

Power, Religion and Violence in Sixteenth-Century Goa¹

Ângela Barreto Xavier

Abstract: This study seeks to discuss some aspects of the processes of Christianisation in the context of the Portuguese imperial experience in India. The object is a violent event that took place on the outskirts of the region of Salcete (in the villages of Cuncolim, Veroda, Assolna, Velim and Ambelim), situated south of the city of Goa, in 1583. The episode resulted in the deaths of five Jesuits and several Christians, as well as of the villagers who were later held to be responsible for these killings. This incident will be analysed here not just in terms of the metropole-colony relationship (which was becoming increasingly evident after the re-incorporation of these territories in 1543, three decades after the conquest of the city of Goa by Afonso de Albuquerque) but also in the context of the local political, social and religious configurations.

This study seeks to discuss some aspects of the processes of Christianisation in the context of the Portuguese imperial experience in India, namely its impact on the expectations and everyday life of local inhabitants. The object of this analysis is a violent event that took place on the outskirts of the region of Salcete (in the villages of Cuncolim, Veroda, Assolna, Velim and Ambelim), situated south of the city of Goa. The episode resulted in the deaths of five Jesuits and several Christians, as well as of the villagers who were later held to be responsible for these killings. This incident will be analysed here not just in

terms of the metropole-colony relationship (which was becoming increasingly evident after the re-incorporation of these territories in 1543, three decades after the conquest of the city of Goa by Afonso de Albuquerque) but also in the context of the local political, social and religious configurations. How did ruptures in local society manifest themselves and contribute towards this kind of event? What other meanings could be revealed if the dynamics of local life were taken into consideration? To this end, the following pages seek to simultaneously understand the point of view of colonisers and of local protagonists and their narratives.

A comprehensive description, like the one proposed several years ago by Clifford Geertz in the *Interpretation of Cultures*, is still, in my view, the best way of accessing these multiple voices. This kind of analysis allows one to unravel levels of significance that would otherwise be inaccessible. This makes the scenario of processes of colonial domination and forms of entrenchment in local life a far more complex issue.² Moreover, I believe that the events in Cuncolim transcend the confines of that village and enrich our understanding of metropole-colony relations in the context of Portuguese imperial domination.³ Finally, this microscopic focus reveals the vital importance of the ritual dimension of these events. This is why Victor Turner's analysis of ritual processes in *The Ritual Process* and *From Ritual to Theatre* inspired my approach.⁴ Some of the situations analysed by Turner, especially in the latter book, have several similarities with the circumstances that have been identified in Cuncolim.

In the next section, I try to analyse these events by first describing the political situation of the village of Cuncolim during the second half of the sixteenth century. Then, in the following section, I focus on the events that took place just before, during and immediately after the martyrdom and attempt to interpret them in the light of the aforementioned presuppositions, both on a local and imperial scale.

The Village of Cuncolim before 1583

An analysis of this event in terms of both the external political scenario (i.e., the relationship between these villages and regions outside Portuguese dominions, namely, relations with the sultanate of Bijapur or the Vijayanagar empire, which had controlled the area before the Portuguese arrived) and the panorama of internal politics (i.e., relations between the Portuguese crown and Goan villages, between metropole and colony, between different villages at a

strictly regional level, and relations within the village itself) provides insights into the political dimensions of the events of 15 July 1583. Other significant aspects that would enable a better understanding of the strategies of domination that were developed by the imperial government and the modalities of resistance expressed by local inhabitants include factors such as its geographical location in the context of territories under Portuguese rule and its political and administrative status in the local framework and in the larger context of the Portuguese Empire.

Thirty kilometres from the town of Goa, Cuncolim, Velim, Veroda, Ambelim and Assolna⁵ (Fig. 1) were five villages in the territory of Salcete, situated between the Sal and Oudh rivers, towards the southern end of this region, and bordering the neighbouring lands of Bijapur.

Cuncolim, one of the largest villages in Salcete (along with Margão and Vernã), was the head of this group. This statute had probably been reinforced during the Muslim domination, when many landowners in Salcete had been transformed into small armed governors who were responsible for collecting taxes at a local level. Moreover, the Adil Shah of Bijapur recruited some of the soldiers of the armies he had in this region from these five villages, which not only reflects their strategic importance but also the existence of a military or para-military tradition amongst local inhabitants.⁶

According to the sources, the village of Cuncolim was located on a road that linked some important towns along the western coast of Southern India (connecting, at least, Goa and Cochin). It served as a staging post for the runners that ensured communication links between these relatively distant places. This position as an important stopover explains the concentration of some military forces in the region, since the protection of information that circulated via this route was apparently sufficiently relevant for the preservation of political order in the vicinity. At the same time, this circulation of information (and the passage of runners) made the local inhabitants more susceptible to different influences. As Teotonio de Souza has shown, the prosperity of the village was still related to its fertile land and agricultural production, besides the development of highly skilled and specialised crafts (namely the manufacture of guns), and a bazaar that was the end of "more than one caravan route connecting it with the mainland through the Ghats of the Ashthagrahar province." This bazaar was connected with temple and religious festivities, which meant that it also depended on the ritual life of the village.⁷ Despite its relatively prominent position, Cuncolim was not part of the regional assembly

that brought together the twelve main villages of Salcete, which was responsible for many decisions pertaining to the region.

