

# Spectacle and Rebellion in Fin de Siècle Brazil: The Commodified Rebel in Machado de Assis's Chronicles

CAROLINA SÁ CARVALHO

*University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill*

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**Abstract:** In the present article, I examine Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis's five chronicles, published between 1894-1897 in the Rio de Janeiro newspaper *A Gazeta de Notícias*, on the Brazilian Republic's assault against the Canudos community in Northeastern Brazil. Focusing on Machado's critique of the role of communication technologies, and particularly print news, in *fin de siècle* Brazil, I argue that he makes use of the transformation of the messianic community into a national mediatic event to thematize the birth of a consumer society, the violent expansion of global capitalist networks and state power, authoritarianism, and the contradictory values of what he refers to as "bourgeois industrial society."

**Keywords:** Media studies, commodification, Canudos, imagined communities, *sertão*

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In his last chronicle published in the Rio de Janeiro periodical *A Gazeta de Notícias*, Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis comments on the public fuss over the community of Canudos and its leader, the prophet Antônio Conselheiro (*A Semana*, 14 Feb. 1897). Rumors of the emergence of an anti-republican community guided by a "fanatic" leader in the backlands of Bahia had sporadically appeared in national news since Conselheiro and his followers settled in the region in 1893 (after almost two decades of pilgrimage in the semi-

arid backlands of the northeast region of Brazil). At the banks of the Vaza-Barris river, the pilgrims founded a large and fully functional community that attracted thousands of people.<sup>1</sup> The settlement, called Belo Monte by its inhabitants and known as Canudos in the coastal urban centers, posed a problem for the local labor economy, and so it attracted the attention of civil authorities and journalists in Bahia. But it was when Belo Monte resisted its forced dispersal that “Canudos” became a national media phenomenon. The *conselheiristas* defended their right to occupy the land and became central to the “conversion of the military campaign into the revolutionary crusade for the consolidation of the [new] regime” (Ventura 114).<sup>2</sup>

The so-called “War of Canudos,” a year-long conflict between the Republican army and the community, was also a battle fought through telegraphs and newspapers (Levine; Nogueira Galvão), which helped to circulate fantastic—and often conflicting—stories about the *conselheiristas*. They were represented as “backward fanatics,” “monarchists,” “bandits,” or incredibly resilient “starving souls” who had defeated three military expeditions before their final destruction in October 1897. Writing in his series of chronicles for the *Gazeta de Notícias*, titled *A Semana*, Machado addresses the torrent of images and stories in the coastal urban centers portraying the distant and exotic preacher of the *sertão* and his “fanatic” army. Machado’s February 14, 1897 chronicle,

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<sup>1</sup> Estimates range from 6,000 to 25,000 people. Historian Robert Levine suggests Canudos became the second largest city in Bahia, after Salvador. Other historians, such as José Calasans argued that this is likely an exaggeration. Calasans, whose work relies largely on oral history and testimonies from Canudos survivors, showed that diverse groups migrated to Belo Monte in its first years: “Vinhã, sobretudo, daqueles lugares por onde peregrinara, durante mais de 20 anos, o Santo Conselheiro. Gente do Tucano do Itapicuru, de Entre Rios, de Inhambupe, do Conde, de Pombal, de Monte Santo, de Alagoinhas, de Massacará, de Jeremoabo, de Curaçá, de Campos, de Itabaianinha, de Vila Cristina, do Geru. Pessoas de recursos, que vendiam sua terra e seu gado. Homens e mulheres paupérrimos. Índios do aldeamento de Mirandela e Rodelas, certamente localizados na rua dos Caboclos; pretos libertados pela lei áurea, conhecidos por ‘13 de maio,’ que deviam predominar na ‘rua dos negros.’ Doentes mentais, aleijados, incapacitados que viviam das esmolas do Bom Jesus e esperavam seus milagres. Todos atraídos pelo poder de Antonio Conselheiro, pelos seus conselhos, pelo lenitivo que ele lhes podia proporcionar” (“Canudos: origem e desenvolvimento” 73)

