

Determining Freedom: Afro-Peruvians and the Meanings of Emancipation in Peru, 1850s

By Emily Sanchez

Introduction

On a Sunday of January 1855, five formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians, Muaricio, Torivio, Gervasio, Gabriel Asin, and Francisco Chavarria gathered as a family to spend their day of rest together and celebrate the emancipation decree announced by President Ramón Castilla just two months prior.¹ During their reunion, the Asin and Chavarria families heard a knock on their door. It was corporal Manuel Piol. They were confused by his visit because they offended no one during their family gathering and it was still early in the day. However, within a matter of minutes, they learned that Corporal Piol was there to arrest the five men for allegedly making weapons for use against the police.² Corporal Piol transported them to the *Intendencia*, escorted by a group of ten armed soldiers. Once at the *Intendencia*, Commander Barquero ordered the whipping of Muaricio, Torivio, Gervasio, Gabriel Asin, and Francisco Chavarria without any evidence of the crime they were charged with.

The Asin and Chavarria family later wrote a letter to President Ramón Castilla detailing this experience with state authorities and published it in the national liberal newspaper of the 1850s, *El Comercio*. While urging the President to punish both Corporal Piol and Commander Barquero, they challenged the vision of emancipation the state had for Afro-Peruvians.³ The letter signed by Muaricio, Torivio, Gervasio, Gabriel Asin, and Francisco Chavarria foreshadowed the

¹ Peter Blanchard, *Slavery & Abolition in Early Republican Peru* (Wilmington, DE: SR Books, 1992), 195.; Castilla announced the emancipation decree on December 3, 1855.; Although the term "Afro-Peruvians" was not used in nineteenth century Peru, this paper will use the term to refer to Peruvians of African descent.

² "Clamor al excelentísimo señor," *El Comercio*, February 11, 1855.

³ In this paper, "emancipation" refers to the social and political lives of enslaved Afro-Peruvians after receiving freedom.

ongoing struggle of Afro-Peruvians to establish their meaning of emancipation and place it at the forefront, in the face of the state, liberal press, and conservative rebels.

Just weeks before this incident, Peru had ended the first of its two civil wars in the 1850s. The first civil war pitted President José Rufino Echenique against liberal rebels. During the Echenique presidency, many prominent liberals, such as Domingo Elias Carbajo, criticized his administration and charged him with corruption. Elias Carbajo and Ramón Castilla organized a rebellion against the Echenique administration in early 1854, and in April of the same year, the rebels named Ramón Castilla provisional president of Peru.⁴ Under this position, Castilla announced the abolition of slavery in the country on December 3, 1854.⁵ Castilla officially claimed victory over the Echenique administration on January 7, 1855, after having won the Battle of Palma.⁶ It was after this battle that the Asin and Chavarria family gathered together and celebrated emancipation. Just a year after their reunion, Echenique along with conservative General Manuel Ignacio de Vivanco started a rebellion against the Castilla administration, with one of its principal goals being the reinstatement of slavery. This second civil war ended in March of 1858 when military troops ordered by Castilla defeated conservative forces in Arequipa.

As of now, historians understand the 1850s in Peruvian national history as a decade consumed by civil wars between the liberal and conservative elite leaders of the nation. In *Historia de la República del Perú*, Jorge Basarde acknowledges the civil wars of the 1850s between Generals Ramón Castilla, Rufino Echenique, and Manuel Ignacio de Vivanco, but does not discuss the place of Afro-Peruvians within these wars or the national society.⁷ Scholar of Peruvian national

⁴ Jeffrey S. Dixon and Meredith Reid Sarkees, *A Guide to Intra-State Wars: An Examination of Civil, Regional, and Intercommunal Wars, 1816–2014* (California: Thousand Oaks, 2016), Chapter 4, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452234205>.

⁵ Blanchard, *Slavery & Abolition in Early Republican Peru*, 195.

⁶ Dixon and Reid Sarkees, *A Guide to Intra-State Wars*, Chapter 4, <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452234205>.

⁷ Jorge Basadre, *Historia de la República del Perú, 1822-1933* (Editorial Universitaria, 1983), x.

identity-building, Brooke Larson, explains that these wars and the following civil codes undermined the political rights and citizenry of Indians in the nation. Ultimately, Larson argues that by the late nineteenth century, Peru was divided into two different republics: one republic of the “white, coastal, and modern” region, and another republic of the “Indian, mountainous, and backwards” region.⁸ In doing so, Larson excludes Afro-Peruvians. This historiography fails to include another important struggle happening in the middle of the wars of the 1850s — the mobilization of Afro-Peruvians to define the meaning of their emancipation for themselves, the press, and state.

Additionally, scholars of Afro-Latin American studies have yet to address the presence of Afro-Peruvians in nineteenth-century Peru. The definition of Afro-Latin America explains the silence within this scholarship. Anani Dzidzienyo and Pierre-Michel Fontaine used the term "Afro-Latin America" first in the late 1970s and established that countries part of "Afro-Latin America" must have a "significant" population of people with known African ancestry.⁹ Although Fontaine did not specify "significant" quantitatively, George Reid Andrews does so in his book *Afro-Latin America*, published in 2004. According to Reid Andrews, "significant" means five percent or greater.¹⁰ The population of people with known African ancestry in Peru was more than five percent in the nineteenth century but dropped in the following decades partly because Black people had lower life expectancies and higher death rates than whites, but also because people who identified as "Black" declined over the years.¹¹ Even though Peru does not fit the definition of Afro-Latin America today, Afro-Peruvians are present in the country and make up a large portion

⁸ Brooke Larson, *Trials of Nation Making: Liberalism, Race, and Ethnicity in the Andes* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 150.

⁹ George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 3-4.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 4.

¹¹ *Ibid*, xii, 5.

of the population of coastal states, such as Ica.¹² Afro-Peruvian organizations, like Ashanti Peru, have coordinated several national projects advocating for recognition of the human rights and citizenship of Afro-Peruvians today.¹³ In order to understand the activism of Afro-Peruvians in present-day Peru, scholars must investigate how Afro-Peruvians in the nineteenth century experienced abolition and created movements of resistance and defiance against restrictive definitions of emancipation.

This paper aims to address this gap in scholarship by exploring how Afro-Peruvians envisioned their own participation in the Peruvian national community as citizens from 1854-1857 through an analysis of *El Comercio* newspaper articles. Manuel Amunátegui and Alejandro Villota founded *El Comercio*, based in Lima, in 1839. They were members of the Chilean and Argentinian creole elite, respectively. Although born outside of the nation, both of them led most of their lives in Peru and were influenced by liberal politics.¹⁴ With Amunátegui and Villota as the main editors, *El Comercio* became known as the main platform to communicate "sound" ideas and opinions that interested the nation by the late 1840s. Guided by the scholarship of Saidiya Hartman, I critically engage the work of *El Comercio* editors in order to understand how Afro-Peruvians envisioned their own emancipation and participation.¹⁵

¹² Ibid, 5.

