ARENAS OF PAPER AND INK: THE COMMEMORATIONS OF INDEPENDENCE IN THE PIAUÍ PRESS (1832-1889)

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1. Introduction

The history of the Brazilian press has, in recent decades, found fertile ground for investigations that transcend the traditional limits of documentary analysis. What was once seen merely as an informative support has become a privileged object of historical research, capable of revealing not only the facts it intended to record but also the processes of social construction of reality, the discursive disputes, and the power strategies that marked imperial Brazil and its republican developments. Newspapers thus constitute fundamental sources for understanding historical processes, especially regarding the formation of public opinion and the construction of social representations in 19th-century Brazil.

According to Galves (2021), from the 1970s onwards, the debate about the use of newspapers and pamphlets by historians became part of the broad process of transformation of Brazilian historiography, marked by the redefinition of the concept of historical document and the revision of the theoretical and methodological bases that, until then, guided historical research practice, a moment in which periodicals in Brazil began to be treated, simultaneously, as a source and object of historical research.

Periodicals ceased to be mere repositories of information to become historical agents with their own materiality, inserted into complex networks of production, circulation, and reception of meanings. As some observe, "the press is, at once, object and subject of Brazilian history. [...] The printed materials that circulated here for 200 years not only witness, record, and convey our history but are an intrinsic part of the country's formation" (Martins & Luca, 2012, p. 1). This dual dimension, as source and object, proves particularly important for the study of the Brazilian imperial period, a time when the press played a crucial role in shaping the national public sphere and in the articulation between the different provinces of the vast Brazilian territory.

These vehicles not only reported events but also actively participated in the construction of historical narratives that would serve the political purposes of different social groups. In the specific case of the Empire's provinces, the local press assumed a particularly important function in the articulation between regional and national identities. Provincial newspapers operated as mediators between local demands and the centralizing discourses of the imperial State, frequently using the memory of Independence as a rhetorical resource to legitimize specific political positions.

Based on these understandings of the press's role in historical research, this study investigates how Piauí's newspapers represented Brazil's Independence in their pages between 1832 and 1889, analyzing both references to September 7 and the specificities of Piauí's adherence to the emancipatory movement, which occurred on January 24, 1823. We seek, in this way, to discuss how the Piauí press constructed discourses and representations about Brazil's Independence throughout the Empire, and how these discourses reflected the province's political and identity tensions.

The relevance of this question lies in the need to understand how provincial educated elites appropriated national memory for local political purposes, contributing to the formation of a specific Piauí identity within the broader context of the construction of the Brazilian nation-state. As a methodological approach and sources consulted, the research analyzed forty-seven journalistic articles identified in a systematic survey of 19th-century Piauí periodicals. The sources were organized into a database that recorded publication date, newspaper, authorship, title, content, and political positioning.

The documentary corpus covers the period from 1832 to 1889, encompassing from the beginning of the press in Piauí to the end of the Empire. The newspapers analyzed include *O Liberal Piauhyense, O Governista, O Echo Liberal, O Conciliador Piauhyense, O Propagador, O Expectador, Liga e Progresso, A Imprensa, A Pátria, O Piauhy, A Época, O Telephone and A Reforma*.

The methodology employed combined quantitative analysis, attentive to the frequency of mentions and temporal evolution, with qualitative analysis of discourses, identifying narrative patterns, recurrent arguments, and transformations in representations over time.

2. The First Representations: Partisan Disputes and Memory (1846-1852)

The first mentions of Brazil's Independence in the Piauí press emerge in a markedly political-partisan context, mobilizing the memory of the emancipatory process as an instrument of contemporary political dispute. On October 8, 1846, the periodical *O Liberal Piauhyense* published an extensive article about the Sousa Martins and Castello Branco families, critically highlighting and contrasting the participation of both in Piauí's adherence to Independence. The newspaper, although not explicitly positioning itself against the imperial regime itself, demonstrates deep dissatisfaction with the differentiated political treatment granted to these two families after emancipation, using their trajectories as examples to criticize privileges and denounce the appropriation of public resources at the time.

Despite being printed in the city of Caxias (MA), *O Liberal Piauhyense* was an opposition political periodical active in Piauí during the 1840s, linked to the Liberal Party and frequently critical of the conservative political groups that controlled provincial offices. In the article, the representation of the Sousa Martins is markedly negative, constructed through accusations of political opportunism and illicit enrichment at the expense of the provincial treasury. The periodical states that the Sousa Martins would have joined the emancipatory movement not out of legitimate political convictions or patriotism, but with a view to the

riches they could obtain, and highlights: "The Sousa Martins [...] were nothing more than poor cowboys, but even so they were already sucking on the big teat, already living off public money" (*O Liberal Piauhyense*, October 8, 1846, p. 2). According to the newspaper's narrative, the family would have strategically instrumentalized their participation in the political process to ensure privileged access to public offices and state resources.

The criticism intensifies when specifically addressing the actions of the Sousa Martins in the village of Caxias (MA) and the siege of Portuguese troops in the struggles for Independence, which would have been ruined by their ambition. The newspaper denounces: "The Sousa Martins from there took everything: the very salt warehouses; the servants, and chairs, were good prizes!!" (*O Liberal Piauhyense*, October 8, 1846, p. 2).

The newspaper further argues that this family "greed" had not been extinguished over time but was perpetuated under the leadership of Manoel de Sousa Martins. The metaphor of the "large teat" (*grande teta*), recurrent in the text, expresses in a visceral and derogatory way the parasitic relationship that the newspaper attributes to the family with the State, and highlights: "Here they are in the Provisional government, here they are successively clinging to the big teat. The National Treasury, the public coffers never again had any rest!" (*O Liberal Piauhyense*, October 8, 1846, p. 2).

