

Antônio Conselheiro and the Arraial De Canudos: A Socio-Anthropological Analysis

Ronaldo Bitencourt de Oliveira¹, Kleyton Gualter de Oliveira Silva², Guilherme Ernesto de Andrade Neto³, Cleiton Lin Oliveira da Silva⁴, Enos André de Farias⁵, Reginaldo Bitencourt de Oliveira⁶, José Inaldo Valões⁷

¹INSCOPSI – Instituto Contemporâneo De Psicanálise.

²UNIVASF – Universidade Federal do Vale do São Francisco.

³SEDUC- Juazeiro.

⁴CAR - Companhia de Desenvolvimento e Ação Regional

⁵UPE - Universidade de Pernambuco

⁶Colégio Estadual Jorge Khoury

⁷UFCG - Universidade Federal de Campina Grande

Received: 08 Jul 2021,

Received in revised form: 13 Aug 2021,

Accepted: 19 Aug 2021,

Available online: 26 Aug 2021

©2021 The Author(s). Published by AI Publication. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

Keywords — *Straws. Counselor. Communitas. Socioanthropological.*

Abstract— *The writing in question was built from the TCC - Course Conclusion Paper by one of the authors, entitled “The prophet and the politician: an analysis based on Antônio Conselheiro and Arraial de Canudos”. Therefore, we intend to use the fragments of the work in question to reorganize the analysis that proposed to put in dialogue the ideas of Antônio Conselheiro, the prophet, with the materiality of the praxis achieved with the Arraial de Belo Monte, Canudos. In relation to the latter, we think of the environment from the concept of communitas proposed by the English anthropologist Victor Turner (1969), contextualizing from Canudos, a “communitarian society” created in the Brazilian hinterland. With this perspective, we will reflect on Canudos as a place where it is possible to glimpse traces of a sertanejo prophetism. Thus, thinking about how that ‘main prophet’ was able, from his place of speech, to lead and seduce those people to faithfully follow their spiritual advice, defending his ideals of an anti-structure society, not refraining from even taking up arms to face the military forces of the Republic structure; we will consider, therefore, about the resistance of Canudos as a practical result of the socio-political-religious discourse of that prophet.*

I. INTRODUCTION

This brief writing aims to reflect on the work developed by Antônio Conselheiro, as well as his political environment: the Arraial de Belo Monte, Canudos. Thus, we created strategies to think about the dialectical relationship between: prophecy and politics, having as existential locus the role of the religious leader. About this, we add to the prophetic plot, the aspect of politics as the

mundane element, expanding the ballast for the practice of what was suggested in the religious discourse.

Canudos is presented here as a communitas, which crystallized in the social relations between newly arrived neophytes from various parts of the sertão, effective sociopolitical actions that brought them back together, under the blessing of that prophet. In this regard, we show that the Counselor knew how to articulate, in a pragmatic way, his religious discourse with the socio-political

discourse and his power of speech enabled that *communitas* to effectively face its main demands. It is, therefore, an analysis of the Counselor's performance as a typical country "prophet" in a communitarian environment; aiming, in this way, to shed light on this discussion, considering that the strength of the speech of a religious leader in the political and social sphere is undeniable, whether or not he is revered as a prophet (TURNER, 1969).

The writing was constructed with the aim of bringing to the center of the debate a spark of what is meant by 'prophet' - from the point of view of a concept. To do so, it was necessary to search the descriptions in biblical-theological approaches, making slight connections with the socio-anthropological implications. The prophet Counselor appears in the text through his performance as a spiritual leader, he knew how to reconcile and articulate the religious and prophetic discourse with a sociopolitical discourse, shaping himself in the course of events, for an effectively more political stance than the religious one of the past, mobilizing actions and reactions in that public space that crystallized a true *communitas*.

