

**Projections of Portuguese Expansion. Lasting impacts of overseas dynamics on Portuguese society (16<sup>th</sup> Century to the present day)**

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*Projections of Portuguese Expansion. Lasting impacts of overseas dynamics on Portuguese society (16<sup>th</sup> Century to the present day)* is the ambitious title given to this presentation. We will put forward some retro-projections (conceived in spatial terms) of Portuguese overseas expansion and, at the same time, we will try to focus on some projections of the same phenomenon in the present<sup>2</sup>.

What we're proposing is, simultaneously, challenging, risky and polemic. To be polemic and challenging were two of the criteria suggested by those who invited me to be here. I will take the risks on my own, in the conviction that some of them are worthwhile, and assuming that there is no better place to check the interest, the pertinence and the scientific value of a project, a thesis, or a theoretical approach than an open session conceived precisely to discuss, to argue, to question ...

This essay is an arrival point, in the sense that it results from several research lines followed in the last five or six years, but it is also a departing point, since it will serve to situate me, as well as you, in relation to new research questions ...

The question we've been trying to answer lately is: how did Portuguese overseas expansion affect Early Modern Portuguese maritime societies? We assumed that the global interactions of Portuguese overseas expansion in the political, economic and technical domains were well-known, and had been extensively analysed in a vast number of national and international studies. However, the internal interactions of the same phenomenon in Portuguese society, particularly in seaport and maritime communities, the very communities which sustained overseas expansion in the 16<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries with human and material resources, had, on the contrary, been practically ignored. Having this concern, several papers have been produced trying to explore those impacts from a social, political and economic point of view. They aimed to

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<sup>2</sup> These paper takes some data related to some of dynamics under analysis on the present days. The tendencies here explained, despite the lack of those official data, were based on some indicators presented by the media, ever since Portuguese and European statistical data are published, in an annual basis. The access to this data, in an institutional and official basis, is not, nevertheless, easy. Several serial samples and statistical data were required to the Portuguese INE (National Statistical Institute). We still wait for their answer to our request. Other data were available on the webpage of INE. Those are secure and considered official.

examine the emergence of new economic mechanisms, new economic logics, new economic standards, new criteria of social promotion, and the implications of male absences, caused by participation in overseas expansion, on the demographic and family structures, including the adjustment and broadening of female roles<sup>3</sup>.

Supported by a range of sources that included notarised deeds, parish records, town council minutes, tax registers, Inquisition proceedings, central archive documents, legislative corpora and a number of sources dealing with shipping and trade activities, covering the period from 1500 to 1640, we thought it would be possible to conclude that the conditions created by Portuguese overseas expansion had a significant impact, in the Early Modern Age, on maritime communities, particularly on those which had the sea as a prominent, if not exclusive, horizon.

Now we stand at another level, assuming that overseas expansion generated structural dynamics that framed the evolution of Portuguese society over the centuries - which is frequently argued, but not totally proven. Based on this hypothesis, we'll reflect on some of those impacts on Portuguese society and economy today, aiming to identify some of the lasting impacts of the overall process of overseas expansion, as it was framed in the Early Modern Age.

We are aware of the fact that we can't ignore the multitude and complexity of other historical dynamics that have occurred between then and now, nor can we even measure if other, possibly even more structural influences occurred that have shaped Portuguese society today. Being aware of that, we accept the challenge of the discussion.

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<sup>3</sup> Among other, we can quote: "L'insertion dans l'axe maritime comme facteur structurant d'une communauté urbaine. L'étude d'un cas. Portugal. XVIe. siècle" in SAUPIN, Guy, dir. - *Villes Atlantique dans l'Europe Occidentale du Moyen Âge au XXe. Siècle*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006, pp. 57-72 ; *The sea and its impact on a maritime Community: Vila do Conde, Portugal, 1500-1640* . "International Journal of Maritime History", XVIII, n° 1 (June 2006), pp. 199-222, "Os náuticos da expansão portuguesa. Perfis de actuação económica, estratégias de investimento e funções sociais. Um estudo micro-analítico" in *O reino, as ilhas e o mar oceano. Estudos em Homenagem a Artur Teodoro de Matos*, coord. Avelino de Freitas de Meneses; João Paulo Oliveira e Costa, Lisboa/Ponta Delgada, CHAM/Universidade dos Açores, 2007, Vol. 1, pp. 377-400; "Elites sociais e elites de poder em sociedades marítimas. Estudo de um caso: Vila do Conde no século XVI" in *O Poder Local em Tempo de Globalização. Uma História e um Futuro Actas*, coord. Fernando Taveira da Fonseca, Viseu, Palimage, 2005, pp. 29-54; *Implications of terrestrial and naval war in maritime communities (Portugal. Early Modern Age)* in XXXIVth in International Congress of Military History (Trieste, 31 Agosto – 04 Setembro 2008) in Proceedings of the XXXIV Congress on Military History, Trieste, Commissione Italiana di Storia Militare, [2009], *Impact des dynamiques économiques en des villes maritimes : la construction de l'espace urbain (Portugal. XVIème – XVIIIème siècles)*. in "La ville et le monde. XVe- XXe siècles". Actes du Colloque International (Nantes/ La Rochelle, Junho 2007), Rennes, Presse Universitaire de Rennes, [2009], "De Portugal al espacio ultramarino. Inclusión y exclusión de agentes femeninos en el proceso de expansión ultramarina. (Siglo XVI)" in *Historia, Género y Familia en Iberoamérica. Siglos XVI-XX*, coord. Dora Davila Mendonza, Caracas, Universidad Católica "Andrés Bello"/ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2004; "Women's participation in labour and business in the European Maritime Societies in the Early Modern Period" in *Il ruolo economico della famiglia. Secs. XIII-XVIII. Atti delle "Settimane di studio"*, Prato, Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini", [-----] (Waits for publication)

Unable to review all the pertinent domains in which we identify parallelism and continuity, some fields were chosen in order to check the hypothesis, namely, demographic frameworks; family and social dynamics; entrepreneurial behaviour and economic patterns.

With regards to the theoretical and methodological background of our research, we began, as the main strategic approach, to develop studies based on the local history of Northwest Portuguese seaports<sup>4</sup>, using a micro analytical methodology, and then moved on to a comparative approach, at a national and international level, and to a multidisciplinary perspective, joining History, Demography, Sociology and Anthropology. We departed from some basic theoretical premises according to which:

- a. we assumed the added value of micro-approaches in answering questions that had never been made, or had no reasonable answer in the historiography of Portuguese expansion;
- b. we assumed, and verified, that sources produced locally were able to provide much greater detail and precision than those produced by the central power, in what concerns the issues we wanted to debate;
- c. we assumed the need to promote new ways of exploring already known sources, crossing central vs. local sources; quantitative vs. qualitative data; statistical analysis vs. qualitative analysis.;
- d. we assumed that the social approach was the answer to a broader understanding of some structural phenomena, since the basis of decision is the historical agent, who is, in the first place, a social agent;
- e. we assumed that economic figures and econometrics provides us with some valuable indicators on certain phenomena, but they don't give the explanations themselves: to obtain them, a socially-based interpretation was unavoidable.

More recently, we understood that a multidisciplinary approach was the key to answering some of the blanks in our comprehension of the past, and that we could reformulate our understanding if we were receptive to concepts, questions and methodologies from other scientific fields. Some examples will arise in this paper ...

Last, but not the least, we accepted that an agent-based analysis would be able to

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<sup>4</sup> Approach developed during the research to a PhD dissertation, presented at 2000, in the Faculty of Arts of the University of Porto: POLÓNIA, Amélia – *Vila do Conde. Um porto nortenho na expansão ultramarina quinhentista*, Porto, 1999, 2 vols, and continued in the project HISPORTOS – A contribution to the study of Portuguese North-western Seaports (XIV- XVIII centuries), coord. Amélia Polónia (POCTI/ HAR/ 6407/2000). In what concern this project, see: POLÓNIA, Amélia; OSSWALD, Helena, coord . - *European Seaports in the Early Modern Age. A comparative approach. International workshop (Porto, 21/22 October 2005). Proceedings*, Porto, IHM-UP, 2007.

rephrase our view of the past; refocusing our perspectives, because we assume, as we already stated, that the individual is the key element in History. What we argue here is that this perspective, which we apply with no resistance to the present, can also be applied to the First Global Age, when individual initiative, individual values and individual interests, which went beyond territorial, political and religious frontiers, interfered in the definition of strategic frameworks and processes. I'm not trying to say that politics, diplomacy, state, rule, social and religious framing are no longer important. I'm just saying that besides states, besides central policies, beside wars and rivalries, some European dynamics, namely those related to the building of empires, were sustained on agent-based networks that haven't yet been conveniently studied. But to this end, we have to put aside the focus on the structures, the systems, the State, and concentrate our attention on individuals ...

Having stated the methodological basis that supports this paper, let's focus on each specific research domain, trying to present some empirical evidence able to support our analytical proposals. I have to stress, again, the risks of this panoramic and multifocal approach which prevents us from going into the overall complexity of the issues under analysis in much detail ...

## **1. Projections on demographic features of the Portuguese population**

A renowned Portuguese historian, Jaime Cortesão<sup>5</sup>, who developed much of his work during the 1940s and 1950s, proposed, as one of the major motives of Portuguese maritime expansion, the geographical features of the territory, to which he added the prevalence of a maritime population, that is, the proportion of population involved in maritime activities and residing in coastal areas. This thesis, which was, in fact, an hypothesis that was never really proven, restricted long-term explanations of Portuguese overseas expansion, and fed the psychological approaches to the dynamics of Portuguese history, insisting on the spirit of a people of sailors, on the adventurous nature and on the call for freedom that marked the profile of those who had the sea as their horizon. However, a very simple presentation of the cartographic data from the population census of 1527/1532, a golden period in Portuguese expansion, leads us to question this thesis. (Cf. maps 1 to 3).

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<sup>5</sup> From this author, see, for instance, *Os descobrimentos portugueses*, reed., 3 vols., Lisboa, INCM, [1990]; *História da expansão portuguesa*, reed., Lisboa, INCM, [1993]; *Os factores democráticos na formação de Portugal*, 3ª ed., Lisboa, Livros Horizonte, 1978; *Portugal. A terra e o homem*, reed., Lisboa, INCM, [1995].

### Maps 1, 2, 3<sup>6</sup>

In the first place, as we can see, Portugal was still a country in which, statistically, the rural and the inland population prevailed, even though it is also clear that the settlements with more than 1.000 households were mostly located in the coastal belt. Other medieval demographic indicators reveal that this concentration was quite recent, and not a structural tendency<sup>7</sup>, what leads us to a second hypothesis according to which the prevalence and the concentration of the population in maritime centres was not the cause, i.e., was not the obvious lever, of the process under analysis, but rather a consequence of it.

The main urban centres were, in fact, in the sixteenth Century, located in coastal areas and coincided with seaports. The case of Lisbon, with about 100.000 inhabitants in the mid-sixteenth century, and about 165.000 in 1620 is, simultaneously, paradigmatic and exceptional. Exceptional, because Lisbon was the kingdom's capital since the Middle Ages, and, since the sixteenth century, the capital of a vast overseas empire.<sup>8</sup> No other Portuguese town could be compared with its dimension. Porto, the kingdom's second city, was a district capital and highly relevant in the kingdom's domestic life. Its population was however, in 1620, lower than 20,000 inhabitants<sup>9</sup>.