¹³ “¿Quiénes Somos? – ASHANTI PERÚ,” accessed December 1, 2020, <https://ashantiperu.org/quienes-somos/>; “Quiénes Somos,” LUNDU Centro de Estudios y Promoción Afroperuanos, accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.lundu.org/quienes-somos.html>; “Presencia Y Palabra: Mujeres Afroperuanas,” accessed December 1, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/presenciaypalabra/>; LUNDU and Presencia y Palabras: Mujeres Afroperuanas are two other activist, Afro-Peruvian organizations. The first organization, LUNDU, focuses on developing programs, laws, and policies that center African descendants in Peru. In addition, the second organization, Presencia y Palabras, aims to create spaces for “dialogue, actions, and reconnection” between Afro-Peruvian women.

¹⁴ Juan Gargurevich, *Historia de la prensa peruana, 1594-1990* (Lima: La Voz, 1991), 67, <https://catalog.princeton.edu/catalog/741428>; Héctor López Martínez, *Los 150 años de el Comercio, 1839-1989* (Edición de “El Comercio,” 1989), 16-17, 60.; In this case, “liberal” does not mean that the newspaper stood for racial equality, but rather advocated for a gradual form of emancipation.

¹⁵ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (July 17, 2008), 11-12.; In “Venus in Two Acts,” scholar Saidiya Hartman discusses how historians can begin to address the silence in the archives of enslaved peoples and imagine their lives and “what cannot be verified.” She challenges researchers to “speculate arguments”

This paper will begin by looking at reports of Afro-Peruvians seeking freedom and positions in government before December of 1854. These reports demonstrate that Afro-Peruvians began defying proposed limitations of the state and liberal press over their freedom before the abolition of slavery. I will then revisit the 1855 letter of the Asin and Chavarria family and explore the continuation of Black activism in the months after abolition. The Asin and Chavarria family make it clear that state-centered abolition did not align with and endangered the vision of emancipation Afro-Peruvians had for themselves. A last set of articles, from 1856-57, discusses the ways in which Afro-Peruvians fought against the reinstatement of slavery and for the Castilla administration on the battlefields. The documented actions of Afro-Peruvians within these articles suggest that, by 1857, they had mobilized themselves to advocate for a multi-faceted emancipation, including legal protection from the state, and ultimately, respect of their humanity and status as citizens in the national society. Although Afro-Peruvians and the liberal press viewed the first as supporters of the presidency of Ramón Castilla from 1855-1857, both diverged in their positions regarding the meaning of emancipation.

Defining Emancipation on the Eve of Abolition

In the months leading up to the abolition of slavery in Peru, Afro-Peruvians advocated for their place in Peruvian national society as active political members. While attempting to make their envisioned freedom a reality, Afro-Peruvians faced direct opposition and violence from state authorities. In 1853, Evaristo Urrutia asked for the price of his freedom from his owner, Nicolás Pruneda. One of Urrutia's countrymen had given him money to purchase his freedom after Urrutia

based on secondary sources and the primary evidence. In this paper, I read both with and against the grain of the *El Comercio* archive to understand how Afro-Peruvians envisioned emancipation in the years following abolition.

had injured himself at a bakery and could no longer work.¹⁶ Since Pruneda refused to give Urrutia the price for his manumission, Urrutia took his case to court, and advocated for his own right to freedom.¹⁷ He had not accepted Pruneda's refusal to inform him of the cost for his manumission.

Despite Urrutia's efforts to gain his freedom, state authorities saw him as someone who must remain without agency over his body and actions. Specifically, by March 1854, the case had been "mysteriously" appealed to the Superior Court of Lima, which consequently delayed a decision on the case, extending Urrutia's status as an enslaved person.¹⁸ Moreover, in March, Pruneda had temporarily given Urrutia to Colonel Felipe Rivas.¹⁹ On the 24th, Rivas ordered his soldiers to tie Urrutia up and place him on a cross in a public square. Later, these same soldiers imprisoned Urrutia in the barracks of the Colegio Real and prohibited any of his family members from visiting him.²⁰ This combination of violent torture and subsequent lack of action from the court suggests that state authorities of Peru, under the administration of Echenique, envisioned enslaved Afro-Peruvians as people who must remain enslaved, and therefore, should be punished for pursuing their freedom.

In contrast to state authorities, the author who published the experience of Evaristo Urrutia in *El Comercio* expressed disagreement with the actions of Colonel Rivas. First, the author titled his report on the case, "Horrible Attack Committed by [...] Coronel Felipe Rivas," and thereby recognized Urrutia's torture as unnecessary and unjust.²¹ Moreover, the author said that Rivas had "so much money with which he could buy the magistrates," suggesting that he was wealthy enough

¹⁶ "Atentado horroroso cometido por el mum-plus ultra Sr. Coronel Felipe Rivas," *El Comercio*, May 26, 1854.; "Countrymen" is quoted from the newspaper article and refers to someone who was most likely also Afro-Peruvian. Although the newspaper did not say whether or not Evaristo was African-born, in the case that he was, "countrymen" might have referred to someone who was from the same region of Africa as Evaristo.

¹⁷ "Atentado horroroso cometido por el mum-plus ultra Sr. Coronel Felipe Rivas," *El Comercio*, May 26, 1854.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

to bribe the courts in his favor.²² Perhaps Rivas had bribed the court to "mysteriously" move the case to the superior court of Lima and, consequently, extended the enslavement of Urrutia on purpose. This statement also implies that Rivas had enough influence on judicial authorities to make them purposefully ignore his use of torture. The reference to Rivas's actions as a "horrible attack" and acknowledgement of his bribery communicate that *El Comercio* disapproved of the illicit lengthening of Urrutia's enslavement. However, this disapproval does not mean that the liberal press supported all paths to emancipation, particularly those outside of the legal system, that Afro-Peruvians pursued for themselves.

Enslaved Afro-Peruvians who resisted their enslavement and found their freedom outside of the legal system faced precarious situations as well. As Carlos Aguirre explains, not all enslaved Afro-Peruvians had a personal network like that of Urrutia, which would facilitate access to legal ways of finding freedom.²³ Due to Urrutia's connection to a friend who could lend him money, Urrutia was able to ask for his manumission and dispute his case in court.²⁴ Many enslaved Afro-Peruvians who did not have channels to legal emancipation ran away from their slaveholders and lived their life on the margins of society.²⁵ This decision to escape was a difficult one to make because they would have to relocate to somewhere far away from their slaveholder in order to avoid capture. *Cimarrones*, enslaved Afro-Peruvians who ran away, escaped into areas that were completely unfamiliar to them and left behind family and friends, who they would possibly never see again.²⁶ Once having escaped, *cimarrones* would have to live in fear of being killed at any moment or being captured and sold into slavery.²⁷ Enslaved Afro-Peruvians who gained

²² Ibid.

