Popular Riots in Madeira Island against the First Medical Sanitary Measures in the First Portuguese Republic, 1910-1917

Abstract

The first set of popular riots after the First Portuguese Republic revolution (1910-1926) took place on the island of Madeira. This series of 14 riots had as a pretext the medical and sanitary measures for the control of a cholera epidemic. The interpretation of one investigator conceived this conflict as having had the motivation to restore the monarchy, due to the insurgents having used the monarchical flag. Another analysis, however, considered that the conflict had erupted only by the preponderance of popular ignorance about the nature of the prophylactic measures implemented. In our study we tried to understand the reason for such opposing interpretations. So, we have analyzed in particular the popular interpretation of the emerging medicine practice since the middle of the 19th century, before the Portuguese republican revolution on October 5, 1910 and also as a result of this revolution, the interpretation of the new practice of State and assistance medical and health laicization. These two forms of secularization have been conjugated during this epidemic and help us to better understand the reason for the existence of these riots.

Keywords: Madeira island; Popular riots; Cholera epidemic; First portuguese Republic; Medical Science; Republican laicism

Introduction

On October 5, 1910, Portugal became the third republican country in Europe, when only the Swiss and French republics existed. This revolution, which took place in Lisbon, had no immediate opposition and the monarchical attempts to restore it were fleeting and inconsequential. The newly proclaimed Republic began to be implanted with such a great laicizing dimension that some authors have already characterized it as a "cultural revolution". This "cultural revolution" began with the adoption of religious freedom, freedom of thought and the substitution of the old symbolic, where religion was mixed with the politician, namely on the flag, with the blue and white, colors of the patron's clothing of the Monarchy, Our Lady of the Conception. The tranquility lived in the country soon after the revolution would be changed fifteen days after the revolt. On October 20, 1910, a popular riot broke out in the city of Funchal, Madeira Island, progressively extending to several counties of the island, until December 13, 1910, until December 13, 1910.

In our analysis of the popular revolts in the First Portuguese Republic between 1910 and 1917 we found that one author considered such riots as a first attempt at monarchical restoration, as the insurgents had adopted as a symbol the monarchist flag. Another however is peremptory to dismiss such hypothesis, claiming that it was only revolts due to ignorance and superstition. Methodologically, we performed a quantitative and qualitative analysis defining the typology, quantification, serialization and cartography of the riots, but we also wanted to understand the nature of each one and its set. The historical sources used were all the press collection of the period, medical-sanitary reports and the minutes of the Deputies Chamber Sessions.

In Madeira riots, which occurred after the proclamation of the First Portuguese Republic, the old flag of the constitutional monarchy was in fact used, but allusions to it always have it as a religious symbol. In fact, this is natural, since the blue and white flag was a Constitutional Monarchical State which however, a Catholic Confessional State, even having Our Lady of Conception patroness. In this way, in our view, the problem of the nature of the revolts can only be understood by verifying the hypothesis of a cultural rupture between the common sense of a large part of the population of Madeira and the two processes of secularization of society, an older one of scientific type, through the growing implementation of medicine and another, due to the revolution political nature. It would have been the popular understanding of this cultural rupture that was considered as "ignorance and superstition" by the second author.

The first process of laicization was a process of scientific nature, preceded the revolution and, as will be seen, implemented the medical, sanitary and pharmaceutical practice, having, as will also be seen, the contribution of the new political power that prohibits all those related to the clergy from acting in the services medical and health care. The second process was directly related to the republican political ideology. Its fundamental objective, with the republic institutionalization, was, as we have already mentioned, that of the laicization of the State and of public life, ending with the confessional state of the constitutional monarchy and rapidly enact laws advocating religious freedom and conscience. These laws also had, as we shall see, incidence on the island of Madeira, one of the plots of Portuguese Catholic tradition.

The riots and their oldest pretext: the popular interpretation of scientific secularization through medicine

On October 20, fifteen days after the republic revolution, the first case of a "colera morbus" epidemic occurred in Funchal. Probably due to contact with passengers of a ship coming from Latin America, the epidemic began in the port area of the city of Funchal and then spread along the South Coast of the island of Madeira. Medical and health services have been detected and isolated the infected with immediate medical measures. Circulation in the port was interdicted and patients were admitted to circumscribed areas, such as the lazaretto of the city, or their own home. After the epidemic was declared and the measures of medical-sanitary control established, the resistance was not delayed. The first riot takes place precisely in the city of Funchal, on December 1, 1910, the month of peak morbidity. It was reported in a newspaper that an attempt had been made on that day to assault the city’s lazaretto, after it was written that the people had the conviction that "only the poor were affected by the plague." This first attempt of attack to the lazaretto was followed of another one to 26 of the same month.