In contrast, the newspaper constructs an opposite representation for the Castelo Branco family, presented as a model of civic virtue, material disinterest, and legitimate patriotism. The periodical highlights the family's "active participation" in the emancipatory process, "including large donations to assist with war expenses" (*O Liberal Piauhyense*, October 8, 1846, p. 2), emphasizing a significant financial contribution to the independence effort without expectation of immediate material return.

The narrative explicitly glorifies the Castelo Branco and their patriotism and emphasizes:

> The Castelo Branco, imitating the Telles and the Belisários, return to their plow, and to their fields, in their legitimate means, they found all that could be desired for the fortune and glory of free and independent peoples, and judging their country at peace, only in domestic delights do they find pleasure, and those who were urged to accept employments, always performed them without receiving salaries or rewards (O Liberal Piauhyense, October 8, 1846, p. 2).

The metaphor of "return to the plow" (retorno ao arado), a classic image of the Roman citizen-soldier who voluntarily abandons power to return to simple agricultural life, reinforces the construction of the family's virtuous republican *ethos*.

The newspaper denounces, however, that this exemplary family would have been betrayed and removed from the political leadership of the province precisely because of their moral rectitude, suggesting that the provincial political system rewarded the opportunism of the Sousa Martins and punished the virtue of the Castelo Branco, a moral inversion that the periodical presents as a symptom of the political corruption of the time.

This initial approach to Independence in the Piauí press reveals a fundamental dimension, in which the memory of the emancipatory process was not primarily mobilized by abstract historiographical, commemorative, or patriotic interest, but served immediately and strategically for purposes of contemporary political criticism. The newspaper selectively instrumentalized the deeds of the past to question and denounce privileges, appropriation of resources, and political exclusions of its present writing. Independence thus functioned as a malleable symbolic repertoire, rhetorically mobilized in political-partisan disputes of the decades following emancipation.

This discursive strategy, which uses historical narratives as a political weapon, constructing moral genealogies that legitimize allies and disqualify adversaries, became recurrent in the provincial Piauí press throughout the 19th century, revealing how public memory is always also a field of political dispute in the present.

Still in 1846, the same periodical *O Liberal Piauhyense* published an article titled "The current ministry and the liberal party," in which it operates an explicit and strategic appropriation of the memory of Independence for political-partisan legitimation. The text categorically states that "Brazil's independence is owed to the liberal party," presenting liberals as "impartial and conscientious men" who would have been the true architects of national emancipation (*O Liberal Piauhyense*, November 6, 1846, p. 3). This narrative constructs a heroic genealogy for the Liberal Party, establishing a direct continuity between the "founding fathers" of the independent nation and contemporary liberal politicians, as if the latter were legitimate and natural heirs of that historical process.

To strengthen this identity construction, the newspaper simultaneously constructs a narrative about political adversaries, presenting them as historical enemies of Independence. According to the periodical, Dom Pedro I would have been "deceived and manipulated" by the opposition, formed by former "Portuguese military and shopkeepers of the same nation" (*O Liberal Piauhyense*, November 6, 1846, p. 3), but without direct criticism of the emperor. These groups, presented as reactionary and unpatriotic, supposedly opposed emancipation and "wanted that when Brazil remained independent, it would be under an absolute government" (*O Liberal Piauhyense*, November 6, 1846, p. 3). The rhetorical strategy was to associate contemporary conservatives with the Portuguese who would have tried to prevent or distort Independence, constructing a negative genealogical continuity that politically disqualifies them.

This interpretation highlights the operation of the liberal appropriation of the memory of Independence, transforming the historical event of 1822 into an argument for political legitimation for disputes in subsequent decades. The past, once again, is not mobilized by disinterested historiographical interest, but strategically instrumentalized to claim contemporary political positions. Through the lines of the periodical, liberals construct themselves as true patriots and legitimate heirs of the "founding fathers," and conservatives are presented as continuators of the "Portuguese absolutists" who would have tried to frustrate emancipation.

Significantly, the newspaper already presented in 1846 what can be interpreted as indications of a republican stance, even if veiled, but progressively more audacious, using criticism of conservatives as a strategy to obliquely question the monarchical regime itself. By describing political adversaries as those who wished Brazil "under an absolute government" (*O Liberal Piauhyense*, November 6, 1846, p. 3), the newspaper does not

explicitly criticize the current constitutional monarchy but established an implicit association between political conservatism and monarchical absolutism, suggesting that the imperial regime perpetuated, albeit in an attenuated form, authoritarian structures that the "true liberals" would have fought in 1822.

This indirect criticism of the monarchical regime through the denunciation of the "absolutism" of political adversaries would become a recurrent strategy in the provincial liberal press, allowing indirect questioning of the monarchy without incurring the risks of sanctions resulting from explicit attacks on the regime and the figure of the emperor. The memory of Independence thus functioned as a rhetorical resource for political claims that, if expressed directly, could cross a dangerous line for the newspaper and its editors.

The political-partisan positioning of newspapers directly influenced their representations of September 7 and the forms of celebrating the date. At the opposite pole, the ruling groups also positioned themselves in relation to Independence. On September 25, 1847, in its first edition, the periodical *O Governista* celebrates the anniversary of Independence with an enthusiastic and solemn tone, highlighting the "cry of Ipiranga" and emphasizing: "September 7, that brilliant Brazilian dawn; September 7, anniversary of our independence" (*O Governista*, September 25, 1847, p. 2). The hyperbolic and celebratory language constructs the ephemeris as a moment of shared national pride.

O Governista, as its name suggests, was a pro-government periodical, linked to the political groups that held provincial offices and generally aligned with the imperial government. Its editorial line was characterized by the defense of constituted authorities and the celebration of governmental achievements, in explicit contrast to *O Liberal Piauhyense*, which had an opposition orientation.