But Lisbon is also paradigmatic in terms of the dynamics that sustained its growth. In fact, the population growth rates of Lisbon, as those of other seaports, were a result of internal migrations from the hinterland to the coast areas; the seaports' need for seamen and naval crafts were supplied by migrations, both from the inland to the seaports, and from every coastal area to centripetal points, that became metropolis as a result of this process. The image of a country that falls on the sea overloaded by the concentration of population on coastal areas is usually used to define the distribution patterns of the Portuguese population, at the present days, which we can check by the following maps. (Cf. maps 4 , 5, 6)..

### Maps 4, 5, 6

The historical mechanisms of this coastal attraction, as well as the historical frames of this phenomenon, consequence of the major appeal that seaport economic and social dynamics represented, can be documented, both in Vila do Conde (a small seaport cc. 30 km north of

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<sup>6</sup> See figures in complementary file.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. AMARAL, Luís Carlos - Formação e desenvolvimento do domínio da diocese de Braga no período da Reconquista, Porto, 2007 [PhD dissertation]; DIAS, João José Alves – Gentes e espaços. Em torno da população portuguesa da primeira metade do século XVI, Lisboa, FCG/ JNICT, 1996; Idem – “A População” in *Nova História de Portugal. Do Renascimento à crise dinástica*, coord. João José Alves Dias, Lisboa, Ed. Presença, 1998, pp. 11-52.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Teresa Rodrigues, “Um espaço económico em expansão. Da Lisboa de Quinhentos a Lisboa do século XX”. *Penélope. Fazer e desfazer a história*, nº 13 (1994), 95-117.

<sup>9</sup> OSSWALD, Helena – “A evolução da população na diocese do porto na época moderna” In *1º. Congresso sobre a diocese do porto. Tempos e lugares da memória - Actas*, Porto, 2002, p.73-95; Idem – *Nascer, Viver e Morrer no Porto de Seiscentos*, Porto, 2008 [PhD dissertation].

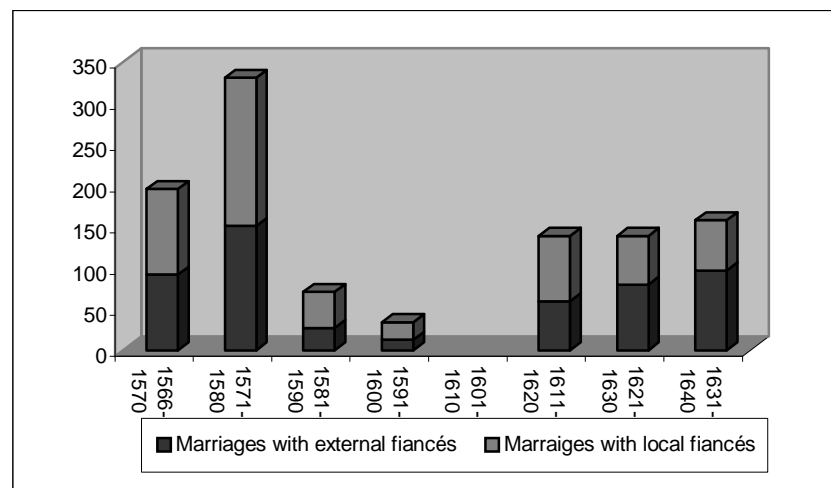
Porto) in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and in Porto itself, over a long period from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The following maps, resulting from the cartographic representation of massive and serial data from parish records, allow us to visualise these tendencies. (cf. maps 7 A/B ; 8A/B)

#### Maps 7 A/B

#### Maps 8 A/B

Both case studies seem to prove the highly mobile profile of their population. High rates of internal migrations shaped the demographic model of these ports. In fact, if we analyse the birth rates, we can see that there is insufficient natural growth to cope with the multiple forms of demographic losses. Yet, there is still demographic growth<sup>10</sup>. This is due to the municipality's ability to obtain significant demographic gains from the rural hinterland, which results on high rates of exogenous marriages, involving mostly, even if not exclusively, male agents. (Cf. graph1)

**Graph 1. Marriages in Vila do Conde (1566-1640)**



Source: ADP, Parish Records, V. Conde, Marriages, books 1 and 2

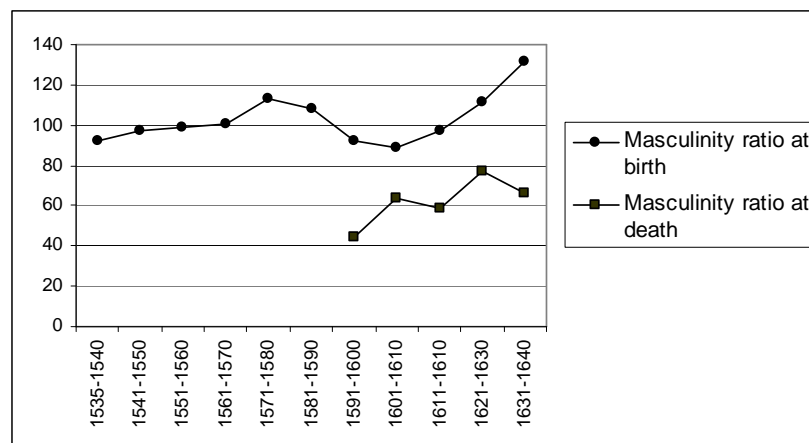
We can understand this trend in the golden age of Portuguese overseas expansion, but what about afterwards? The case study of Porto, a town with a large administrative and rural hinterland, proves that this is an evolutionary movement, in what regards the intensity of the flow, but not a reversible pattern: not even the dependency of Porto in the 18<sup>th</sup> century on Porto wine production in the Douro region, part of its large rural hinterland, subverted this propensity.

At the same time, overseas expeditions and trade nurtured another flow: the exoduses of male agents, whether temporary or permanent, for short or long periods, namely through emigration. The difficulties in studying emigration flows in the Early Modern Age are consensually

<sup>10</sup> Cf. POLÓNIA, Amélia – *Expansão e Descobrimentos numa perspectiva local. O porto de Vila do Conde no século XVI*, Lisboa, INCM, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 208-242 and OSSWALD, Helena - *Nascer, Viver e Morrer no Porto de Seiscentos*, Porto, 2008 [PhD dissertation], pp. 347-378.

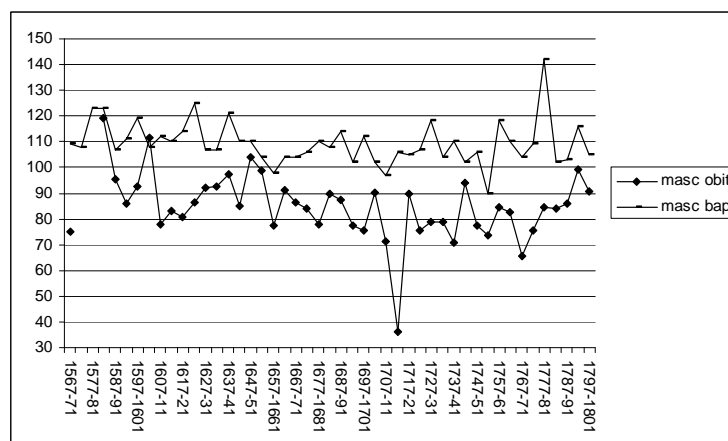
recognised and overwhelming, at least in the Portuguese case, due to the lack of sources. Nevertheless, an approach was essayed in both the towns mentioned, Vila do Conde and Porto, comparing the urban male ratio at birth and death, which reveals a clear discrepancy in relation to the expected rates. The figures from baptism records were close to those indicated as normal in historical demographics<sup>11</sup>, but the adult male rate is far lower than expected (Cf. graphs 2 and 3). As a consequence, we observe an inevitable increase in the female rates in this population – a trend that was to be responsible for profound social impacts, as we will see.

**Graph 2. Comparative Masculinity Male Ratios. Vila do Conde (16<sup>th</sup> . Century)**



Source: A.D.P. (District Archive of Porto) – Parish Records. V. Conde, Baptisms, Lv. 1 and 2; Deaths, Lv. 1

**Graph 3. Comparative Male Ratios. Porto (16<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries)- Porto**



Source: A.D.P. (District Archive of Porto) – Parish Records. Porto, Baptisms and Deaths. In OSSWALD, 2008:337

<sup>11</sup> HENRY, Louis - *Técnicas de Análise em Demografia Histórica*, transl. and notes Manuel Nazareth, Lisbon, Gradiva Henry, 1988.

These results, so unfavourable to male rates, can be observed despite the compensation produced by the well-documented and proven high levels of immigration flows. This intense mobility, parallel to high rates of migrations, namely to overseas territories, shaped, thus, Portuguese maritime societies in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. But, to be more precise, we cannot project these dynamics only on seaports: seaports were only a platform for the redistribution of the population from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, as proven by a large number of works on emigration flows<sup>13</sup>. This thus means that the phenomenon wasn't exclusive to the coastal area. On the contrary, it tended to affect the territory as a whole. In fact, high rates of emigration are a permanent pattern in the Portuguese population, first towards Brazil, then to Africa, then to North and Latin America, then to Europe, mainly France, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxemburg, and now also to Spain and Great Britain<sup>14</sup>, as shown by the emigration flow map.

#### **Map 8 – Destinations of Portuguese emigration today. (Map to be included)**

With 1.049.500 emigrants throughout the world, Portugal possesses the seventh largest community in the world<sup>15</sup>. This information, based on data from the Portuguese National Statistics Institute (INE), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations, contradicts the idea that Portugal stopped being a country of emigrants a long time ago. In fact, even these numbers are underevaluated, since a significant number of Portuguese now residents on Europe escape to the status of emigrants, due of their European citizenship.

Regardless of the destination, the pattern is structural and produces profound implications on the economy, society and family, even though the profile of the migrant or emigrant may change over time, as well as their main destinations. We can give, as an example, the recent features, according to which young qualified professionals, such as teachers, researchers, dentists, doctors, engineers, search for better opportunities, mostly in the Anglo-Saxon world and Northern Europe.

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<sup>13</sup> The bibliography on this subject is numerous on Portuguese historiography, as well as the one resulting from Sociologic and Anthropological approaches.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. BARGANHA, Maria Ioannis - *Portuguese Emigration After World War II*. Available in [http://ies.berkeley.edu/research/files/CP02/CP02-Port\\_Emigration.pdf](http://ies.berkeley.edu/research/files/CP02/CP02-Port_Emigration.pdf) and, from the same author, *From Close to Open Doors: Portuguese Emigration under the Corporative Regime*. Available in [http://ies.berkeley.edu/research/files/CP02/CP02-Close\\_to\\_Open\\_Doors.pdf](http://ies.berkeley.edu/research/files/CP02/CP02-Close_to_Open_Doors.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Cf. data available in "O Emigrante. Mundo Português", October 30, 2008. Data available in <http://www.mundoportugues.org/content/1/2217/portugal-continua-ser-pais-emigrantes/>



Parallel to this, immigration rates compensate, even if only partially, this exodus...In the Early Modern Age those external migrants were mostly European, attracted by the centrality of Lisbon and other Portuguese seaports as distribution platforms of overseas products; and slaves, from Africa or the East. Today they are citizens from the Portuguese-speaking Countries, particularly from Cape Verde and S. Tome, and from Eastern Europe, or Brazil... (Cf. map 9). Despite this flow, recent data indicate that, for every 15 new immigrants who arrive in Portugal, 100 Portuguese leave to work abroad<sup>16</sup>.