Just like the island of Tiswadi, where the city of Goa was located, the territory of Salcete was still disputed by Yusuf Adil Shah's forces, by armies that theoretically depended on him but were in practice seditious and by Portuguese troops. In fact, between 1520 (the first year in which an incorporation of these territories was mentioned) and 1583, the year of the bloody incident in Cuncolim, numerous attempts were made to establish the Portuguese presence.⁸ Several skirmishes pitted the Adil Shah's troops against the Christian powers (Andrada 609ff), and the latter took advantage of internal strife in Bijapur to definitively incorporate the territories of Salcete into Portuguese dominions in 1543 along with the lands of Bardez, situated to the north of the city of Goa.⁹ Even so, the conflict was rekindled four years later, during the administration of Dom João de Castro, and was finally settled in favour of the Portuguese.¹⁰ It is the same to say that, from a geopolitical perspective, Salcete (and especially the five villages under study) was a territory that was constantly disputed by Christian and Muslim forces. It was even coveted by "Hindus," since, at a certain point, the kingdom of Vijayanagar got involved in this territorial game.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, these different possibilities provided the backdrop for the expectations and alliances of local populations and, at least in theory, afforded them some scope for negotiation.

However, unlike the case of the islands of Tiswadi, Divar and Chorão, where the Christian presence was implanted after a period of relatively harmonious relations, of a kind of indirect rule, the incorporation of the territories of Salcete took place during a period in which the Portuguese Crown's attitude with regard to local populations had changed.¹¹ Driven by a desire to ensure a more stable political integration, which Christianisation would seemingly achieve, it now sought the utopia of a possible alteration of the local *modus vivendi*, envisaging the creation of a new world, a new *respublica christiana*. In fact, the incorporation of the territories of Bardez and Salcete, and the respective implantation of the structures of imperial domination, took place during a period in which political and administrative coexistence was moulded by a hierarchy of domination, clearly headed by the Portuguese Crown and its rights, which envisaged the conversion of the entire local population, subsequently direct subjects of the Portuguese Crown. It is possible, therefore, that the population of Salcete perceived the Portuguese domination in a different light than the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages of Tiswadi.

Fiscal evasion, a refusal to allow the right of passage to royal officers, and open conflicts with the crown's agents were just some of the ways in which the inhabitants of Cuncolim and surrounding villages reacted to attempts by Christian authorities to establish their presence. This list reflects some of the methods of defence and protection that these kinds of communities habitually employed against those whom they identified as their enemies. In these initial moments, the Christians and Portuguese could have been perceived as one of the varied enemies that these village communities and their ancestors were used to confronting.¹²

In addition to external powers that fought over the territory and their impact on village life, there were also intra-regional rivalries, especially amongst the villages that sought to establish their primacy over Salcete. Just like in the case of neighbouring territories, here, too, disputes, betrayals and alliances were the order of the day for these villages and their inhabitants.¹³

Let us concentrate now on the impact of conversion strategies on the balance of power within these villages. Contrary to what had been established in the agreement that allowed the transference of the lands of Salcete and Bardez to the dominions of the Portuguese Crown¹⁴ in 1543, strategies for the conversion and Christianisation of local populations began to be delineated almost immediately.¹⁵

It was in this context that the Jesuits obtained a decree from the viceroy, Dom Francisco de Mascarenhas, which confirmed that all the revenues of the temples and deities of Salcete should revert to the Society of Jesus. It further stipulated that the Jesuits were to use these funds "For the ordinary expenditure of churches, officials, and bailiffs, hospitals and to clothe catechumens," while any remaining money was to be handed over to the house for catechumens in Goa.¹⁶ This was the scenario in which leading figures of the village of Margão, the main town of Salcete, met and swore that they were ready to provide information about and an evaluation of the revenues and properties of all the temples in this region.¹⁷

The majority of villages in Salcete conformed to the situation and the local elites (apparently here, unlike in Tiswadi, conversions began among the elites)¹⁸ opted to accept the new circumstances. It is therefore not surprising that several churches were built after 1567, although all of them were protected by military troops.¹⁹ Alternatively, the village of Cuncolim reacted by leading a revolt that took place in 1567 and culminated in the destruction of numerous Jesuit residences and churches.²⁰ And, a few years later, in

1570-71, some of its inhabitants participated in the siege of Goa by forces from Bijapur.²¹

Despite this, the missionaries did not desist and instead rebuilt their churches and residences, but these villages were still far from being pacified. The five villages of Southern Salcete, headed by Cuncolim, continued to “revolt.” They refused to pay tributes and, against the orders of the imperial authorities, rebuilt their main temple and even added four or five smaller temples “alongside it”—the *panchadevata* that Paulo da Trindade identified as a characteristic feature of all Goan villages but which, in fact, only existed in some of them (Trindade I.339). They also held non-Christian ceremonies and festive celebrations in public. All of this caused increasingly violent reactions on the part of the Christian authorities,²² who interpreted this resistance as an open conflict.²³ They repeatedly described the situation as the persecution of Christians by impious heathens,²⁴ which transformed these events into scenarios in which another just war could be developed.²⁵

The first violent punishment took place in 1577. The implantation of mechanisms that would allow the reinforcement of the political integration of these territories and an increase of the Portuguese military apparatus in the area heralded these developments. In this context, “the Negroes were punished in the following manner”: Gil Eanes de Mascarenhas, the captain-major of the Malabar Coast, entered Cuncolim via the Sal River, doing “whatever damage he could in those villages,” burning and razing “whatever he found before him,” “palm groves, vegetable gardens and paddy fields, building trenches where his men could shelter.”²⁶ At the same time, two priests—Pietro Berno and Manuel Teixeira—killed a cow and defiled village lands with its entrails (Biardeau 479).

Despite reassuring promises, the Adil Shah of Bijapur once again attacked Salcete, with the support of the residents of Cuncolim, desecrating and destroying Jesuit churches and Christian houses. In response—it was 1581—the Jesuits recruited about two hundred locals in order to protect themselves, many of whom were from the village of Orlim (Bartoli 630).