Significantly, however, the periodical strategically uses the national commemorative date to celebrate a contemporary provincial political event, the inauguration of Marcos Antônio de Macêdo as president of the province of Piauí. The deliberate superposition of the two dates is not a fortuitous coincidence, but a rhetorical operation that seeks to associate the new provincial government with the symbolic grandeur of Independence, presenting the local administrative transition as a resumption of the emancipatory process initiated 25 years earlier.

This procedure reveals a fundamental mechanism of the appropriations of national memory in the provincial press, in which it is possible to identify that national ephemerides were constantly re-signified and instrumentalized according to local political interests. Brazil's Independence, in the studied sources, was not primarily celebrated as a national historical event of its own importance but functioned as an occasion and as a symbolic repertoire for the legitimation of provincial authorities, the exaltation of local political leaders, and the consolidation of contemporary political-partisan alliances. September 7 thus became less a date of collective historical memory and more a political resource mobilizable according to the needs of the groups that controlled the periodicals.

3. Criticisms of the Empire and the Questioning of Independence (1850-1860)

The 1850s mark a critical and progressive inflection in the representations of Independence in the Piauí press, characterized by the radicalization of questioning of the imperial regime and the growing politicization of national commemorative dates. O *Echo Liberal* gradually becomes more challenging and critical, using the memory of Independence as an instrument to question the legitimacy and political priorities of the Second Reign.

On December 12, 1850, the newspaper published an editorial that articulated multiple criticisms of the imperial government: it denounced systematic corruption in public administration, questioned the excessive centralization of power in the hands of the central government to the detriment of provincial autonomies, and expressed dissatisfaction with what it characterized as undue influence of foreign interests on national political decisions (*Echo Liberal,* December 12, 1850). These criticisms, although presented in a seemingly dispersed manner, articulated around a central accusation, suggesting that the imperial regime had betrayed the original ideals of Independence, perpetuating forms of subordination and authoritarianism that the emancipatory process of 1822 should have eliminated.

Particularly revealing is the discomfort expressed by the periodical with the hierarchy of official commemorations. The newspaper observes that the birthday of Dom Pedro II, celebrated on December 2, had been commemorated with pomp, public festivities, and significant financial resources, while September 7 had passed "almost unnoticed," without celebrations worthy of its historical importance. This disparity is not interpreted by the newspaper as an administrative coincidence or bureaucratic oversight, but as a symptomatic indicator of the political priorities of the regime that would value the personal figure of the emperor more than the founding event of the independent nation itself.

The criticism is formulated in a rhetorically sophisticated manner that deserves careful analysis:

> [...] we cannot find it strange that the anniversary of our compatriot Mr. D. Pedro II, head of the nation, should be celebrated and solemnized with pomp; we even praise that this be done, and that respect and love for the Brazilian Monarch be spread among the people, but despite nurturing these sentiments, we cannot help but feel profound sorrow when we observe that for the solemnization of this day, which in our understanding is certainly not comparable to the day of the proclamation of our political independence, the memorable September 7 [...] (Echo Liberal, December 12, 1850, p. 2).

The argumentative strategy is careful and politically calculated. The newspaper begins with an affirmation of loyalty, stating that it does not question the emperor's legitimacy nor opposes monarchical celebrations per se. This rhetorical precaution was legally necessary, as direct criticisms of the imperial figure could be framed as a crime of lèse-majesté, subject to severe penalties. By declaring that it "nurtures feelings" of "respect and love for the Brazilian Monarch," the periodical protects itself from accusations of disloyalty.

Having established this rhetorical protection, the newspaper introduces the central criticism through the adversative conjunction "but," which marks the true argumentative intention: to express disagreement with the commemorative hierarchy that subordinates national Independence to the celebration of the emperor's personal figure. The expression "profound sorrow" suggests that what is at stake is not a mere divergence over the festive calendar, but a matter of fundamental principles about the nature of the political regime. The newspaper concludes by categorically stating that the imperial anniversary "is certainly not comparable to the day of the proclamation of our political independence," establishing a hierarchy of values, letting it be understood that the independent nation must be symbolically superior to the monarch who temporarily governs it.

This argumentation reveals a fundamental tension of the Brazilian monarchical regime. How to reconcile the celebration of Independence with the maintenance of the monarchy? How to celebrate national emancipation without questioning the legitimacy of the Portuguese imperial lineage in Brazil? O *Echo Liberal,* even while declaring formal loyalty to the emperor, symbolically subverts this relationship by subordinating the monarchical figure to the founding event of the nation, implicitly suggesting that the imperial regime should serve the independent nation, and not the other way around.

This perception that the imperial government did not adequately value the memory of Independence becomes a recurrent theme in the Piauí liberal press. In 1851, O *Echo Liberal* reports that the President of the Province, José Antônio Saraiva, "did not want the anniversary of independence to pass with the same contempt that was noted in the precedents of 49 and 50" (*Echo Liberal,* September 12, 1851, p. 4), organizing more elaborate official celebrations for September 7 of that year.

The lexical choice is significant in characterizing the treatment given to the date in previous years not as negligence or lack of resources, but as "contempt," a term that implies conscious devaluation. This interpretation suggests that, in the perception of the liberal periodical, the commemorative hierarchy that subordinated Independence to the imperial anniversary did not result from chance or contingencies but reflected a deliberate political choice of the monarchical regime to symbolically minimize the founding event of the nation in order to amplify the centrality of the imperial figure. In this way, the praise for President Saraiva functions simultaneously as recognition of a provincial authority that adequately valued the date and as an implicit criticism of the central imperial government, which in previous years would have "disregarded" the memory of emancipation.