It is also plausible to think, from the ontological point of view of a religious, that the prophet's speech may not be, essentially, social, in addition to being religious or prophetic. Therefore, it presents itself impregnated with aspects of its relationship with what is sacred to it and the implications arising from this. Thus, thinking about the relationship between the prophet and the politician, funneling the debate to the context of the Counselor, will undoubtedly provoke a broad reflection, problematizing and pondering the notion or concept of prophet. In this way, we intend, modestly, to contribute to the debate about the prophetic function in the structures of the studied societies.

II. METHOD

The proposal for writing in course is a writing with a qualitative aspect, which seeks to contribute to the debate on the concepts of prophet and politics. In this regard, we seek the context experienced by Antônio Conselheiro, something that will undoubtedly provoke a reflection on the notion or concept of prophet. In this way, we intend to give rise, modestly, to the debate about how socio-anthropological research methods have sought to understand and explain the presence and prophetic function in the structures of studied societies, as well as the maintenance of existing 'powers'.

To understand the hermeneutic movement of the concept of prophet, we seek the understanding proposed by the Social Sciences in dialogue with the historicity, in

part, experienced by the authors of this work, mainly in the political experiences they had in their youth, commonly experienced in ecclesial formations and in the analysis of conjecture that existed in the 80's and 90's. In this regard, it is worth noting that, with this writing, we lend ourselves to the role of studying Canudos as a *communitas*, a category proposed by Turner (1969), thus finding the idea proposed, already predefined, by the prophet Counselor.

III. RESULTS: ANTÔNIO CONSELHEIRO O PROFETA DO BELO MONTE

Antônio Conselheiro (1830-1897) was a leading religious leader in what became known as the Arraial de Canudos. The prophet of the Bahian sertão was on the front line of resistance in the massacre called by the media at the time: "Guerra de Canudos", which took place in Bahia between 1896 and 1897, fatally recorded in the book "Os Sertões" by Euclides da Cunha.

In order to think of Antônio Conselheiro as the prophet that he had become in the Arraial de Belo Monte, it will be necessary to look in his biographical history for elements that help to understand how the construction of his religious and prophetic profile took place. Therefore, it is, in fact, imperative to also look for what his influences were, what models he was inspired by and sought to follow. For this reason, in the course of this biographical narrative, even if briefly, we introject relevant facts and characters that, in some way, directly influenced Antônio Conselheiro. In this regard, we can highlight his contemporary religious, who were directly intertwined with its history: they are José Antônio de Maria Ibiapina (Father Ibiapina - 1806-1883) and Cícero Romão Batista (Father Cícero - 1844-1934). The mention of these characters aims basically to endorse the understanding, as we have said before, that the appearance of a prophet cannot be explained purely and simply or exclusively by superficial arguments, which seem to allude only to the epiphanic aspects.

In this regard, it is essential to also consider the social aspects imbricated in the formation of these religious individuals, evidently that the impacts of the faith defended by them and courageously demonstrated in the course of their social actions should not be overlooked. It is exactly the religious aspect that worried us, especially considering the fact that these are religious subjects who, in defense of the faith and a socio-religious ideal, did not shy away from leading highly significant actions, including affecting the condition of their own existences, but voluntarily succumbed believing in that collective dream and that proved to be possible.

IV. DISCUSSION: CANUDOS COMMUNITAS OR THE PROPHET CONSELHEIRO?

In 1893, the pilgrim prophet arrived in the parts of Bahia, at the crossroads characteristic of the northeastern hinterlands. The region is distanced by about 200 kilometers from the railway, only reached on foot or on donkeys. A village between five mountains and multiple trails along the caatinga. A very decayed place, which had once housed an old farm, then in ruins, on the banks of the Vaza-Barris River, called Canudos, referring to a plant that thrived on the riverbank. There he established himself, founding a new communitarian public space. Thus, the *communitas* were born outside the structural domain of the new Republic, often called the sacred village of Belo Monte, the Promised Land, *Canaã Sertaneja*' (CUNHA, 1992).

For Tunner (1969), *communitas* could be defined as "a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals". For him, the human groups that could be defined as *communitas* would be those that "in a short time are transformed into structures, in which the free relations between individuals are converted into relations, governed by norms, between social people". Thus, we can highlight that Canudos materialized as a *communitas* for having/being "existential and spontaneous", or, as Tunner (*idem*) defined, "approximately what hippies would call happening today, and what William Blake called - "the fleeting moment that passes", or, later, "mutual forgiveness of the defects of each one"".