The Scene of the Martyrdom

The situation had not improved when Rudolfo Acquaviva, a nephew of the Jesuit General, was appointed as rector of the college of Salcete in 1583, after his return from the embassy to the Great Mughal. Instead, the instability of the Portuguese crown’s political and administrative domination, coupled with the expectations of local residents that life would return to what it had been in

the past, prevailed. This explains the conversions achieved by the missionaries in Salcete until the 1580s. A royal letter from this period mentions the investment made to ensure conversions—reflected in the construction of “many churches, where divine offices are celebrated”—and its limited efficacy, since “on the other hand, the heathens pursue their idolatry, thus setting a bad example for new converts, causing agitation, and inspiring many to return to their former rites, which is very prejudicial for conversions.”²⁷

Having gathered the Jesuits in the village of Cortalim and, subsequently, in Vernã, Acquaviva analysed “the most suitable methods to finish converting Salcete and to induce many to convert and be baptised.” It was decided that it was essential to convert the residents of Cuncolim.²⁸

Could the inhabitants of this village have had an inkling of the plans of the Jesuits? Could it be that just like the missionaries they, too, were preparing to receive this onslaught? How can one catch a glimpse of this local life without coeval sources that refer to the same episode, but now viewed from the other side? In the absence of these sources, can one suggest a counter-narrative, a narrative in which the missionaries and Portuguese agents were seen as impious heathens who should have been annihilated? And to what extent can one identify the existence in Cuncolim, as in other villages in Goa, of people and groups within the village who represented themselves as part of the two narratives?²⁹

Images of the moments that preceded the arrival of the missionaries in Cuncolim suggest the existence of social tensions within this village and in its relations with other villages in Salcete.³⁰ The Jesuits stated that on 14 July 1583 they sent a message to the inhabitants of Cuncolim, informing them that they would go on a mission on the following day. The villagers replied that it was not the best moment due to problems caused by the death (owing to a betrayal) of one of the village’s most important gaunkars. The violent death of one of the “leading figures” of the village seems to indicate that Cuncolim was not as harmonious a unit as it would be depicted later.

The account by Francisco de Sousa provides further information on these tensions. Sousa added that on that Monday morning, even before the priests had left for Cuncolim, father António Francisco had asked some Christians from Orlim—perhaps Baltasar Serrão, Pedro de Mascarenhas and Diogo de Castro, who already held Christian names (*Puratatva-Purabhilek* 36-38)—to go to Cuncolim and build a camp there, so that the missionaries could shelter from the heavy rain that was pelting down. The arrival of the Christians from Orlim resulted in conflicts with the residents of Cuncolim, further irked

by the presence of people from a neighbouring village who had already conformed to the directives of the imperial order.

But one should notice that there were already some converts in the village of Cuncolim. There is mention of a Martim Garcia, a local Christian who protected one of the Portuguese during the bloodiest moment of the episode, thanks to whom the missionary in question survived the subsequent bloodbath.³¹ It is possible, therefore, that there were families of Cuncolim who had different expectations with regard to Portuguese domination and its consequences.

The accumulation of tensions in the relationship between metropole and colony and the discord that characterised the fabric of local society all combined to create an explosive situation in the village of Cuncolim on that rainy morning in July.

After they entered the village, the missionaries were received by a single gaunkar from Cuncolim, who told them that a *gancaria* [village assembly] was currently underway, in which the villagers sought to solve the conflict that pitted two of its leading figures against each other. Ever eager to bring about peace, the missionaries did not hesitate and summoned the two parties, convinced that they would be able to settle this local conflict. However, only one of the parties, Calgo Naique, appeared and reacted aggressively towards the missionaries. He refused to talk with his adversary, a man called Chatim, without first discussing the matter with his own family.

Let me open a parenthesis to say that, like this gaunkar, thirteen other inhabitants of Cuncolim bore the surname "Naique" and would later be convicted and executed as "rebels." It is possible that this was the group that had been given the title of "Naique" by the Adil Shah and who now demonstrated their gratitude by continuing to manifest their loyalty to Bijapur.³²

An open conflict was triggered not only by Calgo Naique's refusal to talk but also by a subsequent dance by a warlock (*feiteiro*)—this is the term that appears in correspondence—which resulted in the most violent part of this encounter. While dancing, the warlock began to scream like a "lunatic," inciting the locals to "go to the battle," and announcing that "the time had come."

What reaction would this warlike proclamation have evoked? It was time to do what exactly? To expel the Portuguese? And who was this warlock, what was his status in local society, what was the power of his words?

Even if it is not possible to have access to sources produced by the people of Cuncolim, there are alternative ways of trying to answer these questions; and they suggest political and cultural scenarios that will enrich our understanding

of these events. To reconstruct the way in which the village was organised from a social and religious point of view is therefore necessary in order to proceed with this type of analysis. If missionary narratives allow us to catch some of its characteristics, the inventories of lands and revenues attributed by these villages to local temples, deities and priests produced by the Portuguese imperial administration enable us to view the social and religious complexity of these territories from another angle.³³

Just like most villages in South India, the village of Cuncolim had a vast and complex religious organisation. Different sources indicate that this religious organisation comprised a relationship (not always a peaceful one) between Dravidian and Brahmanical deities. This pantheon reflected alliances and negotiations between pre-existing populations and those that had subsequently settled in the village, both due to invasions (as was the case with Brahmins and Marathas) and to incorporation in the established community (the case of workers and other kinds of migrations).³⁴

