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The Demography of the Portuguese Empire. Sources, methods and results, 1776–1822. Introduction.

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Introduction

In recent decades, academic interest in the study of colonial populations in the modern era has grown significantly. Historians, anthropologists and sociologists focusing on demographic aspects of colonial societies increasingly use techniques of demographic analysis. In doing so, they often rely on classifications of colonial populations that were used in historical surveys and censuses. At the same time, it has been recognized that colonial censuses were often political instruments to affirm sovereignty abroad, an insight that is at the heart of an ongoing historiographical debate.

While in the field of historical demography, the number of publications on European countries and some areas of their former empires is growing, comprehensive compilations of data are often lacking. In the case of Portugal, for instance, the significant body of statistical information on populations in its overseas empire from the middle of the eighteenth century has, for the most part, been ignored by historians and demographers. As a result, we still lack basic information about the demographics of the Portuguese empire, especially regarding such variables as population distribution, ethnicity, legal status, and age group characteristics. With the data currently available, however, it should be possible to answer basic questions about the number of people living in the Portuguese empire, or the demographic weight of slaves in a particular population at a given time.

Beginning in the 1770s, a series of royal orders mandated the production of annual statistics concerning the population of the Portuguese empire Colonial governments throughout the empire began to compile statistics based on systematized instructions, such as those issued in 1776, 1796 and 1797.[1] These population surveys were contemporary to, but in some cases preceded, initiatives undertaken by other European powers, such as Britain

[1] T. Botelho, "Políticas de população no período joanino," in Ana Silvia Scott, & Eliane Deckmann Fleck (ed.), *A corte no Brasil: População e sociedade no Brasil e em Portugal no início do século* xix, Rio Grande do Sul, Oikos-Unisinos, 2008.; P.T. Matos, "Population censuses in the Portuguese Empire, 1750–1820. A research note, Romanian Journal of Population Studies, vol. VII, n.º 1, 2013, pp. 5–26.

(1761) and Spain (1776).[2]. Based on these records, several studies have identified some of the basic demographics of Portugal's former colonial possessions, including Madeira,[3] São Tomé and Principe,[4] Cabo Verde,[5] and the Azores.[6] Other scholars have used demographic data for more focused analyses, for example on Macau[7] and Luanda.[8] Portuguese India has only more recently become the subject of demographic analysis.[9] General studies of Portuguese expansion, such as the *Nova História da Expansão Portuguesa*, the *História da Expansão Portuguesa* or the *História dos Portugueses no Extremo Oriente,* have incorporated some of this demographic information, but often very unsystematically.

In short, systematic processing of the demographic data that can be retrieved from Portuguese colonial archives has only just begun. In addition, there is a need for the production of historical syntheses of the data, as still too little is known about general tendencies of population growth, the social composition of populations, free and enslaved populations, and crude birth and death rates. This kind of information is essential to the historiography of the Portuguese empire.

This collection of articles has grown out of the research project "Counting Colonial Populations: Demography and the use of statistics in the Portuguese Empire, 1776–1875." Most of the statistical tables used by the authors can now be pulled directly from the project's website.[10] Besides several scholars involved in this project, a number of other scholars —young

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2 Dauril Alden, "The Population of Brazil in the late eighteenth century", *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, XLIII(2), 1963, pp. 173–205.

3 T. Rodrigues, T. and M. Rocha, "O povoamento das ilhas da Madeira e do Porto Santo nos séculos xv e xvi," *A demografia das sociedades insulares portuguesas. Séculos xv a xxi*, Carlota Santos and Paulo Teodoro de Matos (eds.), Braga, CITCEM, 2013.

4 Carlos Agostinho Neves, *São Tomé e Príncipe na segunda metade do século xviii*, Funchal/Lisboa, Centro de Estudos de Atlântico/Instituto de História de Além-Mar, 1989.

5 André Teixeira, *A Ilha de S. Nicolau de Cabo Verde nos séculos xv a xviii*, Lisboa, Centro de História de Além-Mar, 2004.