#### **Map 9.**

In fact, the trend has not really changed since the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, even though the general framework has: the Portuguese population searches for new opportunities and new prospects outside their national territory, revealing, once there, rates of efficiency which they are accused of not achieving in Portugal. Could this be due to a lack of institutional and entrepreneurial structures? Could it be erroneous state policies regarding economics? We will debate this matter later on...

It is also important to understand that we are talking of a trend that is generally shaped, from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century, by one overriding characteristic: the prevalence of male emigration, despite some changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. In these latter contexts, the fact that children are left in the care of grandparents during the absence, usually not permanent, of their parents, has produced diverse implications on population structures and family life.

Going back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and centring our attention on Vila do Conde, a town where we can observe a significant male exodus produced by emigration and long-term navigations and trade, we can look for the implications of those flows in several demographic indicators. Low fertility rates, caused by large inter-generational gaps, marriages without children, a considerable number of unmarried women, and a high rate of early widowhood emerge as understandable demographic outcomes of these circumstances, mainly observed in the universe of seamen. A comparative analysis between seafarers' and land-based men's families (craftsmen, officers and, in a small number, farmers), brings to light significant differences between their demographic behaviours. (cf. table 1 and graph 4)

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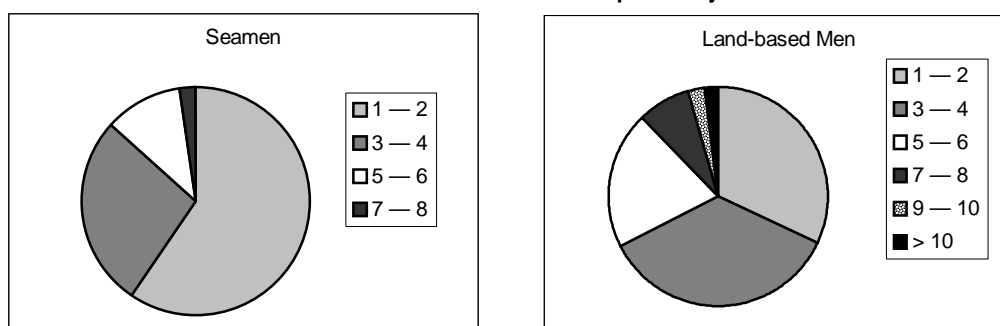
<sup>16</sup> "O Emigrante. Mundo Português", October 16, 2008. Data available in <http://www.mundoportugues.org/content/1/2217/portugal-continua-ser-pais-emigrantes/>

**Table 1**  
**Number of children per family**

Number of Children	Seamen		Land-based Men	
	Nº	%	Nº	%
1 — 2	159	59.3	78	32
3 — 4	73	27.2	87	35.7
5 — 6	30	11.2	49	20.1
7 — 8	6	2.2	19	7.8
9 — 10	—		6	2.5
> 10	—		5	2
<b>Total of occurrences with registered events</b>	<b>268</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>100</b>
Occurrences without registered events	132	33	56	18.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>400</b>		<b>300</b>	

Source: A.D.P.- Parish Records. V. Conde . Baptisms, lv. 1 e 2

**Graph 4**  
**Number of children per family**



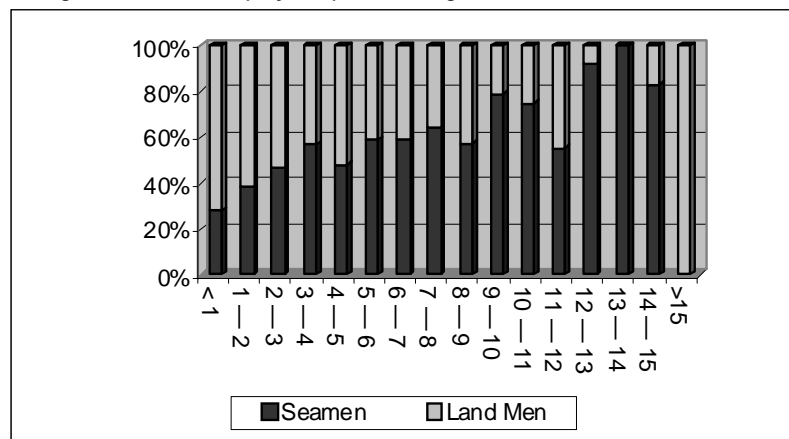
Source: A.D.P.- Parish Records. V. Conde . Baptisms, lv. 1 e 2

This scenario is immediately reflected in the average values we obtained, relative to the number of children per family: 2.5 children in the case of seamen and 4 (more precisely, 3.9) in the case of land-based men. These values, together with the scenario so far analysed, present irrefutable evidence of the existence of differentiated demographic behaviour between these two groups, necessarily resulting from the distinct demands linked to their socio-professional occupations.

This panorama is directly framed by the intergenesic intervals (cf. graph. 5) . A lower birth rate can result both from a marriage interrupted by the untimely death of one of the spouses, and from low fertility rates. One of the factors which influence this variable is clearly the frequency of sexual contact between the spouses. Thus, we contend that the absence of men at sea, dictated by long-haul sailing, is the touchstone in a study into this matter. The results presented in graph 5

show how this factor performs in our universe of analysis. The diversity of the values obtained is immediately clear from a comparative perspective.

**Graph 5**  
**Intergenesic Intervals (in years). Percentage distribution of the occurrences**



Source: A.D.P.. Fundo Paroquial (Parish Records). V. Conde . Baptisms, lv. 1 e 2

From this retro-projection of overseas dynamics on Portuguese metropolitan territories, which projections can we find into the present? This is a particularly difficult, unstable and slippery territory. Demographic behaviours depend, today, on variables and frameworks totally unknown in Ancien Régime societies. Religious behaviours, birth control, marriage structures, mentalities, concepts of childhood, economic and health features – have all changed. Nevertheless, Portugal has the lowest birth rate in Europe: data from 2007 reveal an average of 1.36 children per adult female, equivalent to a birth rate of 9.7‰, which means that generational replacement is not taking place<sup>17</sup>. Since this evaluation implies a much more complex analysis, let's try further developments on family structures, again in the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Vila do Conde case study.

## 2. Projections on family structures and social dynamics

Resulting from the scenario described previously, important social impacts arise in family life, one of which is directly framed by the prevalence of single women, widows, and single-parent families, conferring on women the status of heads of households. (cf. table 2)

<sup>17</sup> Birth rate (‰) by local of residence. INE, Indicadores Demográficos in [www.ine.pt](http://www.ine.pt). Also available at: NEVES, Céu - *Portugal tem a mais baixa taxa de natalidade da UE* in "Diário de Notícias, 19. November 2007. Available in [http://dn.sapo.pt/2007/11/19/sociedade/portugal\\_a\\_mais\\_baixa\\_taxa\\_natalidad.html](http://dn.sapo.pt/2007/11/19/sociedade/portugal_a_mais_baixa_taxa_natalidad.html)

**Table 2**  
**Female heads of household and taxation in tax registers**

<b>Tax registers</b>	<b>Number of taxpayers</b>	<b>Women heads of household</b>	<b>% of female taxpayers</b>	<b>% of female taxation</b>
Conveyance tax (1568)	639	115	18	13
Tithe (1643)	697	300	43	19.3

Source: A.M.V.C. (Vila do Conde Council Archives)- Books. 1699 and 1877

As a result, there is an increase in the number of women who appear to be responsible for the maintenance of family order, particularly among families of seamen, merchants and shipbuilders, the groups that represented the most significant proportion of the active male population in the town under study. All connected with massive male absences, resulting from overseas expansion. Furthermore, in these socio-professional segments, the absences were keenly felt by the women who remained behind. Considering the strategic endogamic tendencies, a woman, or several women in the same family, could often have husband, father, brothers, and even children, all away at the same time.

Our argument is that the mobility and the multiplied male absences had also considerable impact in family contexts. The demand for labour in a society deprived of its male population is also responsible for a growing demand for female labour and economic participation. This process gave single women and widows a better chance to be self-sufficient, leading to lower rates of marriage and remarriage, as well as increasing the part played by married women in family income and social control.

Having these findings as a background, could we try another projection on Portuguese society on the present days? What can we say about the rate of single-parent families, which rises in Portugal in parallel to the divorce rate? Is this another coincidence, that of Portugal being once again at the forefront in European terms in these domains? In 2007, 46.329 marriages took place in Portugal, about half of which Catholic, and 71.687 were ended, whether by death, divorce or separation, 25.255 of which account for the latter occurrences, which means more than 50% of the marriages celebrated in that same year. The absolute rate of divorce has not stopped rising in Portugal, standing, at 2.4 per thousand inhabitants in 2007<sup>18</sup>. For that same year the rate of single-parent families was increasing, according to large impact news; a great percentage of them had women as head of households; and a significant part resulted from divorce processes,

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<sup>18</sup> Divorce rate (%) by place of residence. INE, Indicadores Demográficos. Available in [www.ine.pt](http://www.ine.pt)

which are more and more required by women initiative<sup>19</sup>. As we know, in these circumstances, women are usually awarded, in fact in over 90% of the cases, guardianship of the children, thus becoming heads of households, and responsible for raising and educating their children<sup>20</sup>.

We are not trying to avoid an understanding of this situation based on current socio-economic and sociological patterns: what we are trying to say is that there is an ancestral propensity in the Portuguese population for this kind of social framework, which provides generalised acceptance of these solutions, and transfers added responsibilities in the maintenance of social equilibriums to women ...

In fact, even in the 16<sup>th</sup>. Century, and returning to the case study of Vila do Conde, these women not only amplified their traditional roles related to domestic tasks, such as the education of children and the care for home stability. They extrapolate by far the attributions they are consigned by Christian normativeness, by also assuming functions that go beyond the domestic and private sphere, projecting themselves onto the social and public sphere, as proven in the notary records analysed over time. Tasks such as endowments, deeds of adoption, pardons, granting freedom to slaves, and the exercise of guardianships, a task which, together with endowment, was of great importance in family and social rings, point to a dynamic context in which women assume remarkable centrality<sup>21</sup>.

At the same time, uprootedness, resulting from massive male and female migration from the rural hinterland, tends to contribute to the dilution of an extended family model and to reinforce the model of a nuclear family, where the ties between husband and wife are strengthened, so often underpinned by the absence of children, due to the increase in intergenerational intervals and early widowhood. Population mobility, documented in studies carried out by historical demographics, decisively contributed, in our case study, to this tendency.

This trust between husband and wife is also extended to the world of business, where husbands transfer economic responsibilities to their wives, thus revealing a clear relationship of trust. We configure, thus, in this micro-community, some marks that become structural of the European Modern Society, some of them already pointed out for Flanders<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> We still wait the official data from the National Statistic Institute in order to document this statement. This reality is so striking that Portuguese Government decided to increase, this year, social benefits to this family units. This reality was already analysed in a 1999 paper by WALL, Karin; LOBO, Cristina - *Famílias monoparentais em Portugal*. "Análise Social", 150 (Outono 1999), pp. 123-145.