According to the inventory of the lands that belonged to the temples of Cuncolim, the village had a temple dedicated to Mahadeva (one of the main forms of Shiva in South India), which had been destroyed in 1567 by the Portuguese and the missionaries who had accompanied them. This temple was subsequently rebuilt and, four years prior to the martyrdom, Vittaladas Vittoji, a local resident, had once again placed a Shiva Linga Rameshwar in the sanctum. This was another sign that many of the village's inhabitants had refused to accept the new religious framework that the Portuguese wished to establish there (Pereira 96). A temple dedicated to the goddess Shantadurga (a popular manifestation in South India of Parvati, Shiva's consort) was also associated with the Mahadeva temple. Shantadurga combined all the characteristics of a Dravidian Durga—the goddess of blood and power, who possessed a special divine energy that allowed her to combat impure spirits—with the characteristics of Shanta, a goddess inclined to induce peace. Another temple in this complex was that of the goddess Santeri, which was built over an anthill (a sacred spot that, according to local beliefs, contained reincarnated souls). This temple had been destroyed by father Pietro Berno, one of the Jesuits who would later be killed.³⁵ Paulo da Trindade, the most important Franciscan chronicler of that period, wrote that Santeri was “that land that they worship and consider to be sacred” (I.339), a land that contained thousands of Indras, a sign of the relativity of the history of mankind (Zimmer 19). Nevertheless, Santeri was mostly represented as a female warrior, with a lion at her head and

a mangled demon between her hands. The guardian goddess of the village, Santeri could be, in fact, a source of terror. For this very reason her temple faced towards the south, the direction from which dark spirits traditionally originated.³⁶ Santeri and the ambivalent Shantadurga (which local legends later transformed into a sister of Our Lady of Health, the Christian deity that replaced her)³⁷ provided means of dealing with terrestrial evils. These often entailed animal sacrifices (and even human sacrifices), which were also practised in the village of Cuncolim. "They sacrificed men and committed other similar abominations": this commentary by Sebastião Gonçalves (repeated by Linschoten at about the same time) suggests the presence of devotional practices in which the sacred manifested itself violently.³⁸ Many of these sacrifices took place in situations that were perceived as representing great danger for the cohesion of the village. The demonical power of the deities was revealed mainly in these kinds of situations: they would become even more violent than the enemy, dismembering and destroying adversaries, regaining a symbolic domination over a (physical and symbolic) space that was their jurisdiction.³⁹ It is known that bloody sacrifices of roosters and sheep were frequent in territories bordering Salcete, Bardez and Tiswadi in the seventeenth century and that some Portuguese, who were later condemned by the Inquisition, participated in these rituals.⁴⁰ It is not surprising therefore that the same devotional patterns could be identified in Salcete in the previous century, before conversion to Christianity had been achieved.

If, on the one hand, the articulation between Mahadeva, Shantadurga and Santeri could perform protective functions in the village, on the other hand it is possible that the combination between Brahmanical and Dravidian deities represented concrete social arrangements. In this sense, the village had a complex pantheon that simultaneously emulated the local social order, with all its alliances, conflicts, negotiations and history.⁴¹

It is known, for example, that Naique and Prabhu were two surnames of leading families in Cuncolim, but it is not clear if they were applied to people belonging to different castes (Charodos and Brahmins?).⁴² As has been mentioned, Naiques were associated with military activities, while the surname Prabhu was linked to "intellectual" pursuits. In their turn, the presence of the title of Naique and of the same Shaivite and Dravidian deities in the villages of Ambelim, Assolna, Velim and Veroda—all of which were satellites of Cuncolim⁴³—reveal the existence of religious networks associated with certain social (and occupational?) groups that could transcend the limits of a village and

translate into regional solidarity. It is known that such networks existed in other regions in India (Srinivas has emphasised their importance at all these levels).⁴⁴ Does this imply that the concerted action of these villages in a political context reflected deeper forms of cohesion?⁴⁵ In addition to the Naiques and Prabhus, the elites of Cuncolim included families whose surname was Chatim (probably belonging to merchant groups) who had possibly established themselves in these places at a later date.

What were the relative social and political positions of these families? What was the hierarchy of their temples and religious practices? To what extent did the discord between the Chatins (merchants?) and the Naiques (warriors?), which is mentioned in missionary letters, reflect internal tensions or the changing of local lifestyles previous to the arrival of the Portuguese, and which were violently manifested the day on which the missionaries decided to go about their ill-fated visit?

I do not provide answers for most of these questions, but this brief survey and the set of questions formulated above highlight the different levels of complexity that could be found in a Goan village during the sixteenth century. This complexity influenced imperial actions and provided the context for one of the protagonists of these pages: the warlock and seer mentioned above who, according to the Jesuit historian Daniello Bartoli, was called Pondu Naique (Bartoli 633).

It is probable that Bartoli identified this individual as a warlock and seer not only on the basis of the information that had been provided to him by missionaries *in loco*, but also to cater to European readers, for whom the mere mention of witchcraft and soothsayers instantly evoked negative reactions and associations. Still, and apart from the colourful elements of his description, if Bartoli transmitted reliable information, this individual belonged to one of Cuncolim's Naique families. Since in these villages the task of divination was usually entrusted to Brahmin priests, he must have rendered service in one of its Brahmanical temples, possibly the Mahadeva or Shantadurga temple. His dance and his exhortations to revolt—namely the cry “the time has come”—appear to be involved in a web of meanings that it would be interesting to unravel.