The conflict involving the lazaretto was expected, since it had long been the cause of great suspicions and inquiries into cases of negligent death, even during the monarchy. In fact, in December 1905, five years before the republican revolution, there had been some cases of a suspected illness in the city of Funchal and its sanitary authorities, convinced that they were cases of bubonic plague, decided to isolate the infected and those with whom they had contact. The lazaretto was immediately transformed into an isolation hospital. Patients Isolations were badly perceived by the population, inspired great disgust and gave rise to resistance. There were also many rumors, alarming because there was no more concrete information due to the great secrecy of the authorities about what was happening in the lazaretto. According of these rumors it was said that those in quarantine "went hungry, suffered ill-treatment and also were victims of (many and varied) abuse and malice. In the lazaretto were committed the greatest, most heinous and repugnant crimes, including rape, poisoning, murder and even quartering, mutilation of corpses (and even their mysterious disappearance)!"

On January 7 1906, more than 100 soldiers armed with bayonets accompanied by some of the popular, invaded the lazaretto, shattered the doors and windows, destroyed furniture and broke utensils, bringing out the few of the last hospitalized patients. The mutiny of the soldiers was due to the fact that their captain had sent some of them to that place due to the suspicion that a few days before they had frequented the interdicted area. The majority of the population considered the act of indiscipline of the military as "goodwill act" and the campaign against the director of the lazaretto intensified, having been presented a complaint against itself in the court of Funchal. Until the new assault on the lazaret in 1910, during the First Portuguese Republic, a period in which the director of the lazaret no longer was on the island, since he had escaped to Lisbon in 1906, there was any epidemic disease. This fact strengthened the old suspicions about the falsehood of the declaration of bubonic plague in Funchal in 1905, leading to believe that compulsory hospitalizations were intended to provide victims for the violence that would be practiced there.

One week after the lazaret case of October 1, 1910, the commander of the Funchal civic police and two guards had to leave, respectively, for Câmara de Lobos and Ponta do Sol municipalities. In the first case the displacement was due to the resistance of the people to the hygiene of the village and in the second case to prevent a possible conflict, since, as in the municipalities of Ribeira Brava and St Cruz, pavilions had been installed for the infected population. "The Câmara de Lobos “people’s indisposition” resulted in “riots”. Some disinfections workers had to escape in a boat to Funchal. Those who were transporting a body from a victim to the cemetery “were insulted by some peasants” and the women, "accompanied by a large number of men (they started) threatened the sanitation brigade which unarmed, escaped while the agitators hoisted on the mast of the quay and elsewhere, the blue and white flag (of the monarchy)".

In Ponta do Sol, on the 10th the people prevented the corpse being wrapped in lime? A doctor “very dear to the population” was sent to try to resolve the conflict but “when this one arrived at the house of a deceased woman, more than 100 people men and women gathered almost all armed with sticks, scythes and brushcutters, in a hostile and threatening attitude, letting in only the doctor. As soon as the doctor tried to wrap the corpse in lime, the people objected menacingly and even a woman pulled the doctor away and sat on the lid of the coffin. The doctor had to give up his intention”.

Also in December, on the night of 11 to 12, the biggest and most well-known riot broke out against medical and sanitary prescriptions due to cholera. The people of Machico Municipality gave the signal to the beginning of the revolt and to occupy the county seat place. In addition to being convinced that the epidemic was an invention of doctors, the populations were protesting against the isolation of the patients in an isolation post.

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7Carvalho DL (2011) Os Levantes da República. (1ª edn), Porto Afrontamento, Portugal, pp. 95-118.
8Pereira J (1909) Considerações sobre as doenças surgidas no Funchal Câmara dos Deputados Diário das Sessões (25) Lisboa pp. 5-8.
9Pereira J (1909) Considerações sobre as doenças surgidas no Funchal Câmara dos Deputados Diário das Sessões (25) Lisboa pp. 5-8.
10Pereira J (1909) Considerações sobre as doenças surgidas no Funchal Câmara dos Deputados Diário das Sessões (25) Lisboa pp. 5-8.
11O Povo Funchal (1955).
12O Povo Funchal (1955).
13O Heraldo da Madeira (1859).
14O Heraldo da Madeira (1855).

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or even in their home and opposed the prohibition of washing clothes in rivers.

