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Daniel B. Domingues da Silva 

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CHAM – Centro de Humanidades | CHAM – Centre for the Humanities
Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas
Universidade NOVA de Lisboa | Universidade dos Açores
Av.^a de Berna, 26-C | 1069-061 Lisboa, Portugal
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The early population charts of Portuguese Angola, 1776–1830: a preliminary assessment*

Daniel B. Domingues da Silva**

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Resumo

Em 1776, o Governo português ordenou o primeiro censo sistemático de todo o império, inclusive Angola. Apesar de algumas dificuldades, os oficiais coloniais em Angola criaram centenas de quadros com dados demográficos preciosos, tais como o número de residentes, por sexo, cor da pele e condição social, assim como o número de nascimentos, mortes e casamentos ocorridos na colônia em anos distintos. Este artigo faz uma análise dos primeiros gráficos da população da Angola Portuguesa reunidos pelo projeto Counting Colonial Populations. E mostra que, apesar de, numa perspectiva moderna, os dados dos gráficos nem sempre serem correctos, eles permitem uma perspectiva única da dimensão e do perfil demográfico da população colonial de Angola.

Palavras-chave: Angola, colonialismo, demografia, gráficos populacionais, Império Português, estatística.

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Abstract

In 1776, the Portuguese government ordered the first systematic census of its whole empire, including Angola. Despite some difficulties, colonial officials in Angola created hundreds of tables with precious demographic information, such as the number of residents by sex, color, social condition in addition to the number of births, deaths, and marriages occurred in the colony in different years. This article provides a preliminary assessment of the early population charts of Portuguese Angola compiled by the Counting Colonial Populations project. It shows that, although from a modern perspective the charts' numbers may not be accurate, they provide a unique perspective of the size and demographic profile of the colonial population of Angola.

Keywords: Angola, colonialism, demography, population charts, Portuguese Empire, statistics.

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** University of Missouri, USA. E-mail: dominguesd@missouri.edu

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Daniel B. Domingues da Silva

The early population charts of Portuguese Angola were created in the late eighteenth century as part of the Crown's effort to gain a more systematic knowledge of the size and composition of the population living in its territories overseas. "Rolls" and "enumerations" were previously made but periodic censuses returned in predesigned tables had never been done before. This form of assessing the population represented a dramatic change in the way European powers governed their empires. It allowed rulers and bureaucrats to classify people in arbitrary categories, creating fictional identities and fostering racial, ethnic, and gender prejudice. The Portuguese Crown made two attempts to count the population of Angola systematically: one in 1776, ordered by King D. José I through the State Secretary of the Navy and Overseas Affairs, Martinho de Melo e Castro, and another more lasting in 1797, ordered by Queen D. Maria I through D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho.¹ Each resulted in a number of charts that allow us to examine how the imperial government viewed its subjects and how it went about counting the colonial population of Angola.

Although the population charts of Angola have long been available to the public, scholars have used them only sparingly. John Thornton made, perhaps, the most innovative use of the charts by analyzing two of them, the censuses of 1777 and 1778, to determine the effects of the transatlantic slave trade on the demographic structure of the population of Angola.² Other scholars, such as David Birmingham, Herbert Klein, Manuel dos

¹ ARQUIVO HISTÓRICO ULTRAMARINO [AHU], *Conselho Ultramarino*, Ordens e Avisos para Pernambuco, Cód. 583, fls. 171–172 (Ofício do Secretário de Estado da Marinha e do Ultramar, Martinho de Melo e Castro, para o governador e capitão general de Angola, D. António de Lencastre, Ajuda, 21 march 1776) and "D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho to D. Miguel António de Melo, Mafra, 21 Oct 1797" in D. Rodrigo de Sousa COUTINHO, "Estatística sobre os Mapas que Acompanham esta Carta afim que se Principie hum Trabalho por Meio do qual se Possa Chegar ao Conhecimento das Colonias" *Arquivos de Angola*, Vol. 4, no. 37–40 (1938), pp. 19–21.

² John K. THORNTON, "The Slave Trade in Eighteenth Century Angola: Effects on Demographic Structures," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 14, no. 3 (1980), pp. 417–27.