²³ Carlos Aguirre, *Agentes de su propia libertad: Los esclavos de Lima y la desintegración de la esclavitud: 1821-1854*, 1. ed (Lima: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Fondo Editorial, 1993), 246.

²⁴ "Atentado horroroso cometido por el mudo plus ultra Sr. Coronel Felipe Rivas," *El Comercio*, May 26, 1854.

²⁵ Aguirre, *Agentes de su propia libertad*, 246.

²⁶ Ibid, 252.

²⁷ Ibid, 247.

manumission through the legal system would have legal protection from re-enslavement, but *cimarrones* did not. The state pushed *cimarrones* into the margins of society and made them live precariously because they did not seek their emancipation legally.

The liberal press also contributed to the unstable nature of the lives of *cimarrones*. As Aguirre highlights in his scholarship, *El Comercio* accepted fugitive slave ads from slaveholders before December of 1854.²⁸ *El Comercio* published three fugitive slave ads in less than a month after their report on Evaristo Urrutia,²⁹ conveying that the liberal press did not support all paths to emancipation. They disapproved of Afro-Peruvians who sought ways to freedom outside the purview of the state. Through these ads, *El Comercio* elevated the possibilities of capture, and therefore, further pushed *cimarrones* into the margins of society. The publication of fugitive slave ads defended the institution of slavery and reaffirmed the power of slaveholders, ultimately invalidating the paths *cimarrones* had been taking to freedom. Although *El Comercio* supported the legal manumission of Evaristo Urrutia, it starkly opposed Afro-Peruvian agency in determining the terms of emancipation.

In 1854, Afro-Peruvian individuals began to advocate for a kind of emancipation that encompassed political leadership. According to an *El Comercio* article from February, an unnamed Afro-Peruvian was running for a local office in the Huancavelica region.³⁰ This person viewed himself as a leader within the nation. However, the liberal press opposed Black political participation.

Particularly, *El Comercio* disagreed with the idea of granting freed people political rights because it would lead to the possibility of Black people holding positions in government. For

²⁸ Aguirre, *Agentes de su propia libertad*, 251.

²⁹ "Ojo," *El Comercio*, June 17, 1854.; "Viente y cinco pesos de gratificación," *El Comercio*, June 17, 1854.; "Dos onzas de oro de gratificación," *El Comercio*, June 20, 1854.

³⁰ "Huancavelica - Cura Palomino, Juez Valdiva," *El Comercio*, February 14, 1854.

example, in reaction to the abolition of slavery in Ecuador, an *El Comercio* article stated that slavery was “abusive,” and “barbaric,” but ultimately warned Ecuador that the emancipation of enslaved peoples would endanger the political stability of the society.³¹ The author first said in reference to the emancipation of enslaved Black Ecuadorians, “no está el bien en soltar derepente á la plaza los tigres que se han enjualados.”³² This image of caged tigers entering public spaces suggested that formerly enslaved Black people would threaten the stability of the country and create chaos.³³ The author then said that by emancipating enslaved peoples, and granting them citizenship, including all civil and political rights, a Black person could become President or Minister,³⁴ and thus further specified the future instability and chaos as political. Ultimately, the author’s initial disagreement with the immorality of slavery and fear of viewing a Black person in a position of power communicates that the emancipation of enslaved Black people in Peru was acceptable to the liberal press as long as they did not have access to the right of holding political offices.

The lives of *cimarrones* and the aforementioned aspiring Afro-Peruvian politician demonstrate that Afro-Peruvians disagreed with the liberal press about the meanings of emancipation even before abolition in late 1854. Afro-Peruvians without the networks and means to seek manumission legally continued to escape from their slaveholders, while *El Comercio* published fugitive slave ads. On the eve of abolition, free Afro-Peruvians were already fighting

³¹ “Ecuador,” *El Comercio*, April 22, 1854.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 102. Moreover, many cities across Latin America in the nineteenth century had “public order” statutes, which “tightened restrictions on black street dances and other public festivities.” Reid Andrews explains that the police force in Lima had asked artisan guilds to help “discipline ... and control Lima’s unruly and frightening dark-skinned plebes.” This animalization and criminalization of black people was part of the larger nineteenth-century racist discourse and was a manner to communicate that black people were an inferior race, and thus, unfit for freedom. I would like to thank Professor Mota for suggesting that I make a connection to this larger racist discourse

³⁴ “Ecuador,” *El Comercio*, April 22, 1854.

for their incorporation into national society as citizens with civil and political rights. They were advocating for a definition of emancipation that would affirm their leadership in the nation, while *El Comercio* argued otherwise. This divergence on the meaning of emancipation would continue and amplify in the years following the abolition of slavery in Peru.

Directing the Mobilization of Afro-Peruvians: At Home or on the Battlefields

At Home

Afro-Peruvians continued advocating for an emancipation that encompassed civil and political rights well after the abolition of slavery on December 3, 1854. As the case of the Asin and Chavarria family demonstrates, formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians viewed themselves as supporters of the Castilla administration, but also advocated against the continued violence they faced from the state in January of 1855. The Asin and Chavarria family began their letter, addressed to President Ramón Castilla, by introducing themselves and recounting the morning before their arrest:

Muaricio, Torivio, Gervasio, y Gabriel Asin, y Francisco Chavarria, esclavos que fuimos de la hacienda de este señor Asin, á V. E. clamamos para que se digne oír nuestra suplica. Señor Excmo., El proximo Domingo que acabó de vuelta de toros hemos venido con nuestra familia para nuestra casa y estando en ella reunidos divirtiendonos con orden y regularidad, celebrando el éxito de la campaña de la Palma, [illegible], a V.E. de rato en rato como nuestro libertador y por quien disfrutamos.³⁵

By emphasizing their celebration of Castilla's victory at the Battle of Palma, naming him a "liberator," and publishing this letter in a national newspaper, Muaricio, Torivio, Gervasio, and Gabriel Asin and Francisco Chavarria inserted themselves within the national discourse and expressed support for the Castilla administration.³⁶ However, this support for the Castilla

³⁵ "Clamor al excelentísimo señor," *El Comercio*, February 11, 1855.