<sup>2</sup> The Brazilian Republic was established in the wake of a military coup against D. Pedro II on November 15, 1889—nearly seven decades after most of its Latin American neighbors. The period that followed was marked by political instability and a series of struggles between different political forces: politicians who represented a new bourgeois class, the military, old landowners, and aristocrats. For a historical overview of the social and political context of the so-called “Velha República,” see Bethell. For a historical contextualization of Canudos, see Levine.

published during the preparations for the third military expedition, reflects on an experience that is proper to the rise of something akin to mass culture: “Conheci ontem o que é celebridade. Estava comprando gazetas [...] quando vi chegar uma mulher simples e dizer ao vendedor com voz descansada: ‘Me dá uma folha que traz o retrato desse homem que briga lá fora.’” In the same chronicle, Machado significantly refers to both the event’s actuality and its memory: “O nome de Antônio Conselheiro acabará por entrar na memória desta mulher anônima, e não sairá mais [...] um dia contará a história à filha, depois à neta.” Maybe in a hundred years, Assis continues, another author will write a few valuable paragraphs about the conflict, and someone will celebrate the centenary of the extinct “sect.” Machado seems to have realized that the conversion of Conselheiro into an image for public consumption already signified his death.

Machado’s February 14, 1897 chronicle would be his last for the series *A semana*, published in *A Gazeta de Notícias*. *A semana* was his longest and most notorious contribution to print news. It consisted of 247 weekly texts written from April 1892 to February 1897, and it was the only series of chronicles to which Machado attached his own name. Arguing that there should be more attention paid to Machado’s long-overlooked newspaper chronicles, critics such as John Gledson and Massaud Moisés have noted that Machado not only dedicated years of his life to writing them but also thought it worth republishing six chronicles written for *A Semana* in the collection *Página recolhidas* (1899). Among them is “Canção de piratas,” Machado’s first chronicle about Canudos. After the end of *A Semana*, Machado only wrote two other chronicles, both in 1900 and as a substitute for Olavo Bilac.

In the present article, I examine Machado’s five chronicles on the Brazilian Republic’s assault against the Belo Monte community published in *A semana* between 1894 and 1897. My goal is to investigate Machado’s critique of the role of technologies of communication, and particularly print news, in the social, cultural and political environment of *fin de siècle* Brazil. In his chronicles about the transformation of the messianic community into a national mediatic event, the author thematizes the birth of a consumer society, the violent expansion of global capitalist networks and state power, authoritarianism, and the contradictory values of what he referred to in one of his chronicles as “bourgeois industrial society” (*A Semana*, 31 Jan. 1897).

*Normalcy and Governance: The First Three Chronicles*

The first of the four chronicles in which Machado mentions Conselheiro is “Canção de piratas,” which was first published in 1894, one year after the foundation of Belo Monte and before the start of the so-called “War of Canudos.” In the chronicle, Machado compares the preacher and his followers—not without some irony—to the pirates described by Romantic poets, who criticized a life regimented by calendars, watches, and taxes, and who “sacudiram as sandálias à porta da civilização e saíram à vida livre.” When the chronicle was published, Canudos had not yet confronted state forces, but Machado nonetheless refers to a telegram calling its inhabitants “2,000 armed men.”

The comparison between the *conselheiristas* and the Romantic pirates was Machado’s ironic response to the alarmist telegrams that local landowners and authorities started to exchange after Conselheiro settled in the region. If Conselheiro first appeared as a problem in the context of local religious disputes, or as a pitiable curiosity in the testimony of metropolitan travelers, after the foundation of the village, he started to be represented as a real threat to local economic powers (Campos Johnson). Landowners complained that workers were leaving their farms to follow the prophet, and that the community posed a danger to private property in the region. The community was described as “criminal” and “anti-capitalist.” An account of a pastoral mission sent to Canudos in May 1895 to bring Conselheiro and his people under church control—the only extensive written eyewitness account of the village before the military expeditions—affirms that *conselheiristas* did not pay taxes and that private property did not exist in Canudos: “Whoever had goods disposed of them and handed over the product to the good Conselheiro, reserving for themselves only twenty percent” (qtd. in Campos Johnson 101).<sup>3</sup> A local landowner accused Canudos of being a threat to private property, ending a letter by exclaiming that Conselheiro’s doctrine was communism.