Anjos Rebelo, Joseph Miller, and José Curto, used the censuses to estimate the number of slaves leaving Angola to the Americas in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.³ José Carlos Venâncio, José Curto and Raymond Gervais collected data from several censuses, especially those from Luanda and Benguela, to examine the demographic and economic history of the Portuguese settlements on the coast of Angola during the period of the slave trade.⁴ Jan Vansina and Mariana Cândido are essentially the only scholars who have drawn on census data from the interior of Angola, the former in a study on Ambaca society during the slave trade era and the latter in a book examining the relationship between Benguela and its hinterland, especially Caconda.⁵ Nevertheless, little has been said about the censuses themselves. How were they made? What was their purpose? What kind of information did they contain? And how did they shape the history of Angola?

However, “Counting Colonial Populations,” a project under development at the New University of Lisbon with support from the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology, is currently compiling all the census charts made in Angola as well as in every other former colony until 1890. The project is also making them available to the public online at http://www.cham.fcsh.unl.pt/pr_descricao.aspx?ProId=8. It is the largest statistical survey to present about the demographic history of the Portuguese Empire. Paulo Teodoro de Matos, the project leader, has published some of the project results while other researchers are also reporting preliminary

³ David BIRMINGHAM, *Trade and Conflict in Angola: The Mbundu and Their Neighbours under the Influence of the Portuguese, 1483–1790*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1966; Herbert S. KLEIN, “The Portuguese Slave Trade From Angola in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 32, no. 4 (1972), pp. 894–918; Manuel dos Anjos da Silva REBELO, *Relações entre Angola e Brasil (1808–1830)*, Lisboa, Agência Geral do Ultramar, 1970; Joseph C. MILLER, “Legal Portuguese Slaving from Angola: Some Preliminary Indications of Volume and Direction, 1760–1830,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer*, Vol. 62, no. 226–227 (1975), pp. 135–76; *Idem*, “The Numbers, Origins, and Destinations of Slaves in the Eighteenth-Century Angolan Slave Trade,” *Social Science History*, Vol. 13, no. 4 (1989), pp. 381–419; José C. CURTO, “A Quantitative Reassessment of the Legal Portuguese Slave Trade from Luanda, Angola, 1710–1830,” *African Economic History*, no. 20 (1992), pp. 1–25; *Idem*, “The Legal Portuguese Slave Trade from Benguela, Angola, 1730–1828: A Quantitative Re-Appraisal,” *África: Revista do Centro de Estudos Africanos da Universidade de São Paulo*, Vol. 16–17, no. 1 (1993), pp. 101–16.

⁴ José Carlos VENÂNCIO, *A Economia de Luanda e Hinterland no Século XVIII: Um Estudo de Sociologia Histórica*, Lisboa, Editorial Estampa, 1996; José C. CURTO, “The Anatomy of a Demographic Explosion: Luanda, 1844–1850,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 32, no. 2/3 (1999), pp. 381–405; José C. CURTO and Raymond R. GERVAIS, “A Dinâmica Demográfica de Luanda no Contexto do Tráfico de Escravos do Atlântico Sul, 1781–1844,” *Topoi*, no. 4 (2002), pp. 85–138.

⁵ Jan VANSINA, “Ambaca Society and the Slave Trade c. 1760–1845,” *Journal of African History*, Vol. 46, no. 1 (2005), pp. 1–27; Mariana P. CÂNDIDO, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2013.

findings on how the censuses were made as well as on the demographic history of one or more regions of the empire.⁶ The Angolan section of the project is still underway. The research team has already compiled all surviving censuses made in the region between 1777 and 1830. They have still a lot to cover but the data collected thus far allow us to understand how colonial officials conducted the censuses as well as to assess the government's views of the colonial society and the extent of its power into the interior of Angola.