For this reason, the gestures of this warlock as described literally in missionary accounts should be analysed. From the very outset, they seem to suggest that the situation at that moment was a liminal one: the fact that he shook loose his hair, accompanied by disordered body movements, could indicate a return to a natural state, a state in which neither passions nor movements were

controlled. This evokes the transposition of a ritual and symbolic combat to a terrestrial stage. It is necessary to keep in mind that Mahadeva, the main deity of Cuncolim, was an image of Shiva, and Shiva was also Nataraja, the lord of dance, a "pantomimic dance" that sought to "transform the dancer into the demon, god or terrestrial existence that was being interpreted." As Heinrich Zimmer has suggested, "A war dance, for example, transforms those who dance it into warriors, arousing their bellicose virtues, converting them into intrepid heroes." This bellicose and heroic interpretation (which would aptly describe this village) is corroborated by Veena Das, who affirms that actions such as loosening the hair, body, hands and feet in more or less wild movements were gestures attributed to individuals in a liminal state. Many people enter this state voluntarily, as in the case of warlocks and seers.⁴⁶ Textual descriptions of the warlock allow us to identify this kind of *performance* in his dance. This is also confirmed by some recent anthropological research about manifestations of goddesses linked to blood and power in Southern India (in regions that are very close to the territories that constitute the modern-day state of Goa). Here, too, similar gestures have been identified, which signalled the beginning of the unleashing of disorder.⁴⁷ This kind of comportment mimicked animal attitudes, thus initially evoking a wild aggressiveness, imitating the martial fury of a military group. In a second phase, this was followed by more elegant movements that evoked images of a cosmic dance, representing the body on the battlefield, raising it to a state of ecstasy and then to liberation.

This impression becomes even stronger after considering other exhortations placed in the warlock's mouth: "This is a good present and one with many heads" is a reference to the fact that demons require a sacrifice of five roosters. As is known, animals substituted for humans who should have been occupying their place. Could it possibly be that on that day the warlock had access to a veritable sacrificial bounty (instead of a representation), which would transform Cuncolim into an exceptional sacrificial stage?

Without being able to say that this was a situation similar to ones that anthropologists have identified in regions in the vicinity of Goa, the information outlined above suggests that the arrival of the missionaries at that specific moment (specific in its multiple scales, internal and external, macro and micro) appeared as an excellent occasion to carry out a ritual sacrifice. The warlock would be the one to initiate the sacrifice, which would enable the internal cohesion of the village to be reinforced and establish the pre-eminent position of Cuncolim with regard to the other four villages.

On the other hand, the crescendo of violence that took place on 15 July 1583 suggests a situation that, in the first place, fits perfectly into the framework of what Victor Turner has defined as social drama: the violation of fidelity/solidarity/respect, owed by a subject or family with regard to one or more groups to which they belong, which requires them to resort to extraordinary forms of restoring order. According to Turner, the mechanisms used to resolve social dramas differed according to their nature and effects. These mechanisms could range from mere advice (as Calgo Naique had done, until a certain point, with the warlock and his family) to the performance of public rituals, which could involve the sacrifice of victims, which was often perceived as the only way to exorcise the evils that affected a village and to pacify the wrath of the gods (Turner, *From Ritual* 69).

It seems that in the case of Cuncolim the imperial configuration had compounded this social drama by introducing new actors on the stage. In this regard, one can find an almost symmetrical inversion of the Christians' immediate interpretation of these events. As the missionaries had accused the inhabitants of the village of being idolaters and promoters of diabolical acts that they sought to combat to liberate the locals, they could have been perceived by most villagers as malignant spirits, coming from outside the village—although from Northern Salcete instead of from the South. This would unleash a latent conflict in the already fragile local order, a revolt and ritual sacrifice in which the missionaries and their companions were actors in a play that was in the making, and protagonists of a story that they were not able to decipher. It is possible, too, that some of the Jesuits who were murdered wished to die at the hands of the residents of Cuncolim. The irony could lie in the fact that they did die, just as they had wished, thus simultaneously satisfying the equally religious and ritual desires of their adversaries.

The decapitation or semi-decapitation of the missionaries, as well as the mutilation perpetrated upon the body of Pietro Berno, corroborates the idea that the event assumed a ritual dimension. This is also indicated by the gashes inflicted on the top of the head of Berno, the mutilation of half an ear, and the dismemberment of his sexual organs (which were later placed in his mouth), which were all habitual forms of defiling the bodies of enemies, before killing them. This was frequent in situations that were perceived as political and religious conflicts in villages in South India during this period (Bayly 53).⁴⁸ The images recorded by missionary accounts described how the residents of Cuncolim had manifested great sacrificial glee, smearing the blood of Francisco Aranha on the village's main

deity. This glee continued until the moment when the bodies were handed over, "Since they were still like man-eating tigers, licking the blood of the ministers of the Gospel." These observations further corroborate this interpretation.

Nevertheless, other kinds of interpretations prevailed. Contrary to Pondu Naique's predictions, a few days after the event, sixteen Indians, who had been identified as the *heads* of the rebellion, were punished on the orders of the thirteenth viceroy of Goa, Dom Francisco Mascarenhas. In this document, the revolt of Cuncolim was termed, "an enormous case, as was the treachery with which they treated the Fathers of the Society of Jesus." It added that "it is necessary to punish these traitors for this, so that no other such enemies will dare at any other time to commit similar actions." Curiously, only the "main heads" of the revolt were punished, who "lost all the properties of the said *gan-cars*, to Our Lord the King for the said treachery, which they committed." It was decided not to take action against "the *curumbins* and other lesser folk of the said Villages, because they did not understand this defence, and they can safely come to other Villages in the said lands, without being injured in any way."⁴⁹ The order was to be executed by Vicente Villalobos, the Portuguese official responsible for these areas, who was to impale the heads in the centre of the village, as a warning to anyone who dared to dream of revolting against Portuguese domination (*Admirabile Vida* 224).

