INTRODUCTION

> Many questions were troubling the explorer, but at the sight of the prisoner he asked only: “Does he know his sentence?” “No,” said the officer, eager to go on with his exposition, but the explorer interrupted him: “He doesn’t know the sentence that has been passed on him?” “No,” said the officer, again, pausing a moment as if to let the explorer elaborate his question, and then said: “There would be no point in telling him. He’ll learn it on his body.”
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> —Franz Kafka, “In the Penal Colony”

The title of my book owes something to Homi Bhabha’s suggestion that “it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.”[1] The notion of “suffering the sentence of history” sounds a double register. Legally, a sentence is the imposition of punishment following a judgment of condemnation. One is sentenced never to happiness but rather to jail, to death, or to oblivion. Suffering the judgment of history, then, suggests material defeat of some kind: subjugation, domination, annihilation, disappearance. It refers to those who, like the prisoner in Kafka’s tale, have no choice but to learn their sentences on their bodies. In the grammatical register, however, a sentence is paradigmatically a predicative syntax, a law of language. It is a structure of representation, a unit of closure. The coincidence of the normative and the constative that the concept of the “sentence of history” metaphorically betrays is perhaps at the heart of the reason peasant rebels often want to destroy the written record, burning books and papers, since the written record, as John Beverley puts it, “is also the record of their legal conditions of property-

lessness and exploitation."[2] Of course, a peasant may want to destroy a paper that assigns ownership of a particular piece of land to someone else so as to then take possession of that land, but this urge transcends such particularities; it more broadly concerns destroying a representation of the world in which peasants exist only insofar as they do not own land and are exploited, a world in which their identities, to paraphrase Ranajit Guha, amount only to the sum of their subalternities.[3] Likewise, the written record we call history is not just a totalizing depository of information but a mechanism of classification and intelligibility. Insofar as it ""creates the borders between history and nonhistory, it operates, as Michel Foucault suggests, as a system of discursivity.[4] Mark Taylor, commenting on Kafka's story "In the Penal Colony," writes that "philosophical sentences are judgments. Judgment, which works by subjecting the particular to the universal, has as its goal the establishment of law and order. Before and/or apart from judgment, there is, as Foucault suggests, anarchy."[5] What is before or apart from the sentence of the law is anarchy: what is rebellious to rule but also what is outside the archive of history, pure noise.

In this book I will suggest how the people of the community of Canudos were *sentenced to history*. The name by which we remember this community already encapsulates the problematic at the heart of the book, for the inhabitants called it *Belo Monte,* not *Canudos.* Under the leadership of the lay prophet Antônio Conselheiro, Belo Monte/Canudos fought a war against the still-fledgling republican government in Brazil in the backlands of the state of Bahia in 1896–1897. After three failed government expeditions, the conflict finally ended with the destruction of the community and the deaths of most of its inhabitants. At the end of the "Canudos War" one man declared: "There on the mountain peaks and gorges, on the darkened walls of plunging rocks, the story of a resuscitated people was written with the blood of the men of the backlands. There the whistling of the wind or the bellow of the wild bulls forever utters the epic of Brazilian heroism."[6] The history of Canudos is, for this man, both eternal and fleeting, both written and unwritten: forever inscribed, but only in the blood on rocks, the whistling of the wind, or the hoarse bellowing of the wild bulls. Far from being remembered only by the backland's wild bulls, however, the Canudos campaign has had no lack of written testaments and detractions, from the letters, poetry, articles, and novels of those who lived through it to any number of historical and artistic interpretations up to the present day.[7] Indeed, not only is it an indelible referent in Brazilian history, but it has jumped national borders, becoming inscribed in a larger Latin American

tradition (for Roberto González Echeverría, *Os sertões* is, along with Domingo Sarmiento's *Facundo*, paradigmatic of what he calls the second phase of Latin American literature) and even emerging as an example in contemporary works on political theory by writers including Ernesto Laclau, Mike Davis, Slavoj Žižek, and Antonio Negri.