<sup>20</sup> For further developments, see the article by Karin Wall - *Famílias monoparentais*. Available at <http://www.scielo.oces.mctes.pt/pdf/spp/n43/n43a04.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> POLÓNIA, Amélia - *Expansão e Descobrimientos numa perspectiva local...*, vol. II, pp. 392-414: Results of a cross analysis, over time, of notarised deeds, testaments and municipal records.

<sup>22</sup> COORNAERT, E. - *Les Français et le commerce international à Anvers*, Paris, 1961.

This central role in family and social life does not seem, however, to be assumed in confrontation with the male universe, but rather through active complementarity. We believe, though, that in the long term, this protagonism became a structuring element of female performance in the domestic sphere, and even in the social one. Thus, it was not restricted to the longer or shorter periods of absence of the family head, and, on the contrary, became a structural mark.

To sum up, by contributing to male absences and implementing factors of social instability, the process of overseas expansion, when analysed over time, reinforced the role of those who remained behind. They are given the responsibility of guaranteeing the normal functioning of community life.

**Table 3**  
**Women involved in notary acts - Marital status**

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Single	59	5.5
Married	332	31
Widowed	681	63.5
<b>Sub-Total</b>	<b>1072</b>	<b>100</b>
Nuns	16	
Unspecified	129	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1217</b>	

Source: A.D.P.(District Archive of Porto). Notary Records V. Conde, 1<sup>o</sup> cart., 1<sup>a</sup>, 2<sup>a</sup>, 3<sup>a</sup> and 4<sup>a</sup> sr., passim

This engagement can be measured by the frequency with which women were involved in public actions via notarised registrations (Cf. table 3). In about 4000 records, between 1560 and 1620, around 1200 refer to women, not only as participants, but as central agents, which means they make up 30% of the total. The importance of this dynamism justifies a more detailed study. Analysing this universe in terms of marital status, we find what was to be expected: the prevalence of widows among participants in notary acts: 63.5%. Single-parent families, resulting from the husband's death, naturally imply obligations and functions for women that increase their duties. The strong showing of widows in our sample is therefore understandable. The significant role of married women is, on the other hand, associated with the male absence in this maritime society, which is responsible for the transfer to their wives of responsibilities and duties that they would otherwise not perform. Let us now look at those functions (Cf. table 4).

**Table 4**  
**Powers and functions performed by women in Notary Acts**

Areas of Intervention	Powers and functions performed	Number	%
<b>Society</b>	Adoptions	2	0.2
	Guardianships	2	0.2
	Institution and administration of chapels	3	0.3
	Granting	3	0.2
	Ransoming captives	3	0.2
	Drawing up wills	5	0.4
	Endowments	89	7.1
<b>Justice</b>	Judicial interventions	185	14.6
<b>Administration</b>	Post possessionpossession	3	0.2
<b>Economics</b>	Ecclesiastical and fiscal rents	6	0.5
	Guarantees	38	3
	Shipbuilding	3	0.2
	Signing of apprenticeship contracts	6	0.5
	Ship management	13	1
	Provision of voyages	1	0.1
	Trade	19	1.5
	Credit	34	2.7
	Negotiation of assets	351	27.6
	Money collection and quittances	460	36.3
	Financial investments	11	0.9
<b>Others</b>	Exercising diverse powers	33	2.6
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1270</b>	<b>100.3</b>

Source: A.D.P. - Fundo Notarial (Notary Records). V. Conde, 1<sup>o</sup> cart., 1<sup>a</sup>, 2<sup>a</sup>, 3<sup>a</sup> and 4<sup>a</sup> sr., *passim*.

If, in the traditional world of guilds and according to the tax registers, the women of Vila do Conde displayed the same anonymity found in other urban European spaces<sup>23</sup>, in Spain, Italy, France, England or Germany, in the busy world of trade, even at long distances, they were undeniably strongly active, proving to be co-operative partners of and/or invaluable substitutes for husbands, fathers or sons, and even as an independent businesswomen, free of any male reference. This reality is very close to that of Flanders, which appears otherwise to be quite an exception in the eyes of its contemporary Italian, French or German travellers<sup>24</sup>, thanks to its urban policy, its educational organisation, its energetic performance in the business world and, in particular, in the social condition of its women...

<sup>23</sup> See, on this subject, POLÓNIA, Amélia - "Women's participation in labour and business in the European Maritime Societies in the Early Modern Period" in *Il ruolo economico della famiglia. Secs. XIII-XVIII. Atti delle "Settimane di studio"*, Prato, Instituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini", [-----] (Waits for publication)

<sup>24</sup> *Description des Pays Bas* par Louis Guicciardini, transl. by F. De Belleforest (1582), p. 53-54. It seems to be also true in 16<sup>th</sup> century Paris, if we take the testimony of Francesco d'Ierni, in 1596, where he declares that in this town, where commerce was active and diversified, more women than men take care of business (Cf. D'IERNI, Francesco (s/d), *Viaggio da Roma a Rarigi del cardinale di Fiorenza lanno 1596*, publ. by G. Raynaud - "Paris vu par un italien" in *Bull. dela Société d'Histoire de Paris*, t. XII, p. 166.).

In fact, if these data are, at first sight, surprising, they are similar to those indicated by other researchers relative to Flanders and latter on, to the Netherlands. A survey of information contained in Antwerp's municipal archives, enabled Emile Cornahert, already in the 1960's to reveal that a significant number of powers of attorney and bills were signed by women, and to show that they organised their own accounting ledgers<sup>25</sup>. Furthermore, widows, as well as married women, were issued with permits to undertake their own commercial activities, as showed and proven more recently by Danielle van der Huevel and Manon van der Heijden<sup>26</sup>.

If, at the same time, we look at the sociological profile of the women involved in notarised deeds in Vila do Conde, in order to ascertain the connections of this framework with the experience of overseas expansion, we find a clear prevalence of those who are related to seamen, mostly pilots (Cf. table 5).

**Table 5**  
**Family relations of women involved in notary acts**

<b>Professional grouping of direct family members</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>%</b>
Clergymen	1	0.1
Military men	1	0.1
Squires/ Knights	29	3.6
Officials	45	5.6
Mechanics	47	5.9
Merchants	75	9.4
Seamen/ Skippers/ Pilots	601	75.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>799</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: A.D.P. - (Notary Records). Vila do Conde, 1<sup>o</sup> cart., 1<sup>a</sup>, 2<sup>a</sup>, 3<sup>a</sup> and 4<sup>a</sup> sr., *passim*.

The presence of female relatives of merchants is equally conspicuous, even if the gap is significant. The scale of this representation is clear when we consider that 75% of the women are relatives of pilots, skippers and seamen. The reinforcement and extension of female social engagement, which the above examples demonstrate, inevitably requires better preparation and qualification to intervene in the public domain with authority and independence. However, it was not to be expected that these women, related to seamen and merchants, would master the skills required to sign notarised deeds in which they are centrally involved. This, in fact, is the reality we

<sup>25</sup> COORNAERT, E. - *Les Français et le commerce international à Anvers*, cit., II, pp. 68-69.

<sup>26</sup> VAN DER HEIJDEN, Manon; VAN DEN HUEVEL, Danielle - *Sailors' families and the urban institutional framework in early modern Holland*. "History of the Family", 12 (2007) 296-309.

<sup>28</sup> For further details on these issues, see POLÓNIA, Amélia - *Vila do Conde no Século XVI. Um Porto Norteno na Expansão Ultramarina Quinhentista*, Porto 1999 (PhD Dissertation), I, pp. 797-818.



found. In our data source, the notarised records from 1560 to 1620, about 16% of the women involved were able to sign their names.

We do not seek to prove that these are all literate women who could read and write, and who may have had regular schooling. However, we do say that it is undeniable that some of them are in that condition, signing their names firmly, clearly and in an aesthetically distinguished manner, and with outlines that are repeated without wavering. These women undoubtedly knew how to write - and not only their name. As proof of this, we can cite the case of Francisca Carneira, wife of a professional pilot, who handwrote her own will, and that of Catarina Henriques, who entered her own accounts' books, and credit records<sup>28</sup>.

### Map 9<sup>29</sup>

This is in the context in which we should also understand the results obtained in what regards women's labour and the household.

Overseas expansion required supporting industries for maritime activities, like sail-making, rope-making and ships' provisions industries, such as biscuit-making. In the absence of male labour, due to the temporary or definitive absence of men, involved in shipping, trade and emigration, the demand for female workers became an economically relevant fact. Simultaneously, the internal development of coastal villages led to a demand for more servants, which was met by female migration from surrounding rural areas, as well as for crafts and trade-people, supplied by women who stayed in a world of men who had departed. At the same time, maritime economy itself demanded women's participation in the world of work so as to permit greater financial stability in an income structure that is, in the case of sailors, random and very often precarious.

We observe, in fact, in this context, in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Portugal, a significantly higher number of female workers in the labour market of maritime societies. This is demonstrated by the number of women engaged in crafts, trade and professional occupations in Lisbon, in the 1550s. They ascended to 37% and 44% of the total, according to Cristóvão Rodrigues de Oliveira<sup>30</sup> and João Brandão<sup>31</sup>, respectively.

However, female labour is not only prominent in maritime towns. In the hinterland we can observe the same phenomenon. This is borne out by the sail-making industry, which developed

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<sup>29</sup> For different reasons, mostly related to socioeconomic indicators, the rate of analphabetism and illiteracy is, in Portugal, as we can see, much more striking in inland and rural areas than on coastal areas. A much deeper analysis would be necessary in order to understand this phenomenon on the present days....

<sup>30</sup> OLIVEIRA, Cristóvão Rodrigues de - *Lisboa em 1551. Sumário...*, Introduction and Notes by José DA FELICIDADE ALVES, Lisboa 1987.

<sup>31</sup> BRANDÃO, João - *Tratado da Magestade, Grandeza e Abastança da Cidade de Lisboa na 2ª Metade do Século XVI: Estatística de Lisboa em 1552*, Lisboa, 1923.

all over the north of Portugal, rural areas included, in an economic dynamic where weaving was no longer just a domestic or family activity. It was, rather, an industrial activity that aimed to export sailcloth to European fairs, and to continental and overseas shipyards<sup>32</sup>. Furthermore, it interacted with market strategies, under the leadership of maritime traders. The same phenomenon also occurred with respect to the manufacture of rope, in Lisbon, a town where women figured as a workforce, and even in Ribatejo, as logistical support to the same rope industry demanded by the ship-building industry<sup>33</sup>.