In light of the above, we can state that Canudos became the *communitas* of the outskirts of the Bahian hinterland, where it was possible to enable effective political actions in a contingent, albeit ephemeral, under the baton of a religious leader first, then a political agent whose power of speech was capable of fostering the necessary persuasion for its viability. In that socio-religious and political environment, all individual interests were supplanted by essentially collective interests, it is clearly possible to think there the existence of 'liminalities' in that councilorist '*communitas*'; and also to glimpse that those who were attracted there, effectively submitted to certain 'rites of passage' (TURNER, 1969), as we will try to demonstrate later on when the arrival of subjects who voluntarily adapted to that established scenario, but still under construction .

Another aspect of that Canudian prophetism is that the Counselor, despite acting as a prophet, did not foster the mystical characteristic or the magical aspect of this function; it is possible to visualize this, through his writings, that there was a subject with an undeniable intellectual capacity of persuasion or persuasion, due to the

skill of argumentation. He did not oppose, at the expense of his prophetic posture, that his minions would take up arms in defense of the Arraial and himself; and they did so without, however, losing their spiritual tranquility and religiosity, not even in the worst moments of that apocalyptic confrontation between 'good and evil', between us and them, as seen by both sides.

It is necessary to undertake a good socio-anthropological analysis in reading the writings left by the Counselor in his sermons, taking into account the circumstances and contexts in which they were recorded, the thoughts and feelings of that prophet; these writings were found in the sanctuary where he lived, shortly after the invasion of the camp of Canudos. The Centro de Estudos Baianos, of the Federal University of Bahia (CEB-UNEB) , published the *Breviário de Antônio Conselheiro* , in a volume with more than 800 pages; dividing into two parts: the first with excerpts from the Gospels; the second with historical-biblical episodes and summaries of sermons, with theological and doctrinal themes, such as the symbolism of the cross or the laws of divine worship. It was his practical and liturgical Sermonary. In the volume there is also an annotation entitled: "Notes on the Precepts of the Divine Law of Our Lord Jesus Christ for the Salvation of Men, by Pilgrim Antônio Vicente Mendes Maciel, in the village of Belo Monte, Province of Bahia, May 1895". Clear evidence that the Counselor did not claim other titles besides being a simple pilgrim.

As seen, Conselheiro did not call himself a prophet, but a pilgrim. In relation to this it is also known that many of his followers respected him as a prophet, and gave him other titles. To try to bring the Counselor a little closer to a prophetic profile, from the point of view of the concept, we could recall here some elements that, in a way, helped to foster this image projected on him. However, it is necessary at least to bring to light what would be the prophecies attributed to him, which could justify such fame.

It is known that, as a pilgrim of the sertões, he not only built works, but also wrote his sermons with relative aplomb and intellectuality, as can be seen; among his writings are found, what many authors understood to be his prophecies:

"In 1897 there will be a lot of pasture and little trail and one shepherd and one flock."

"In 1898 there will be many hats and few heads."

"In 1899 the waters will remain in blood (...) It will rain a great shower of stars and there will be the end of the world".

"In 1890 the lights will go out".

“Verily I say to you, when the nations fight with the nations, Brazil with Brazil (...), from the waves of the sea D. Sebastião will leave with all his army”.

“There will be four fires, the first three will be mine, the fourth I give to my good Jesus”. (NOGUEIRA, 1978).

However the prophecy that became most famous was the following, “(...) In 1896 had a thousand flocks run from the beach to the right; then the certão will become a beach and the beach will become a certão” (sic).

There are records of another writing attributed to the Counselor, entitled: “Storms that rise in the Heart of Mary on the occasion of the mystery of the Annunciation”; that it had been found in the same place as the previous ones, but that it took a different fate, passing from hand to hand to the writer Euclides da Cunha, a few months before his death.