“Canção de piratas” draws on these representations, while it inverts its values. Bandits (or pirates) challenge civilization and its regulations, but in the name of freedom and poetry. A similar procedure appears in another chronicle

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<sup>3</sup> The mission stayed there for one week and, having failed to exert any influence over the inhabitants, was then suspended.

Machado published in September 1896. The chronicle starts with a defense of Manuel Benta Hora, a preacher whom the press wanted to see in jail. As the tensions with Canudos grew, these preachers were progressively hemmed in within the discourse of the law. Departing from an article in the Bahian newspaper that exhorted the government to arrest the prophet, Machado decides to play with juridical logic: what is the crime committed by Benta Hora? Preaching? Does freedom of speech apply to prophets, or only to journalists and politicians? Deceiving? Who can say that what the prophet preaches is false? After all, he argues, “as descobertas últimas são estupendas: tiram-se retratos de ossos e de fetos. Há muito que os espíritas afirmam que os mortos escrevem pelos dedos dos vivos. Tudo é possível neste mundo e neste final de um grande século.” Ultimately, Machado’s chronicle leads the reader to ask what is, after all, the difference between a journalist and a preacher, a politician and a prophet, and between science and myth.

By dissolving binaries, Machado questions the logic that sustains the production of otherness and legitimizes the power over people’s bodies and minds. This is not a new theme for Machado. In his novella *O alienista* (1892) for example, Machado tells the story of a renowned doctor who searches for an objective way to distinguish the lunatics from the sane. Once the doctor realizes that he has put his whole town in the asylum, he concludes that he himself must be the abnormal one. He then releases all the “lunatics” and locks himself up in the asylum. The central issue of *O alienista* is the flimsy scientific pretense of drawing lines between the normal and pathological, and the use of psychiatric discourse in the governance of bodies and peoples. In the first two chronicles that mention Canudos, published in 1894 and 1896, Machado likewise criticizes the attempt to inscribe Conselheiro and his followers into the discourse of disciplinary control or, in his own words, into the “hard prose of the end of the [nineteenth] century”—which could be a reference both to positivism and to the pseudo-scientific naturalism found in the literature of the time. Machado thus thematizes the representation of Canudos in the newspapers to question what these representations tell us about the underlying logic of these systems of representation. But does Machado present an alternative to the “hard prose of the century”? If he does, this alternative is not to be found in Conselheiro’s prose or preaching. This would not suit Machado’s usual skepticism. When Machado mentions Canudos, Conselheiro, or the *conselheiristas* in his chronicles, he

repeatedly declares he does not know anything about them “besides their name.” Only this mystery can be redeemed, because the unknown lies on the side of poetry and the imagination.

***The Truth Inscribed in Conselheiro’s Face: The Fourth Chronicle***

“Os direitos da imaginação e da poesia hão de sempre achar inimiga uma sociedade industrial e burguesa. Em nome deles protesto contra a perseguição que se está fazendo à gente de Antônio Conselheiro. Este homem fundou uma seita a que se não sabe o nome nem a doutrina. Já este mistério é poesia” (*A Semana*, 31 Jan. 1897).