The conviction that the doctors had had faith toward the people was based on the memory of the conflict of 1905 and was strengthened by a rumor that the former director of the lazaretto had once again walked around the island, incognito, placing poison powder in the waters to ingest. Thus, although the physician had never returned to Madeira after his flight in 1906, the first objective of the rioters was to search for him, conducting household searches, especially in the Deputy Health Delegate house, that incorporated a pharmacy. Robbed four times, this house suffered great damage and her pharmacy was completely destroyed. In addition, its owner avoided with great difficulty the coercive ingestion of its medicines, considered as poison by the people.\textsuperscript{15}

The riots and their earliest pretext: that of the popular interpretation of scientific laicization through medicine

With the arrival of a thirty-man military force aboard a steamer the rebels did not disarm and reinforce their number with the incorporation of more people, armed with chestnut arches, sickles and axes. The council administrator and some influential localities tried to intervene peacefully, but were forced to “stand at the head of the people, toward the chapel of the Lord of Miracles. There they were obliged to kneel and to pray, obliging the administrator of the Council the commitment to “administer by the old law”. Then they went to the fort of the quay (where the isolation post installation was planned). The administrator of council was forced to affix a monarchic flag on the terrace of the same fort, raising for this occasion many cheers\textsuperscript{21}. The population tried to find again the lazaretto former director and those considered more committed to him, as a watchmaker also accused of “poisoning the waters”. At dawn of 12, when a force of Infantry 27 arrived at the Village, already the people had dispersed\textsuperscript{22}. Four other sources add some extremely important details about Machico riots.

A Terceira, azorean Island, newspaper said that on Sunday, 11, the conflict had erupted after a procession in the village where a large group of people said that the plague “was launched by the doctors and gentlemen since evil did not attack these, but only the popular”\textsuperscript{19}. In Funchal a newspaper specified that the procession had followed a novena, both in honor of Our Lady of the Conception, (the patroness of the Constitutional and Confessional Monarchy) and that the flag raised was the monarchial flag. Its purpose was to obtain its religious intercession to end the epidemic\textsuperscript{20}. Another newspaper also reported that a rumor circulating and motivating Machico’s “riot” was that “the republican party was constituted by “evil men” who tried to kill the religious people. The doctors, considered monarchists, killed to cause embarrassment to the government of the Republic”. The same newspaper specified in another number that the people had found in a house used by the watchmaker suspected “a portion of skinned flesh and flakes with yellow balls and powders of all colors,” which were immediately burned\textsuperscript{23}.

Two days after the Machico case, similar cases occurred in the neighboring municipality of Stª Cruz for three days. In the Parish of Stª Cruz, the búzios again blew to revolt appeal and the insurgents having been made three attempts to assault the seat of the county. Despite being ordered to disperse by the military forces, the insurgents constantly disobeyed and shots were fired until their withdrawal. His attitude seemed to be due to the refusal of household disinfection, the sick people isolation, funerals without religious rituals and the refusal that the corpses were “salted” (wrapped in lime)\textsuperscript{24}. The detail revealed by one of the periodicals, that the tumult of Machico would have begun in a procession in honor of Our Lady of Conception, where the blue and white flag of the monarchy was carried, since this figure of religious devotion was the patroness of monarchy is very important. It reveals that the monarchic flag was being used within its religious symbolism the Our Lady of the Conception vestments colors and in a religious and non-political context in which Our Lady of Conception appeared as the divine intercessor for the end of the epidemic\textsuperscript{25}.

The confusion between religious and political symbolism in the case of Machico using the monarchy blue and white flag and performing a cult of Our Lady of the Conception as a form of religious intercession against the disease contrasted with the laicizing measures. These were due to the medical-sanitary practices, still poorly understood, although they were prior to the republican revolution and also to the new zymology and new procedures of a political-religious nature by the new republican authority. This, with the laicization of the State and of public life, interfered directly in old sanitary institutions, linked to the Catholic Church. The new republican administration of the island extinguished the Congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of Santa Cruz, nuns who had rendered services relevant in previous epidemics; expelled the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul; replaced the “Table of Mercy” (Catholic charity) with another without a clear link with the Catholic Church. The administrator of the Municipality of Funchal published a letter in the press declaring himself an atheist and anarchist; exonerated the Prelate of the diocese from the leadership of charitable associations such as the “Good Jesus charitable home”; replaced the “asylum of the poor people” ancient commission for another who removed all religious zymology from the building. Finally, on the eve of S. Martinho, one of the saints of which the Falklanders were devout, the new authority of the Island authorized the parody processions to the religion in the streets\textsuperscript{26}.