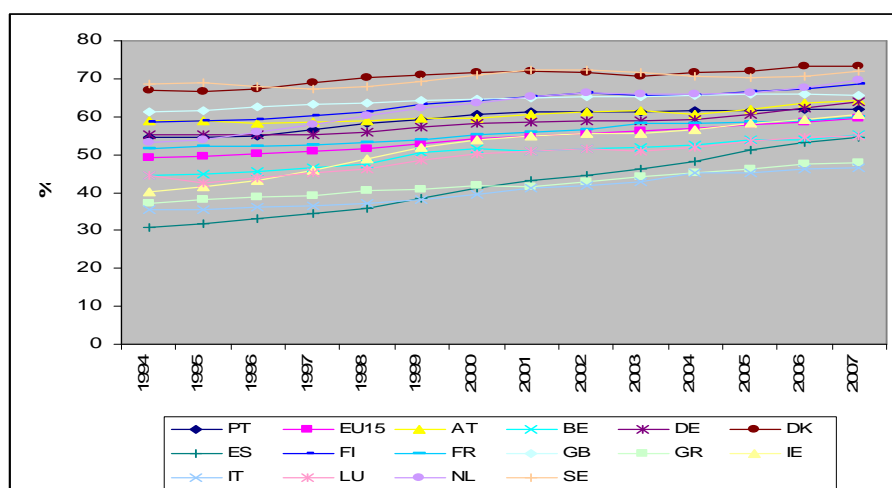
We believe that, as long as the contextual conditions mentioned above were sustained, female participation in economic activities, including the labour market, and their social roles were a relevant historical fact in Portuguese maritime towns. However, looking at the situation in terms of professional oaths and mechanical crafts', based on our case study, Vila do Conde, the only guilds with a female presence are the weavers, the tailors and the seamstresses. And even these lose their representation during the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as we can see from their presence on a symbolic representation of local socio-professional hierarchies: the participation in the Corpus Christ procession. Other council regulations mention bakers, saleswomen, washerwomen, inn-keepers, peddlers and, of course, prostitutes. If we compare this data to the previous picture derived from the notary registers kaleidoscope we easily apprehend that this lack of institutional representation is determined by source productions frameworks that totally camouflage women vitality in labour and economic life, expressively proven by other indicators.

Is it possible that this picture have anything to do with the rates of women participation in the labour market in Portugal nowadays? In fact, Portuguese women present, since 1994, a rate of participation in the labour market above the average for the Europe of the Fifteen, as shown in Graph 3. In 2000, for instance, Portugal presented an average of 60.5% compared to the EU's 54.1%. (Cf. graph 3). This tendency even increased, in the following years, going up to 62% in the Portuguese case in 2006. Only in countries like Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Great Britain or the Netherlands does female participation present higher levels in the labour market. But those belong, in fact, to "another world", in European terms. On the contrary, the Portuguese case doesn't reveal any parallelism with Spain or Italy, for instance.

**Graph 3. Female participation in labour market . Age bracketIntervalo etário: 15 to 64 (1994-2007)**

<sup>32</sup> POLÓNIA, Amélia - *A Tecelagem de Panos de Tréu em Entre-Douro-e-Minho no Século XVI. Contributos para a Definição de um Modelo de Produção*, in J. FERNANDES ALVES (coord.), *A Indústria Portuense em Perspectiva Histórica. Actas do Colóquio*, Porto, FLUP/ CLC, 1998, pp. 11-24.

<sup>33</sup> COSTA, Leonor Freire - *Naus e Galeões na Ribeira de Lisboa. A Construção Naval no Século XVI para a Rota do Cabo*, Cascais, 1997, pp. 342-359.



Source: INE (National Statistique Statistics Institute) <http://indest.ine.pt/IETree.asp>

In fact, if we go further back, to 1993, we find the third highest rate of female participation in Europe for the age bracket 25 to 49 years (75.1%) following the Netherlands, which reached 90%, and France, with 77%, according to 1995 data from EUROSTAT<sup>34</sup>. These data also highlight the low rate of part-time work. Whereas in Portugal, in 1993, only 8.3% of married, employed women worked part-time, in the Netherlands, this was true in 80% of the cases, and in the United Kingdom, in 53.2%.

This framework is, according to economic analysts, directly connected with the decreasing birth rate mentioned above. In fact, one of the most influential reasons pointed out in relation to this decline is the increasingly high participation of women in the labour market.

This pattern is not, in fact, compatible with other growth or development indicators for Portugal in the EU, nor can it be explained by specific economic or religious features. Why then does this framework arise? Why then do we find this parallelism with the picture presented of the 16<sup>th</sup> century? Is it a mere coincidence? In the same way, is it a coincidence that the Netherlands presents similar tendencies, having been marked by similar process in terms of female protagonism in the Early Modern Age, as proven, not only in the classic and traditional study of Émile Cornahert, but also in a multitude of on-going individual and collective research projects? We don't think so...

Taking the overall picture of women increasing protagonism related to dynamics framed by European Expansion, as we have described above, as a background, and going back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, bearing in mind the conclusions we obtained from the case study of Vila do Conde,

<sup>34</sup> <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page>

a question remains to be answered: what is the representativeness of these conclusions, both at the Portuguese and European level? Based on reflections drawn by Alain Cabantous, a French historian of maritime societies, the effective impact of the behaviours highlighted here should differ, within maritime societies, according to the effective internal weight of the seafaring community in the society as a whole. If we take into consideration that the weight of these sub-communities tends to be greater the smaller the dimension of the urban space, the model presented here could be especially valid for small maritime communities, but possibly less relevant in medium-sized ports or large seaport cities. This is not, however, because the phenomena analysed did not occur, dictated as they are by maritime experiences and male absence<sup>35</sup>, but rather because their global effects and their impact tended to become diluted in a society where the male proportion prevailed, regardless of the mobility and the absence of seamen.

Similarly, it seemed to us, as we have frequently stated, that this model could be valid for maritime societies based essentially on navigation and overseas trade, more than for those whose economic performances were sustained by fisheries or local and regional trade. We thought we could not project the conclusions found, based on the study of a prevailing universe of sailors and merchants, to other maritime universes, especially those of the fishermen. We have frequently stated that, regardless of the experiences they shared, imposed by their lifestyle, it was important to capture specific identities, even within the universe of the maritime communities, in order to understand women's participation in the labour market and household governance.

However, if we attempt to establish a more global comparison, it seems undeniable that the same patterns, even though at different scales, took place all over Europe, namely throughout the Atlantic seaboard. Alain Cabantous, Nicole Dufournaud, Bernard Michon, for France, Danielle van den Heuvel; Marjolein van Dekken; Manon van der Heijden; Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, Ariadne Schmidt or the research team coordinate by Tine de Moor for the Netherlands, seem to present, in different contexts, enlightening testimonies of the wide-spread participation of women in labour and household governance in Early Modern Europe<sup>36</sup> - and in different contexts.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. for Porto, BARROS, Amândio - *Mulheres e comércio. Linhas de intervenção da mulher portuense no negócio durante o século XVI*, in "Portuguese Studies Review", 13, 2006, 1, *Women in the Lusophone World in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Period*, pp. 229-268.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. CABANTOUS, Alain - *Aspects des structures démographiques des populations maritimes de la France aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles. Actes du Colloque « Les traditions maritimes »*, Québec, 1985, pp. 433-445 ; CABANTOUS, Alain - *Le ciel dans la mer. Christianisme et civilisation maritime. XVI-XIX siècle*, Paris, 1990 ; CABANTOUS, Alain - *Deux mille marins face à l'océan. Les populations maritimes de Dunkerque au Havre aux XVIIe et XVIIIe. Siècles (vers 1660-1794). Etude sociale*, Paris, 1991 ; CABANTOUS, Alain - *La mer et les hommes. Pêcheurs et matelots dunkerquois de Louis XIV à la Révolution*, Dunkerque, 1980 ; DUFOURNAUD, Nicole - *Roles et pouvoirs des femmes au xvie siècle dans la France de l'ouest* [Thèse de doctorat présentée à l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales], Paris, Septembre 2007 ; DUFOURNAUD, Nicole; MICHON, Bernard - *Les femmes et le*

Are we then facing a global model which can be mainly applied to maritime and merchant communities? And what happens when this profile tends to be diluted over time? In the case of Portugal maritime towns the conclusion seems to be undeniable: it has persisted, mainly related to the conditions created by long-haul fishing and overseas emigration, trends which are responsible for similar contexts, all of them related with male absence and the reinforcement of the strategic roles played by women in societies whose internal dynamics and stability depend on their action and performances...

The most striking aspect is, though, that when we focus this phenomena through sociological and anthropological studies, we can identify the same pattern today, as well as during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, not only in maritime centres, but in a much broader universe: rural areas where male absences are keenly felt are also marked by identical features, as shown in multiple studies<sup>37</sup>. The fact leads us to a different hypothesis: that perhaps this framework does not have a merely conjunctural meaning, that it can in fact have found resonance in the long term in the structure of Portuguese society.

Take for instance the eloquent example of Caxinas, a coastal parish in Vila do Conde. There, the model of a community with markedly matriarchal traits is undeniable, to the extent that

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*commerce maritime a Nantes (1660-1749):un rôle largement méconnu.* "Clio. Histoire, Femmes et Sociétés. Le genre du sport", 23 (2006), pp. 311-1330 ; DE MOOR, Tine - *The silent revolution. The emergence of commons, guilds and other forms of corporate collective action in Western Europe from a new perspective in Il ruolo economico della famiglia. Secs. XIII-XVIII in Atti delle "Settimane di studio"*, Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini", [----] – (waits for publication); MEERKERK, Elise van Nederveen - *Segmentation in the pre-industrial labour market: women's work in the Dutch textile industry, 1581-1810'* in: "International Review of Social History" (2006); VAN DER HEIJDEN, Manon; VAN DEN HUEVEL, Danielle - *Sailors' families and the urban institutional framework in early modern Holland.* "History of the Family", 12 (2007) 296–309. Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com); MEERKERK, Elise van Nederveen - *Women and work in the early modern Netherlands: textile workers, gender, and the organization of production [Working paper]*. Paper presented at the "Fifth European Social Science History Conference" (Berlin, March 2004) in <http://www.iisg.nl/research/nederveen.doc>; SCHMIDT, Ariadne - 'The winter of her life? Widowhood and the lives of Dutch women in the early modern era' in: A.B. Mulder-Bakker and R. Nip (eds.) *The prime of their lives: Wise Old Women in Pre-Industrial Europe*, Leuven, 2004. pp. 137-148; SCHMIDT, Ariadne - *Working in the World of Crafts: the Roles of Women in Family Based Production in the Dutch Republic in Il ruolo economico della famiglia. Secs. XIII-XVIII. Atti delle "Settimane di studio"*, Prato, Istituto Internazionale di Storia Economica "F. Datini", [----] – waits for publication; VAN DEKKEN, Marjolein, *Female brewers in Holland and England [Working paper]*. Paper presented at the "Fifth European Social Science History Conference" (Berlin, March 2004) in <http://www.iisg.nl/research/dekken.doc>; VAN DEN HEUVEL, Danielle - *The capacity and incapacity of married female traders in the Northern Netherlands. An exploration of the legal status of female public vendor [Working paper]*. Paper presented at the First Conference on the Economic History of Low Countries (Antwerp, 18-19 November 2004) <http://www.iisg.nl/publications/female-traders.pdf>; VAN DEN HEUVEL, Danielle - *Women and work in the early modern Netherlands: women's work in trade [Working paper]*. Paper presented at the Fifth European Social Science History Conference (Berlin, March 2004) in <http://www.iisg.nl/research/heuvel.doc>.