This visibility of Canudos, the fact that it has acceded to the status of a memorable event in the historical archive, is one of its first enigmas, since it was in many ways not that unique. One could draw up a catalog of comparable rebellions and revolts in Brazil around the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, all tied to the same hybrid and uneven processes of modernization that ushered in the republic in 1889. In contrast to Canudos, however, such conflicts have suffered a general obscurity, largely because Brazilian historiography and public memory tend to emphasize the peaceful evolution of history wherein changes are supposed to have been tranquilly and cordially resolved by the elites and the people. One could list, for example, the Federalist Revolution, which broke out in Rio Grande do Sul in 1893 between two local oligarchic factions, a vaguely monarchist faction that had held prestige during the empire and the new president of the state. That same year the Revolta da Armada, a naval revolt led by monarchist officers, took place in Rio de Janeiro. Both uprisings were crushed. Brazil also witnessed a number of other movements that, like Canudos, had an expressly religious content. One great influence on Antônio Conselheiro was another wandering preacher, Padre Ibiapiana (1807–1883), who drew a great following in the northeastern region. While attracting persecution from the Catholic hierarchy, Ibiapiana survived thanks to his institutional ties, which shows that millenarian religious movements produced a variety of outcomes and did not necessarily lead to state violence. The movement that Padre Cícero Romão Batista led in Juazeiro from 1872 to 1934, a movement that joined social revindications with religious content, is another example of survival by accommodation with local powers. The Contestado Rebellion, however, which broke out in the backlands of Santa Catarina and Paraná from 1912 to 1916, underwent a fate similar to that of Canudos. Like Canudos, the Contestado Rebellion was a peasant-based movement in which a prophet preached the evils of the Brazilian republic and called for a return to the monarchy. According to Todd Diacon, the rebellion was in large part a reaction to the construction of railroad tracks in the area and the accompanying penetration of international capital and changes in land tenure that threatened peasant subsistence.[8] The events at Canudos, then, were

no more exceptional than—or perhaps just as exceptional as—any of these. And yet, Lizir Arcanjo Alves asks, "A century later, when so many other revolts that took place in the nineteenth century have been forgotten, why have we not yet forgotten all that happened in Canudos?"[9] The enigma is the memory of Canudos. Or perhaps Canudos is the memory of an enigma.

Part of the answer for the enduring afterlife of Canudos is *Os sertões* (1901), by Euclides da Cunha, which strives to account for the conflict's origins and ferociously denounces the government for the massacre. The young war correspondent's book was an immediate bestseller in a country where 85 percent of the population was illiterate. Between 1902 and 1909 *Os sertões* sold 10,000 copies in three successive editions published by Laemmert; it then passed to Francisco Alves, which published the fourth edition in 1911. Between 1911 and 1982 Francisco Alves alone published twenty-eight editions of *Os sertões*.[10] More than thirty-five editions have been produced, and total sales in Portuguese have reached 750,000.[11] Not surprisingly, then, in 1994, when *Veja* magazine published the results of a survey in which fifteen leading Brazilian intellectuals were asked to name the twenty most representative works of Brazilian culture, the first book listed was *Os sertões*.[12] Thus, one answer to my question is simply that Canudos has endured because of the success of da Cunha's book. One typical version of this answer is given by Edivaldo Boaventura when he writes, "It is the style that paints what endures. The great force of Euclides's grandiose expression immortalized Canudos. Let us take into consideration Canudos, the phenomenon, and Euclides, the expression, and ask: if it weren't for Euclides da Cunha, what would have been the fate of Canudos?"[13] But Boaventura's answer is also symptomatic of precisely what I want to put into question.

What does it mean to pose the relationship between Canudos and da Cunha's text as one between a "phenomenon" and "its expression"? And what does it mean to understand the *force* of this expression in largely aesthetic terms, as Boaventura does here? These two elements in his answer exemplify the naturalization of intellectual mediation that takes shape in Latin America under the narrative of the intellectual as the voice of the voiceless (in a continent of mostly voiceless people) but that subaltern studies has taught us to recognize as a "sentencing" essential to the establishment of modern forms of governmentality.

It is not a matter—or not only a matter—of revealing da Cunha's particular political interests in his rendering of the Canudos War. Rather, I mean

to use the story of Canudos and its multiple inscriptions to question how we understand the "location of culture" as a place of naturalization in the construction of modern governmentality, particularly in the two extremes formed in the bifurcation between the "cultured" and the "anthropological" versions of culture: literature or aesthetics, on the one hand, and everyday life, on the other.

My analysis thus unfolds in the space bounded by the state, everyday life, and writing and poses questions such as the following: How do writing and culture function in the constitution of the modern nation-state? How is a construction of hegemony related to changes in the order and legibility of everyday life? How do certain genres and strategies of representation interface with different principles of sovereignty? While each of my chapters is organized around a particular theoretical angle, they unfold in close confrontation with the thick materiality of the discourse on Canudos, shuttling between practices of thinking and writing that are deemed abstract and others that are more recalcitrantly local. Theoretical debates are never neutral or universal, and though, in the present economy of theoretical capital, Latin America may be marginal to many of them, it is my conviction that it nevertheless provides a place not only to think *about* but to think *from*.

