pedro Salgado, from the Liberal Party, the owner of a salt beef plant and a slave-owner himself.

the President of the Province, the diplomatic body, military and religious authorities. The ordinary citizens were regarded anonymously as "audience," or "crowds," a necessary allusion to legitimize the public event. Even the illumination of several public buildings obeyed a hierarchy of power: "Besides the Municipal Assembly, the following buildings were also externally illuminated: the Governor's Palace, the headquarters, the Provincial Assembly, the Cathedral, as well as the printing establishments (belonging to different political parties)"...[23]

Nevertheless, contrasting with the secondary role played by ordinary citizens in public celebrations of abolition, newspaper announcements represented it as a democratic "fete" and emphasized popular participation.[24] There were two moments of celebration where "popular manifestations" were highlighted, namely, the Civic Parade, throughout the capital's streets and the Abolitionist Fair, the Kermises held in the central square of the city, Plaza Pedro II. On the September 6th the Republican press commented on the abolitionist parade:

> At nine o'clock at night on the sixth [of September], the crowd gathered at Senator Florencio square and from there departed, incorporating the Abolitionist Center and the emancipation committees, led by the president of the Abolitionist Center and other members of the same corporation, parading with the musical bands and the cars conducting ladies and some citizens that took part in the abolitionist actions. The fireworks followed several streets of the three districts of the capital and at eleven o'clock penetrated the Municipal Chamber, profusely illuminated.[25]

This quote illustrates that the civic parade was not an exclusively male affair but that some "lovely ladies of our better society" participated in cars. The high point of the emancipationist movement was the Kermis (charity bazaar) held at the central plaza and led by the wives of the members of the Abolitionist Center, on the seventh and eighth of September, with the intent of fund-raising for the manumission of slaves, through the sale of objects donated by the capital's elite for this very purpose. "The idea of a Charity bazaar to redeem the slave was met with great acceptance by Porto Alegre's population and the results were there: thirteen tends carefully adorned and named at national and local leaders of the abolition movement …" [26]

Kiosks were named to pay tribute to provincial leaders of the abolitionist movement such as: José Julio, president of the Province, Silveira Martins, Liberal political leader, Coronel Salgado, president of the Abolitionist Center, Júlio de Castilhos, Republican political leader and to national abolitionists as: Euzébio de Queirós, Rio Branco, José do Patrocínio, Joaquim Nabuco, Luis Gama. Women participation in the regional abolitionist campaign was reported in local newspaper through a language of gender which represented

[23] "As Festas," *A Federação*, (September 9, 1884),
[24] The headlines of the newspaper *A Federação* emphasized popular participation: "Festejos populares," (August 1, 1884); "O povo em festas" (August 16, 1884); "As festas populares," (September 7, 1884).
[25] "As festas populares," *A Federação* (September 7, 1884), 1.
[26] *A Reforma,* (October, 9, 1884), 2.

women according to the proper behavior required for "a respectable woman" on the end of the nineteenth century. Their participation in the *Kermis*, as *tendeiras* ("tentmakers") was so reported: "The capital's entire population, except for some half a dozen slave-holders, ran to deposit the gift of charity in the delicate hands of the kind ladies, who in exchange for sweet smiles won large sums for the redemption of the captive."[27] The regional abolitionist narrative stressed women' sweetness and delicacy, which were the values prescribed as proper for the ladies at that time. They were the wives of honorable white citizens represented as philanthropic and charitable ladies. As Vron Ware (1992) remarks, the philanthropic role assigned to the women of the emerging middle class was the most important theme of nineteenth-century history and the logic was that they had a useful part to play in public societies working for social and moral reform. Women's participation in the abolitionist movement in Porto Alegre seemed to fit the role of social reformers.