The crown's intentions were clear—to warn the elites while keeping the population that worked the fields from which the crown earned its revenues. According to coeval accounts, other inhabitants of the village who had been involved in this episode fled to neighbouring lands and remained there. And, contrary to the wishes of much of the local population, the villages of Southern Salcete continued to be part of the territories that were directly administered by the Portuguese crown.

In contrast, the blood of the "martyrs" that had been spilled on those lands fertilised a veritable "garden of Christianity." According to Portuguese sources, after the martyrdom/revolt/sacrifice, about 1500 Indians converted to Christianity. In 1586 and 1587 another five settlements were converted, as were another four villages in 1588. At this time, 1900 Indians were baptised and some 2000 catechumens were being instructed "with great joy, and to the utter amazement of the Faithful, because amongst these Populations, there was one that was particularly obstinate in its idolatry and just talking about someone there becoming a Christian was equivalent to being immediately killed." This enthusiasm for converting to Christianity resulted in a further 3850 people being baptised in

1590. The conversions continued successively, and “by common consensus it was decided that whoever did not wish to live here as a Christian could not live amongst them, but had to go into exile” (*Segni maravigliosi* 40, 41).

Equally suggestive were the later attitudes of the Portuguese crown. In addition to the immediate punishments, the crown chose to symbolically kill the villages involved in the episode, extinguishing their *gancarias* and appropriating their lands, which reverted to the Portuguese king. The latter then gave the villages of Cuncolim and Veroda to Dom João da Silva and, on the same day, the other villages—Ambelim, Assolna and Velim—to Dom Pedro de Castro, who then donated them to the Jesuits.

In practice, these donations meant the political relegation of these villages in the context of Portuguese domination. This was further compounded by a cultural stigmatisation. An official report dating from 1722, which sought to describe the state of various settlements in Goa (an early statistical instrument to be used by the political authorities), mentions that almost all the inhabitants of this village had remained, and I quote the exact terminology used: “gentios” [heathens]. In other texts, the settlement was noted for the poverty of its inhabitants, which was seen as being a consequence of their religious choices. According to an eighteenth-century account, unlike in the Christian villages of Salcete, the lands of Cuncolim had become sterile. In a field in front of a chapel that had been built on the spot where the events of 1583 had taken place, which had been rented by non-Christians who wished to sow sugarcane there, a plague of rats constantly destroyed their crops. Instead of resorting to their own deities to solve the problem, local villagers entered Christian churches where their prayers were answered and the rat infestation came to an end (*Segni maravigliosi* 108-113). The same memoir noted how the family who owned a dog that had discovered the moribund body of one of the missionaries had lost their ability to speak and had sought refuge in the forest. Ever since then this family (who would have symbolised all the non-Christians of Cuncolim) communicated by means of gruesome shouts, which were just like canine howls. Apart from the metaphoric dimension of the reference, it reactivated a *topos* that had been evoked in literary works ever since Megasthenes’s third-century account, which was later reproduced by Pliny, Isidore of Seville, Mandeville, and others, according to which there existed hybrid human-canine races in India, beings with the body of a man and the head of a dog.

Physical deaths, a political death, discursive relegation, a diminution in status, economic impoverishment—the change in the statute of these villages,

caused by a sort of anathema that, even today, from the perspective of the Christian population, is still associated with this village, was linked to the 1583 incident and the memory that was constructed around it. From the Christian point of view, until contemporary liberationist movements, Cuncolim became a case that was not to be imitated (and during the movements, one that was to be emulated). If, during the seventeenth century, the *memory of the repression* worked (Scott 40)—it is known that forty years later, the residents of Cuncolim were the first to resist an attempted entry by the forces of the captain of Ponda (“Upon seeing the said men of war there, the inhabitants of that village took up arms, and successively pushed them out of there”) and requested military support from the governor.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, as is confirmed by the 1722 inventory, which also stated that the village was the poorest settlement in all of Salcete, the culpability of this hamlet and its inhabitants extended over time, as did its stigmatisation. Although in other parts of Goa Christianity gradually became the centre of local order, marginalising or excluding from this order all those who chose not to adopt the orthodoxy and behavioural norms of the mother country, in peripheral areas, where the political mechanisms of the Portuguese crown were less effective, local history developed at another pace.

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I hope that this description sheds more light on the scenario of processes of the Portuguese imperial presence and its forms of entrenchment in Goan local life, allowing new questions to be raised about metropole-colony relations and the ways of dealing with the challenges involved in the imperial scenario. Just like in other villages of Goa,⁵¹ the case of Cuncolim also makes it clear how the social landscape of the place was an important variable in the shaping of relations between colonisers and the colonised (and not only in this particular case) and affected the future political relationship of the Portuguese crown with these territories.

Depending on the different histories of these villages and their villagers, their different positions in the regional order, or, even, their relationship with the regional centre—in this case, the city of Goa—these relations could be unpredictable and more or less violent or more or less pacific. Similarly, the attitudes of the Portuguese crown adapted to the behaviour of the local populations. In the case of Cuncolim, pragmatic resources were displayed in order to control a particular situation. It is also clear that the Portuguese crown was also anticipating

future conflicts. The memory of repression acted as a limit to the freedom of political expression of local inhabitants (of the colonised), eventually “pacifying” their relationship. It is the same to say that the events of Cuncolim reveal that the process of the conversion and Christianisation of the Goan population was, at certain moments, extremely violent and involved bloodshed. They demonstrate, too, that the crescendo of violence increased when the sites were peripheral or located near frontier regions (peripheral with regard to the city of Goa and the power of conformance that this urban nucleus was capable of imposing, as the political and administrative centre of these territories).