6 Artur Boavida Madeira, *População e emigração nos Açores (1766–1820)*, Cascais, Patrimonia Historica, 1999.

7 António Vale, "A População de Macau na segunda metade do século xviii," *Povos e Culturas, 5 – Portugal e o Oriente: Passado e Presente*, Lisboa, CEPCEP, 1996, pp. 241–54.

8 José C. Curto e Raymond R. Gervais, "The Population Study of Luanda during the Late Atlantic Slave Trade, 1781–1844," African Economic *Economic History*, no. 29.

9 Maria Mártires Lopes, *Tradition and Modernity in Eighteenth-Century Goa (1750–1800)*, Deli, Manohar/Centro de História de Além-Mar, 2006; Matos, Paulo Teodoro de, "The population of the Portuguese Estado da Índia, 1750–1820: Sources and demographic trends," in Laura Jarnagin (ed.), *The making of the Luso-asian world. Intricacies of engagement*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011; Bauss, Rudy, "A demographic study of Portuguese India and Macau as well comments on Mozambique and Timor, 1750–1850", *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 34, 2, 1997, pp. 199-216.

10 http://colonialpopulations.fcsh.unl.pt/mainEnglish.html

Portuguese researchers as well as more seasoned historians—were invited or decided out of *motu proprio* to contribute this volume.

The thematic issue has three main objectives. First, it demonstrates the wide range of available documents that help to define aspects of the demography of Portuguese overseas territories between 1776 and 1822, of which the population charts produced under royal orders are the most important. Secondly, the articles discuss existing sources for writing demographic histories of specific colonial territories, highlighting the normative context in which they were produced. Finally, as the articles assess the quality of the data and suggest methods for the correction of inaccuracies, this volume aims to improve the level of critical analysis of demographic data. Population tables or parish records may look unproblematic—quantitative data seem to provide an air of objectivity to historical analyses—but as with all historical evidence, careful examination of the sources is imperative.

The thirteen contributions that make up this volume offer a critical addition to the growing field of historical demography. Nine contributions (Sousa and Matos; Lucas; Domingues; Silva; D. Paiva; Rato; Botelho; Y. Paiva; and Mello) provide new insights into the demographic evolution of distinct colonial territories, spanning from Brazil to Macau. These case-studies follow a standard format to facilitate the comparison of demographic indicators across time and space. Apart from the necessary quantification, the authors focus on prevailing "demographic regimes" and their relation to geographically specific economic and political constraints. For example, they discuss the relation between allegedly low (or "gentle") mortality rates in the Azores and local patterns of migration (Sousa and Matos), or the periodic outbreaks of subsistence crises in African economies like São Tomé and Principe (Lucas).

In addition, four articles (Moreira; Bacellar; Scott; and Lima) reflect more generally on the quality of the sources, the nature of census production, and the problems of social categorization. Considering the large variety of social groups living under imperial rule and the way central power tried to categorize them, it is fitting to ask to what extent in the process of census production—which is always "negotiated" rather than "neutral"—local authorities were involved in the construction and interpretation of the census categories.[11] By generating a much required discussion about the precision and

[11] Mara Loveman, *National colours. Racial classification and the state in Latin America*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2014; C. N. Silva, *Constitucionalismo e Império: A cidadania no Ultramar Português*, Coimbra, Almedina, 2011; M. Dornemann *et. al.*, "Travelling knowledge. Population statistics as "circulating entities,"*Contemporanea*, a. XVIII, luglio-settembre, 469–472.

scope of the Portuguese colonial data, these articles intervene in a wider methodological debate about the possibilities and limitations of historical demography.

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The Portuguese empire stands out in comparative perspective for its longevity and global scope. The institutions and the historical narratives developed in places such as Goa, Mozambique or Brazil are part of a distinctively Portuguese history of colonial expansion. Nevertheless the colonization of indigenous lands, the trade in African slaves, and the movement of Portuguese migrants overseas mirror processes that occurred in other European empires. In recent years the field of colonial or imperial history has expanded, and scholars have continuously refined their questions and enquiries, resulting in the emergence of new perspectives and sub-disciplines. The field of historical demography, specifically, has witnessed an increase of both qualitative and quantitative studies of colonial history, which is why the Counting Colonial Populations project is very timely.