<sup>37</sup> Vd., entre outros, BRETTELL, Caroline B. - *Homens que partem, mulheres que esperam. Consequências da emigração numa freguesia minhota*, Lisboa, Publicações D. Quixote, 1991; COLE, Sally – *Mulheres of the Praia. Work and lives in a Portuguese Coastal community*, Princeton / New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1991; MENESES, Inês Salema; MENDES, Paulo Daniel – *Se o mar deixar. Comunidade e género numa povoação do litoral alentejano*, Prefácio de João de Pina Cabral e Maria Antónia Lima, Lisboa, Edições do ICS da Universidade de Lisboa, 1996.

researchers talk about the “men of the sea” and the “women of the land”. The centrality and protagonism of man ends in fact when he comes back to shore and puts away his nets and boats, after delivering his catch of fish. Care of the nets and the sale of fish is now the work of the women. And at home, domestic organisation is also their responsibility, as is educating the children and even the family’s economic management, defining priorities, seek to save, and even stipulating the amounts the men can (or cannot) spend.

Living testimonies of this strongly matriarchal society still prevail today, despite the fact that the underlying traditional economic dynamics – long-haul fishing for cod of the Terra Nova coast or fishing in Moroccan waters, as well as coastal tasks – have now practically disappeared<sup>38</sup>.

Without intending to close such a complex picture, let’s now check another projection on the present of dynamics we believe were forged in the past... let’s focus on economic patterns and behaviours, topic that will lead us to the discussion of another one: of the role of state and individuals in Portuguese economic dynamics...

### 3. Projections on economic patterns

About five years ago, in a Portuguese newspaper, an editorial stated, in an article suggestively entitled: *From mirage to mirage: “The main Portuguese problem is the inexistence of a strong enterprising class, independent of the State, capable of driving the country forward. This is not a new problem. In truth, it is an age-old problem. So as to compensate for this internal frailty, we keep believing that the solution will come from outside. For a while, the solution to our problems was the Empire: the pepper from the East, the gold from Brazil, the coffee from Angola. Then it was the remittances from emigrants. Next, the European funds. More recently, revenue from Expo98 and Euro2004...”*<sup>40</sup>.

This editorial was selected due to its paradigmatic value as a long-term analysis of Portuguese economic features. It is a very generalist view, of which I only share partially, but which has the merit of introducing two central topics of reflection: the question of the role of state

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<sup>38</sup> MAIA, Maria Isaura dos Santos – *Gentes de ferro em barcos de pau. Memória, identidade e comunidade entre as gentes das Caxinas e da Poça da Barca*, Braga, 2003. [Masters thesis in Anthropology presented to the University of Minho].

<sup>40</sup> SARAIVA, José António – *Editorial* in Journal “Expresso”, 29 November 2003.

vs. individuals in Portuguese overseas expansion and in contemporary Portuguese society and the entrepreneurial profile of Portuguese economic agents. We tried to deal partially with both topics in a paper presented at the International Maritime Economic History Association, held in Greenwich, last June<sup>41</sup>.

This is a subject which has for years been in our thoughts, connected either to our studies on maritime communities, on seaports, on Portuguese Expansion research and lecturing and on the classes of Portuguese Early Modern Expansion and History of European Colonisation, in which the building of overseas European empires is a central topic. Bigger questions than our capacity to provide answers for them arose, first of all, concerning the concept of empire and the corresponding patterns of administrative, logistic, military, territorial and economic definition, parallel to those related to the differences between empire and emporia: I think the wisdom of Charles Boxer partially avoids this problem, or resolves it, when he applied to both the Portuguese and the Dutch the designation of "seaborne empires". I wouldn't dare pursue this discussion, not even briefly, by now. In any case, the issue state vs. individuals will be a central argument in this reflection.

One major influential factor led me to introduce the above questions in my research and inquiries. In fact, my participation in an international research project, as the coordinator of the Portuguese team, open new theoretical horizons which can be applied to the issues at hand. I am referring to DynCoopNet ("Dynamic Complexity of Cooperation-Based Self-Organizing Commercial Networks in the First Global Age")<sup>42</sup>. The project sustains that, in the period between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the world economy was increasingly characterised by widespread collaboration that went beyond the boundaries of countries and continents, which was made possible by new means of global communication and the building, not only of formal but also informal networks, frequently multinational. According to some of the DynCoopNet assumptions, cooperation-based self-organising networks were characterised by a diffusion of authority and served as a source for the creativity and innovation necessary to respond in a flexible manner to the disruptions in commodity, information, and capital flows<sup>43</sup>.

The strategy and work plan of this research programme presents itself as a major tool to re-evaluate worldwide dynamics from a new perspective, centred on individuals. We will try to apply and discuss these assumptions focusing on the Portuguese case. Summarizing our point of

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<sup>41</sup> *Self organising networks in the construction of the Portuguese overseas empire* in 5th International Congress of Maritime History (International Maritime Economic History Association, Greenwich, 23-27 June 2008)

<sup>42</sup> DynCoopNet - "Dynamic Complexity of Cooperation-Based Self-Organizing Commercial Networks in the First Global Age", approved by TECT ("The Evolution of Cooperation and Trading") – Program EUROCORES (European Collaborative Research) – European Science Foundation (Ref. 06-TECT-FP-004).

<sup>43</sup> *Idem*.

view, we would argue that the role of the Modern State in the construction of European empires is undeniable. The constitution of overseas empires, in terms of administrative control and military organisation, required complex logistics and substantial financial capacity, which was inaccessible to individuals or isolated groups. However, the complex systems produced and coordinated by the central power often depended on cooperation from individuals. The performances of self-organising networks, working in favour or even against state policies and systems, are central to understand informal ways of building overseas empires.

To discuss the evidence underlying these hypotheses, we will focus on two levels: 1<sup>st</sup>. the role of state and individuals in the maintenance of the logistics of Portuguese expansion; 2<sup>nd</sup>. the role of self-organising trade networks in the construction of a global economic system.

Departing from the logistics of the enterprise, we could say that the participation of numerous seafaring and mercantile communities along the Portuguese coast was determinant to the sustainability of the maritime empire. It is our perception that, in this domain, individual agents played a much more important role than the State itself. Overseas expansion depended on seamen, ships, military personnel and capital, but the fact is that in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the Portuguese crown did not possess a real naval fleet or official army, or even shipyards able to respond to the growing needs of shipbuilding. Even if *Ribeira das Naus* emerged as the State's main shipyard, built up in Lisbon by King Manuel I, at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, mainly to equip the Cape Route with ships, which individual agents were unable to build in the appropriate schedule, the Portuguese crown did not furthermore possess sufficient capital to deal with the technical and financial needs of the enterprise.

Monographic studies on Portuguese seaports have proved that all those means were guaranteed by individuals who responded to the logistical needs of the crown, while **they were favourable to them**: shipbuilding was provided by multiple associations of partners and capital; ship freights were provided by informal companies of ship-owners and merchants, but mostly pilots, ship masters or seafarers joined in variable number, putting together small amounts of capital to build ships in which they played also technical roles; technical knowledge was provided by endogamic familial transmission and by apprenticeship contracts celebrated according the longstanding model of mechanic crafts.

We should remember that the formal teaching of subjects related to navigation and shipping was unknown in Portugal until the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century: the first known cosmography course in the kingdom dates from 1592. This institutional apprenticeship was not even compulsory, since the regulations clearly foresaw the possibility of seafarers to attend, on a voluntary basis, the



classes where main nautical subjects were taught. Even if we presume that the same stipulations could also be present in a unknown 1552 regulation, it is undeniable that all the geographical discoveries, all the technical skills, all the knowledge involved in the trade and maritime routes were developed on an individual, empirical and self-organised basis<sup>44</sup>.

The Portuguese crown had a very clear perception of this dependency on the voluntary involvement of individuals and tried to obtain their commitment with privileges, which were improved when their contributions were most needed. Authorisation to cut wood on private properties; exemption from fiscal taxes to buy and import shipbuilding materials, in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century; grants conceded according to the tonnage of the ships and subsidies to buy military equipment, mostly artillery, in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century; social privileges for those who built *galleons* in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century - are some of the measures taken by the Portuguese crown in order to improve shipbuilding<sup>45</sup>.

Fiscal and social privileges conceded to seamen that included, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, access to the city council administration in some coastal cities; the suspension of crime punishments on round trips to India and even the suspension of the status of mechanics to the children of seamen that followed the seafaring activity of their parents, are some of the central power initiatives taken at a time when the crown did not have sufficient ships or sailors to sustain regular voyages to India or urgent naval fleets to respond to the Dutch attacks on Brazil<sup>46</sup>. These concerns are, in themselves, proof of the dramatic dependency of the Portuguese crown on individual commitments to maintain an overseas empire.

In addition, even when the crown intended to enforce a response to its needs, whether in terms of men, ships or capital, evading mechanisms were put in place that enabled the achievement of the proposed targets, mostly in situations of crisis. We can illustrate this with some examples: in 1557, crown's deliberations made the presence of artillery on board ships compulsory; however, accounts give testimony to the fact that shipmasters and captains would depart from Lisbon with artillery on board, as required, but then unload it in Cascais, a few miles

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<sup>44</sup> POLÓNIA, Amélia – *Os náuticos das carreiras ultramarinas*. "Oceanos", nº 38 (Abril-Junho de 1999), pp. 113-128; "Técnicos de navegação portugueses. Desempenhos e perfil socioprofissional na era quinhentista" in *Estudios de Historia de las Ciencias y de las Técnicas. Actas do VII Congreso da Sociedad Española de Historia de las Ciencias y de las Técnicas (Pontevedra, 14-18 Setembro 1999)*, Pontevedra, s.n., 2001, Vol. I, p. 245-255.

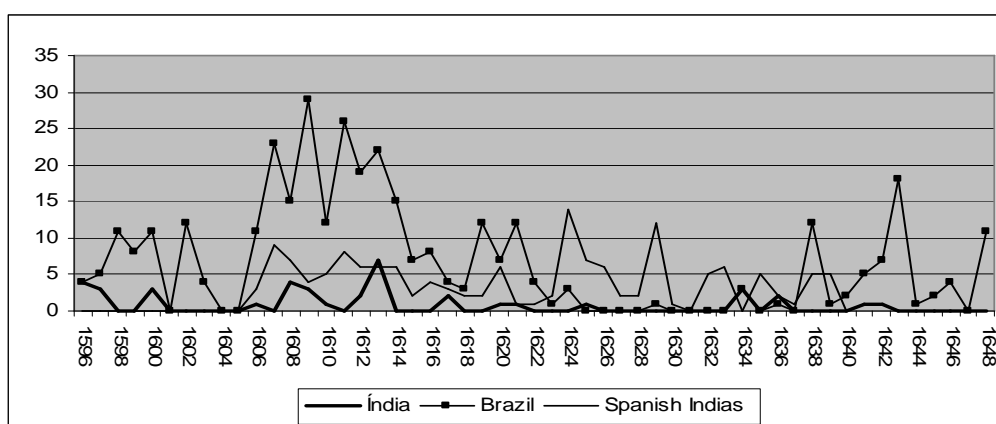
<sup>45</sup> *Certas providências régias respeitantes à guarda da costa do reino e do comércio ultramarino no século de Quinhentos*. "Boletim Cultural da Câmara Municipal do Porto", vol. 30, 1967, pp. 337-360; POLÓNIA, *Expansão e Descobrimentos numa perspectiva local. O porto de Vila do Conde no século XVI*, Lisboa, IN-CM, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 330-342.