Machado’s fourth chronicle on Canudos was published in January 1897, after the second expedition of Bahia’s police and military forces to the *sertão*. Although hundreds of *conselheiristas* were killed during this expedition, the soldiers were surprised by the unexpected resistance and force of the *sertanejos* and decided to retreat, triggering a national uproar. In the chronicle, Assis protests the persecution of Conselheiro, a man who “fundou uma seita a que se não sabe o nome nem a doutrina.” While Conselheiro’s own words remained unknown, the prophet’s face became the surface where the truth of the sect, and thus the fate of the Brazilian Republic’s crusade, was inscribed.<sup>4</sup>

It was after the defeat of the second expedition to Canudos, organized by the State of Bahia, that the community came into the radar of the federal government. Canudos was transformed into a national public enemy and his movement was

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<sup>4</sup> From this, one might ask what knowledge of the sect was being produced, what voices had to be silenced in this production, and who was given the right to speak. Recent work on Canudos has shown that some peripheral or “unlettered” voices have survived and circulated, especially in more rural areas, through oral history and popular poems (Calasans). From the capital, Machado declared that the public could only imagine what promises the preacher was making. Hence, Machado’s “Romantic pirates” were no more detached from the reality of Canudos than the “fanatic criminals” who appeared in the news. Both were different sides of the same coin, the transformation of Canudos into an extraordinary event. This is why revisionist histories after the 1960s have attempted to rewrite Canudos by challenging its status as “extraordinary,” an exceptional space and time that broke or interrupted the quotidian norm. For more on this, see Borges; and Campos Johnson.

framed as monarchist. The national media largely contributed to the hysteria, with a burst of articles, caricatures, and poetry depicting Conselheiro as a leader of a sect of faithful and resilient fanatics. With his characteristic irony, Machado mocks this public obsession with Canudos, suggesting that a photographer should go to Canudos to “trazer as feições do Conselheiro [...] e colher a verdade inteira sobre [a seita].” The chronicle was published before any reporter or photographer had gone to Canudos—news arrived through telegrams sent by members of the army, or by reporters, who, as Machado remarked, were based in Salvador da Bahia (*A Semana*, 31 Jan. 1897). Like news articles, drawn portraits reproduced in the press at the time were based on a mix of oral testimony, rumors, and collective imaginary, frequently relating Conselheiro to religious and pre-modern figures. On the one hand, the multiplication of images of Conselheiro seemed to increase their mystery and the prophet’s aura. On the other, Machado suggests that the media obsession also responds to a desire to take hold of Conselheiro’s image and his body in the name of progress.

“Trazer as feições do Conselheiro” is not just any kind of representation but the production of a “resemblance through contact” (in the double sense of contact as encounter and inscription), containing both the likeness of the portrait and the technical efficacy of the index (Didi-Huberman), or the trace, which would reveal the true aspects of Canudos. Machado does not claim that the reporter-illustrator-photographer will picture, but that they will “collect” and “bring back” the features of the prophet. When *The New York Times* reported on October 20, 1862 that photographer Matthew Brady had brought bodies from the American Civil War “and laid them in our dooryards and along the streets,” it stressed this double fascination (and horror) with photography as semblance and vestige: “It seems somewhat singular that the same sun that looked down on the faces of the slain, blistering them, blotting out from the bodies all semblance to humanity, and hastening corruption, should have thus caught their features upon canvas, and given them perpetuity forever.”

The idea of an image produced through the supposedly direct imprinting of light on paper, the same light that emanated from the object that was in front of the camera and which, for that reason, maintained its exact form, had an important impact on discourses of truth in the nineteenth century, from history and anthropology to physiognomy, criminology and psychiatry—all of which are related to the belief that the features of Conselheiro could reveal the meaning of

the rebellious community. Connected to the scientific and popular appropriation of these fields of knowledge, the portrait, or rather the face, occupied an important place as the threshold between surface and depth, physical traits and character, as well as the individual and the social “type.”