The censuses gathered by this project provide an impressive snapshot of several populations within the Portuguese empire at different points in time. The project has also successfully created a website where data can be searched and extracted. There are currently several related large-scale historical databases available. The Minnesota Population Center (IPUMS, NAPP), for example, is the world's leading organization for preserving and disseminating both modern and historical census data, containing data on indigenous and non-indigenous populations from various countries.[12] The database of the North Atlantic Population Project (NAPP) does not go as far back in time as the Counting Colonial Populations database, but it is nominal and allows for linkages between censuses. The website of Counting Colonial Populations provides aggregated data, broadening the understanding of not only the size of populations but also where they lived and at what time.

This ongoing research project also demonstrates how church books can be used to examine population distribution and change. Church books are, in fact, undervalued sources for the study of historical demography; hopefully more material will soon be retrieved from the archives. But already some large historical datasets, such as the Demographic Database (DDB) at Umeå University, are mainly based on church books, which document

[12] Kris Inwood and Michelle Hamilton, "The aboriginal population and the 1891 census of Canada" in P. Axelsson and P. Sköld, *Indigenous peoples and demography: The complex relation between identity and statistics*, Berghahn Books, 2011, pp. 95–116.

individual lives from cradle to grave. The DDB enables scholars to analyse, for example, how Sweden expanded its colonial domains from 1750 onwards and where Swedes colonized Sápmi, the traditional land of the indigenous Sami people. In Canada, the Quebec historical database has records from the seventeenth century onwards, covering the development of the first European settlement in Canada.[13] The Mosaic project has also a launched a database infrastructure containing historical censuses that enable the reconstruction of the population history of continental Europe.[14] Nonetheless few existing databases match the global scope of the Counting Colonial Populations project.

But even if the Portuguese data are exceptional for their temporal and geographical scope, like all data they should be treated with some caution. As a historical discipline, demography has long been criticized for its under--utilization of qualitative or contextual sources and its dependence on modernisation theory.[15] Scholars working in the field of colonial or indigenous demography need a thorough understanding of the historical and cultural settings in which their data were produced. As the articles collected here demonstrate, in the Portuguese empire the naming and counting of peoples were done in the same way as in other states and empires. Places were named and maps were drawn. People were counted and registered in pre-printed columns. But these names did rarely, if ever, reflect traditional geographies or existing group and kinship identities. The fact that the practice of counting people served and still serves political purposes creates a methodological problem. Counting was a tool in the exercise of state power, which has shaped the design of the charts and the categories used to classify people within them. Indeed, the state decided how—and even which—people were made visible.

In identity statistics, especially, the state usually defines what constitutes an ethnic group, how ethnic groups are distinguished, and how information is collected and synthesised. Historian James C. Scott has eloquently described how modern nation-states try to control and "civilize" their subjects, as their administrations "strive to shape a people and landscape

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13 Lisa Dillon, "Parental and sibling influences on the timing of marriage, XVII[th] and XVIII[th] century Québec," *Annales de démographie historique*, Dec. 2010, no. 1, pp. 139–80).

14 Mikolaj Szoltysek and Siegfried Gruber, "Mosaic: recovering surviving census records and reconstructing the familial history of Europe," *The History of the Family*, 2015, pp. 1–23.

15 Susan Greenhalgh, "The social construction of population science: An intellectual, institutional, and political history of twentieth-century demography," *Comparative studies in society and history*, 1996, 38(01), pp. 26–66; Per Axelsson et al., "Epilogue: from indigenous demographics to an indigenous demography," *Indigenous peoples and demography: The complex relation between identity and statistics*, pp. 295–308.

that will fit their technique of observation."[16] Statistical categories shape the way the state perceives its population and, in the long run, also the way people view themselves. The articles in this volume are wonderful case--studies of the politics of categorization.

