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THE FALL OF THE *EXÉRCITO DA INDIA*. ACCLIMATISATION AND RESENTMENT IN THE WRITINGS OF GERMANO CORREIA

Szymon GŁĄB (Poland)

Abstract

Alberto Carlos Germano da Silva Correia, a Portuguese physician and physical anthropologist from Goa, devoted much of his writings from the late 1910s to the 1930s to studying the acclimatisation of Portuguese descendants in India. His research was part of a wider debate on whether the “white race” could adapt to tropical climates. Correia argued that the decline of the Portuguese population in Goa that occurred in 19th century was not due to the tropical environment, but to the consequences of the disbanding of the local armed forces in 1871. By analysing his writings, this paper will examine why Correia expressed strong resentment towards the events of 1871, the influences behind his views and how he used the disbanding of the army as a historical argument to claim that the Portuguese had acclimatised in India. It is argued that Correia’s views reflect a complex interplay of factors in the acclimatisation debate. His personal resentments arising from his identity and his connection to the tragic history of the group, influenced by the writings of Frederico d’Ayalla and the use of political and social event as an argument, make him an interesting voice in the debate on acclimatisation.

Keywords: Acclimatisation, Tropics, Portuguese India, Goa, Portuguese Army

Introduction

Germano Correia, a physician and physical anthropologist born in Portuguese India in 1888, wrote extensively throughout his life on various fields, including climatology, medicine, history and anthropology. However, he paid particular attention to the history and society of the lusodescendentes, a group to which he belonged and which he believed to be descended from the Portuguese who had settled in India. He investigated their ethnic background and identity, while also addressing the broader issue of the acclimatisation of Europeans to tropical climates. From the late 1910s to the 1930s, he participated in the broader European and American debate on the adaptability of the “white race” to the tropics, a subject that attracted much attention from scientists and physicians of the time. Unlike many of his contemporaries, however, who attributed the decline of the white settlers to the detrimental effects of climatic conditions, Correia offered a different explanation. He argued that the real cause of the decline of the Portuguese population in India in the late 19th century was not environmental challenge, but a “socio-political catastrophe”. According to him, this catastrophe was the disbanding of the local armed forces by the Portuguese authorities in 1871. The decision, taken by Prime Minister Jaime Constantino de Freitas Moniz, led to the dissolution of an important institution in which the majority of soldiers were of Portuguese descent. Due to reduced social security and limited job prospects, many Portuguese descendants left Goa, leading to a decline in their numbers.

In this paper, I will analyse Correia’s writings in the broader context of the debate on acclimatisation and the historical and social implications of the dissolution of the Portuguese Indian Army. I will examine why Correia expressed strong resentment towards the events of 1871, the influences behind his views, and how he used the dissolution of the army as a historical argument to claim that the Portuguese had indeed acclimatised to India.

The Road to the Army’s Disbandment in 1871

The Exército da Índia was a colonial military formation in Portuguese India whose history goes back to the early 16th century, to the time of Afonso de Albuquerque, the Portuguese viceroy of Goa from 1509 to 1515. Soldiers of this formation took part in numerous wars waged by the Portuguese in Asia, both against other European powers and against various Indian states. Until the 19th century, the Portuguese Indian Army comprised several thousand men stationed in garrisons throughout the region. The force included various military units such as artillery, cavalry, infantry battalions and auxiliaries. In keeping with the ethnic and religious diversity of the colony, the personnel included European officers from the metropolis, the lusodescendentes locally recruited sepoys from the Indian population and even some soldiers from Portuguese Africa.⁽¹⁾

1. Teddy. Y. H. Sim, *Portuguese Colonial Military in India. Apparition of Control, 1750-1850*, (Singapore: Palgrave

Despite this diversity, the core of the army consisted mainly of the lusodescendentes. For them, military service was a traditional and highly valued profession. Many of them saw themselves as descendants of the Portuguese aristocracy that had settled in India in the early modern period and often emphasised their purely European origins without any admixture of native blood. They were strongly opposed to major reforms of the army,⁽²⁾ as it was their main source of income, the basis of their social position and an instrument for exercising their local influence. The army enabled them to compete with the Catholic Brahmins of Portuguese India, a long-standing rival and a powerful faction fighting for supremacy in the colony. However, maintaining the army was a financial burden, consuming more than 50 per cent of the colony's revenue. The troops were considered oversized in relation to the needs of the colony, probably because there was no immediate external threat to Goa, which was largely under British control.⁽³⁾ The army was primarily responsible for maintaining internal order. Its only significant external engagement was the pacification campaign in Zambezia in 1869. From the perspective of the government in Lisbon, the descendants were also not seen as the heirs of the Fidalgos who had fought for the Portuguese crown in Asia, but rather as a military caste that lived in prosperity and used their position to maintain control and privileges.⁽⁴⁾ Given these factors, Portuguese officials proposed to reorganise and downsize the army in order to reduce the financial burden on the colony.