Much nineteenth-century physiognomic research looked for visual markers for specific populations: the lunatic, the primitive, the criminal. While physiognomy and phrenology long predated the invention of photography, the new medium revitalized both fields, offering what appeared to be a rigorous, scientific basis that would dispense with the occultist connotations of each. As Tom Gunning notes, both the study of the face and the development of photography were driven by a desire to see and know the face in its slightest and most fleeting expressions. Disciplinary institutions such as prisons and hospitals built (or improvised) their own photographic studios and protocols, hoping to apply photographic images to the identification and classification of facial marks of individual or collective madness and degeneration. One of the hypotheses used at the time to explain the formation of the community led by Conselheiro—a hypothesis defended by, among others, the famous doctor Raimundo Nina Rodrigues—associated race and phenotype with religious atavism and innate tendencies to commit crimes (Levine; Costa and Schwarcz). Given this, it is not hard to suppose that a photographic portrait of Conselheiro might be expected to reveal, in Machado’s words, some kind of “truth about the sect.” It is also worth keeping in mind that by the time Machado published this chronicle, he had already published some of his most important novels, in which he consistently derides the popularization in Brazil of strands of positivism, social Darwinism, as well as anthropological criminology and psychiatry.

Machado’s suggestion that a reporter should go to the community and *bring back* the features of Conselheiro also raises the question of distance and proximity, and of the connection between the *sertão* and the urban spaces of the country. It also speaks to the role of communication technologies in forging national imaginaries. At the outset of the third military expedition, which relied upon federal soldiers from the South and was led by the infamous Colonel Moreira César (known as “corta cabeças” after his role in the violent suppression of the federalist revolt in Santa Catarina), Canudos became a national obsession. The military campaign enjoyed unprecedented press coverage, new telegraph



lines were extended to Canudos, and Moreira César's epithet turned the possibility of collecting Conselheiro's "traits" even more literal and sinister.

***Commodification: The Fifth Chronicle***

"Conheci ontem o que é celebridade," writes Machado in his final chronicle for *A Semana*. "Estava comprando gazetas [...] quando vi chegar uma mulher simples e dizer ao vendedor com voz descansada: 'Me dá uma folha que traz o retrato desse homem que briga lá fora'" (*A Semana*, 14 Feb. 1897). In the 1897 chronicle, the question of truth fades away as Machado focuses on the transformations of Canudos into a spectacle and of Conselheiro into a celebrity. Writing as the frenzy around the third military expedition grew, Machado points to the fact that Conselheiro had become more than a subject of newspaper articles: he figured in popular poetry, advertisements for all kinds of goods, and even in carnival costumes. As Machado seems to suggest, Conselheiro had become inscribed in a global language of reproduction, circulation, and consumerism. In a hundred years, writes Machado, there might even be a celebration of Conselheiro's *cabeleira*, "como agora, pelo que diz o *Jornal do Comércio*, comemoraram em Londres o centenário da invenção do chapéu alto."

Machado's comparison of Conselheiro's hairstyle with the top hat, as if one had stumbled upon them together in a *fin de siècle* shop window, is not specious. Placed side by side, they constitute what the urban population—the minority of literate newspaper readers, but also those who shared the news through visual and oral communication, such as Machado's anonymous woman—could recognize as being "the present," a world detached from its context, at the same time distant and available to the public.

The decontextualization of Conselheiro's image in Machado's somewhat incongruous arrangement is purposefully meaningful. The montage evidences the contradictions that lie in modernity itself or, more specifically, in the adoption by a lettered elite of liberal ideals and discourses in the context of a society marked by an only-recently abolished system of slavery. The contradictions proper to this "peripheral capitalism" (to use Roberto Schwarz and John Gledson's concept), which is not to say that "metropole" capitalism does not show analogous contradictions, manifest themselves in Machado's chronicle in two dimensions: 1) the elite's desire to adhere to liberal and bourgeois ideals

while simultaneously rejecting everything that represented the colonial era; and 2) its apparently contradictory aristocratic urge towards distinction through fashion. The top hat—a sign of both bourgeois consumerism and of Europeanized aristocratic distinction—seems to express one side of this “contradiction.” As Jeffrey D. Needell has argued, aristocratic values, anxiety about social status, and an expanding urban market combined to explain the centrality of fashion in bourgeois culture in fin-de-siècle Brazil (156-71). Knowing how to choose a hat was, as other Machado texts show, a question of distinguishing oneself not only from the poor but also from a tropical *petit bourgeoisie* who lacked “good taste.”<sup>5</sup> The implicit goal here was to come ever closer to a European aristocratic model.