³⁶ Aguirre, *Agentes de su propia libertad*, 244.; For clarification, the use of "liberator" in this piece demonstrates support for Castilla, but does not necessarily communicate that Afro-Peruvians viewed Castilla as the cause of abolition and their freedom. Historians, such as Carlos Aguirre, have emphasized the role of Afro-Peruvians in

administration did not mean that the family did not face restrictive definitions of their emancipation. In particular, this introduction implies that the Asin and Chavarria family were facing surveillance from their local authorities. They specified that they were celebrating with "order and normalcy." Thus, it seems that their local police had already been monitoring their actions and perhaps were attempting to track moments of "disorderly conduct" to punish them. Ultimately, the Asin and Chavarria family, formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians, could celebrate together, but had to do so without creating the slightest public disturbance in order to avoid any state retribution. As conveyed in the following excerpt, this good behavior was not enough on that Sunday morning:

Cantando el sereno las diez en punto se nos presentó en la sala un cabo o teniente de serenos ordenandonos cesase nuestra diversion [sic], y porque repusimos que todavía era temprano, y en nuestra casa sin ofender á nadie, nos hizo salir al patio, y haciendo entrar una partida de 10 hombres de tropa armada que comandaba nos metieron en el centro como á unos criminales andando por las calles hasta llegar a Santa Catalina [...] y de ahí nos condujo á la Intendencia donde para criminarlos, y salvar su atropellamiento dijo al comandante de serenos, que eramos unos escandalosos y que habíamos hecho armas contra la comitiva que manda.³⁷

As Muaricio, Torivio, Gervasio, and Gabriel Asin and Francisco Chavarria explained above, at ten o'clock, a corporal asked the family to stop their celebration, even though it was still early in the day and they had not bothered anyone. This corporal then asked them to exit their house and forced them to travel to the Intendencia as "criminals," meaning mostly likely in chains, and waited until their arrival at the Intendencia to mention their crime — they had allegedly created weapons for use against the police. The abrupt stop of their celebration and subsequent criminalization of the Asin and Chavarria family suggests that the state feared gatherings of Afro-Peruvians because they would possibly create commotion and endanger the state itself. Contrary

bringing about the abolition of 1854. In particular, Aguirre argues that cimarrones challenged the power of slaveholders and ultimately weakened the institution of slavery in the country.

³⁷ "Clamor al excelentísimo señor," *El Comercio*, February 11, 1855.

to this perspective, the Asin and Chavarria family envisioned an emancipation that included not just the right to celebrate without state intervention, but also included recognition of their status as citizens with rights and legal protection:

En esta virtud Señor Excelentísimo ya no tenemos amo que hable por nosotros, un mas amparo que Dios, y V. E., pues asi como nos ha dado la libertad sacandonos de la triste esclavitud en que viviamos, esperamos que sabe lor que V. E. sea de esta crueldad, que se ha hecho con nosotros no dejará impune el castigo que merece Manuel Piol comandante de la partida, y el señor Barquero comandante de serenos por la ligereza en el obrar — asi los esperamos de la rectitud de V. E.³⁸

In the excerpt above, Muaricio, Torivio, Gervasio, and Gabriel Asin and Francisco Chavarria express that they have not received protection from the state or any authority since the abolition of slavery. More specifically, they found themselves having less protection from the state as freed people than compared to the protection they received as enslaved people and legal property of their slaveholder. They demanded that President Ramón Castilla punish Corporal Piol and Commander Barquero, and were also suggesting that the President clarify and protect the position of Afro-Peruvians as citizens with legal protection and the right to gather. This letter advocated for mobilization against state violence and urged the president to act. Most importantly, the Asin and Chavarria family were making public their vision of emancipation to the President and readers of the liberal *El Comercio* newspaper: their emancipation encompassed political rights and legal protection, rather than violence, from state authorities.

Although Muaricio, Torivio, Gervasio, and Gabriel Asin and Francisco Chavarria wrote the letter, the way *El Comercio* published it conveys doubt on the vision of emancipation of the family. In particular, the editors did not include a prefatory comment for this letter.³⁹ Usually, letters within *El Comercio* were preceded by a small paragraph introducing the authors, addressee,

³⁸ “Clamor al excelentísimo señor,” *El Comercio*, February 11, 1855.; In the letter, the five men specified that after Corporal Piol had arrested them, Commander Barquero ordered his officers to whip them without any evidence suggesting that the Asin and Chavarria family had participated in the creation of weapons.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

and concern raised within the piece.⁴⁰ This silence accompanying the piece suggests that the editors felt discomfort with the demands of the Asin and Chavarria family, and thus communicates that the liberal press had challenged the activism of Afro-Peruvians urging for protection from the state, rather than violence. In other words, the liberal press did not approve of the open mobilization of Afro-Peruvians for meaningful freedom.⁴¹ As the possibilities of Afro-Peruvian activism expanded, *El Comercio*'s disapproval began to manifest itself as fear in the following year.

On the Battlefields

Later in 1856, the liberal press promoted an image of Afro-Peruvians as specific types of supporters — as defenders — of the Castilla administration. This circulation of “defender” images occurred in the same year when General Vivanco initiated a conservative rebellion and planned to create a new constitution for Peru that would reinstitute slavery. On April 12, 1856, in response to the most recent publication of the *El Heraldo* newspaper, which had suggested that the Castilla administration “destroy itself,” and had recommended the installation of a government that would retract emancipation, an *El Comercio* editor claimed that Afro-Peruvians thought, “Este periódico ataca al Gobierno, lo hiere con teson, por lo tanto, si nosotros herimos al que hiere al Gobierno, este no puede castigarnos, luego tenemos impunidad para destrozarnos al papel que desea nuestra esclavitud.”⁴² The editor implied that if *El Heraldo* continued to publish articles that promoted

⁴⁰ “Carta a los negros manumisos,” *El Comercio*, December 12, 1856.; “Nuevo Atentado Cometido,” *El Comercio*, April 3, 1854.; “Cañete,” *El Comercio*, January 11, 1854.; Look at “Carta a los Negros Manumisos,” “Nuevo Atentado Cometido,” “Cañete.” For each of these letters, either the editor of *El Comercio* or the author of the letters themselves wrote a prefatory comment explaining to whom the letter was addressed and the issues presented in the letters.

⁴¹ Aguirre, *Agentes de su propia libertad*, 253.; Carlos Aguirre explains that before December of 1854, Afro-Peruvian cimarrones were living on the margins of society because they were resisting a system that defended slavery. The Echenique administration had been protecting the institution of slavery. This letter of the Asin and Chavarria family and its publication in *El Comercio* demonstrate that the state and liberal press transitioned from explicitly defending the slavery to defending a restricted vision of emancipation for formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians.

⁴² “El Heraldo de Lima,” *El Comercio*, April 12, 1856.

the reinstatement of slavery and elimination of the Castilla administration, Afro-Peruvians would hurt the newspaper's writers in response. Moreover, the editor communicated that the state would not punish Afro-Peruvians for physically hurting *El Heraldo* editors because they "had impunity to destroy the paper" that desired their slavery,⁴³ and further shows that the liberal press perceived Afro-Peruvians as receiving more leeway with the law and state authorities because their freedom was targeted by conservative rebels. This article demonstrates that the liberal press thought that the emancipation of Afro-Peruvians under Castilla provided them with sufficient protection.