Chapter 1, "The Voice of Others," interrogates the problem of intellectual mediation by analyzing the form it takes in the Latin American tradition of the intellectual as the voice of the voiceless. Of the innumerable examples of this narrative at work, we can take Henrique Coelho Neto's comments in 1915 at the yearly commemoration at Euclides da Cunha's tomb: "Euclides was . . . the real interpreter of the ignored masses. He was the taciturn poet of solitary spaces, the harsh historian of the barbarians. He described the deserts and the tragic inhabitants of savage lands."[14] This formula is by now easy to recognize and repudiate, for most now acknowledge that the intellectual doesn't *really* speak for the people. Still, the stubborn staying power of da Cunha's Canudos reflects the fact that the formula "the voice of the voiceless" rests on a set of deeply naturalized assumptions that continue to govern our practices of reading. First, the formula is embedded within a genealogy of political thought in which "the people" are posed as the origin of sovereignty, and this chapter briefly lays out Brazil's participation in an emerging transatlantic discourse on popular sovereignty. Second, as David Lloyd and Paul Thomas argue in *Culture and the State*, nineteenth-century Europe saw a convergence of theories of the

state and theories of culture, with culture brought into suture the gap between "the people" and the state. Brazil and the rest of Latin America participated in this theoretical development, too, but postcolonial conditions forced theories of culture there to differ from efforts in Europe, so that by the twentieth century "culture" acquired the function of compensating for the state's failure to produce a people.

Chapter 2, "The Prose of Counterinsurgency," develops a subalternist perspective on the ways in which Canudos has been sentenced to history. I track changes in the description of Antonio Conselheiro and his followers beginning some twenty years before the conflict and culminating in *Os sertões*. A careful perusal of letters, both private and public, and newspaper articles reveals the emergence of something that I, following Ranajit Guha, call a prose of counterinsurgency, with Canudos slowly becoming a surface of inscription onto which a variety of tensions and fears were projected. As a result, Canudos became intelligible almost exclusively through a discourse whose central problematic is the security of the state. By reconstructing this process in such thick detail, I mean to make visible the contingency of the process and thus divest it of its inevitability. In other words, the narrative that came to dominate—and da Cunha's text was not so much a repudiation of this narrative as a crystallization of it—was not the only way to conceptualize what was happening in Canudos. Other alternatives were slowly overshadowed and delegitimized as the conflict advanced. That is, the construction of this dense textual web about Canudos reveals the emergence of a hegemonic discursive formation. David Lloyd and Paul Thomas define hegemony in such a way as to resituate it within the multiplicity it occludes. It is a process "by which certain paradigms become so self-evident as to relegate alternatives to the spaces of the nonsensical and the unthinkable. It is not so much that hegemony represses as that the dominance of its 'forms' of conceptualization renders other forms, other imaginaries, unreadable, inaudible, and incomprehensible."[15] My project, then, is both to denaturalize what seems so self-evident as to be as invisible as the air we breathe and to mark out the contours of alternatives that are invisible and inaudible precisely because their ties to all forms of evidence have been mangled.

Chapter 3, "The Event and the Everyday," analyzes one of these alternatives. One of the places where revisionist historiography has attempted to push the boundaries of the audible and comprehensible concerning Canudos—to extract it from what one historian called the "golden cage" of *Os sertões*—is the

level of "everydayness."[16] This is an attempt to rewrite the historical archive by challenging an image of Canudos as "extraordinary," as an exceptional space and time that broke or interrupted a normal, "everyday" time. The idea that the inhabitants of Canudos were monstrous or that they represented the irruption of religious barbarism in an enlightened and more modern age evokes the image of an other than ordinary Canudos at the heart of the prose of counterinsurgency. Revisionist historians have attempted to show how "ordinary" Canudos was by detailing, for example, the community's economic activities and showing its similarities to other communities in the Bahian backlands, so that it hovers on the edge of becoming just one more city in a continuum of cities. In this chapter I draw on my fieldwork and interviews with local Bahian historians, critics, and filmmakers who work with local oral history, as well as the testimony of a merchant who lived in Canudos, to interrogate how the categories of the everyday and the ordinary function in political projects and critical theory alike. Everydayness has proved to be an elusive concept in contemporary theory despite the efforts by authors such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Maurice Blanchot. My study of state hegemony's ambiguous relationship to everydayness attempts to illuminate an obscure area in the study of governmentality. How are general political directives incarnated in everyday life, and what happens when the realm of the everyday proves resistant to change? What does it mean if everydayness is erased in a process of subalternization, as happened with Canudos? What is it about the normal, ordinary life of a rebel, peasant community such as Canudos that needs to be excised in the process of nation-state formation? And what are the limits to conjuring up the ordinary, everyday life of Canudos?