In that Canudos *communitas*, Antônio Conselheiro clearly demonstrated his effectiveness as a prophet; skillfully mobilizing their spiritual discourse, in accordance with the needs of those listeners, showing their concerns in the field of spirituality of that people, but reconciling their preaching with the sociopolitical sphere, acting effectively in the face of the ills suffered by them. There, it was possible to see evidenced the figure of a subject who managed to acquire a certain prominence as political leadership, as a result of his oratory, his charismatic capacity and for knowing how to articulate religious and sociopolitical discourses with the reality in which he himself lived. This is certainly the reason why he managed to arrest those listeners, who became followers under his baton; keeping them away from hunger and drought, feeding them also by faith; and so all placed their full trust in that divine sertanejo spokesman.

V. THE BELO MONTE ARRAIAL: CANUDOS COMMUNITAS

In the world socioeconomic context of the time, as is known, capitalism and the era of republicanism were expanding, beginning with the United States War of Independence in 1776 and the French Revolution of 1789. History points out that the economic and social capitalist system it continued to subject the forms of government that existed until then, starting with England and from Europe to the rest of the world; becoming the majority system until the first world war, when some countries opted for communism. In Brazil, at the end of the 19th century, specifically in Arraial de Belo Monte, Canudos, there was established a communitarian religious society, based on work and a self-sustainable economic activity and based on solidarity. This reality, as we have already

seen, quickly showed its practical effects in terms of food production, housing, and with that, mainly, it kept away, for a relatively long period, drought and hunger, which had always been the main fears of those backhanders.

Canudos, therefore, emerged as a communitarian environment, socially just, in theory, without classes and without inequalities; just like a real '*communitas*', where subjects interacted stripped of their former values, which is why they did not need to sustain the hierarchies of structures from outside; in that *communitas* there was no exacerbated concern between the public and the private, it belonged to everyone. Composed of individuals who separated themselves from the condition they experienced in the past, fleeing from their respective '*social dramas*' and temporarily undergoing a '*liminal*' process, as if an intermediary to be again added to a new social reality proposed there.

To the detriment of having '*merchants*' there, there are also records that private owners put houses for sale; however, there was a great mass that was supported equally, that was the essence and dynamics of Canudos; the fertile, communal and egalitarian side of Belo Monte made it a scenario where it would be possible, roughly speaking, to glimpse a socialist/communist aspect working literally and guaranteeing the subsistence of those sertanejos. There the Counselor preached the Kingdom of Heaven, but he called on those poor to unite in building a new world where it was possible to glimpse equality and justice in the here and now.

The socio-religious, political and economic character of that camp attracted crowds; there were rumors that that '*communitas*' reached the status of the second largest '*city*' in the state, if we consider the questionable post-conflict military reports as true, which indicated that there were about twenty-five thousand inhabitants there (to have one idea the capital of Bahia, Salvador then had 200,000 inhabitants); it is said that Canudos came to export part of its production of goats and skins, as well as having a certain organization to the point of having commercial relations with other locations (as an example there is the case of wood purchased in Juazeiro-BA for the works of the Temple). Belo Monte made it possible to integrate economic and social needs with religious needs, and vice versa; fully concretizing what for the countryman should never be dissociated: religion and life.

Thus grew that public space *communitas*, countless people and entire families flocked there, mainly the poorest of the Brazilian Northeast; residents of the region, farmers, Indians (kaimbé, Kiriri and Tuxá), as well as newly freed Afro-descendants. These human groups came from all over, leaving, as some claimed, certain regions of

Bahia and Sergipe almost uninhabited due to the exodus that had taken place.

In practice, the socio-political-economic regime of Canudos was relatively similar to the proposal of socialism, in terms of the production and distribution system; without state control, as if aiming to establish a communist society, or without classes of exploited and exploiters, justifying the clear opposition to the anti-capitalist vision defended by the Counselor and often publicly evidenced; for example, when he declared to reject the tax charges of the newly instituted republican regime; the scenario already foreshadowed the existence of two antagonistic forces about to confront each other, on the one hand the councilors ideology seeing the new regime as a demonic force; on the other side, the new Republic, which, in turn, also faced any idea or movement that seemed monarchist or anti-capitalist, as being equally demonic, retrograde and, therefore, contrary to the new positivist ideals of "order and progress" already on the pennant.