These criticisms reveal an important transformation, in the 1850s, regarding the memory of Independence in the Piauí press, which progressively ceases to function as a consensual reference of shared national identity, becoming an object of fierce political-ideological dispute between pro-government and opposition forces. September 7 thus becomes a symbolic battlefield where different political groups dispute not only control over the interpretation of the past, but also legitimacy to occupy positions in the provincial public administration of the present.

In 1852, just two years after the criticisms of the commemorative hierarchy discussed earlier, O *Echo Liberal* radically changes its discourse, abandoning the rhetorical caution that still characterized the articles of 1850 and moving towards questioning not only specific imperial policies, but the very historical results of Independence. In an editorial published on December 18, 1852, the periodical states in a forceful and unprecedented manner that:

> [...] after 30 years of a system of government called freedom, we are currently more oppressed than we were under the fierce despotism of the Portuguese colonial system. The centralizing oligarchy that governs us today is more oppressive than the old one [...] (Echo Liberal, December 18, 1852, p. 2).

This statement represents a moment of significant discursive rupture. The newspaper no longer merely criticizes specific policies or the hierarchy of commemorations, but fundamentally questions the very nature of the independent Brazilian State after three decades of imperial rule. The expression "system of government called freedom" is deeply ironic and critical, suggesting that the designation "freedom" is merely nominal, a rhetorical facade that hides a reality of oppression.

The comparison with the colonial past is devastating: "we are currently more oppressed than we were under the fierce despotism of the Portuguese colonial system". This assertion directly challenges the triumphalist narrative of Independence as a definitive break with colonial oppression and a conquest of freedom. On the contrary, the newspaper suggests that the independent regime is worse than the colonial one, having replaced one form of despotism with another, potentially more severe. The "centralizing oligarchy that governs us today" is explicitly characterized as "more oppressive than the old one," implying that the imperial regime, far from being a liberator, is a new oppressor.

This radical criticism of the results of Independence had significant political and legal risks. By suggesting that the imperial regime was more oppressive than the colonial system, the newspaper implicitly questioned the very legitimacy of the monarchy and the entire emancipatory process of 1822. This position was politically audacious, as it could be interpreted as subversive, threatening to public order, and potentially seditious.

These criticisms reveal a fundamental transformation in the political status of the memory of Independence. In the 1850s, September 7 progressively ceased to function as a date of consensual celebration of national identity – a moment when all political groups, regardless of partisan differences, would symbolically unite around the commemoration of emancipation – to become an object of fierce political-ideological dispute between pro-government forces (who defended the centralized imperial regime) and provincial liberal opposition (who claimed greater regional autonomy). The memory of Independence, therefore, was not preserved neutrally, but constantly re-elaborated and mobilized according to contemporary political-partisan agendas.

4. The Emergence of Provincial Memory: Construction and Disputes Around January 24

Parallel to the growing politicization and contestation of the national memory of Independence centered on September 7, as analyzed in previous sections, a similarly significant and politically strategic discursive development is observed in the Piauí press of the second half of the 19th century: the progressive construction of January 24, 1823, as a specifically provincial commemorative date, celebrating not the proclamation of national Independence by Dom Pedro I on the banks of the Ipiranga, but the formal and deliberate adherence of the province of Piauí to the emancipatory process, an event that conferred regional particularity to the national narrative.

The date refers to the day when, gathered in the then provincial capital Oeiras, representatives of Piauí's political, military, and economic elites formally decided to adhere to the cause of Independence proclaimed five months earlier in the south-central part of the country, definitively breaking institutional ties with Portugal and recognizing Dom Pedro I as Emperor of Brazil. This adherence was neither automatic nor immediate: it involved local political negotiations, disputes between pro- and anti-emancipation factions, and military actions to consolidate territorial control of the province – processes that conferred drama and local protagonism to an event that could be interpreted as a mere provincial ratification of a decision made in Rio de Janeiro.

The growing valorization of this date in the Piauí press throughout the 19th century thus reveals a fundamental symbolic operation: the provincialization and regionalization of the memory of Independence, a movement through which local elites claimed their own historical protagonism, constructed regional heroic genealogies, and affirmed a specific Piauí collective identity within – but also potentially in tension with – the imperial national unity.

In 1863, the newspaper *Liga e Progresso* published an enthusiastically titled article "PIAUHYENSES!," a direct and interpelling appeal to regional collective identity, emphatically and emotionally proclaiming that "The memory of January 24, 1823, will never fade from the Piauí heart" (Liga e Progresso, January 27, 1863, p. 4). The language laden with affection and permanence, "will never fade," "Piauí heart," constructs this date not as an administrative ephemeris or merely bureaucratic official calendar, but as a constituent element of the emotional and affective identity of the provincial collectivity, a memory that organically lived in popular sentiment and could not be erased by time or institutional negligence.

Significantly, the periodical establishes an explicit and hierarchically egalitarian parallel between the two commemorative dates, the national and the provincial: "Let us enthusiastically salute January 24; because it is for us of such grateful memories, as September 7 is for the entire empire" (Liga e Progresso, January 27, 1863, p. 4). This comparison is not rhetorically innocent, but operates a symbolic equalization between events that, in the imperial political-administrative hierarchy, occupied clearly unequal positions: September 7 was a national date of first magnitude, celebrated throughout the Empire and associated with the figure of the emperor, and January 24 would be, in principle, merely a secondary provincial ephemeris.

By stating that January 24 has "for us" an importance equivalent to that which September 7 has "for the entire empire," the newspaper operates a relativization of the commemorative hierarchy, in which, for the Piauí, provincial adherence would be as or more significant than the national proclamation. This claimed symbolic equivalence reveals a process of constructing a specific provincial memory that, although not frontally contradicting national memory, establishes regional particularity and claims its own historical dignity.