Conselheiro’s *cabeleira* becomes an object of curiosity for different, albeit complementary reason. It is one of the marks of what is seen as Brazil’s undesirable “belatedness” in relation to the European modern world. Images of this belatedness, such as popular (and particularly Afro-Brazilian) religiosity, music, and festivities often appeared in the pages of newspapers, accompanied by emphatic words of reproach. About a religious pilgrimage in downtown Rio, for example, Bilac wrote: “Era a idade selvagem que voltava, como uma alma do outro mundo vindo perturbar e envergonhar a vida da idade civilizada” (qtd. in Costa and Schwarcz 93).

In Machado’s February 14, 1897 chronicle (his fifth that mentions Canudos), the possibility of comparing the *conselheiristas* with Romantic pirates, or the invitation to imagine what kind of powerful and mysterious words the prophet used, fades away. The prophet appears as a caricature of himself, a celebrity being consumed by the same system that he refused and mystified by the same media that condemned his mysticism. Conselheiro’s image is not only detached from his words and his community, but his body itself is fragmented, so that the urban public can consume his mane, his beard, or his prophet’s robe. It is in the context of the reproduction and circulation of representations of the exotic prophet Conselheiro that Machado seems to have grasped both the invention of Canudos as a historical event and, in the same gesture, the effacement of the experience of it.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Machado’s “Capítulo dos chapéus.”

<sup>6</sup> Thinking of Conselheiro’s *cabeleira*, one could adopt Ernst Jünger’s words, and say that, at the dawn of the modern technological age, the advent of the event was being “subordinated to its

With his distinctive irony, Machado weaves together the many dimensions of Conselheiro's transformation into a "celebrity" and his inscription into a language of image reproduction, circulation, and consumerism. Among these is the important role of the press and telegraphy at the end of the nineteenth century in shaping the idea of a simultaneous, synchronic "present," shortening distances and connecting the remote *sertão* to the Rua do Ouvidor in downtown Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of Brazil. In the late nineteenth century, it was there, among the European-style cafés and elegant shops, that the elite would go to see and to be seen, to discuss politics and other themes of the day or to spread rumors about the latest private dramas.<sup>7</sup>

Machado perceived what twentieth-century scholars would later conceptualize as the role of technologies of communication in changing our perception of time and space, through the creation of the idea of a present as "novelty" (Koselleck) or "event" shared among people who, although having nothing to do with each other, imagine themselves as partaking in the same reality (Anderson). Machado also refers to the increasing importance of a transnational economic system in shrinking distances and shaping the imaginary of an interconnected world. He suggests that through the narrow streets of downtown Rio, the "echoes" of Canudos reached London and New York, where "o nome de Antônio Conselheiro fez baixar os nossos fundos" (*A Semana*, 14 Feb. 1897). In the same nineteenth century that had witnessed the consolidation of global capitalism (Sevcenko), "Canudos"—like the *chapéu alto*, which, as Machado reminds his reader, was also a type of *canudo* or "pipe"—was being consumed by a *fin-de-siècle* urban public avid for novelties.<sup>8</sup>

Significantly, Machado also refers to the ways in which the future will remember Conselheiro and celebrate the centenary of the "extinct sect." In

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broadcast" and thereby turned "to a great degree into an object" (40). Even though there were probably no photographs of Conselheiro yet (photographers, as well as reporters, arrived in the settlement a few months after the publication of Machado's chronicle, along with the fourth military expedition), Machado alludes to media culture in order to highlight the objectification and commodification of the prophet's image. What Machado seems to have understood was that "Canudos" as a national event did not exist outside its representation, circulation and consumption.

<sup>7</sup> Rua do Ouvidor appears in Machado's novels and chronicles as a symbol of rumor. In *Esau e Jacob*, for example, it is on Rua do Ouvidor that the character Ayres learns about the "Revolution." For a more detailed account of Rio de Janeiro at the turn of the century, see Chalhoub; and Needell.