If in other moments and situations in the Goan experience one can identify attitudes of compromise, Cuncolim allows us to observe a moment of political radicalisation.

I would argue that, besides its peripheral position, this political radicalisation in the stage of Cuncolim also depended on its cultural configuration. In addition to some regional identities, each village had a singular status, its own history. The history of Cuncolim and the surrounding villages, as well as its political, social and religious landscape, allowed, apparently, this type of situation. The colonial experience was made up of these multiple entrenched histories, of different villages, but also of different villagers. It depended, therefore, on the dialogues and dialectics of a precise moment, on the different combinations of external and internal aspirations, fears and material conditions.

In order to deepen our perception of these processes it is thus necessary to combine an ethnographic approach and a historical one, to view these processes in terms of their synchrony and diachrony, on multiple scales—micro and macro scales—and multiple geographies—physical and symbolic geographies. Given the availability of sources, it is not always easy to proceed to this kind of analysis, but I believe that a counter-reading of sources produced under the imperial umbrella, and the raising of a new questionnaire, can provide interesting answers or, at least, new problems.

It is clear that after doing this exercise in a systematic way, we will have a more complex image of the role played by the different actors involved. The Portuguese imperial presence in these territories will appear to be riddled with more tension and conflicts than macro-level approaches suggest. Brute domination will become a part of it, but the agency of the colonised cannot be dismissed in the process of shaping this colonial relationship. If the colonisers invented the colonised in discursive (and practical) terms, they were also involved in making some colonial subjects, in some places, more brutal

than others. Thus, instead of continuing to presuppose that local populations manifested a homogenous behaviour and that all the territories of Goa were essentially identical, it would be prudent to examine the destinies of these territories by keeping in mind these concrete situations and traditional local behaviours, without forgetting that these communities could opt for distinct scenarios according to different situations.

Notes

¹ An earlier version of this article was published in Portuguese as chapter six of my book, *A Invenção de Goa*.

² There is a vast bibliography on this event, which is still rather controversial in Goa. The most interesting literature in this regard includes Newman and Axelrod and Fuerch. In *Conversion, Continuity and Change*, Rowena Robinson also addresses this case. More recently, Teotonio de Souza has published online "Why Cuncolim Martyrs? An historical re-assessment." About Cuncolim, also see Kamat.

³ See Geertz, chapter 1.

⁴ See Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

⁵ I am using the names of these villages as they were used by the Portuguese power in the sixteenth century.

⁶ See Velinkar, chapter 2. The same situation is identified in other imperial experiences in India (see Vidal 25).

⁷ See Souza "Why Cuncolim Martyrs?"

⁸ There is information, for example, confirming the existence of at least two *tanadares*, António Pinto and Rui de Moraes; they apparently fought in many conflicts against the forces of the Adil Shah (who usually gathered on the opposite bank of the Sal River) (Velinkar 32).

⁹ Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo (henceforth ANTT), *Corpo Cronológico*, Part I, Mss. 77, No. 52, No. 60. Martim Affonso de Sousa dedicated a paragraph in his autobiography to this situation. Although he stated that there was a lot that had yet to be told in this regard, he revealed the scant importance attributed to the incorporation of these lands at that point (Souza 78).

¹⁰ In addition to letters by Dom João de Castro to his children and the Portuguese monarch, other correspondence was also sent to Lisbon with information about the local situation. See ANTT, CC, Part I, Mss. 79, No. 139; Part II, Mss. 2, 41, No. 24.

¹¹ See Xavier, "Aparejo y disposicion" 783-805.

¹² On these types of reaction, see Elias, "Introduction," in Elias and Scotson.

¹³ Frequent references to these kinds of situations in documents pertaining to property prove the existence of a climate of rivalry between various villages.

¹⁴ In the treaty that was signed between Amir Khan and Pedro Mascarenhas in 1554, and which was confirmed in the following year, it was explicitly stated that in the territories of Salcete and Bardez, "The mosques and temples that already existed in the said lands would not be destroyed, nor would they [the Portuguese] oblige them to leave their faith by any kind of force, but would only receive those who wished to become Christians of their own free will." The Portuguese also guaranteed that the properties of these village communities would be respected

(Rivara, *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental* [henceforth *APO*] F5.I.267-278). Three years later, the royal order that gave the revenues of the temples of Salcete and Bardez to the churches in this region crystallised the situation (*APO* F5.II.694-698).

¹⁵ *APO* F5.II.613-614, 872-874.

¹⁶ *APO* F5.III.993.

¹⁷ *APO* F5.II.489. Curiously, a document dating from 1569, which can be found at the beginning of the records (*tombo*) of the lands belonging to temples in Salcete for the year 1567, mentions that the most productive fields of the villages of Salcete had not provided revenues because "the entire area has revolted" and that "no *gaoncar* or clerk had even appeared to receive these revenues." It also mentioned the exceptions: the villages of Cuncolim, Sancoale and Murmugão, Ysorsy and Quelossim, which had been dominated.

¹⁸ Xavier, *A Invenção de Goa* chapter 5.

¹⁹ For an overall perspective of the military framework of the *Estado da Índia*, see Rodrigues vol. 2.

²⁰ Wicki, *Documenta Indica* (henceforth *DI*) X.942; *DIXI*.262, 563-569, 692.

²¹ *APO* F5.I.825-831, 841-842.

²² With regard to the rationale that dominated this crescendo of conflicts, see Adas 99. According to the Jesuits, the Brahmins were the main strategists behind the collective reactions of Cuncolim. This perspective is hardly surprising since, in the view of the missionaries, they were the main opponents of Christianity. It is quite possible that they were indeed the masterminds of this resistance, since the most explicit signs of a refusal to accept Christian domination were manifested at the level of the local elite.