However, this article also conveys that Afro-Peruvians had been mobilizing themselves against possible infringements on their rights, including conservative efforts to reinstate slavery. This mobilization becomes clear in the following excerpt of the article: "Luego los negros [...] tienen ojos para ver que la calle de Valladolid está empedrada con buenos guijarros; tienen manos para extraer esas piedras y lanzarlas sobre esa imprenta de donde sale diariamente ese grito que proclama el sistema destruido en la Palma."⁴⁴ This image of Afro-Peruvians destroying the *El Heraldo* office suggests that formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians envisioned themselves as supporters of Ramón Castilla, but also conveys that Afro-Peruvians created a prominent and powerful public opinion against General Vivanco and his followers in Lima in 1856. They had been organizing themselves and publicly expressing their opposition to the conservative rebellion.

This image of Afro-Peruvians throwing rocks and destroying the *Heraldo* office echoes the unexplained arrest and torture of the Asin and Chavarria family. For Manuel Piol and Commander Barquero, the alleged idea that the Asin and Chavarria family had constructed weapons for use against the police was enough to arrest and punish them physically.⁴⁵ They feared the possibility

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Look to page 11 of this paper for an excerpt of the Asin and Chavarria family letter detailing this incident.

of an Afro-Peruvian uprising. In this article, an *El Comercio* writer was advising *El Heraldo* editors to halt publications supporting General Vivanco in order to avoid the possibility of an attack from Afro-Peruvians. Both the experience of the Asin and Chavarria family and the "defender image" used by the *El Comercio* editor demonstrate white fear, of the state and liberal press, of a "race war" following abolition.

A couple months later, on December 11th, another contributor to *El Comercio* recognized the power of Afro-Peruvian mobilization in an article entitled, "Letter to Freed Blacks." In particular, the author demanded that Afro-Peruvians join government efforts to combat the armies of Generals Vivanco and Echenique in order to guard their freedom and the nation.⁴⁶ This call for Afro-Peruvians to join war efforts, like the last article, implied that there was a significant number of Afro-Peruvians publicly speaking out against the conservative rebellion, and thus highlighted the prominence of the Afro-Peruvian public opinion in Lima. This call, in addition to the aforementioned image of Afro-Peruvians destroying the *Heraldo* office, communicates that the liberal press envisioned Afro-Peruvians as defenders of the Castilla administration, and, therefore of the Peruvian government and state. However, simultaneously, this tall order took away from Black emancipation because it implied that Afro-Peruvians owed the Castilla administration their lives on the battlefields since Castilla "garantiza vuestros derechos."⁴⁷

By early 1857, *El Comercio* recognized Afro-Peruvians fighting against the conservative rebels, supporting the image of Afro-Peruvians as defenders again. For example, on February 6, 1857, one article, while attempting to name and debunk the propaganda of General Vivanco, conveyed that Afro-Peruvians were heroes of the nation. In particular, the article addressed a rumor that General Castilla had given black people weapons to assassinate Peruvians randomly and

⁴⁶ "Carta a los negros manumisos," *El Comercio*, December 12, 1856.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

refuted this rumor by asking "¿A quién han asesinado los manumisos?"⁴⁸ The author then explained that Vivanco and other conservative rebels had, on the contrary, been killing formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians, including those fighting for the Castilla administration,⁴⁹ and thus recognized the sacrifice of Afro-Peruvian lives to the stability and preservation of the Peruvian government. In another *El Comercio* article, published in early 1857, the author said, "los negros han compendido la guerra, que es á ellos á quienes se quiere volver á la esclavitud y con heroismo se han lanzado al combate."⁵⁰ This author contends that Afro-Peruvians knew that the conservative rebellion opposed their liberty, and consequently, were devoting themselves to protecting it on the battlefield.

Although the 1857 articles presented Afro-Peruvians as defenders and martyrs in the civil war against conservative rebels, we must remember that previous articles reaffirmed white fear of "Black threats" and a "race war" after abolition. In 1854, *El Comercio* expressed fear at the prospect of Black people in Ecuador gaining government offices, thus communicating that the liberal press disapproved of the political mobilization of Afro-Peruvians. In 1855, editors published the letter of the Asin and Chavarria family without a prefatory comment, and in 1856, used the possibility of an attack from Afro-Peruvians to halt the publication of an opposing newspaper. The explicit disapproval of Black leadership in Peru, the silence around demands for a fuller emancipation, and the reference to violence from Afro-Peruvians all speak to how the liberal press was participating in the construction of race in Lima after abolition. The combination of white fear and the representation of Afro-Peruvians as defenders and martyrs communicate that the liberal press, although disapproving of Afro-Peruvian rebellion, sanctioned mobilization and

⁴⁸ "Los siervos de la rebelión," *El Comercio*, February 6, 1857.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ "Los negros manumisos," *El Comercio*, January 27, 1857.

organizing that defended the state. These articles illustrate the divergence between the liberal press and Afro-Peruvians over the direction and possibilities of Afro-Peruvian activism, and therefore, the meaning of emancipation.

Redefining Emancipation from 1856-1857

In the late 1850s, Afro-Peruvians found ways to express and propel forward their visions of emancipation in the face of slaveholders hanging on to the remnants of slavery. As Peter Blanchard points out in his own scholarship, after abolition, many formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians had no choice but to remain working on the plantations of their former owners because the government did not provide them with resources needed for their economic independence, such as land, which would have allowed them to work separately from their former owners and potentially become independent farmers.⁵¹ Some Afro-Peruvians did have access to land, but as sharecroppers who had to contribute unpaid labor to slaveholders at the time of harvest.⁵² In the Chancay Valley, freed Afro-Peruvians who did not have any access to land and worked on plantations received very small wages, if any.⁵³ As Blanchard demonstrates in his work, despite the abolition of slavery in 1854, former slaveholders and the Peruvian state still found means to control and exploit the labor of Afro-Peruvians. To them, the emancipation of Afro-Peruvians did not include control over their own labor.