Coverage

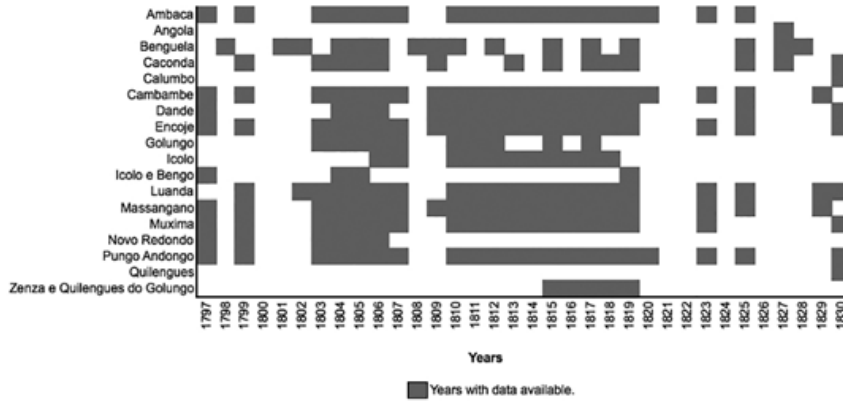
The research team recovered two hundred and seventy tables of the censuses made in Angola between 1777 and 1830. Some of them, twenty-four to be more precise, are copies of surviving tables available in the Portuguese archives. However, the chronological and geographic distribution of the census returns is significantly unbalanced. The royal order of 1776 required the governor of Angola to send a copy of the census return of the whole colony to Lisbon annually, but only two copies of such returns survive, one for 1777 and another for 1778.⁷ There is no evidence that these censuses were continued, except for a report on the population of Luanda, capital of Portuguese Angola, for 1781 organized according to the same structure prescribed by the 1776 order.⁸ One of the tables, dated 1796, was originally commissioned by the governor of Benguela in a local attempt to count the city's population. A series of ten returns for both Benguela and its hinterland made between 1798 and 1825 also exists, but their origins or purpose remain unclear. They may have resulted from another attempt at counting the population of those territories. In 1779, Benguela and its hinterland emerged as a separate captaincy subordinated to Luanda but which answered directly to Lisbon.⁹ Furthermore, the structure of the tables is different from that prescribed by the royal orders of 1776 and 1797.

⁶ Paulo Teodoro de MATOS, "Population Censuses in the Portuguese Empire, 1750–1820: Research Notes," *Romanian Journal of Population Studies*, Vol. 7, no. 1 (2013), pp. 5–26. See also the articles published in this volume.

⁷ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 61, doc. 81 (Mappa de todos os Moradoes, e Habitantes deste Reyno de Angola... do anno de 1777... Luanda, 15 Jul. 1778). See also "População de Angola (1778)," *Arquivo das Colónias*, Vol. 3, no. 16 (1918), pp. 177–8; "População de Angola (1779)," *Arquivo das Colónias*, Vol. 3, no. 16 (1918), pp. 175–6.

⁸ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 64, doc. 63 (Relação dos Habitantes desta Cidade de São Paulo d'Assumpção do Reyno de Angola no anno de 1781).

⁹ Ralph DELGADO, *O Reino de Benguela: Do Descobrimento à Criação do Governo Subalterno*, Lisboa, Imprensa Beleza, 1945, pp. 357–8.



1 Distribution of the Population Charts of Portuguese Angola, 1797–1830

Source: Paulo Teodoro de Mafros (ed.), *Counting Colonial Populations*, 2014–, [Accessed on August 2014]. Available at http://www.cham.fesh.unl.pt/pr_descricao.aspx?ProId=8.

Portuguese efforts to count the population of Angola were more consistent following the 1797 order, which also required the governors to send a copy of the census returns to Lisbon annually. Records of census returns for this period are way more abundant but, instead of providing an overview of the colony’s entire population, they show the population size and composition of each district separately. The research team was able to locate and copy two hundred and thirty-two returns made between 1797 and 1830. Despite this number, the sample is nowhere complete. As Figure 1 shows, census returns are missing for several territories and years, making the reconstruction of the demographic history of Portuguese Angola more complex. Moreover, the administrative organization of the colony changed several times. Since 1779, the Portuguese divided Angola into two broad territories: the Kingdom of Angola and the Captaincy of Benguela. Each was subdivided by a number of districts and *presídios*, districts guarded by a fortress and a regiment of troops. Nevertheless, new districts emerged over time, some changed jurisdiction, while others were merged just to be unmerged later.

Elias Alexandre da Silva Corrêa, a soldier and historian who lived several years in Luanda, informs us that in the early 1780s the Kingdom of Angola alone was divided into twelve districts: six *presídios* guarded by troops (Ambaca, Caconda, Cambambe, Encoje, Novo Redondo, and Pungo Andongo); three without troops (Galangue, Massangano, and Muxima); and three over which the Portuguese claimed jurisdiction but had little footing (Dande, Golungo, and Icolo). Silva Corrêa notes also that the Portuguese were present in six other places over which they had no jurisdiction (Bengo, Calumbo, Libongo, Quanza, Quilengues, and Quilengues de Benguela).¹⁰

¹⁰ Elias Alexandre da Silva CORRÊA, *História de Angola*, [ed. Manuel Múrias], Lisboa, Editorial Ática, 1937, Vol. 1, pp. 24–7.