In the 1840s and early 1850s, some minor reforms were carried out that reduced the army to about 3,100 men.⁽⁵⁾ It consisted of an artillery regiment and municipal guard stationed in Panji, the capital of Goa, and four infantry battalions stationed in the towns of Margao, Ponda, Bicholim and Mapusa. On 2 December 1869, Luís Augusto Rebello da Silva, the Minister for the Navy and Overseas, issued a decree ordering a significant reduction of the Portuguese Indian Army to 2694 soldiers. The plan was to disband one of the four infantry battalions and reduce the remaining three by removing two companies from each⁽⁶⁾. In accordance with the decree, the Governor General of Portuguese India, José Ferreira Pestana, disbanded the Margao battalion. The soldiers feared for their fate and decided to start a mutiny. Four battalions began to march on the capital, prompting the governor to enter into negotiations with them. A delegation that the governor had sent to the mutineers returned with their demands. The governor, knowing that he could not rely on the troops who had remained loyal to him, and in an effort to maintain order, agreed to the demands and the soldiers returned to their

Macmillan, 2022), 71-72.

2. Sim, *Portuguese Colonial Military in India*, 58.

3. Pinheiro Chegas, *As colónias portuguesas no século XIX (1811 a 1890)*, (Lisboa: Livraria de A. M. Pereira, 1890), 174.

4. Frederico Diniz d'Ayalla, *Goa Antiga e Moderna*, (Nova Goa: Livraria Coelho, 1927), 39-41.

5. The reported strength of the army before the decree of 1869 varies: Rodrigues cites 3,135 soldiers, while Kamat gives 6,250.

6. L. A. Rodrigues, "The Portuguese Army of India," *Journal of Indian History*, vol. 57 (1979): 84.

barracks. They were granted amnesty, the order to disband the soldiers was revoked and they were assured that they would not be forced to serve overseas.⁽⁷⁾

However, the government in Lisbon refused to authorise the governor's decision. After the end of the rebellion, he was removed from office and replaced by the Viscount of São Januário, who was ordered to carry out the reorganisation of the army provided for in the decree of 1869. Although the new governor-general attempted to draw up his own reform proposal, which offered the Goan soldiers better opportunities for service and promotion, his proposal was rejected by Lisbon, which insisted on the implementation of the original plan. This led to another revolt, which was essentially a continuation of the previous one, fuelled by the same fears of unemployment and discontent.⁽⁸⁾

The four battalions revolted again, prompting the governor to act quickly. He barricaded Panaji, set up cannons and launched two steamships on the Mandovi River, which run through the city. He personally supervised the defence preparations and sent a telegram to Lisbon requesting the dispatch of expeditionary forces to Goa. The new government in the metropolis, with Jaime Constantino de Freitas Moniz as Minister of the Navy and Overseas, organised expeditionary troops under the leadership of the son of the Portuguese Queen Maria II, Augusto de Bragança, to put down the rebellion. In the meantime, having secured the support of the population, the governor sent a military mission to give the mutineers an ultimatum. They were to return to their barracks or face harsh punishment under the law.⁽⁹⁾

On 1 October 1871, the soldiers, aware of the seriousness of their situation and the measures taken by the governor and the government in Lisbon, returned to their barracks. The Governor, noticing their obedience and peaceful behaviour, granted them amnesty. However, on 10 December 1871, reinforcements arrived from Lisbon, together with a new Governor General. The Portuguese government decided to disband the four rebel battalions, close the Military and Mathematics School in Goa, which was a local military institution, and completely reorganise the garrison in the colony.⁽¹⁰⁾ This disbanded the Portuguese Indian Army, a move that had significant social consequences for the descendants.