The liberal press viewed Afro-Peruvians as permanent laborers of the nation as well. In February of 1856, an *El Comercio* article proposed that the government monitor and distribute their labor, reaffirming the notion that Afro-Peruvians must exclusively form part of the working

⁵¹ Blanchard, *Slavery & Abolition in Early Republican Peru*, 214.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Blanchard, *Slavery & Abolition in Early Republican Peru*, 214.

class. Specifically, in this article, published almost a year after the Asin and Chavarria family letter, *El Comercio* editors complained about the arrival of Chinese migrants in Peru, who mainly worked on plantations. The author argued that this migration was not necessary because “libertos,” freed Afro-Peruvians, could work the fields instead. The author said, “Por qué no se obliga á trabajar á los libertos cuya mayor parte se halla entregado á la ociosidad y al robo.”⁵⁴ The reference to “forcing” Afro-Peruvians on the fields communicates that the labor of Afro-Peruvians, despite the abolition of slavery, should have been monitored and determined by the state as well. Thus, from the perspective of the liberal press, the emancipation of the Afro-Peruvians did not include agency over their labor, but rather included constant surveillance and guardianship. Afro-Peruvians in Huaraz, within the province of Ancash, disagreed with this notion.

Similar to the Chancay Valley, in the years after abolition, several plantations in Ancash were relying on the labor of formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians. In January of 1856, an *El Comercio* article entitled, “Sucesos de Huaras [sic],” explained that a group of freed Afro-Peruvians enlisted as soldiers fighting for the side of the Castilla administration destroyed the plantation of their former slaveholder in the city of Huaraz.⁵⁵ Perhaps, they had worked in this plantation up until their enlistment.⁵⁶ The article read,

Los negros en número de doscientos se han retirado á Huarás, pero talando notos en absoluto la hacienda de San José en que han cabado todo su furor, á pesar del respeto y cariño que siempre han tenido á su antiguo amo al pacífico y honrado señor D. Gerónimo Gonzalez. No se comprende lo que esto *significa*; pero es un hecho que este hacendado ha sido arruinado completamente.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ “Chinos,” *El Comercio*, February 18, 1856.

⁵⁵ “Los sucesos de Huaras,” *El Comercio*, January 20, 1857.

⁵⁶ “Republica peruana: Prefectura del departamento de Ancash,” *El Comercio*, December 25, 1856.; This article suggests that several regions of Ancash, aside from Huaraz, had been relying on the labor of formerly enslaved peoples. Months after the incident in Huaraz, this article reported that Afro-Peruvians, who were formerly enslaved, had been working on a plantation in San Jose, Ancash. Given this evidence and the scholarship of Peter Blanchard, it is probable that the soldiers in Huaraz had previously worked on the plantation they destroyed after abolition.

⁵⁷ “Los sucesos de Huaras,” *El Comercio*, January 20, 1857.; The original document italicized the word “significa.”; English translation: 200 black people have retreated to Huaraz, while totally tearing down the plantation of San Jose, which they have destroyed with all their fury, despite the respect and kindness they always held towards their previous owner, the peaceful and honored Don Gerónimo Gonzalez. We do not understand what this *means*; but it is a fact that the plantation has been destroyed

In the excerpt above, the editor claimed that the soldiers had respected the "peaceful and honored" Gerónimo Gonzalez, their former owner, and thus could not find a reason why the soldiers would have destroyed the plantation "with all their fury." However, as mentioned before, like many formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians, perhaps these soldiers had been forced to work on the Huaraz plantation after abolition because they had no land and no other option. Or, perhaps, Gerónimo Gonzalez had sharecropped the land to the soldiers and ordered them to work without pay on his fields during the time of harvest.⁵⁸ Thus, in contrast to the conclusion of the *El Comercio* editor, the Afro-Peruvian soldiers did have a reason to destroy the plantation — it represented a limitation on their agency over their own labor. This elimination of the plantation symbolizes opposition to the permanent position of Afro-Peruvians as laborers and forming part of the working class. *El Comercio* disagreed with this type of mobilization:

Esto significa, diremos nosotros, que de un partido que en Huarás tiene por defensores á 200 negros bandidos debe temer el pais mucho, y especialmente los hacendados de la costa que se hallan amenazados de ser victimas en sus personas, familias é intereses por este modo con que Castilla hace la guerra á la revolucion de los pueblos. Esto significa que el negro autorizado y armado por Castilla, podrá robar, talar y asesinar; pero que será inútil á su Libertador y nada temible al G. Vivanco, de cuyas fuerzas correrán siempre.⁵⁹

According to this editor, the Afro-Peruvians soldiers, whom the *El Comercio* newspaper communicated were defenders and martyrs before, were now "bandits" and people whom "the country must fear very much." Moreover, the second excerpt conveys that Afro-Peruvians enlisted

completely.

⁵⁸ Blanchard, *Slavery & Abolition in Early Republican Peru*, 214.; As mentioned before, Peter Blanchard explains in his work that many Afro-Peruvians were forced to work on the plantations of their former slaveholders after abolition. Afro-Peruvians who were able to find land were often sharecroppers. The owners of the sharecropped land often forced them to work on their fields without pay during the time of harvest.

⁵⁹ "Los sucesos de Huaras," *El Comercio*, January 20, 1857.; English translation: This means, we would say, that the country should fear very much the group of 200 bandits Huaraz has as defenders, and especially the plantation owners of the coast who have been threatened, along with their families. It is along these interests that Castilla makes war against the revolutions of the pueblos. This means that the authorized black person, armed by Castilla, can rob, destroy and assassinate, but will be useless to the Liberator and not scary at all to General Vivanco, whose forces they always run away from.

in the war were taking advantage of their position as soldiers to "steal, destroy and assassinate" and, consequently, were "useless" to Ramón Castilla in the fight against conservative rebels. This excerpt suggests that Afro-Peruvians were physically hurting the nation, and even contributing to a possible Vivanco victory since they "ran away" from his forces. Considering previous examples of editors that framed Afro-Peruvians as defenders of the nation who owed the government their lives on the battlefields, and thus took away from Black emancipation, this example went a step further by criminalizing the soldiers in Huaraz. *El Comercio* stripped the titles of "defender" and "hero" from them because they were fighting to establish their vision of emancipation.

The aforementioned desire to control the labor of Afro-Peruvians, along with the criminalization of Afro-Peruvian activism in Huaraz, reverberate the white fear present in "El Heraldo de Lima."⁶⁰ The first of the two articles argued that if the government neglected action and left the labor of Afro-Peruvians unmonitored, Afro-Peruvians would continue to devote themselves to "idleness and theft."⁶¹ This image of "idleness" referred to Afro-Peruvians not working on the fields and perhaps mobilizing themselves in an effort to establish their visions of emancipation, like the soldiers of Huaraz. "Theft" might have referred to Afro-Peruvians who did not have enough means to survive and therefore had to steal in order to subsist.⁶² Theft as means of survival connects back to the period before abolition in Peru, as Carlos Aguirre highlights in his own work. Cimarrones had to revert to banditry in order to survive, resist the institution of slavery, and protect their freedom.⁶³ Thus, this call to the government to force Afro-Peruvians on the field

⁶⁰ "El Heraldo de Lima," *El Comercio*, April 12, 1856.; "Chinos," *El Comercio*, February 18, 1856.; "Los sucesos de Huaras," *El Comercio*, January 20, 1857. In the first two clauses of this sentence, I am referring specifically to my analysis of the "Chinos" and "Sucesos de Huaras" articles, respectively.