Years later the number of districts in the kingdom increased. J. C. Feo Cardoso de Castelobranco e Torres, son of Governor Luís da Motta Feo e Torres, says that by 1819 the Kingdom of Angola was divided into fifteen districts: seven *presídios* (Ambaca, Cambambe, Encoje, Massangano, Muxima, Novo Redondo, and Pungo Andongo) and eight regular districts (Barra do Bengo, Barra de Calumbo, Barra do Dande, Dembos, Icolo e Bengo, Dande, Golungo, and Zenza e Quilengues), three of them (Barra do Bengo, Barra de Calumbo, and Barra do Dande), he notes, “made long part of the capital’s jurisdiction, from which they were separated by several captain generals.”¹¹ The Captaincy of Benguela, to which he refers as “kingdom,” had one *presídio* (Caconda) and seven districts (Bailundo, Bié, Dombe Grande da Quinzamba, Galengue e Sambos, Hambo, Quilengues e Huíla, and Quilengues e Sambos). These districts, however, were located so far away from Portuguese authority that he was not able to give us detailed information about them in view of the “near complete absence of reliable documents.”¹²

Nevertheless, the surviving census returns provide us with a slightly different picture of the Portuguese administrative organization. The number of *presídios* seems to have remained unaltered between the 1780s and 1830s. Together, the Kingdom of Angola and the Captaincy of Benguela had eight *presídios* (Ambaca, Cambambe, Caconda, Encoje, Massangano, Muxima, Novo Redondo, and Pungo Andongo). These *presídios* are also clearly identified in the 1827 census return for Angola, the only surviving return for the entire colony to 1830 produced according to the 1797 order.¹³ By contrast, the number of districts differed significantly. Neither the individual census returns, nor the 1827 census, have several of the districts that Silva Corrêa and Castelobranco e Torres mentioned (Galangue, Libongo, and Quanza, cited by the former and Barra do Bengo, Bailundo, Bié, Dombe Grande da Quinzamba, Galengue e Sambos, Hambo, Quilengues e Huíla, and Quilengues e Sambos cited by the latter). These were probably places that the Portuguese grouped under other designations or over which they had little control. Others, especially those lying between rivers Bengo and Dande, seem to have been rearranged over time.

¹¹ João Carlos Feo Cardoso de Castello Branco e TORRES, *Memórias Contendo a Biographia do Vice Almirante Luis da Motta Feo e Torres, a História dos Governadores e Capitaens Generaes de Angola desde 1575 até 1825, e a Descrição Geographica e Politica dos Reinos de Angola e Benguella*, Paris, Fantin, 1825, p. 361.

¹² J. C. F. C. B. TORRES, op. cit., p. 367.

¹³ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 156, doc. 16 (Mappa da População do Reino de Angola, 20 Jun. 1827).



2 Detail of Map of Portuguese Angola, 1860

Source: BIBLIOTECA NACIONAL DE PORTUGAL [BNP], *Cartografia*, cc-21-v (Mappa dos Reinos de Angola e Benguella, Lisbon, 1860). [Accessed August 2014]. Available from <http://purl.pt/1498>.

According to Castelobranco e Torres, the population of Bengo, Calumbo, and Dande used to be part of Luanda’s jurisdiction, but census returns for Dande survive from as early as 1797.¹⁴ The population of Calumbo may indeed have been previously counted with that of Luanda, since it appears listed separately in the historical records only in the 1827 census. The first individual census return for Calumbo dates from 1830.¹⁵ The population of Bengo, on the other hand, was probably counted with that of Icolo. Census returns for Icolo e Bengo are available as early as 1797.¹⁶ From 1806 to 1818, the returns appear listed only as Icolo but in 1819 they appear labeled again Icolo and Bengo. Despite these changes, the population of Icolo and Bengo seems to have been counted always together. Both, Castelobranco e Torres and the 1827 census, mention a district called Dembos, situated east of Golungo. The Dembos were chiefdoms over which the Portuguese claimed suzerainty since the seventeenth century but were never able to control them. The earliest individual census available for Dembos dates

¹⁴ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 86, doc. 76 (Mappa do Districto do Dande... 1 Jan. 1798).

¹⁵ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 167, doc. 33 (Mappa do Districto de Calumbo... 16 Aug. 1830).