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Many of the articles in this volume shed light on the size and composition of slave populations in different corners of the Portuguese empire. Admittedly, the quality of the data on local slave populations is very uneven. In general, in places where Portuguese settlers formed a small minority and the power of their administration was curtailed by existing political structures, as was the case on the African continent and in Asia, the coverage of colonial censuses remained limited. As Diana Rato points out, for instance, the surveys taken in Macau between 1770 and 1820 only counted slaves living among the minority Christian population of Portuguese immigrants and their descendants. Slaves from Mozambique and Timor constituted a large segment (25 to 35 percent) of this immigrant population. But non-free people among the resident Chinese population of Macau, whose numbers must have been significant, were omitted from the counts.

The population charts from Daman and Diu, analysed by Diogo Paiva, show similar limitations. For a long time, population surveys in these territories lacked an explicit category for slaves. Instead, their presence can be deducted from the use of ethnic rubrics such as "blacks" or "Africans," assuming the latter were generally slaves of Mozambican origin. Between 1785 and 1820, according to Paiva, Africans and people of African descent made up two and five percent of the populations of Daman and Diu, respectively. But since this group does not include people of servile status within the majority Asian population, it is difficult to get a sense of the overall importance of slavery in Daman and Diu from the surveys in this period. In short, the early demographic data assembled by colonial administrators in Asia are interesting for showing the transoceanic movement of slaves within this part of the Portuguese empire, although they are less useful for understanding local systems of slavery.

As might be expected, the data from Brazil are more solid and allow for different kinds of analysis. Tarcísio Botelho, Márcia Melo, and Yamê Paiva have primarily used the available population charts to reflect on the size and composition of slave populations within specific regions of Brazil.

[16] James C. Scott, *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human condition have failed*, Yale University Press, 1998, p. 82.

The odd one out, in this regard, is Carlos Lima, who has compared the censuses with church registers, inventories, and newspaper advertisements to offer a qualitative analysis of the eighteenth-century practice of labelling slaves born in Brazil as mulattoes (*mestiços*). As Botelho's article shows, the population tables make it easy to compare the size and growth of different slave populations within Brazil, where the incidence of slavery varied widely between regions, and to compare Brazil with other slave societies in the Portuguese empire, like São Tomé and Príncipe.

To explain growth or decline in Brazilian slave populations, the demographic surveys collected by the Counting Colonial Populations project must be combined with data on emancipation rates and the movement of slaves into and out of specific regions. Comparing the charts from Amazonia with numerical evidence of the transatlantic slave trade to this region instantly raises some interesting questions. For instance, Márcia Mello's article shows that between 1774 and 1821 the slave population of Maranhão increased fivefold from approximately 17,000 to 85,000 slaves. Voyages, the online transatlantic slave trade database[17] indicates that these numbers could not have been sustained by direct slave imports from Africa only, which were well below 17,000 in the years before 1774 and stood at 70,000 between then and 1821. In other words, to explain the size of Maranhão slave population, it is necessary to take natural growth (if there was any) and intra-Brazilian slave trading into account. In fact, the region of Pará, which in 1774 counted approximately 54,000 slaves of whom at most 13,000 had been shipped directly from African shores, constitutes an even stronger case for examining the internal slave trade in Brazil.

Until 1820, approximately 3.6 million African slaves were carried to Brazil, where they mixed into a population with relatively large white settler and Native American segments. According to demographic surveys from 1780, 1808, and 1835 (see Botelho's article) slaves consistently made up about a third of the Brazilian population in this period, although in regions like Rio de Janeiro and Maranhão the figure was closer to half. The case of Portugal's other main slave society in the tropics, São Tomé and Príncipe, provides an interesting contrast. Unlike Brazil, the archipelago was almost exclusively populated by African slaves after 1500. Despite the collapse of the sugar economy in the seventeenth century and the emancipation of some slaves over time, levels of enslavement remained consistently high. As Patrícia Lucas shows, slaves still formed the majority of a population of

[17] www.slavevoyages.org

about 12,000 around 1800. Instead of growing sugar, slaves produced crops for local consumption and the provisioning of transatlantic slave vessels. Although Lucas notes a decline of the slave population around this time, especially on São Tomé, the colony remained a slave society even in the absence of a major export crop. With the growth of coffee and cocoa plantations and a corresponding rise of imported slave labour from the African mainland, slavery on the islands would expand again in the nineteenth century.

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