The Abolitionist Kermis was reported extremely popular and "for all classes."[28] Nevertheless, if we attend to the list of donations "kindly" conceded by the "charitable" ladies of the city, their elitist character is confirmed. Most of the objects sold in the Abolitionist Kermis were part of regional elites' everyday habits. For instance, there was "a crystal clock case, a golden pheasant to fasten gowns, a satin box with superior perfumery, a gold brooch embedded with precious stones, a porcelain furnishing for buffet, a cigar-case, a baccarat set, etc."[29] The eventual buyers were also from the same social segment. The only popular participation that merited specific mention in the coverage of the liberation festivities was an episode that was to a certain extent anecdotal reported in the newspaper *A Federação*, from the Republican Party:

> An eight-year old lad, as black as an olive, one of his pants' legs rolled up, without a jacket, wearing a rustic, risqué sweater neared the stand, prompted by curiosity, examining with his wide-open eyes the objects on display. Upon carefully browsing all items, he came across a sandwich platter, and an enormous satisfaction irradiated his distressed face. He asked in a timid voice for the price of a little piece of that bread with cheese. The attendant smiled and replied: "a couple of vintens." The lad took out of his pocket a few coins and said: "Since it is to manumit the blacks, I'll pay that," and vanished.[30]

David Haberly, in his study of racial identity in Brazilian literature, recognized that in Brazil physical characteristics as well as cultural patterns such as clothing, religion, education, and speech were associated with race and contributed to reinforce a system of racial categories founded upon prejudice towards nonwhite people (HABERLY, 1983). The celebration of abolition in Rio Grande also included a significant military presence, be it in the participation of the Military School and the 13th Infantry, which

[27] "A Kermese," O Século, (September 21, 1884),
[28] *A Federação*, (September 9, 1884),
[29] *O Século*, (August 17, 1884),
[30] "A Kermese," *A Federação*, (September 9, 1884),

took charge of the artillery salvos, or through the Abolitionist Society "Rio Branco," made up of students from the Porto Alegre Military School who actively participated in the abolition "festivities," organizing marches in the capital streets for fundraising.[31] This aspect refers once again to the military vocation of Rio Grande de São Pedro, being the last frontier of Portuguese America, always marked by the strategic presence of the military. Following the civil ceremonies, the religious commemorations were celebrated in the cathedral where the diocesan bishop celebrated a Te Deum rendering praise for the extinction of slavery in the city, in the presence of the entire clergy of the capital, the higher authorities, the Abolitionist Center, military offices, magistrates, the consular body and ordinary citizens. According to Carlos Brandão, in civic festivities religious events were like appendages, different from the traditional festivities of patron saints (apud GUIMARÃES, 1990, p.190).

CONCLUSION

The Abolitionist celebrations of slaves' freedom in Porto Alegre were based on the recollections of a "glorious" past and aspired to restore it by liberating provincial slaves before the national abolition and through legal means. The slaveholding political elite and urban professional abolitionists sought to recreate the identity of the freedom-loving and patriotic *Gaucho*, defender of liberty and national dignity, by manipulating Riograndenses' collective memory and substituting the threat of the external enemy for the menace of slavery. I should like to close this analysis with the words of a journalist from the Republican newspaper *A Federação* that clearly illustrate the appropriation of Riograndense historical traditions on the occasion of the abolition of slavery in Porto Alegre:

> In order to honor its immaculate historical traditions, this Province must obey the appeal of patriotism, respond to the voice of freedom and proclaim straightaway that all of its children are free (...) As long as foreign insults have threatened the dignity of the motherland this Province has been the first to copiously shed its children's blood to repel such affronts. Now, even more than the insults of external enemies, the black institution stains the motherland's honor and cannot be judged worthy of civilization (...) it is the motherland's honor that the great province is called once again to keep it unharmed, by proclaiming the freedom of all Riograndenses and offering thus an example worthy of itself...[32]

The purpose of this study was to deconstruct the regional abolitionist discourse so as to emphasize its invention of abolition in Porto Alegre and to allow some room for what Du Bois called the black counter-memories, the ones constructed by slaves' narratives, black abolitionist societies, black clubs, and black feats and celebrations of

[31] *O Século* (August 17, 1884),
[32] "A abolição no Rio Grande," *A Federação*, (August 1, 1884),

freedom (BLIGHT, 1994, p.46). These counter-memories of freedom evoke a past which even though painful to remember needs to be addressed by historians through what Toni Morrison (1988) called the re-memory of black presences, otherwise as she says "they will haunt the social imagination and disrupt the present" (MORRISON, 1988, p.86).

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