¹⁶ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 86, doc. 76 (Mappa do Destricto do Icolo e Bengo... 4 Jan. 1798).

from 1831 but, according to Captain-Major of Golungo, Joaquim Geraldo da Fonseca do Amaral Gurgel, the population of Dembos as well as of Zenza do Golungo were counted separately from that of Golungo since 1811.¹⁷ Quilengues and Zenza e Quilengues are two different districts. The former was located in the Captaincy of Benguela, while the latter at the Kingdom of Angola. Although census returns for each are scarce, Portuguese colonial records dating before 1797 already mention their existence.

Content

The information available in the two principal efforts to count the population are significantly different. The 1776 order required colonial officials to divide society merely according to sex and age. The age categories, however, differed for males and females. Males were divided into four categories overlapping each other: males under seven years old, from seven to fifteen, fifteen to sixty, and men sixty years old and over. Females were also divided into four categories overlapping each other, but the age structures were somewhat different: females under seven years old, from seven to fourteen, fourteen to forty, and finally women forty years old and over. The difference in age categories indicates that the census aimed at showing how many men could bear arms and how many women were at their reproductive age.

The 1776 order also required colonial officials to list the number of births and deaths occurred in the colony during the census year. As Fernando de Sousa noticed, the Portuguese as well as other European powers of the time viewed the population size of their territories as one of their principal sources of wealth and power. Men and women were supposed to not only fight and reproduce, but also to be economically active and generate revenue through taxes and tributes.¹⁸ Therefore, keeping an eye on the population's rate of natural growth, as measured by the ratio of births over deaths, was critical to govern and manage the colony.

Although the 1776 instructions did not require, colonial officials also indicated the number of people who were over ninety years old and organized the censuses by race and legal status. They used three categories to describe the population's races: whites, blacks, and *pardos*, meaning people of mixed race. They used only two categories to describe legal status: slaves

¹⁷ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 174, doc. 21 (Mappa Estatístico da Povoação da Provincia dos Dembos... 1 Jan. 1832) and AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 124, doc. 9 (Mappa do Destricto do Gollungo... 1 Jan. 1812).

¹⁸ Fernando de SOUSA, *História Da Estatística Em Portugal*, Lisboa, Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 1995, pp. 45–6.

and *forros*, a term implying free people but that was actually used at the time to describe ex-slaves or people who had achieved freedom through manumission. The colonial officials who organized the census return did not use any of these terms to describe whites, but they always specified whether blacks and *pardos* were slaves or *forros*. Although many if not most of the blacks and *pardos* were in fact born free, government officials simply assumed that they had been slaves at some point of their lives.

The censuses produced as a result of the 1797 order provide a more complex view of the colonial society. They have similar information to previous censuses but organized in a different way, one that tried to superimpose older forms of describing society over modern ones. The censuses following the 1797 order divided colonial society according to sex and social classes stemming from medieval times. Women were classified separately from men and the latter were subdivided into clergy, military, and *paisanos* or civilians. The clergy were further divided according to their religious hierarchy and order, while civilian men and women were subdivided according to legal status, this time using the terms “free” and “slave.” Although the census returns clearly placed them apart, the math indicates that in some districts orphans were considered as a third category of legal status. Government officials organized all this information as the columns of a huge table and used the table’s rows to specify to which race the individuals belonged. The racial groupings were similar to those of previous censuses, consisting of whites, blacks, and *mulatos* to describe people of mixed race.

The censuses compiled according to the 1797 order also provide a wider range of information, revealing a greater preoccupation with the control and governance of the colonial society. The censuses show the number of civilian men and women by age using the same age categories for each gender with some of them still overlapping. They included individuals of up to seven years of age, from seven to fourteen, fourteen to twenty-five, and

3 Sample of a Population Chart Produced According to the 1797 Royal Order

Source: ARQUIVO HISTÓRICO ULTRAMARINO [AHU], *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 115, doc. 28 (Mapa do Presidio d'Ambáca... 1 de Janeiro de 1806).

over twenty-five. Additionally, the censuses organized the number of civilian men and women by marital status, indicating whether they were single, married, or widowed, and by continental region of origin, listing them as Africans, Americans, or Europeans. Similar to previous censuses, the returns following the 1797 order also provide the number of births and deaths during the census year, but they included a new piece of information: the number of people who arrived at and departed from each district. This information shows that the government grew clearly concerned with internal migration by the end of the eighteenth century.