The discursive movement is twofold. On the one hand, the newspaper does not deny the importance of September 7 nor question imperial national unity; on the other hand, it affirms that Piauí has its own history and memory that deserve equivalent celebration, suggesting that the province is not a mere passive administrative extension of the center, but possesses a specific collective identity worthy of symbolic recognition.

The growing valorization of January 24 does not remain only on the discursive plane of the press, but progressively becomes institutionalized through official celebrations organized by provincial authorities. A Imprensa, in 1868, reports commemorative festivities of the date promoted by the then president of the province Polidoro César Burlamaqui, describing events that combine official elite celebration with popular participation:

> [The president] gathered in his palace the most important citizens of this capital and offered them a well-served tea. On the same night, an enthusiastic parade marched through the streets of this city in which the Piauí people gave the most significant proofs of true love for freedom (A Imprensa, January 25, 1868, p. 4).

The description reveals a ceremonial structure typical of 19th-century civic celebrations, articulating multiple social spaces and forms of participation. First, the reception at the presidential palace for the "most important citizens," members of the provincial political, economic, and intellectual elites, constitutes a moment of restricted sociability, affirmation of social distinction, and cohesion among local authorities. The "well-served tea" functions as a performance of civility, hospitality, and refinement of the provincial elites.

Subsequently, the "enthusiastic parade" that marches through "the streets of this city" expands the celebration to the urban public space, allowing broader participation of what the newspaper characterizes as the "Piauí people." The affirmation that this popular participation constitutes proof of "true love for freedom" reveals a rhetorical effort to build the consensus that the commemoration would not be merely an imposition of the elites, but a genuine expression of shared collective sentiment, demonstrating that the memory of adherence to Independence remained alive in the population, as *Liga e Progresso* had proclaimed five years earlier.

This institutionalization of celebrations shows that January 24 had achieved, at least in some periods, the status of a recognized official ephemeris, not being just a date valued by the press, but effectively celebrated by governmental institutions.

However, just four years after the enthusiastic celebrations reported in 1868, a significant inversion in the tone of the press is observed. In 1872, the periodical *A Pátria* published a strong criticism of the "indifference with which among us pass the anniversaries of the most glorious epochs of our political life" (*A Pátria*, January 27, 1872, p. 1), specifically lamenting the negligence with which January 24 had been treated that year. According to the newspaper, the commemoration was limited to minimal and superficial aspects:

> The People learned that one of the days of the week that is ending was January 24, because the notes of the martial music woke them from their deep sleep, and made them inquire, perhaps out of mere curiosity, the cause of such a difference. And that was all the people's curiosity amounted to (A Pátria, January 27, 1872, p. 1).

The description, laden with irony, constructs a devastating image of commemorative superficiality, in which the "people" would have remained in "deep sleep" and only "woken up" by bureaucratic protocols. The population would have reacted with "mere curiosity," asking why that day was different, but without genuine interest that went beyond momentary unease. The concluding phrase "And that was all the people's curiosity amounted to" expresses frustration, denoting that no patriotic sentiment was aroused, no historical consciousness was mobilized, no collective identification with the memory of adherence was manifested.

The newspaper shows that the celebration of January 24 was not consensual, permanent, or stable, but varied substantially according to the provincial government and the priorities of the elites in power. It also denounces the fragility of provincialized memory, where constructing a regional ephemeris that symbolically competed with national dates required constant effort of mobilization, institutional resources, and consensus among elites, conditions not always present. Thus, it is observed that January 24 depended crucially on specific provincial political will, being vulnerable to governmental priorities.

Thus, it is observed that January 24 never achieved, as noted in the consulted sources, a status truly equivalent to September 7, remaining an ephemeris of fluctuating importance, celebrated enthusiastically at some moments and neglected at others, according to specific provincial political conjunctures.

5. Provincial Heroes and Identity Narratives: Construction of Regional Memory (1870-1889)

From the 1870s onwards, a systematic and progressively institutionalized effort to construct a gallery of provincial heroes of Independence is observed in the Piauí press, a discursive movement that transcends the occasional and fragmented references observed in previous periods. This project of regionalized memory materializes mainly through biographical series published in the periodical A Imprensa, written by the journalist and intellectual Miguel Borges Leal Castelo Branco, a prominent figure in Piauí's literature of the period, who dedicated multiple articles to local figures considered protagonists of the provincial emancipatory process.

Among the personalities biographed and celebrated in these series are Manoel de Sousa Martins, whose image was rehabilitated and heroicized in the periodical, Raimundo Pereira da Silva, Leonardo de Nossa Senhora das Dores Castello Branco, and José da Cunha Lustosa. These biographies do not constitute neutral or disinterested historiographical exercises but operate as instruments for the construction of provincial heroic genealogies that underpin contemporary identity and political claims, establishing a pantheon of Piauí "great men" regionally equivalent to the consecrated national heroes, conferring upon the province its own historical dignity and legitimizing local elites as descendants of these founders.

In 1878, the same periodical dedicated special attention to Colonel José Francisco de Miranda Osório, emphatically described as "one of the collaborators of the proclamation of the independence of the empire, in the then village, today city of Parnaíba, on October 19, 1822" (A Imprensa, January 17, 1878, p. 3). The characterization of Miranda Osório as a "collaborator of the proclamation" in the village of Parnaíba, on the Piauí coast, fulfills a strategic function, demonstrating the active importance of the Village in the emancipatory movement and its own protagonism in adhering to the Imperial Prince.

The text specifically highlights Miranda Osório's participation in the "battle of March 13, 1823, between the independent and enemy forces" (A Imprensa, January 17, 1878, p. 3), a euphemism referring to the armed confrontation of Jenipapo, near Campo Maior. This mention, apparently incidental in 1878, foreshadows a discursive movement that would intensify in the 1880s: the transformation of the Battle of Jenipapo into a central founding event of Piauí's provincial memory of Independence, converting military defeat into a symbolic triumph of heroism and sacrifice.