⁶¹ "Chinos," *El Comercio*, February 18, 1856.

⁶² "Documentos Parlamentarios," *El Comercio*, October 30, 1857.; This excerpt from a congressional record reported that some Afro-Peruvians had to steal in order to support themselves.

⁶³ Aguirre, *Agentes de su propia libertad*, 253.; English translation: He informed Hurtado of the incident, he [Hurtado] then took his hat, weapon (?), and gun, and directed himself to the place of the incident, and then spoke with his own words about the education and employment, with the goal of having them each one retreat without

and prevent “idleness and theft” symbolizes opposition to the mobilization of formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians advocating for an emancipation that included economic and social mobility.

Later in 1857, *El Comercio* released a police report that demonstrates the manners in which Afro-Peruvians who were not at war, but were in Lima, advocated against the continuous surveillance and brutality of the state. In this report written by Jose Maria de la Portilla, the officer recounts his investigation of a group of Afro-Peruvians in Lima, which had allegedly injured the Superintendent of police officers, Manuel Hurtado.⁶⁴ When de la Portilla finds the group of Afro-Peruvians on Maravillas Street, a fight breaks out between him, the accompanying police officers, and a group of Afro-Peruvians. An officer at the scene informed Hurtado of the fight:

La aviso a Hurtado la ocurrencia, esto en el acto tomando su gorra, sable y una pistola, se dirigió al sitio de la ocurrencia, y hablandoles con palabras propias de su educacion y empleo a fin de que se retirarse cada uno de ellos a su casa y no interrumpiesen el orden publico, los negros atrevidos le contestaron a palos encorralandolo, y las palabras que decian los negros eran: matar á la policia, viva Castilla, matar blancos.⁶⁵

Here we can see another instance of the state reaffirming the notion that Afro-Peruvians must form part of the laboring class. As mentioned above, when Hurtado arrived at the scene, he began lecturing the Afro-Peruvians on "their education and employment," so that they would return to their homes and no longer "interrupt public order." Perhaps, Hurtado assumed that they were unemployed and suggested that they find a job. Additionally, considering previous articles discussing the place of Afro-Peruvians in the working class,⁶⁶ Hurtado may have even suggested that they work on plantation fields and under the supervision of former slaveholders. Similar to

disrupting the public order, the bold black men answered him back with sticks, corralling him, and the words that the black men said were: Kill the police, long live Castilla, kill the whites.

⁶⁴ “Republica Peruana,” *El Comercio*, September 2, 1857.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ “Chinos,” *El Comercio*, February 18, 1856.; “Proyecto Sobre los Esclavos,” *El Comercio*, February 2, 1855.; Refer back to the discussion of the “Chinos” articles on page 18. Another article, titled “Proyecto sobre los Esclavos” proposed the formerly enslaved people stay under the “surveillance” of their former slaveholders to work on the fields, conveying that formerly enslaved Afro-Peruvians must form part of the nation’s working class.

the *El Comercio* editor who opposed abolition in Ecuador in 1854, and Manuel Piol who arrested the Asin and Chavarria family while they were celebrating emancipation in 1855, Manuel Hurtado echoed the white fear of free Black people disrupting "public tranquility." Regardless of what Hurtado said about the education and employment of Afro-Peruvians, his position as a superintendent in the police force and his default to lecturing on their employment reveals that the state continued and increased the criminalization of Afro-Peruvians in the years following 1855 to 1857.

Despite this criminalization, Afro-Peruvians in this report rejected Hurtado's lecture and demanded recognition of their vision of emancipation. After Hurtado gave his speech, some members of the group responded with, "Kill the police, long live Castilla, kill the whites." The middle phrase, "long live Castilla," implicated the abolition of slavery and reminded the police officers of the freedom of Afro-Peruvians, suggesting that state authorities had repeatedly been challenging the boundaries of their emancipation. Furthermore, the first phrase, "Kill the police," communicated that this instance of violence between the police and Afro-Peruvians was not the first during this second civil war. Even while the Castilla administration was fighting against a conservative rebellion, with the aid of Afro-Peruvians, the state was denying them peace and protection in their communities and doubting their freedom at home.⁶⁷ Together, the phrases "Kill the police" and "long live Castilla" conveyed that emancipation included protection from the state, not violence. Rather than accepting Hurtado's definition of emancipation, Afro-Peruvians refused to leave and proposed another version of freedom instead, echoing the vision of the Asin and Chavarria family.

⁶⁷ "Kill the police," also called for the mobilization of Afro-Peruvians against state brutality.

The last of the three phrases, “kill the whites,” asserts that Afro-Peruvians advocated for a multifaceted emancipation that did not just include agency over one's own body and labor, and protection from the state, but also encompassed a social acknowledgement and respect of their humanity. The article, “Matanza canina,” described how Afro-Peruvians mobilized to accomplish it. In this article, *El Comercio* editors complained about the number of dogs killed by *aguadores*, who were people employed by the government to clean the streets and kill stray dogs.⁶⁸ The authors later revealed this article was a joke and said:

Ojala que los maten a todos juntos! solo que por no dar lugar a los perros no nos pongan en su rasgo en el "Comercio," diciéndonos las groserias que nos dicen los negros y los artesanos inciviles á quienes tenemos necesidad de tocar en jeneral, hemos tratado de congratularnos con los perros, para ahorrarles el trabajo de redactar un articulo ordinario y soez.⁶⁹

This excerpt demonstrates that Afro-Peruvians had been complaining and standing up against jokes and disrespectful commentary regarding race in the newspaper.⁷⁰ This advocacy suggests that Afro-Peruvians had been envisioning an emancipation that included social recognition of their humanity and place in the nation as citizens. The liberal press mocked their vision. Specifically, at the end of the same excerpt, the authors said that they created this article to save dogs time from writing a complaint about *aguaderos*, thus ridiculing and invalidating Afro-Peruvians who did stand up against disrespectful commentary. When equating the efforts of Afro-

⁶⁸ Stewart King and Beverly Tomek, ed., *Encyclopedia of Free Blacks and People of Color in the Americas* (New York: Facts on File, 2011), 609.; Many of the *aguadores* were Afro-Peruvians. In fact, King and Tomek explain that the position of *aguador* was a remnant of the colonial era, and was a governmental effort attempting to impose the responsibility of maintaining the streets clean onto Afro-Peruvians.

⁶⁹ “Matanza canina,” *El Comercio*, May 6, 1856.; English translation: Let’s hope that they kill all of them at once! Just because we didn’t give a place to the dogs, they mention us in their piece in the “Comercio,” calling us all the bad words that the black people and uncivil artisans call us, who we have the need to touch (?) in general, we have tried to congratulate ourselves with the dogs, to save them the effort of writing an article that is ordinary and rude.