The 1797 order required governors to supply in a separate table, information on the number of indigenous people inhabiting the colony as well as the number of births, marriages, and deaths occurred among them during the census year. However, only Benguela was able to provide this information and rather incompletely. Data on births included the number of babies born alive, stillborn babies, and twins. All of them organized by sex. The data on marriages and deaths came divided by sex and age using a different set of age categories for both, males and females. This set started with ages zero to five, five to ten, and then moving in eleven-year intervals beginning with ten to twenty until reaching ninety to one hundred. The urge to single out the indigenous population living in the colony and measure every aspect of their lives clearly indicates that the government was no longer interested merely in the defense and economic growth of its possessions.

As previously mentioned, Benguela has also a set of census returns that were not created by the royal orders of 1776 and 1797. The captaincy's governor commissioned one of them in 1796. It shows the number of people living just in the city of Benguela by legal status.¹⁹ Another covers the population of the entire captaincy for 1798. It provides the numbers of military men and inhabitants to Benguela and six other provinces (Bailundo, Bié, Caconda, Galangue, Huambo, and Quilengues) by race, sex, and legal status with the slaves' race unspecified. However, the governor pointed out that "for all the seven provinces only for that of Huambo I have more accurate news, not only because it is the smallest of all, but also because of its captain's attention and work."²⁰ Huambo had about seven hundred people living under Portuguese jurisdiction but the governor also claimed suzerainty over an estimated forty-seven thousand Africans living in villages

¹⁹ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 83, doc. 66 (Mapa das Pessoas livres e Escravos... de que se compoem a Cidade de Benguella... 15 Jun. 1796).

²⁰ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 180, doc. 100 (Mappa da Capitania de Benguella... 1 Jan. 1799).

spread throughout the region.²¹ The remaining returns are exclusively for the parish of Benguela. They divide the population by race, legal status, marital status, sex, and age. Males and females are divided using the same age categories, starting with six-year intervals from zero to five and five to ten, moving next to eleven-year intervals, from ten to twenty until reaching ninety to one-hundred.

Accuracy

Despite the government's efforts, from the modern standpoint the information contained in the census returns are not accurate. The colonial officials themselves called attention to the censuses' problems and not a single one pretended to have compiled an accurate return. In 1778, for example, D. António de Lencastre, Governor of Angola, wrote to Lisbon sending a copy of the first census return commissioned by the 1776 royal order. He reported that the distance to the colony's backlands, the lack of trained officials to count the population, and the inhabitants' suspicion caused a great delay in compiling the census. He noted that the African chiefs, in particular, thought that the introduction of this new census was aimed at "removing some of their people according to their quantity."²² Although the governor managed to persuade the chiefs to allow conducting the census, he further observed: "I do not give the number of inhabitants of these lands as correct and neither certify its accuracy to Your Majesty."²³

The distance between the coast and the backlands was no doubt a major obstacle in conducting an accurate census. Although Portuguese geographers or chorographers, as many refer to themselves at the time, often exaggerated the size of the Crown's possessions overseas, colonial officials had to cover great lengths to count the population of their territories in Angola. Since the lower Kwanza is a navigable river, counting the inhabitants of the *presídios* along the waterway may have been relatively easy, but the populations living in other places in the interior must have been very challenging. Officials, for example, could sail as far as Cambambe, but to reach Pungo Andongo they had to march an additional one hundred and twenty kilometers. Some *presídios* and districts had no water access, so census takers had to travel all the way over land. Encoje, which is relatively isolated, is two hundred kilometers far from Luanda as the crow flies, while Ambaca two hundred and fifty.

²¹ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 180, doc. 100.

²² "D. António de Lencastre to Martinho de Melo e Castro, Luanda, 15 Jul. 1778," *Arquivo das Colónias* 3, no. 16 (1918), p. 175.

²³ *Ibidem*.

Caconda, the only *presídio* in the interior of Benguela is situated two hundred and twenty kilometers inland. Officials usually had to travel the whole journey by foot or transported in hammocks carried by Africans, for the terrain and the incidence of sleeping sickness in the country discouraged the use of other transportation methods, including horses, camels, and oxen.²⁴

The lack or low number of trained officials was another major problem that affected the accuracy of the early population charts of Angola. The number of Europeans and people from the Americas living in the colony was already very few in relation to Africans. The majority was probably illiterate and many had come as condemned criminals. As a consequence, the Crown viewed the colony's priests, magistrates, and civil servants as the primary agents for counting the population, the former responsible especially for providing the number of deaths, births, and marriages. D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, for example, in his instructions to the governor of Angola, clearly suggests that governors should take this point for granted.