In the 1880s, the Battle of Jenipapo achieved unprecedented centrality in Piauí's representations of Independence, transforming from an occasionally mentioned military episode into a provincial founding myth, an object of epic narratives that construct regional collective identity through the paradoxical celebration of military defeat as moral victory. In 1885, *A Imprensa* published an extensive and detailed series titled "History of Piauí – The Struggles of Independence," authored by Clodoaldo Freitas, an intellectual, self-taught historian, and central figure in Piauí's historiographical production of the period, who dedicated multiple articles to the epic narrative of the confrontation:

> On March 13, 1823, the patriotic troops and the Portuguese troops were facing each other, in Lake Jenipapo, near Campo Maior. The combat begins, the patriotic force fights heroically, but without discipline, and without weapons, fighting with imperfect rifles, and with scythes and axes, against disciplined and well-armed troops, and with four mouths of fire, it had to yield the pass, to the stronger, victory to the enemy, and takes refuge in the village of Campo Maior (A Imprensa, January 23, 1885, p. 3).

The narrative construction operates through a rhetorical strategy of heroicizing defeat that would become canonical in Piauí's memory. It explicitly recognizes the adverse military outcome, in which the Piauí contingent "had to yield the pass, to the stronger, victory to the enemy," but this result is immediately re-signified and subordinated to the celebration of the heroism demonstrated in the adverse conditions of combat. The emphasis falls not on the objective result of the battle, but on the unequal circumstances in which it was fought and on the exceptional courage of the local combatants.

The narrative establishes a systematic and dramatically emphasized contrast between the two armies, highlighting, on one side, the "Portuguese troops" characterized as "disciplined and well-armed, and with four mouths of fire"; and on the other, the Piauí "patriotic troops" described as fighting "without discipline, and without weapons," using "imperfect rifles, and with scythes and axes." This radical military asymmetry becomes a central element of the narrative, establishing the image that still resonates today: that the Piauís were not defeated by incompetence or cowardice, but by the insurmountable material disproportion of the forces in confrontation.

The use of agricultural tools as weapons has multiple and potent symbolic meanings. First, it highlights the popular and unprofessional character of the local troops, presumably composed of farmers, cowboys, and other workers who abandoned their daily tasks to defend the cause of Independence. Furthermore, it constructs an image of heroic sacrifice, of common men who, even aware of their material inferiority, faced regular troops out of patriotic conviction. Finally, it establishes an implicit moral contrast between Piauí popular authenticity and Portuguese mercenary professionalism.

The statement that the "patriotic force fought heroically" is not attenuated by the subsequent defeat, but precisely emphasized. Heroism manifests itself precisely in the willingness to fight even in unfavorable conditions. Military defeat thus becomes a moral victory that demonstrates the superior character of the Piauís, represented by their courage, patriotism, and willingness to sacrifice.

Clodoaldo Freitas, in a continuation of his analyses published in the February 12, 1885 edition, goes beyond the heroicization of Jenipapo to operate an even more ambitious re-signification of Piauí's role in the national emancipatory process. The intellectual concludes, emphatically and proudly, that "Maranhão's adherence to independence, in part, was due to the courage, activity, and efforts of the Piauí independents" (A Imprensa, February 12, 1885, p. 2).

This statement represents an extraordinary qualitative leap in the construction of provincial memory. It is no longer merely about celebrating Piauí's adherence to Independence on January 24, 1823, nor merely about heroicizing Piauí's resistance to Portuguese troops on the banks of Jenipapo on March 13, 1823, but about claiming Piauí's regional protagonism in the emancipatory process of neighboring provinces. According to Clodoaldo Freitas, the "efforts of the Piauí independents," including the Battle of Jenipapo, would have decisively contributed to Maranhão, an economically more important and politically more central province, subsequently adhering to the cause of Independence. Clodoaldo Freitas thus lays the groundwork for an important representation of the struggles for Independence in Piauí, which still strongly reverberates in local historiography, with the argument that Piauí forces, although militarily defeated, would have weakened, delayed, and demoralized the Portuguese troops.

This narrative construction inverts traditional regional hierarchies, where Piauí, a peripheral province, economically and politically marginalized in the Empire, is portrayed as a decisive historical agent that enabled the emancipation of a more central province, and even of all of Northern Brazil. The Piauís, in this way, are presented as active protagonists whose sacrifice and courage made possible emancipatory conquests on a broader regional scale. Jenipapo, therefore, ceases to be an isolated provincial military defeat to become a strategic Piauí contribution to the emancipatory process of the North of the Empire.

If the valorization of January 24 proved to be, as analyzed in the previous section, a fragile and discontinuous process, subject to oscillations according to specific political conjunctures, the heroicization of Jenipapo in the 1870s-1880s represented a more systematic, intellectually founded, and symbolically potent effort to construct provincial memory. The Battle of Jenipapo offered more dramatic narrative elements than the bureaucratic adherence of "January 24." There was combat, blood, sacrifice, and heroism, perfect ingredients for a founding narrative capable of mobilizing affective bonds and constructing collective identity.

This systematic effort to construct a pantheon of provincial heroes and an epic narrative of Piauí's participation in Independence fulfilled multiple political, symbolic, and identity functions for local elites, among which we can highlight that the construction of patriotic genealogies offered the biological and political descendants of these founding heroes authority based on past patriotism, presenting them as political candidates who continued the heroic traditions established in the struggles for Independence.