<sup>46</sup> POLÓNIA, Amélia – *Expansão e Descobrimentos numa perspectiva local. O porto de Vila do Conde no século XVI*, Lisboa, IN-CM, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 417 ; VASCONCELOS, Frazão de – *Subsídios para a Carreira da Índia no tempo dos Filipes*, Lisboa, 1960 (Separata do Boletim Geral do Ultramar).

away, to avoid the excess weight, the inconvenience of having cannons on the ship and the reduction in cargo capacity<sup>47</sup>.

The multiplicity of royal orders to force seamen into naval recruitment, applied throughout the Portuguese coast, and the drastic increase in the penalties established for those who evaded recruitment or attempted to desert, including the imprisonment of family and relatives<sup>48</sup>, were also quite expressive of the crown's desperate dependency on the commitment of these individual agents to guarantee the accomplishment of central power initiatives, to achieve state policies or even to guarantee the fragile subsistence of a maritime empire.

**Graph 4 - Pilots examination by maritime route (1596-1648)**



Source: IANTT – *Livros das Ementas*, lv. 1-15

If we analyse the pilot examinations performed by the king's cosmographer, between 1596 and 1648, the only period for which there is an almost continuous series, we can also observe the impact of individual decisions. In times when the central power depended on these individuals the most, there is a notorious lack of candidates, precisely for the maritime routes considered in crisis: the Cape Route throughout the period under analysis, and even the Brazilian route, during the Dutch attacks on the Brazilian coast, mostly in the period from 1630 to 1637<sup>49</sup> (Cf. graph 4). The same scenario also reveals the capacity of these men to make choices and seek alternatives to the routes which were considered the riskiest.

<sup>47</sup> *Certas providências régias respeitantes à guarda da costa do reino e do comércio ultramarino no século de Quinhentos*. "Boletim Cultural da Câmara Municipal do Porto", vol. 30, 1967, pp. 335-360.

<sup>48</sup> POLÓNIA, Amélia – *Expansão e Descobrimientos numa perspectiva local. O porto de Vila do Conde no século XVI*, Lisboa, IN-CM, 2007, vol. 1, pp. 416-422.

<sup>49</sup> POLÓNIA, Amélia – *Mestres e Pilotos das Navegações Ultramarinas (1596-1648). Subsídios para o seu estudo*. "Revista da Faculdade de Letras- História", II Série, Vol. XIII (1995), pp. 135-217. This can also be proved by the analysis of the pilots examinations to the Spanish Indians maritime carriers held at the Casa de la Contratación de Seville, for the period between 1574 and 1650. In this sample, 5 % of the candidates were Portuguese, mostly from Algarve (Cf. POLÓNIA, Amélia - *O Porto nas navegações ultramarinas quinhentistas. Embarcações e náuticos*. "Revista da Faculdade de Letras. História", 3ª Série, Vol. 1 (2000), pp. 29-52.

We can observe that, at a time when the Brazilian route is considered dangerous, and then neglected, seamen proposed, as an alternative, routes to Spanish America, in which their presence was permitted during the Iberian Union. This fact reflects economic choices and strategic investments which also show up when cross-analysing with other sources. To sum up, in times where they were most needed on some maritime routes, on which Portuguese supremacy at sea greatly depended, seafarers not only avoided them, but were able to make their own practical and opportunistic choices.

There is another level on which those choices and mechanisms of defection are even more dramatic and perilous to the subsistence of the overseas empire: the war. Indeed, even the military campaigns and the defence of the empire often depended on private and individual contributions<sup>50</sup>. This is apparently the case not only in what concerns human resources, but also financial ones. The Sebastian attack on Ksar-el-Kebir, in Northern Africa, in 1578, depended on contributions from the Church, the New Christian Community, and even on loans from private bankers and merchants. When the Dutch attacked Brazil and took Pernambuco, in 1630, the state was unable to arm a fleet and to constitute an army, and had to appropriate several loans from the municipalities in order to provide for the constitution of a defence fleet.<sup>51</sup>

In the end, it was not a Portuguese army, provided by the Portuguese state, that drove the Dutch from Brazil, but a colonial army, constituted by three military garrisons: one formed by the Portuguese settlers, the other by slaves and the third by Indians, in which even the participation of female squadrons is mentioned<sup>52</sup>. This event is interpreted, in terms of Brazilian historiography, as the first moment of the constitution of a Brazilian army and as the germination of a kind of colonial society that included the three components that structured, by an active process of acculturation and miscegenation, Brazilian society today: Europeans, Slaves and Indians. This episode illustrates how the Portuguese state was proven impotent to provide the defence and the safeguard of a colonial territory, central to the Portuguese overseas empire on

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<sup>50</sup> As an example, we can put forward that Ceuta, as other North African fortresses, were taken by troops transported by a naval fleet constituted by merchant ships, commandeered for the enterprise through compulsory procedures.

<sup>51</sup> The naval and terrestrial force sent to rescue Pernambuco from Dutch depended in fact on local contributions, mostly of seaports, a fact that even provoked rebellions, reacting to the transference to the municipalities of financial responsibilities that should be provided by the State (OLIVEIRA, António de – *Movimentos sociais e poder em Portugal no século XVII*, Coimbra, Faculdade de Letras – Instituto de História Económica e Social, 2002). The same policy was applied to a vigilance fleet of the Portuguese coast in times when northern European piracy and privateering ravaged the Portuguese coast, mostly during the Iberian Union (1580-1640), some of them led by Francis Drake. (Cf. - SILVA, Francisco Ribeiro da – “O corso inglês e as populações do litoral lusitano (1580-1640)” in *Actas do Colóquio "Santos Graça" de Etnografia Marítima*, Póvoa de Varzim, 1985, Vol. III, pp. 311-336.

<sup>52</sup> MAURO, Frédéric, coord.- *O império Luso-Brasileiro. 1620-1750* in *Nova História da Expansão Portuguesa*, dir. Joel Serrão e A.H. de Oliveira Marques, Lisboa, Estampa, 1991, vol. VIII, pp. 32-37.

the context of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, just as it was unable to maintain the *Estado da Índia*, when confronted with the advance of the Dutch and British in the East.

The fact is that, even when the State sought to affirm itself as a lever of the system, centralising politically the administration of overseas territories, as is the case from 1542, with the establishment of the General Government in Brazil, or the creation early on of the the State of India (*Estado da Índia*), it has been proved that these structures were never able to exclude, or avoid, the informal and often marginal intervention of private parties, being in logistics or economic terms. In fact, the *Estado da Índia* is a concept created by the Portuguese State to refer to the Portuguese presence in the East, based on representatives of the Portuguese crown – the “*Vice-Reis*” (Viceroys) and on a military, financial and administrative system, governed by the Portuguese. But even a definition of *Estado da Índia*, given by one of the most prominent historians of these dynamics in the East, Luis Filipe Reis Thomaz, points clearly to the idea that the presence of the Portuguese in the East went far behind the control of the *Estado da Índia*<sup>53</sup>.

The same author stresses the importance of the sub-colonisation phenomena, the creation of colonies from the main colonies, which escaped central power control, whether in administrative or economic terms. In fact, apart from the modes of settlement as organised by the Portuguese State in the Indian Ocean, spontaneous colonies of Portuguese traders also arose. These colonies proliferated throughout the Indian Ocean, in places like, for example, Pattani (In Southern Siam); Negapatan; Saint Thomas of Mylapore (Coromandel Coast), and most particularly Macau. Indeed, Macau began as a territory in which the State was only represented by the Captains-General of the Goa Route to Japan, comprising a type of mercantile republic, which developed in connection with the establishment and consolidation of municipal power, through the *Leal Senado*<sup>54</sup>. It was only later that the foundations of Portuguese sovereignty were to be consolidated there, by concession from the emperors of China.

The examples presented above are quite expressive of the ways self-organising networks were bound to be successful, even in contexts where the Portuguese crown should have had a more forceful presence in economic, financial and administrative domains.

On the basis of these examples, it seems that several individuals or groups contributed extensively to the dynamics and processes that built and maintained the Portuguese overseas empire, sometimes even more than the central power itself. This approach gave us, in fact, some

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<sup>53</sup> “The State of India in the 16<sup>th</sup> century designated not a well-defined geographical space, but rather a collection of territories, establishments, assets, individuals and interests that were administered, managed or governed by the Portuguese crown in the Indian Ocean and neighbouring seas, and the coastal territories from the Cape of Good Hope to Japan”. (THOMAZ, L. F. Reis – *De Ceuta a Timor*, Lisboa, Difel, 1994, p. 207).

<sup>54</sup> *Leal Senado* - Portuguese for Loyal Senate, the seat of Macau's government.

examples of individual or group participation and cooperation, spontaneous or forced, in processes that were officially coordinated by the state, in which they were essential to guarantee some degree of success, but also gave us testimonies of defection, responsible for the failure of State politics and central power strategies, dependant on them.

Thus, it is our perception that, in what regards naval logistics, the construction, maintenance and even the crisis of Portuguese naval power during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries is a result of the response of individual decisions and self-organised networks, as much as it is of state policies, frequently unable to be self-sustaining. If this premise is acceptable in what regards naval logistics and colonial settlements, we believe it can be taken even further, particularly centred on economic performances related to overseas trade, despite the fact that Portuguese and European historiography describes Portugal's commercial expansion as based on monopolistic strategies led by the crown.

It is, in fact, true that the Portuguese crown imposed some monopolies, as it is also true that monopolistic systems led to the primacy of state policies in detriment of individual initiatives. But in the Portuguese case in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Centuries, this monopolistic model can only be identified in what concerns the Mina gold trade and the spice trade on the Cape Route. And even these monopolistic policies were never really able to totally exclude individual initiatives, and frequently coexisted with them. We are not referring only to smuggling, which is an illegal and parallel flow of merchandise and capitals, but also to internal mechanisms authorised by the state itself which allowed the presence of single agents in monopolistic circuits. In Portugal, in 1560, at the height the monopolistic spice trade, only 60% of the products was handled by the crown. The other 40% was traded by individual agents, with the crown's permission, as has long been proved by Vitorino Magalhães Godinho<sup>55</sup>.

In fact, trade circuits and trade strategies are the most obvious object of discussion to sustain our thesis, promoted by theoretical approaches centred on the analysis of trade networks, but not only between merchants, also within the universe of seafarers. Several frameworks worked in favour of these standard: the seamen's wage scheme for royal or private voyages established that a part of the payment was to made in cash and another (in some cases, the most significant or, at least, the most attractive) resulted from the possibility of transporting merchandise on the ships they served, on which there was further tax exemptions or discounts.

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<sup>55</sup> GODINHO, Vitorino Magalhães – *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial*, Lisboa, Presença, [1987], vol. 3, pp. 43-80.

The 'quintalada' system<sup>56</sup> paradigmatically confirms this in the strict domain of the Indian trade route. By reserving also, on freighting among private parties, portions of the ship's area for the transport of the crew's merchandise, an income system with a significant commercial component became generalized.

Thus, these individuals inevitably became small-scale traders, and the volume of their trade depended on their technical status or their capacity to invest capital in merchandise, such as spices, silks or precious stones, on the Eastern route; or in African slaves or Brazilian cotton and sugar. It is also well-known how, when lacking capital, they would put these privileges to use at the service of third parties, albeit charging a commission, thus stimulating deals which allowed more prominent traders to acquire advantages in a business which was already in itself quite profitable<sup>57</sup>.