It is useless to tell Your Lordship that to make the first three [charts; meaning those of the population, the inhabitants' occupation, and the births, deaths, and marriages occurred in the colony] Your Lordship can use the priests as well as the magistrates.²⁵

However, priests, magistrates, and civil servants were rare in Angola. In a letter discussing the state of the colony at the beginning of 1800, Governor D. Miguel António de Melo noted that twenty-five parishes did not have pastors, six canonicates were vacant, and the colony did not have a single seminary to train and ordain new priests.²⁶ This situation, Melo observed, forced the church to search for other alternatives to fulfill its obligations.

[The bishops are forced] to accept as pastors of the churches of the interior, the clergy that come here as ship chaplains, devoid of science, and frequently even of good manners, and those who accept the invitation do not go moved by their zeal to save souls, but expecting to make, against the orientation of the sacred canons, capital through commerce with which they can, after a few years, live well, or move as rich men to their home countries.²⁷

²⁴ On the issue of transportation methods in the history of Angola see Beatrix HEINTZE and Achim von OPPEN (eds.), *Angola on the Move: Transport Routes, Communications and History*, Frankfurt am Main, Otto Lembeck, 2008.

²⁵ "D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho to D. Miguel António de Melo, Mafra, 21 Oct 1797," *Arquivos de Angola I*, Vol. 4, no. 37–40 (1938), p. 20.

²⁶ "D. Miguel António de Melo to D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, Luanda, 3 Feb 1800," *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, Vol. 6, no. 5 (1886), p. 280.

²⁷ "D. Miguel António de Melo to D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, Luanda, 3 Feb 1800," *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, Vol. 6, no. 5 (1886), p. 280.

Yet, many chaplains probably did not accept such an invitation. Colonial officials in the interior frequently noticed the absence of priests. In 1821, for example, the regent of Cambambe observed that the *presídio* “does not have a priest for nine years and the church is completely ruined.”²⁸

Governor Melo also noticed, in a detailed report on the colony’s bureaucracy enclosed with his letter, that Angola was short in magistrates and civil servants. The report lists a total of one hundred and eighteen positions for the entire colony, of which twenty-seven were vacant and seven fulfilled by three individuals alone.²⁹ Part of the problem was the general poverty of the colony and the lack of resources to offer a competitive salary to trained bureaucrats.

The salaries are too low and consequently nobody wants to apply to these positions [...] moreover, the people born in Angola and who are relatively civilized can barely resist the temptation of leaving this country for a better one, so they do not look for positions to apply, and do not even want to try establishing roots in this land.³⁰

The way that the population charts themselves were organized also did not help the censuses’ accuracy. The problem of overlapping age categories has already been mentioned, but another one was that of individuals occupying multiple social and occupational categories at the same time. This problem affected especially the tables made following the 1797 order. Sergeant-major António José de Faria, who compiled the Luanda population chart for 1802, explains the problem:

Since the present chart must show the different hierarchies of all those employed in the ecclesiastic, military, and civil services, a single individual may be counted several times in different classes as, for example, the General Treasurer and Deputy of the Board Manoel José da Rocha, who is counted as civilian and as graduate sergeant-major of the Militia Squad just as other individuals.

As a consequence, Faria notes, “it is not possible to know [the number of] all individuals in general, what... greatly contributes to the low accuracy of this chart.”³¹

²⁸ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 139, doc. 85 (Mappa do Prezidio de Cambambe... 1 Jan. 1821).

²⁹ “Relação dos officios civis de justiça e fazenda, economia publica e politica que n’este reino de Angola existem, feita segundo a determinação do aviso de 11 de fevereiro de 1779,” enclosed with «D. Miguel António de Melo to D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, Luanda, 3 Feb 1800», *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, Vol. 6, no. (1886), pp. 281–92.

³⁰ “D. Miguel António de Melo to D. Rodrigo de Sousa Coutinho, Luanda, 3 Feb 1800,” *Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa*, Vol. 6, no. 5 (1886), p. 292.

³¹ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 105, doc. 44 (Mappa de toda a Povoação de São Paulo da Assumpção de Loanda... 1 Jan. 1803).

Finally, the distrust Africans had of colonial officials affected the credibility of any statistical assessment of their territories. As Governor Lencastre pointed out in 1778, they feared that the census could result in the imposition of tributes by the Portuguese government. Such tributes were usually collected in kind, goods, and even people, so Africans had a legitimate concern with the government's attempts to assess their numbers. In 1796, after a five-year long trip to Ambaca and the presidios along the Kwanza to determine a new method for calculating the tithe due to the church, Captain Francisco António Pita Bezerra de Alpoem e Castro observed that Africans "are very sensitive to the way that the tithe was collected, not only because of the regulation to which it was subjected, but mainly because of the collectors' overly unjust usurpations and extremely violent behavior."³² As a consequence, Africans devised ways of preventing colonial officials from making an accurate assessment of their population.