²³ Michael Adas has highlighted the lack of differentiation—in certain documents—in terms of the dimensions and nuances of "refusal" and "confrontation," the former being more passive than the latter, which is clearly more active (91).

²⁴ According to missionary versions, these populations obstructed the political and religious zeal of the viceroy, Dom Constantino, during whose administration "Our fathers began to enter that wild and dangerous territory" (*APO* F5.I.615-622).

²⁵ With regard to this issue in Portugal, see Costa, "A expansão portuguesa"; Coxito, "O problema"; Bebian, "A Guerra."

²⁶ *DIXII*.919-921.

²⁷ *APO* F 5.III.967-969.

²⁸ *DIXII*.933.

²⁹ See Xavier, "Disquiet on the Island" *in genere*. These kinds of situations in other parts of India, in the context of British imperialism, have been studied by Gauri Vishwanathan.

³⁰ Teotónio de Souza has mentioned another kind of tension that existed at the heart of these villages, which was related to the changes that were taking place in the context of economic relations, i.e., the growing impact of the increasingly monetary nature of these relations.

³¹ Historical Archives of Goa, No. 7583-7585, f. 933.

³² See Aquinas. Some years earlier, another "Naique" had been punished by the Portuguese authorities. After accusing him of collaborating with the Adil Shah's forces, the latter expropriated the lands and revenues he possessed in Cuncolim.

³³ I am referring, above all, to the documents that can be found in the Historical Archives of Goa, No. 3071, "Foral de Salcete, 1567, copy of 1585"; No. 7583-7585, "Foral de 1622"; No. 7604, "Foral de Salcete." Selected excerpts of these documents have been published in Pissurlencar *Tombo da ilha de Goa*. Other kinds of local sources include versions of the *Mahabharata*

and the *Ramayana* that circulated in these territories at the time when the Portuguese arrived (see Gomes; the *Konkanakhyana*; and Cunha, as well as the collections of books of the “communities” that are preserved in the Historical Archives of Goa, some of which have been used by Ghauntkar in his *History of Goa through Gōyakanadi Script*, all of which are equally relevant for any analysis of the structure of local life.

³⁴ See both Bayly and Gune. In regard to Goa, see Xavier, “Disquiet on the Island.”

³⁵ The Bhagavad-Gita explains how a soul can transmigrate even in an insect. The villagers of Cuncolim possibly believed that the anthill was constituted by souls and even perhaps that it contained the souls of the community’s ancestors. Other sources attribute this temple to Santeri, but according to the records (*tombo*) prepared by Francisco Pais, this would have been the main temple.

³⁶ The Church of Our Lady of Health was built over the ruins of the Santeri temple. The walls of the church still have niches for the deities they contained when the structure was a local temple (Heras 19).

³⁷ See Chauhan. In this regard, also see Mosse.

³⁸ In addition to these temples, there were two other important temples, one of which was dedicated to Santeri and the other to Durgadevta. There were also three Vaishnavite temples—dedicated to Rama, Krishna and Narayana Ramanatha respectively—and a set of tutelary temples for clans and families: Golcho-Paik, an obviously warlike deity and Goddeamata, Sat-purusha, Sidha-purusha. With regard to the links between the sacred and violence, see the inspiring study by Girard.

³⁹ In addition to the temples dedicated to Shantadurga (and Durgadevta), Mahadeva and Santeri, Cuncolim also had temples dedicated to the founders of clans. The existence of such temples corroborates the idea outlined above that in this aspect too the village did not have a linear social and religious fabric.

⁴⁰ This was the case with Francisco Rangel, who was sentenced for having sacrificed a lamb in a local temple (see ANTT, TSO, proc. 8916).

⁴¹ Some of these interpretations were inspired by the works of Christopher Fuller (“The Hindu Pantheon” and *The Camphor Flame*); see also Prakash (p. 282 onwards).

⁴² See Feio.

⁴³ While Mahadeva and Durgadevta were amongst the main deities of Veroda and Ambelim and leading families in both villages used the surname Naique, Velim and Assolna worshipped Santeri.

⁴⁴ See Srinivas.

⁴⁵ As is known, devotion to these deities associated with blood and power could extend beyond the boundaries of the settlement, in an inter-village network (Bayly chap. 1).

⁴⁶ Zimmer 156 onwards; also see Das.

⁴⁷ See Assayag.

⁴⁸ Likewise, the statement by the Christian missionaries who recorded these events that the “lowest” residents of Cuncolim had hidden the bodies in a village well should be carefully scrutinised.

⁴⁹ ANTT, *Armário Jesuítico*, Mss. 89, No. 21.

⁵⁰ This support was given, both in order to avoid the entrance of the Adil Shah’s forces and also to avoid “disheartening them, so they will not depopulate the village” and so that “They are occupied only in watching over and guarding our lands from any attack against them, and so that they do not enter into their [lands], nor should there be on our part any motive or occasion for a rupture” (Pissurlencar, *Assentos* 185–186).

⁵¹ See Xavier, “Disquiet on the Island.”

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Ângela Barreto Xavier is Researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon (ICS-UL). She holds a PhD in History and Civilisation from the European University Institute, a Master's in Political and Cultural History, and a History and Art History Degree from the New University of Lisbon. Her research interests include the history of political ideas and the cultural history of early-modern empires, namely, the problems related to power, religion, science, and cultural geopolitics. Recent publications include: *Cultura Intelectual das Elites Coloniais* (special issue of *Cultura—Revista de História e Teoria das Ideias*) and *A Invenção de Goa. Poder Imperial e Conversões Culturais*. E-mail: angela.xavier@ics.ul.pt