This intensified construction of heroic provincial memory in the 1870s-1880s was not an isolated phenomenon in time but was inserted into a broader political and cultural context. Throughout the country, debates on federalism, provincial autonomies, and criticisms of imperial centralization intensified. The heroicization of Jenipapo and the construction of the Piauí provincial pantheon were, therefore, local expressions of broader trends of affirmation of regional identities and contestation of the centralizing hierarchies of the imperial State.

Finally, it is necessary to point out that the periodical narrative, by constructing a unified heroic epic image, erases internal conflicts, divergent interests, and social complexities, presenting the "Piauí people" as a homogeneous and unanimously patriotic collective subject, a political fiction that serves to legitimize elites and that obscures more complex and contradictory historical realities.

6. Disillusionment and Radical Criticism: The Negation of Independence (1869-1888)

The final decades of the Empire are characterized by a qualitative and radical transformation in the representations of Independence in the Piauí press. If in previous periods criticisms of the imperial regime, even when forceful, still preserved September 7 as a positive conquest that had subsequently been distorted or betrayed, from the late 1860s onwards a fundamentally distinct discursive movement is observed, in which Independence itself is questioned in its original legitimacy, presented not as an authentic emancipation, but as a historical fraud that had merely replaced forms of domination without altering fundamental structures of oppression.

On September 7, 1869, the anniversary of Independence, the newspaper *A Imprensa* published a provocative and subversive reflection, directly questioning whether that date was truly "a day of festivity" worthy of celebration. The newspaper's implicit answer is devastatingly negative. The periodical argues, with unprecedented clarity and forcefulness, that "Brazil is not yet a free country [...], and where there is no freedom there can be no independence, and there can be no freedom where there is master and slave!" (A Imprensa, September 7, 1869, p. 1).

This formulation represents a fundamental epistemic and political rupture. For the first time in the Piauí press analyzed, the issue of slavery is explicitly articulated as a structural and insurmountable limit to the very possibility of authentic national independence and freedom. The argument is logically chained, highlighting that freedom is a necessary condition for genuine independence. Thus, where there is slavery, there can be no true freedom, and therefore, slave-owning Brazil has no real independence, only nominal. September 7 would, therefore, be a commemorative simulacrum of an emancipation that did not effectively occur, an empty celebration of a fictitious conquest. This articulation between criticism of the imperial regime and the denunciation of slavery as inseparable dimensions of the same structure of domination signals the growing influence of the abolitionist movement in the reinterpretation of national historical memory. Independence could not be legitimately celebrated as long as Brazil remained a slave society. Thus, proclaiming political emancipation while maintaining slavery constituted a fundamental performative contradiction that delegitimized the entire process of 1822.

The 1869 editorial goes beyond this conceptual articulation to operate a complete and iconoclastic deconstruction of the heroic narrative of Independence, criticizing its most sacred symbols:

> we have no more freedom today than under the absolute reign without disguise of D. João VI; if to enjoy the graces of power, without any limit to their individual liberties, the Lusitanians of yesteryear were replaced by today's reds – what does it matter to us that Dom Pedro I had uttered on the banks of the Ipiranga a deceptive cry, a vain promise of redemption to the poor dreamers of a freedom always longed for and never achieved! (A Imprensa, September 7, 1869, p. 1).

The formulation is extraordinarily radical in multiple dimensions. First, it states that independent Brazil does not have "more freedom" than colonial Brazil under the "absolute reign without disguise of D. João VI," that is, it denies any political-institutional progress resulting from Independence, presenting the imperial regime as functionally equivalent to the colonial absolutism it should have overcome. This equivalence completely nullifies the narrative of civilizational progress associated with emancipation. Second, it presents Independence as a mere substitution of dominant elites without structural alteration of power relations by pointing out that "the Lusitanians of yesteryear were replaced by today's reds," a reference to the members of the Conservative Party, who dominated imperial politics at the time. Emancipation would, therefore, have been merely a change of personnel in control of the state apparatus, maintaining unaltered the structures of domination and political exclusion.

Third, the newspaper characterizes the "cry of Ipiranga," the mythical inaugural moment of Brazilian nationality, as a "deceptive cry," that is, a deliberate fraud, a consciously false promise, a deception perpetrated against the people.

What the official narrative celebrated as a moment of glory and national liberation is presented as a moment of betrayal and mystification. Dom Pedro I would not be a founding hero of the independent nation, but a deceiver who proclaimed a "vain promise of redemption" never fulfilled. The expression "poor dreamers of a freedom always longed for and never achieved" is particularly laden with disillusionment, signaling that those who believed in the emancipatory promise of 1822 were naive individuals who cultivated a hope, "freedom always longed for," systematically frustrated over decades, "never achieved." Independence would not only have failed in its objectives but would have been from the beginning a deliberate deception, an instrument of mystification that channeled popular emancipatory energies into a political project that perpetuated domination. The rhetorical question, "what does it matter to us?," expresses a refusal to celebrate. Why would the Brazilian people commemorate an event that brought them no substantive benefits, that merely replaced forms of oppression, and that perpetuates slavery and the absence of freedoms to this day?

The criticism observed in 1869 did not constitute an isolated explosion but foreshadowed a progressive intensification of the contestation of the imperial regime in the following decades. In 1887, on the eve of Abolition and the Proclamation of the Republic, the periodical *A Reforma* maintained a severely critical and mobilizing tone, declaring in an editorial on September 7:

In the solemn and anguished hour, we are going through, before the wreckage of public liberties crushed by the arrogance of irresponsible ministers. It is imperative that every citizen arm himself as a knight to defend his own rights and the sacred rights of the homeland betrayed and vilified by a government that set itself up as a dictator of a constitutional country. (A Reforma, September 7, 1887, p. 2).