One of these ways was to move temporarily to lands that the Portuguese did not control. José Diogo Rodrigues Ferreira, the regent of Golungo district in 1806, provides a good example:

This year [1805] there are 14,069 less individuals recorded among the black population [...] some of whom are dead, others left in the service of the traders to benefit the commerce, and the remaining have deserted, some to the neighboring Mahungo, while others to the Dembos, from where they cannot be retrieved, for the Dembos and the Mahungo are equally fierce, the former have little respect for the laws and orders of a sovereign, while the latter have no respect whatsoever, they also have no respect for the orders of captain-majors [...]³³

Another way was to simply skip the officials' visit or refuse to answer their questions. In the census for 1830, Diogo Vieira de Lima, captain-major of Quilengues, made precisely this observation.

In the number of the inhabitants are not included the black gentiles of all this province, except the so called quimbares [traders], and those living close to this capital, and thus there are no mention of the great number of their cattle, because when sought [to answer] this matter they do not obey, and their disobedience grows stronger.³⁴

³² AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cód. 1644, fl. 96 (Nova Convenção dos Dízimos... Nov. 1796).

³³ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 115, doc. 28 (Mappa do Destricto do Golungo... 1 Jan. 1806).

³⁴ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 165, doc. 57 (Mappa Estatístico da Povoação e Presidio de Quilengues... 1 Jul. 1830).

Methods

Despite these challenges, Portuguese officials developed creative ways of counting the population of their territories. One of them was to count the number of villages in a district and multiply it by an average number of dwellings. The result could be then multiplied by an average number of people living in each dwelling, resulting thereby into an estimated total number of people living in that particular district. Governor of Benguela, Alexandre José Brito de Vasconcelos, for example, used this method to calculate the population of Huambo in 1798. According to him, the province had “three hundred and eleven settlements, which through a reasonable calculation can be regulated at about 50 houses each one, and each house at a minimum of three people [...]”³⁵ The number of people living in each house, however, varied according to region, so colonial officials had to adjust their multipliers accordingly. In the periphery of Benguela, for instance, the same governor noticed a few years earlier that the small houses made of earth and thatch “could accommodate up to six people.”³⁶

Similarly, they could estimate the sexual and age distribution of each district by using multipliers calculated with basis on a smaller sample of the population of their respective districts. Examples of how colonial officials came up with these numbers are rare, but the observations of Captain-Major of Ambaca, Joaquim José da Silva, to the population chart of that presidio for 1797 gives us an idea.

It is not possible to tell in detail the age of each one of the inhabitants [of this presidio], being the majority gentiles, because the parishes have no records. The same should be understood of the number of women, which can only be estimated by approximation as the triple of the number of all [male] inhabitants.³⁷

Therefore, although the statistical data available in the early population charts of Angola are, from a modern point of view, far from accurate, they do provide us with an approximate idea of the size and distribution of the population living in Portuguese territories.

³⁵ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 89, doc. 88 (Mappa da Capitania de Benguella... 1 Jan. 1799).

³⁶ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 83, doc. 66 (Mapa das Pessoas Livres e Escravos... de que se compoem a Cidade de Benguella... 15 Jun. 1796).

³⁷ AHU, *Conselho Ultramarino*, Angola, Cx. 86, doc. 76 (Mappa do Presidio de Ambaca... 1 Jan. 1798).

Conclusion

The population charts of Portuguese Angola will be soon available for the public at the project's website. Although a quantitative assessment has yet to be made, the charts clearly provide a unique perspective of the size and demographic profile of the colonial population. From the modern point of view, the charts' numbers are rarely any accurate. Portuguese colonial officials had tremendous difficulties in counting the population of Angola. They lacked trained personnel, were inconsistent in how to categorize people, had to cover huge distances, and faced strong African resistance. They developed clever ways of counting the population, but even that may be considered a clear indication of the Crown's weaknesses in this remote region of the empire. Indeed, Portuguese imperial administrators entertained unrealistic expectations about what their representatives in the colonies could accomplish. Nevertheless, the charts stand as undeniable evidence of the Crown's gradual effort of counting and classifying the population living in its territories overseas.

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