Chapter 4, "*Os Sertões*: Nationalism by Elimination," confronts da Cunha's reading of the conflict, first by reading *Os sertões* in its performative, or prescriptive, dimension—as a sentence, in other words—rather than in a descriptive dimension, as an act of re-presentation or the "expression" of a referent. *Os sertões* did not just "electrif[y] the nation because it shattered the elite's comfortable myth about Brazilian reality."[17] It also produced a new myth. Building a representational field that traverses and exceeds any given representation, my reading of *Os sertões* confronts this text with an "other scene" that da Cunha himself produced in his on-the-scene articles written for a São Paulo newspaper and the field notes he jotted down (published in 1975 as *Caderneta de campo*). By confronting these three sets of texts, I argue that da Cunha solves the concep-

tual challenges Canudos posed by subsuming it to the regulating ideal of the modern state. In the process da Cunha constructs a particular "visibility" and "sayability" (to use Foucauldian terms) that still have purchase today.

While subaltern studies has done much to provincialize historiography and to highlight its limited operational territory, one bound by specific notions of agency, subjectivity, and temporality (among others), in my last chapter, "Another Canudos," I extend those analyses to the problem of literary form within the horizon of competing versions of sovereignty proper to the encounter between modernization and postcolonial structures of power and representation. Here I consider two novels published three years before *Os sertões* (Afonso Arinos's *Os jagunços* and Manoel Benício's *O rei dos jagunços*) that produce a barely recognizable Canudos. The mere existence of alternative interpretations of Canudos (and these texts do exhibit real differences from da Cunha's) prompts questions about an economy of representation and its place in the larger picture of nation and state formation in Latin America. The central goal here is to discover what about these two marginalized and largely forgotten texts seems nonsense to us. Or, put another way, how do they perform representations whose "sense" does not seem to "express" the phenomenon of Canudos? First, and continuing my analysis of everydayness, I contend that the difficulty in "recognizing" Canudos in their representations arises from their attempts to locate the truth of the community and its rebellion on the level of ordinary, daily life (although it is not the kind of ordinary Canudos imagined by the revisionist historiography). While there is clearly a disciplinary intent to such an enterprise (by "normalizing" Canudos), it produces the unexpected effect of denaturalizing the "norms" regulating the government's actions. Second, I argue that the lack of correspondence between "Canudos" and their "expressions" results from the generic options undertaken by each text. In other words, each of these texts uses particular formal strategies to achieve its goal of presenting an ordinary Canudos. The dominant cultural grammar of the time, however, did not recognize these forms as viable ways of representing the community. Arinos, who was a monarchist, used the national family romance as the genre best able to enact a different principle of sovereignty. Benício, though, was as much a republican as da Cunha was. The interest in his case lies in the way his text veers clumsily between a historical essay and a novel, which I argue reveals Benício's dissatisfaction with the inability of a neutral, scientific principle of knowledge to account for the conflict. While da Cunha's text is grounded in an idea of sovereignty that aims to correct but not to impugn the ethics of

the modern state, furnishing images and enunciations for a new form of governmentality, Arinos's and Benício's texts exhibit textual strategies that fit uneasily with an emerging project for the cultural presentation and integration of internal differences.

My overall argument is of course deeply indebted to the historians in the Subaltern Studies Group, who taught us to be suspicious of the accounts of insurgency performed by a lettered elite. These historians often began with the observation that the archive through which events such as peasant insurgency are registered almost exclusively comprises documents that reflect the perspective of power, since most of them were produced by and for the regime to understand and suppress such an insurgency. Thus Ranajit Guha says that the "historical phenomenon of insurgency meets the eye for the first time as an image framed in the prose, hence the outlook, of counter-insurgency—an image caught in a distorting mirror. . . . Inscribed in elite discourse it had to be read as a writing in reverse."[18] Although Guha's project was to recover insurgency by reading elite discourse against the grain (by deducing it as negativity), subsequent theorists have since then developed the argument that the subaltern insurgency under study inescapably remains the one produced by the historical archive. The archive produces what it names, just as Robinson Crusoe conjures up "wildness" when he sees a footprint on the island's shore and assumes that it has to do with something "wild." Certeau, discussing this moment in *Robinson Crusoe,* writes, "Naming is not here the 'painting' of a reality; it is a performative act organizing what it enunciates. It does what it says and constitutes the savagery it declares. Just as one excommunicates by naming, the name 'wild' both creates and defines what the scriptural economy situates outside of itself."[19] Subalternity, then, is both created and defined by elite discourse and does not exist apart from it.