⁷⁰ “Chinos,” *El Comercio*, February 18, 1856.; This disrespectful commentary may have included positions promoted by the liberal press that restricted their emancipation, such as the position that Afro-Peruvians must exclusively make up the laboring force of the country to maintain social order. Refer back to the discussion of the “Chinos” article on page 18.

Peruvians to an action performed by dogs, the editors dehumanized Afro-Peruvians and ridiculed their struggle to put forth a version of emancipation that respected their humanity.

In another example, a gossip columnist explained that a “phenomenon” was gaining traction in Lima — white people were insulting black people on the street and black people were responding with “revenge-insults.”⁷¹ Such commentary speaks to an environment of racial tension between black and non-black Peruvians in the post-abolition period. Moreover, the author recommended that Afro-Peruvians, instead, remain passive to the insults of white people, further mocking and invalidating efforts of Afro-Peruvians advocating for social recognition. While attempting to define the boundaries of emancipation for Afro-Peruvians, the liberal press actively took part in the construction of race in the country.

Although these articles undermined the advocacy of Afro-Peruvians, they also offer evidence of their activism against dehumanization and rejection of their definition of emancipation. In the "Matanza Canina" article, the author explained that Afro-Peruvians reacted with "groserias" whenever the newspaper published an article disrespectful of their position in national society.⁷² In the gossip-columnist article, "Los blancos y negros," the author explained that Afro-Peruvians responded with insults when white people insulted them.⁷³ The explicit mention of Afro-Peruvians reacting to and opposing comments that proposed limited definitions of their freedom suggests that efforts of Afro-Peruvians to make their envisioned emancipation a reality were gaining prominence in Lima. Ultimately, while the liberal press dehumanized Afro-Peruvians and envisioned an increasingly limited form of citizenship for them, a growing number

⁷¹ “Los blancos y los negros,” *El Comercio*, January 9, 1857.

⁷² “Matanza canina,” *El Comercio*, May 6, 1856.

⁷³ “Los blancos y los negros,” *El Comercio*, January 9, 1857.

of Afro-Peruvians were imagining a multi-faceted emancipation that included some degree of racial equality and respect of their status as citizens in the national society.

Conclusion

In the months leading up to the abolition of slavery in Peru, the *El Comercio* newspaper published several articles expressing support for the emancipation of enslaved peoples and for Ramón Castilla, the president who would eventually announce the decree abolishing slavery in December of 1854.⁷⁴ However, upon further examination, it becomes clear that *El Comercio* did not support all forms of emancipation, particularly those envisioned by Afro-Peruvians, both before and after abolition.

As explained in the first section of this paper, after hearing the news that Ecuador had abolished slavery, the *El Comercio* newspaper reacted strongly against that decision. In the article entitled, “Ecuador,” the author argued that formerly enslaved black people should not gain all civil and political rights because they could create chaos and social disorder. This article reflects a sentiment that appears year after year in *El Comercio* issues following abolition — the sentiment being that the state must monitor and restrict the emancipation of Afro-Peruvians in order to maintain public order. In 1855, Corporal Piol and Commander Barquero arrested and punished the Asin and Chavarria family due to the allegation that they had built weapons for use against the police.⁷⁵ Later, in February of 1856, *El Comercio* editors suggested that the state force Afro-Peruvians to work on the fields in order to reduce “idleness and theft.”⁷⁶ The liberal press was

⁷⁴ Héctor López Martínez, *Los 150 años de el Comercio, 1839-1989* (Edición de “El Comercio,” 1989), 61, 63-64.; Peruvian historian, Hector López, explains in his book that *El Comercio* expressed support for Ramón Castilla and the abolition of slavery. However, considering the articles presented in this paper, I argue that *El Comercio* only supported certain forms of emancipation.

⁷⁵ “Clamor al excelentísimo señor,” *El Comercio*, February 11, 1855.

⁷⁶ “Chinos,” *El Comercio*, February 18, 1856.

proposing a restricted version of the emancipation of Afro-Peruvians. Yet, at times, it seemed that *El Comercio* supported Afro-Peruvians and their efforts to maintain their emancipation after abolition. Editors named Afro-Peruvians, who were fighting on the side of the Castilla administration against General Vivanco, “heroes.”⁷⁷ However, the newspaper was quick to strip away this label once Afro-Peruvian soldiers in Huaraz destroyed the plantation of their former slaveholder,⁷⁸ communicating that their place in Peruvian national society must not be restricted to the working class.

Throughout the constant rejection of the visions of emancipation of Afro-Peruvians, *El Comercio* contributed to the construction of race in the nation. As explained in the “Directing the Mobilization of Afro-Peruvians - Battlefields” section, editors of *El Comercio* used the image of Afro-Peruvians attacking the *El Heraldo* office to convince them to stop publishing articles in favor of the conservative rebellion.⁷⁹ They threatened *El Heraldo* writers by reaffirming “white fear” of a “Black threat.” Moreover, the editors who commented on the actions of the Huaraz soldiers claimed that the nation should fear any Afro-Peruvian soldier armed by the Castilla administration.⁸⁰ The *El Comercio* newspaper was reframing Afro-Peruvian activism as evidence of possible “race wars” in the nation.

While *El Comercio* participated in the construction of race, Afro-Peruvians continuously advocated for their visions of emancipation. Nearly two months after the abolition of slavery in Peru, the Asin and Chavarria family wrote to the President and demanded that he punish Manuel Piol and Commander Barquero for their unjust punishment.⁸¹ They decided to publish their letter

⁷⁷ “Los negros manumisos,” *El Comercio*, January 27, 1857.

⁷⁸ “Los sucesos de Huaraz,” *El Comercio*, January 20, 1857.

⁷⁹ “El Heraldo de Lima,” *El Comercio*, April 12, 1856.

⁸⁰ “Los sucesos de Huaraz,” *El Comercio*, January 20, 1857.

⁸¹ “Clamor al excelentísimo señor,” *El Comercio*, February 11, 1855.

in the national newspaper and demanded recognition of an emancipation that included state protection, rather than violence. The soldiers of Huaraz destroyed the plantation of their former slaveholder and established that their place in national society was not exclusively in the fields. They emphasized that their emancipation included agency over their own bodies. And in 1857, on the eve of the second civil war's end, Afro-Peruvians still had to prove and remind the state of their emancipation while also mobilizing for a Peruvian national society that would recognize racial equality and citizenship. Ultimately, in the years following abolition, Afro-Peruvians advocated for a multifaceted emancipation in the face of the state, conservative rebels, and liberal press, setting up the stage for future movements of Afro-Peruvian activism.

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