With the dissolution of the Exército da Índia, the lusodescendentes lost their most important source of income and pride. For centuries, military service had been their most important career path and a cornerstone of their social status. Due to this deeply rooted military tradition, they were ill-equipped for the quick transition to other professions. As a result, many of them joined the regular army of the metropolis, which led many

7. Pratima Kamat, "Mutiny in the Portuguese Indian Army," in *Farar far: Local Resistance to Colonial Hegemony in Goa, 1510-1912*, ed. Pratima Kamat, (Panaji: Institute Menezes Braganza, 1999), 72-75.

8. Kamat, "Mutiny in the Portuguese Indian Army," 76.

9. Kamat, "Mutiny in the Portuguese Indian Army," 77-78.

10. Kamat, "Mutiny in the Portuguese Indian Army," 78.

families to leave the colony for other parts of the Portuguese colonial empire.⁽¹¹⁾ Faced with economic difficulties, some decided to leave the colony for Portugal or Mozambique in search of better prospects.

Army's History as an Argument for Acclimatisation

Almost 50 years after the events of 1871, in 1918, Alberto Germano da Silva Correia, a doctor, anthropologist and lusodescendente from Goa, took up the subject of the army as a part of his anthropometric studies on the acclimatisation of the Portuguese in India. Germano Correia carried out three studies on the adaptation of Portuguese descendants to the tropical climate of India, with the aim of proving that they had acclimatised without showing signs of degeneration.⁽¹²⁾ His studies were part of a prolonged scientific debate among physicians, anthropologists and climatologists in the 19th century as to whether the “white man” could successfully adapt to tropical climates. Many believed that such an adaptation was impossible, arguing that the newcomers would show various signs of degeneration over time as their bodies could not cope with the heat and humidity of tropical regions. It was thought that life spans are shorter in the tropics, that children are born weaker and prone to rickets, that anaemia is widespread, that alcoholism occurs after some time, that various psychoses develop and that entire population groups tends to show brachycephaly (the shape of a skull shorter than average). Of particular concern were the possible effects on intellectual abilities. Some claimed that the tropical environment did not support sustained normal mental activity, as the one practiced in Europe, and that anyone who tried it was prone to various nervous system disorders. It was generally believed that Europeans needed to return regularly to temperate climates to regain their strength. The tropics were considered a region of degeneration, where not only the direct influence of the climate, but also tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever could destroy the life and health of the colonists.⁽¹³⁾ High mortality rates, declining populations, physical weakness, and low birth rates were all viewed as evidence that the tropical climate placed Europeans at a disadvantage. By analysing

11. Vimala Devi and Manuel de Seabra, *A literatura indo-portuguesa. Antologia*, (Lisboa: Junta de Investigações do Ultramar, 1971), 138.

12. See: Alberto Carlos Germano da Silva Correia, *Índia Portuguesa. Estudos Antropológicos e Acclimológicos*, (Nova Goa: Imprensa Nacional, 1918), Alberto Carlos Germano da Silva Correia, *Les Lusos-Descendants de L'Inde Portugaise*, (Nova Goa: Imprimerie Rangel-Bastora, 1928), Alberto Carlos Germano da Silva Correia, *Les enfants et les adolescents luso-descendants de l'Inde portugaise*, (Nova Goa: Tipografia Rangel-Bastora, 1931).

13. See: David Livingstone, “Human Acclimatization: Perspectives on a Contested Field of Inquiry in Science, Medicine and Geography”, *History of Science*, vol. 25, no. 4 (1987): 359-394. Louis Westenra Sambon, “Acclimatization of Europeans in Tropical Lands”, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 12, no. 6 (1898): 589-599, Glenn Thomas Trewartha, “Recent Thought on the Problem of White Acclimatization in the Wet Tropics”, *Geographical Review*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1926): 467-478, Filomeno da Câmara Melo Cabral, *As diversas raças humanas poderão indiferentemente habitar toda e qualquer linha isothermica? Será possível a aclimação dos Europeus nas possessões portuguesas ultramarinas?*, (Coimbra: Imprensa da Universidade, 1870).

these indicators, researchers like Correia tried to find out whether the group had really adapted to the new environment or not.⁽¹⁴⁾

In addition to sophisticated anthropometric measurements and racial theories about the acclimatisation of different ethnic groups, Correia also used the history of the army's disbandment in 1871 to argue for the successful adaptation of the Portuguese to the tropics. He analysed statistical data on the population development of the lusodescendentes from the 19th to the 20th century, examining whether their numbers grew, declined or stagnated, and then explaining the underlying causes of these trends.