Conclusion

After our analysis, we think that the monarchist flag used by the Machico insurgents did not mean that they wanted to return to the old regime. The return to the “Old Law” evoked in the Machico tumult did not mean that it was intended to restore the Monarchy. He intended only to continue with the type of relationship of the Confessional Monarchy, putting an end to secular, medical-

\textsuperscript{15}O Heraldo da Madeira (1857).
\textsuperscript{16}O Mundo (3643).
\textsuperscript{17}Voz da Verdade (XVII 52).
\textsuperscript{18}A União Angra (5009).
\textsuperscript{19}Diário de Notícias Funchal (10717).
\textsuperscript{20}O Povo Funchal (270).
\textsuperscript{21}Diário de Notícias Funchal (10717).
\textsuperscript{22}Diário de Notícias Funchal (10717).
\textsuperscript{23}O Heraldo da Madeira (1859).
sanitary and politico-religious precepts considered impious. “Wickedness” was not an exclusive attribute of Republicans due its secular politics. As evidenced in the case of lazareto in 1905, it dated from the Monarchy itself and had been revealed in the secularizing context of medical and sanitary nature. The absence of mutual understanding between the medical conception and the popular conception was based on a cultural “abyss” denounced at that time and soon attributed to an alleged obscurantism produced by the monarchical regime. Anticipating secularization through political-religious policy, the institutionalization of medical-sanitary precepts has long required attitudes and behaviors incompatible with those of the vast majority of communities. They did not understand the concept of preventive medicine used by health authorities; they continued to consider the causes of illness and death within the strict limits of the “Will of God.”

In a small but very interesting study of the intellectual power of physicians between the late nineteenth and early twentieth century’s, there is the conclusion that since the beginning of the nineteenth century, physicians have been able to understand and enjoy the fact that they are progressively equated with priests, through similar elements denoting sacredness. According to this author, such as the priests or the judges, doctors distinguished themselves by dress and professional secrecy and, above all, by their clinical language and practices, with a hermetic and mysterious meaning25. Thus the doctors claimed their role in the modern societies, that apart from religious and/or metaphysical prejudices, if they wanted to be governed by science, religion of the future as Comte prophesied. (They would carry out) salvation in this now sacralized life26 and as their action did not have an individual effect alone, should encompass the regulation of collective behavior and the reordering of their times and spaces in a recent preventive medicine26.

The “corpse service” in the regulation of isolation hospitals during the epidemic is a good example of how this collective regulation has been called into question. All the usual mortuary ritual in the populations, from the wake in the churches to the disturbance of habitual popular behaviors before the death. The experience of the death of the other aroused feelings of deep religiosity unleashing and potentiation of confrontations. The experience that the death was real, the corpse wrapped in the natural holes cotton corks soaked in that same solution and according to the aforementioned regulation, “About two hours after death was the corpse washed with disinfectant solution, in the natural holes cotton corks soaked in that same solution and then wrapped in litter; passing to the mortuary. After long enough we discover that the death was real, the corpse wrapped in the litter was put in a coffin with lime and taken to the graveyard without any accompaniment (which was always of a religious nature) and at the time, less traffic was there in the streets”27. The accusations in 1906 that in the lazaretto would mutilate the corpses and the assault on the residence of a pharmacist suspected of wanting to poison the population provide us good examples to demonstrate how autopsy and medical pharmacopoeia practices were interpreted by many people.

In 1910 the insults of Câmara de Lobos compassions to the men who were transporting a body of a victim to the cemetery on December 7; the opposition to the deposition of lime in the corpses in Ponta do Sol to 10; the discontent over empty and priestess burials and the opposition to the corpses being “salted” in Stª Cruz on the 14th of the same month seem to show with great evidence that the greatest foundation of the resistance was due to the disturbance of habitual popular behaviors before the death. This was present in a central way in the epidemic outbreaks (the total number of deaths of the 1910 epidemic was 556 deaths distributed by the municipalities where they occurred as follows: Funchal, 210, Câmara de Lobos, 161, Machico, 75, Ponta do Sol, 71; Stª Cruz, 26; Porto Santo, 13)28, was the great pretest for the unleashing and potentiation of confrontations. The experience of the death of the other aroused feelings of deep religiosity with a conception of its accompaniment incompatible with that of emerging medicine, especially when, with the advent of the Republic, this conception was combined with another, seeking to institutionalize the secularization of society and of State, removing the Catholic Church primacy.

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None.

Conflict of Interest
Author declares there is no conflict of interest.

27França C (1911) A Epidemia Cholérica da Madeira. (1ª edn), Lisboa Typographia Universal, pp. 31.
28França C (1911) A Epidemia Cholérica da Madeira. (1ª edn), Lisboa Typographia Universal, pp. 41.