In Latin American studies the issue of the subaltern as an external, autonomous domain versus the subaltern as an effect of discourse was raised with particular clarity and force by the historian Florencia Mallon, who identifies this division "as the deepest, most irresolvable, and also the most fertile tension in the Subaltern Studies project"[20] and warns against either flattening out the tension or discarding one of its components.

The recovery of subaltern practices, beliefs, and actions necessitated the use of new documents and especially new methods for reading old documents. This laborious and methodologically complex task led many historians into semiotics, literary criticism, and other forms of textual analysis. Yet, by en-

couraging the deconstruction of texts along lines of power and hierarchy and by decentering all subjects that emerged in the documents, according to Mallon, these techniques have ultimately questioned two assumptions central to the Subaltern Studies Group's political purpose: that subaltern practices enjoy some autonomy from elite culture and that subaltern politics possesses a unity and solidarity of its own.[21]

As her remark shows, Mallon was then, in 1994, particularly critical of a tendency she saw within the Latin Americanist version of subaltern studies, visible particularly in the "Founding Statement" of the Latin American Subaltern Studies Group (constituted formally between 1992 and 2000), namely, a tendency to privilege what she called the Foucauldian and Derridean theoretical position over a Gramscian one.[22] According to Mallon, the problematic result was that "access to most subalterns . . . remains elusive" if one is simply reading existing documents against the grain. She instead advocated maintaining the tension between "a more narrowly postmodern literary interest in documents as 'constructed texts' and the historian's disciplinary interest in reading documents as 'windows,' however foggy and imperfect, on people's lives."[23]

My approach differs slightly to the extent that Mallon ascribes a certain positive, ontic determination to subalternity—there is a subaltern thing-in-itself (identity, consciousness, subjectivity) out there—and assumes that the written record is, however foggy and imperfect, a means of access to it. If the problem of optics is taken seriously, however, then the concept of subalternity cannot be equated with a pure exteriority on the other side of the documents, cannot but name a recalcitrant difference that arises inside elite discourse with no ontic determination of its own. One cannot, in this case, work on retrieving the consciousness or agency of the subaltern on its own terms.

At the same time, however, by choosing the moment of insurgency as the starting point for analysis, Guha and others understand subalterns as "exerting pressure" on the structures that subordinate them.[24] Insurgency is proof that subalterns have, as Mallon puts it, a certain autonomy from elite culture, a unity and solidarity of their own. One can therefore also read the way in which the particular structures of elite discourse are themselves constituted and shaped by the challenge to their rule posed by insurgency. In this sense, documents are not foggy windows onto the subaltern, not something to see through, but artifacts in themselves, disfigured in symptomatic ways by the actions of subalterns, much as the universe can be warped by the presence of black holes, which can never be "represented" as such but only be deduced. In

these circumstances, the task is to make visible the structural distortions produced by the "failed translation and assimilation of that which they constitute as minor or outside."[25] This means both the way otherness or difference has been assimilated into versions of "the same" (e.g., translating various forms of power relations in India, such as the caste system, patriarchy, and ethnic oppression, into class relations) and the way "self-exceeding exteriority," a heterogeneous array of positive differences, is translated into a difference of polarity or negativity (precapitalist, nonpolitical, etc.). Indeed, part of the intractability that the subalternists work to identify is the resistance of a self-exceeding exteriority to being represented as what Prakash will name a "self-confirming other."

Like Mallon, then, I have found a tension at the heart of subaltern studies, but an immensely productive one: if on the one hand we come to peasant insurgencies that have always been written over and turned into a datum in a history not the insurgents' own—sentenced to history—we cannot forget, on the other hand, that the very fact of insurgency posits a challenge and intractability to this history, that it signals the failures and limits of power. The alternatives posed by the rebellion disappear as it becomes inscribed in the archive within another's history, so that they become a "night-time of love" rather than a "lifetime of love."[26] At the same time, the intractability revealed in the representation of the subaltern as an "autonomous and unintelligible domain exterior" to the functioning of the dominant system, "beyond rational understanding,"[27] cannot but mark the continued possibility of an outside. This is the reason my project is not to uncover what Canudos was "really like" but both to investigate how it was constituted through discourse and to ask what we can learn about the way it continues to exert pressure on our judgments.