<sup>8</sup> For studies of the last decades of the nineteenth century in Brazil in relation to the growth of a new bourgeoisie, financial capital, and the enthusiasm about new technologies and consumption of international products, see Costa and Schwarcz; and Sevcenko.

referring to both the event's actuality and memory, Machado seems to suggest that even while Canudos was emerging as an image for the consumption of the urban public, it was being sentenced to death. The text is thus both comical and somber. It is about the making of a celebrity and of a corpse. The comical effect is mainly the result of the de-contextualization of Conselheiro, or of Conselheiro's head of hair and its re-contextualization in the sphere of fashion. But according to Kracauer, if outdated fashion accessories are funny, they are also frightening, for their anachronism refers to what was once alive and, thus, to its death. The comical effect of Conselheiro's *cabeleira* also takes on a somber dimension at the end of Machado's chronicle, when he reminds the reader that whether one chooses *chapéu alto* or *baixo*, what is important is to preserve one's head.

Machado's reference to keeping one's head in its proper place is likely a reference to the reputation of Colonel Moreira César, the leader of the third military expedition to Canudos, as a decapitator. Although Moreira César died in the field a few days after the publication of Machado's chronicle (leading to another defeat of the Republican army), the outcome of the Campanha de Canudos would actualize the expectations suggested by Moreira Cesar's sobriquet. The army adopted the practice of beheading the *conselheiristas* captured during combat (Zama; Benício; Cunha), and the most famous beheading was that of Conselheiro himself. In contrast with the other *conselheiristas*, however, Conselheiro was already dead when the military found him. They photographed the body and then cut off his head—and with it the “features” that Machado's anonymous woman so eagerly wished to see. The fragmentation of Conselheiro's body was actualized. The skull was taken to Salvador, where the famous doctor Nina Rodrigues, an enthusiastic publicist for criminal anthropology, would measure and analyze it in the search for signs of madness and degeneration. And despite the disappointing findings of the medical evaluation, Conselheiro's skull was preserved as a relic in the *Escola Bahiana de Medicina*.

### ***Conclusion***

Julio Ramos has spoken of the formal aspects of the chronicle, such as its fragmentary and ephemeral nature, and related these to the fact that the genre was

widely adopted by Latin American writers at the turn of the century. For Ramos, this stems from these writers' desire to respond to modernity's fragmentary mode of experience. In a similar vein, scholarship on Machado's chronicles has suggested that he explores the fragmentary nature of modern experience in his newspaper writing.<sup>9</sup> In particular, Machado frequently comments on the changes brought about by new technologies of communication. He calls attention, for example, to the fact that the urban public was bombarded daily by telegrams and news coming both from the interior of the country and European capitals, and that the information they communicated was mostly rushed, contradictory, and intentionally or unintentionally misleading. Thus, the ephemeral actuality of the chronicle is especially suitable for Machado's exploration of some of his favorite themes: the unstable borders between truth and lie, historical and fictitious events, and the relationships between the writer and reader. Second, as evidenced by the last chronicle Machado wrote for *A semana*, he thematizes this modern way of experiencing the present not only through the content of his chronicles but also through their form. For example, he brings together apparently disparate subjects such as Conselheiro's hairstyle and the top hat. Through these montages, he reveals not only the absurdity of the subjects that constitute the daily news but also the role of news print in forging a mode of apprehending the world that resembles a shop window and transforms its subjects into commodities. In Machado's chronicles about Conselheiro, however, this formal strategy serves not only to mark Brazilian modernity's specificities but also to question the divide between the modern and the primitive, a divide central to the construction of Conselheiro as an enemy of the Republic and the condemnation of his community to death. Technological modernity and consumer society appear in Machado's chronicle as a form of mystification itself, revealing the contradictions that underlie the accusation that Conselheiro was little more than a mystical fanatic.

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Luz; and Quadros.

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