The socio-religious and political context of Canudos constitutes a scenario where it is easily possible to reflect on the close connection between faith and the socio-political circumstances experienced in that model of communitarian public space; an atmosphere where it can be seen that the religiosity of those counselors grew to the extent that they could not

VI. THE REPUBLIC AND CANUDOS. THE CONFLICT BETWEEN STRUCTURE AND ANTISTRUCTURE.

The Counselor's preachings, or rather, his socio-religious and political discourse, were already impregnated and imbued with criticism of the society organized under the great property that exploited the poorest. It was common to hear of entire families selling what little they had to go in search of the Canudista socialist ideals. In a short time, the socio-religious and political discourse began to provoke irritation, not only to ecclesiastical authorities, but to the current system of government. That Belo Monte *communitas* began to demonstrate its dangers to the new imposed pattern of society; it generated all kinds of unrest, certainly that the Counselor's speeches, leadership posture and socio-political actions evidently boosted the forces against that *communitas* even more. The newly instituted republican political regime was seen by the Counselor as something demonic, for the reasons we have already listed; he saw the Republic interfering in the things of God, taking away the Emperor's divine right to rule in the guise of the infamous patronage. The Counselor uncompromisingly defended the right of the

Sovereigns as being divine and any regime contrary to this would be, for him, the personification of the evil itself.

Straws *communitas* imbued with clear liminalities generating multiple creative actions that crystallized and stratified a real liberation from the external structural contours, but at the same time demonstrated, in the eyes of others, postures considered absolutely dangerous from the point of view of maintaining the law and structural order, the purity potentiated inside the camp, was the inversely proportional danger outside it. The drama and the stage were staged there, and the climax of the socio-religious reality of Canudos *communitas* was already demonstrated, whose performance really upset the state structure, the anticlimax was under way, the conflict was inevitable.

In that Brazilian social context, a scenario of imminent war was being drawn up. In this case, two points of view were formed, shouting out antagonistic conjectures; on the side of the republican military, the worst of feelings regarding any idea of a return to monarchy, seen as a delay, an unacceptable setback; also with extreme words, feelings and actions, they projected on the figure of the Counselor, his followers and Canudos *communitas*, the retrograde, grotesque and even 'demonic' figure of the battered monarchy, to be annihilated at all costs. In a short time, the army was ordered to destroy that ephemeral *communitas*, already insubordinate to the State; justifications soon came, various preposterous arguments, all making efforts to point out in that religious leader, a demented and dangerous monarchic counterrevolutionary, who should be annihilated at all costs; this was the main justification used for that fratricidal war, started in 1896 and which lasted until the end of 1897.

VII. CONCLUSION

Although the sources that allude to this theme are plentiful, the productions are still considered few. Those dealing with the importance and implications of socio-religious discourse with the political. It seems that the vast majority of the works focus only on the socio-political aspects of the episode; they don't care so much about the steeped socio-anthropological implications of religious nuances. It seems that many authors and researchers cannot escape the temptation to look at the sertanejo religious subject, through lenses riddled with prejudices and value judgments. Thus, failing to envision positively the social and political value of a religious subject.

The figure of the "sertanejo religious subject" is seen, therefore, in this work, exercising its 'prophetic' function with effective power of speech in the sociopolitical sphere, perhaps it is exactly for this reason that we have so little research bringing more coherent

approaches, which look for all possible versions of the saga of the Arraial de Canudos *communitas*, also known as the Tróia de taipa and the 'sacred village' (CUNHA, 1992).

Given the above, we emphasize that the importance of reflecting on the importance of a prophet and his socio-religious discourse in his social and political context reasonably demonstrated how much the power to speak of a religious subject, linked to his ability to mobilize a range of followers, with effective sociopolitical actions.