The language mobilizes a dramatic and belligerent register that transcends ordinary political criticism to assume an insurrectionary tone. The characterization of the moment as "solemn and anguished hour" constructs a sense of national existential crisis. The reference to the "wreckage of public liberties crushed" presents the imperial regime not only as authoritarian, but as an active destroyer of constitutional conquests, and the accusation of "arrogance of irresponsible ministers" denounces the government as tyrannical and not subject to institutional controls, and, finally, the affirmation that the government "set itself up as a dictator of a constitutional country" characterizes the regime as an absolutist usurpation that violates the very legal order that should underpin it.

Significantly, the editorial explicitly calls upon citizens to "arm themselves as knights," a metaphor that evokes the medieval tradition of defending honor and rights through combat, to "defend their own rights and the sacred rights of the homeland." This call to active resistance, although still formulated in metaphorical language and not explicitly insurrectionary, exceeds the limits of tolerated institutional political criticism, suggesting that the defense of the "betrayed homeland" could justify extralegal or even armed forms of protest. The characterization of the homeland as "betrayed and vilified" by the government itself operates a fundamental inversion, for it is not dissenting groups that betray the nation, but the imperial regime that, by destroying liberties and establishing a dictatorship, betrays the constitutional and emancipatory ideals that should underpin its legitimacy. Authentic patriotism would therefore require resistance to the treacherous government, not submissive obedience.

This radical discourse observed in the final years of the Empire, although certainly not hegemonic or consensual, being contested by pro-government periodicals that defended the regime, marks a decisive rupture in the representations of Independence in the Piauí press. If in the 1840s-1860s criticisms of the imperial regime still operated within the symbolic limits of the constitutional monarchy, claiming that the government respected the ideals of Independence, in the 1870s-1880s the monarchical Independence itself is presented as a historical fraud that should be overcome, not celebrated.

This discursive radicalization articulated and expressed the convergence of multiple contesting movements. Abolitionism, which denounced slavery as a negation of any claim to national freedom, republicanism, which questioned the legitimacy of the monarchy as a form of government and advocated for the establishment of a republic, radical federalism, which denounced imperial centralization as oppression of provincial autonomies, and radical liberalism, which accused the regime of systematically violating constitutional guarantees and civil liberties. These movements converged in the perception that the Independence of 1822, as carried out under the monarchy of Pedro I, had been a failed or fraudulent historical project that had not fulfilled its emancipatory promises, perpetuating under new forms the colonial structures of domination. True national emancipation would therefore require not the ritual celebration of September 7, but a second Independence, this time republican, abolitionist, and democratizing, that would finally realize the ideals betrayed in 1822.

This radicalization in the Piauí press was not a direct and mechanical cause of the Proclamation of the Republic in 1889, but it certainly foreshadowed and contributed to the erosion of the symbolic legitimacy of the monarchical regime. By transforming September 7 from a date of consensual celebration into an occasion for radical criticism and questioning of the very foundations of the imperial order, newspapers such as A *Imprensa and A Reforma* actively participated in the historical process that would culminate in the collapse of the Empire and the establishment of the Republic.

7. Final Considerations

The analysis of the Piauí press during its imperial period allows us to follow the complexity of the representations of Brazil's Independence constructed and disputed by the provincial educated elite. Far from constituting a linear, consensual, or stable narrative, these representations reflected and helped to produce the profound political tensions of each historical moment, serving alternately as an instrument of legitimation of authorities, a resource for criticism of adversaries, and a mechanism for mobilization for contesting political projects.

Three main patterns can be identified throughout the analyzed trajectory. First, the systematic political-partisan instrumentalization of the memory of Independence, especially by liberals, who strategically appropriated the founding event to criticize conservatives, claim historical protagonism for their party, and point to republican ideals presented as necessary realizations of the betrayed promises of 1822. Second, the progressive development of a specific provincial memory, initially centered on the adherence of January 24 and subsequently on the epic heroicization of the Battle of Jenipapo, constructing a pantheon of regional heroes that complemented the hegemonic national narrative. Third, the increasing intensification of disillusionment with the results of political emancipation, culminating, in the final decades of the Empire, in the radical questioning of the very historical legitimacy of monarchical Independence, presented as a "deceptive cry" that promised freedom but perpetuated domination.

The Piauí press contributed, through these complex and contradictory processes, to the formation of a multifaceted provincial identity that articulated, in ways not always harmonious, multiple dimensions, from belonging to the Brazilian national community, through the affirmation of Piauí's specificities and regional dignity, political-partisan identifications, and ideological positions on fundamental issues such as slavery and form of government. Simultaneously, it actively participated in the great national political debates of the Empire, inserting provincial voices into discussions that transcended local particularities and systematically using historical memory as a privileged rhetorical resource for intervention in contemporary conflicts.

These findings demonstrate the fundamental historiographical relevance of the systematic study of the provincial press for a deep understanding of the complex processes of construction, dispute, and transformation of national memory in 19th-century Brazil. The analysis of the Piauí press reveals that even in seemingly secondary regional contexts, educated elites developed sophisticated, politically strategic, and ideologically complex appropriations of national memory, challenging hegemonic narratives, constructing counter-memories, and mobilizing the past for contesting political projects.

The trajectory of the representations of Independence analyzed highlights the fundamentally dynamic, conflictual, and politically instrumentalized nature of the formation of collective memories and identities. The same historical event was successively celebrated as a glorious conquest, criticized as a betrayed promise, questioned as a structural fraud, and frontally denied as a deception, according to transformations in the political context and the emergence of new contesting movements. Representations of the past, therefore, are not simply passively inherited or preserved unaltered by immutable traditions, but are constantly re-elaborated, disputed, and re-signified in the present according to the needs, interests, and political projects of the groups that control the means of production and circulation of public discourses. Understanding how societies relate to their past is a fundamental dimension for understanding how they organize, legitimize, and transform themselves in the present.

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