Correia was particularly focused on the significant population decline between 1864 and 1878, when their numbers fell from 2,440 to 1,437 over the course of just 14 years. He dismissed climate, wars and tropical diseases as the main reasons for this decline, arguing that if climate had been the decisive factor, its effects would have been felt much earlier, at the beginning of the permanent Portuguese presence in the 16th century. In fact, population numbers had sometimes risen over the centuries, providing further evidence that climate alone was not to blame. According to Correia, the main reason for this dramatic population decline was the disbandment of the Exército da Índia, which triggered a mass migration of the lusodescendentes from the colony to Portugal and Mozambique.⁽¹⁵⁾ He expressed this view with a tone of resentment and deep regret, stating:

"In 1871, however, there was a social catastrophe in this colony that dealt a fatal blow exclusively to the Portuguese-descended ethnic group. This catastrophe was the nefarious extinction of the Army of India, advocated and requested by enemies of the Portuguese colony in India, and whose implementation was proposed and ordered by a heartless and unscrupulous Portuguese man. This Portuguese exterminator of his own race's descendants was the sinister Minister of Overseas Affairs, who in life was called Jaime Constantino de Freitas Moniz."⁽¹⁶⁾

Correia also cited the examples of military officials in the Exército da Índia to argue that the lusodescendentes were not mentally debilitated by the tropical climate. He emphasized that many of these descendants had received advanced military education, largely provided by the officers of the Mathematical and Military School in Goa.⁽¹⁷⁾ Correia referenced the work of Frederica Ayalla, a Goan writer, who claimed that the school produced many distinguished army officers. He also cited José Dionísio de Sousa e Faro, a Portuguese official, who praised the intellectual abilities of the school's graduates.⁽¹⁸⁾

14. Gilbert Edward Brooke, *Tropical Medicine, Hygiene and Parasitology*, (London: Charles Griffin & Company, 1908), 16-17.

15. Correia, *India Portuguesa*, 92-93.

16. Correia, *India Portuguesa*, 92-93.

17. Correia, *Les Lusos-Descendants*, 119.

18. Correia, *India Portuguesa*, 105-107.

Correia was deeply convinced that the disbandment of the army considerably diminished the status of the group to which he belonged and of which he was very proud. He perceived this action as a grave injustice inflicted by the metropolis, “his brothers in race”, a decisive blow that triggered mass emigration from the colony and led to the social and financial decline of its descendants. His choice of words – “catastrophe”, “nefarious”, and “exterminator” - reveals the intense negative feelings he harboured about this event. Correia was undoubtedly influenced by the Goan writer Frederico Ayalla, author of “Goa Antiga e Moderna”, a book that highlights the injustices the Portuguese community in India faced during the events of 1870-1871. Correia frequently cited Ayalla, whom he regarded as one of the most illustrious figures in Portuguese India.⁽¹⁹⁾

In his 1918 book, Correia noted that the group’s numbers were growing, but in his later historical studies he realised that they were slowly disappearing for economic reasons. In 1945, as he contemplated the future of his community, he feared the loss of one of the greatest legacies of the Portuguese empire. Revisiting the events of 1871, Correia argued that the disbandment decision not only weakened the descendants’ status but also sealed their fate, predicting with certainty that the group would eventually vanish as a consequence:

“This is what has happened. The lusodescendants of India are rapidly heading toward disappearance, which will soon be complete. And so an ethnic group that, for almost four centuries, has marked an unequivocally superior place in the history of the colonisation of the Orient, will disappear forever.”⁽²⁰⁾

Conclusions

The example of Germano Correia illustrates the various arguments in the debate on acclimatisation. The views on whether or not the “white race” could acclimatise were influenced by numerous factors. Some had to do with views on human evolution, while others stemmed from personal experiences with disease in the tropics, religious beliefs, and differing opinions on whether Europeans should settle in the colonies or simply exploit them economically. The Correia case illustrates how political and social events, such as the disbanding of the army, could be used to influence attitudes towards the possibility of acclimatisation. He also added a personal dimension to the debate by relating it to his own grievances, which are vividly reflected in his work. These personal and historical aspects make him a unique voice in this debate.

19. Correia, *Índia Portuguesa*, 93, 105, 107.

20. Alberto Carlos Germano da Silva Correia, “Os luso-descendentes da Índia”, *Boletim Eclesiástico da Arquidiocese de Goa* no. 1-2 (1945): 64.

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