To clarify this finding, inevitably, efforts were needed to problematize this theme, making it a feasible task, especially because it was possible to think about the inescapable questions raised and raised, implicit and explicit in the textual body; for example, to what extent can the power of speech of a religious figure reconcile spiritual and sociopolitical discourse? And can his acting as a prophet promote effective sociopolitical actions, in an environment with communitarian characteristics? Judging by the example of prophet and *communitas* that we use, we can see that yes, the questions can be effectively materialized, obtaining plausible positive answers.

When sewing this theme, using the figure of Antônio Conselheiro as the prophet and Canudos as a socio-religious environment typifying the public space *communitas*, it was quite evident that the religious discourse and the leadership posture of that prophet, fully articulated the relationships structured there by subjects in state of liminalities and, even to the detriment of this, incontestable practical political actions were carried out in that communitarian camp; clearly demonstrated in the efforts for survival and, at the end, in the unquestionable resistance undertaken in the face of the armed conflict that took place there.

It was important to point out the religious subjects mentioned, with the Counselor in greater focus, as 'types' that minimally fulfilled the proposal of this research; for understanding the importance that these had in recent history, when they acted as true sertanejo prophets in their sociopolitical contexts. The work allowed us to think about the power of speech of a religious subject in his communitarian environment. Linked to this, we saw that this undertaking would not be possible without an environment model as an example. Therefore, the Arraial de Belo Monte, Canudos shown as a *communitas* was the ideal space that made it possible for us to foster reflection.

By analyzing it, we were able to see that a real dimension of public space was created there, *communitas* with major socio-religious and political events, where it was also possible to see crystallized the phenomenon of liminalities; that same space arrived individuals fleeing social structures, passing through ritual processes of

passage, being aggregated in communion, demonstrated in the final resistance of the conflict.

In addition to these points listed, the research also allowed to bring to this reflection, the discussion about what the prophet was with the Counselor model and portraying him as a type of sertanejo prophet of our recent history, enabling the extraction of possible socio-anthropological implications of this concept for more up-to-date reflection. In this way, the writing pointed out the importance of the necessary reflection, as it instigated us, with this, to debate about the perspectives that authors of the social sciences brought to light, pointing out the perspective of making future efforts to further problematize this concept; to perhaps even contribute, modestly, in 'repositioning' the place of the prophet in socio-anthropological approaches; with that, it can favor bigger and better reflections alluding to this theme.

Another interesting point achieved in this research was when we could see that, when dealing with the figure of a prophet, his power of speech and action in his social context, both the biblical-theological-Jewish-Christian and the socio-anthropological approach, in fact, point out that it is about

REFERENCES

- [1] CUNHA, Euclides da – Os Sertões. São Paulo: Círculo do Livro, 1992.
- [2] ALMEIDA, Bible Dictionary of, - Comp. By Levita Digital – 2nd Ed. 1999 – Biblical Society of Brazil – Electronic Version, 2005.
- [3] HORCADES, Alvim Martins. Description of a trip to Canudos. Salvador, 1899. Reprinted in 1996.
- [4] LEVI-STRAUSS, Claude - "Symbolic Effectiveness, Structural Anthropology. Rio de Janeiro. Brazilian time. 1975, pp. 215-236.
- [5] LEVI-STRAUSS, Claude - "The Sorcerer and His Magic" - Structural Anthropology. Rio de Janeiro. Brazilian time. 1975, pp. 193-213.
- [6] MACEDO, Nertan. Antonio Conselheiro - the living death of Blessed Canudos. 2nd ed. Ed. Renes. Rio de Janeiro - RJ. 1978. 164 p.
- [7] NOGUEIRA, José Carlos Ataliba. Antônio Conselheiro and Canudos. São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1978.
- [8] TURNER, Victor W. The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure (1969); td. by Nancy Campi de Castro. Petrópolis, Voices, 1974;
- [9] ZAMA, Caesar. Libello Republicano Accompanied by Comments on the Canudos Campaign. Salvador, 1899.