There were also economic features which entailed a number of essential strategies able to promote this individual participation in overseas trade, including the slave trade. One was the use of credit and other alternative financing schemes to obviate the shortage of capital. Among others, these techniques included mortgaging vessels still under construction; borrowing against freights that had not yet been earned; using advance freight payments so that ship owners and seafarers could invest in trade and other mercantile activities; advancing parts of future inheritances or selling assets. All these innovative mechanisms clearly testify to the attraction exercised by overseas trade on a heterogeneous group, based on informal mechanisms of commercial participation that frequently overtook the frontiers of Portuguese empire and enable active exchanges with other colonial empires, namely the Spanish one, in America. Another strategy was the creation of mercantile societies, the so called "parcerias", with a large number of small-to-medium participants, including women. The constitution of trading networks involving foreign merchants with greater financial capacities was yet another technique that was favoured especially by the merchant community of New Christians. Finally, there were partnerships between the maritime and merchant communities.<sup>58</sup>

This framework is essential to understand the economic patterns of these men, as well as their entrepreneurial behaviours. They emerge as small or medium investors that follow,

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<sup>56</sup> "Quintalada" : Proportion of the merchandise ( some 'quintais' - hundredweights -, thus the term 'quintaladas') which were included in the wage system of crews on the Cape Route. Cf. *Dicionário de História dos Descobrimentos Portugueses*, dir. Luís de Albuquerque, Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores, [1994], Vol. 1, pp. 929-930.

<sup>57</sup> Vd., on this matter, among others, GODINHO, Vitorino Magalhães – *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial*, Lisboa, Presença, [1987], vol. 3, pp. 53-80.

<sup>58</sup> POLÓNIA, Amélia - "Redes informais de comércio ultramarino" in *Estudos em Homenagem a Luís A. de Oliveira Ramos* Porto, Faculdade de Letras, 2004, Vol. III, pp. 881-891 and *Expansão e Descobrimentos numa perspectiva local. O porto de Vila do Conde no século XVI*, Lisboa, INCM; 2007, vol. II, pp. 149-209.

frequently, a pattern of pluriactivity, in which trade or business are just one of several components. Most of these men are not merchants, but crown officers, gentlemen, pilots, ship masters or even priests or women that took advantage of positive contexts and niches of opportunities to participate in a promising business, in which they act in an informal and self organised way.

This profile explains also some of the idiosyncratic behavioural patterns of this individuals. One of the main ones is, apparently, the way they take advantage of the privileges given by the crown in order to appeal to their commitment to an enterprise that seemed clearly far too overpowering for a small country such as Portugal. This commitment only seems to work as long as business provides more benefits than losses: in times of crisis, evasion mechanisms replaces institutional obligations; in times and circumstances of strict monopoly, smuggling replaces and circumvents financial and political control; in times of war, like the one between the Spanish Crown and the Netherlands, between 1568 – 1648, the cooperative patterns between political “enemies” replace political embargos; in times of warfare, evasion mechanisms, such as resorting to fleets with lower merchant tonnage and fire power, able to flee faster from the enemy, rather than resist the Dutch galleons<sup>59</sup>, replace adequately armed and formed official naval fleets.

The contours of this individual enterprising activity, typical of prevailing small or medium investors, who frequently have more than one economic and professional activity, is responsible for the lack of an apparent merchant spirit or financial logic, and explains why they are, at the same time, co-operators, cheaters and defectors of the State. As we see it, this could also partially explain the inefficiency and the lack of sustainability of the so-called Portuguese empire. Self-interest, self-organised initiative; self and immediate benefit arising from small and very small investment seems to be an overriding feature of the enterprising initiative that prevails in Portuguese society.

The problem is that, then as now, this enterprising fabric does not correspond to market rules, to the challenges of competition, particularly in an international global market, whether that of the current Global Age, or of the First Global Age. The Portuguese were, in fact, involved in intense entrepreneurial activity, based on family companies, on small or medium capitals, self-organised and inventive criteria, that depended on the degree of interaction with a constantly changing world: the responses existed, even though they weren't the most adequate to the effective evolutionary contexts.

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<sup>59</sup> Vd. COSTA, Leonor Freire – « Caravelles et flottes escortées: risque et affaires au XVIIe. Siècle dans l'Atlantique portugais » in in MARZAGALLI, Silvia et MARNOT, Bruno, dir. - *Guerre et Economie dans le Monde Atlantique du XVIe au XXe. Siècle. Actes du colloque international de Bordeaux 3-4 Octobre 2003*, Bordeaux, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2006, pp. 177-193.

In what regards significant financial and commercial enterprises, Portuguese expansion depended, in fact, mostly from Italian merchants or German bankers. Portuguese business men seemed, in fact, to be excluded, or to self-exclude themselves, from significant partnerships involved on overseas business. When suspended the monopoly on the Cap run spice trade, in the 1570's, it was a company of foreign merchants who replaced the crown on the business, not the Portuguese; when the Portuguese Company of India, was finally funded, in 1628, in a fragile and totally unsuccessful initiative trying to emulate the Dutch, the British, and even the French, Portuguese merchants and Portuguese investors were totally absent: the crown had to buy 76,6% of the capital; compulsory participation of municipalities, i.e., the people, since the founding of the enterprise was supported by public loans or public taxes, added 23%, the municipality of Chaul (India) participated with cc. 0,3% and particular stakeholders were present with the insignificant percentage of less than 0,1%. Portuguese crown had to guarantee, in this context, the financial monopoly of the enterprise, by inevitability, as it had done before, previously, by its own decision. The Company was closed in 1633, after five years of unsuccessful business, from which we don't have a slice trail<sup>60</sup>.

How can this situation be explained? Was it because it occurred at a moment when the Portuguese presence in the Middle East and Far East, as well as the spice trade they controlled, was already declining, in the face of Dutch and British competition? Was it because the king's business strategy, structured on high-scale investment, wasn't affordable by Portuguese entrepreneurial standards, in opposition to a well-organised and strategic policy of monopolistic companies, as embraced by Northern European powers? Was it because the prevailing strategy of the Portuguese entrepreneurial fabric was mostly based on non-institutionalised mechanisms, that were able to show some results at a small or medium scale, but not at a high business level?

And today, why is it that the biggest companies involved in industrial production and heavy industries are all multinational, which the Portuguese government tries to attract, the same way as the Portuguese crown did, five centuries ago, giving benefits and advantages, trying to attract Italian, German Dutch merchants, bankers and capital? Does this mean the acknowledgement of the incapacity of Portuguese society to be self-sufficient in terms of entrepreneurial initiatives?

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<sup>60</sup> GODINHO, Vitorino Magalhães – *Os descobrimentos e a economia mundial*, Lisboa, Presença, [1987], vol. 3, pp. 43-80; SILVA, Álvaro Ferreira da – “Companhias Comerciais” in *Dicionário de História dos Descobrimentos Portugueses*, Lisboa, Círculo de Leitores, 1994, vol. 1, pp. 281-182



As we see it, it is not the lack of enterprising spirit or the lack of individual initiative, as stated in the editorial of the newspaper we quoted above, that were, and keep being, responsible for the apparent difficulty of sustainable economic growth in Portugal, as it was responsible for the failure of a major plan of overseas expansion and maritime dominium. Maybe it was, beside the striking dimension and the lack of means of a little and border country, the absence of commitment, the absence of a project, the absence of a lasting plan; the absence of a sustainable political and economic logic, being it assigned by the State, by individuals, or by both. But it is unquestionable that the experience of such a challenge framed some economic features of Portuguese society.

Reflecting on nowadays economic framework, if we look to the distribution of business companies by district, in 2004, we can fairly observe the prevalence of the enterprises sieged on coastal cities and coastal regions. More desegregated data would show us the remaining prevalence of the small or medium enterprises all over the country, exception made to Lisbon region and, in a certain degree, Porto (Cf. maps 10,11).

#### **Maps 10,11**

Today even though there exists major Portuguese companies, most of them are involved on the tertiary sector (Cf. map 14), and are dedicated to consumption markets, not to the productive ones. They are able to provide benefits to their shareholders, and some degree of employment, but do not necessarily contribute to generating national wealth or create sustainable development - another structural framework we'll have to investigate.

#### **Maps. 12, 13, 14**

In fact, the traditional Portuguese productive industries during the ages, from the 18<sup>th</sup>. and the 19<sup>th</sup>. Centuries on, were domestic or small-based structures: textiles and shoe-making prevailing. The entry of Portugal in the EU in 1984 introduced new rules, much as the Marquis of Pombal's economic policy had done in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, that proved to be contrary to the traditional features of investments and, to some extent, to the disorderly, creative, imaginative, traditional Portuguese economy.

Together with this, since the Middle Ages, Portugal's international position was mostly rooted in maritime resources, particularly salt and fish; it was then transferred to the anchor products of overseas trade: spices, sugar, cotton, slaves, gold, tobacco, coffee... Internally, Portugal was sustained by its agricultural production, based on livestock and dairy products, and fisheries... Currently, deprived of all of these opportunities, by a regulated market and a regulated economic community in which those products are not needed or have other competitors with higher levels of productivity and efficiency, Portuguese entrepreneurs search for new

opportunities. But they do so in China, in Brazil, in Africa, to where the entrepreneurial flows have increased incessantly, while Portuguese productive internal structures reveal an obvious devitalisation and a real incapacity to find the long-standing demand for a market niche – something in where the Portuguese could be unique, pioneering, could be the first: the age-old demand for a new oasis, going from mirage to mirage, and avoiding the internal market, internal demand, internal production ... Is this not a pattern which has endured for centuries? Is this not the same answer that was given five centuries ago?

Are we revisiting the past, as if it were some kind of Jurassic Park, in which the risks of an attempt to resuscitate an equilibrium that didn't, in fact, work from an economic point of view, are higher than the potential opportunities? Let's not judge, either the past or the present... We're historians...

But let me focus on a final topic resulting from the socio-economic framework under analysis: the consumption levels of the Portuguese population. Besides the number of shopping centres, which have radically changed the social and commercial spaces in Portugal in the last 15 years, as well as having practically been the only ones to create jobs (unqualified) and to generate benefits, the rates of consumption in Portugal have risen significantly, while the global indicators of the essential standard of living tend to follow opposite lines. Taking the paradigmatic case of mobile phones, their dissemination rate in Portugal grew up to 117.2% last June, with 12.4 million subscribers, in a population of 10.6 million inhabitants, about 10 points above the European average (107.3%)<sup>61</sup>.

Additional empirical evidence points to the number and the prevalence of luxury automobiles in Portuguese society<sup>62</sup>. Besides the luxury models such as Jaguar, Rolls Royce or Ferrari, all present in Portugal, the significant presence in the market of the full range of Mercedes, Audi, Volvo, and BMW models is evidence of the attraction of the Portuguese to high standards of consumption when it comes to automobiles. Sociological approaches show that this choice is not related with the models' quality standards but rather with social status. Furthermore, these consumption patterns do not in any measure reflect the financial capacity of the Portuguese population. Consequently, the high level of unsolvable credit is a recognised phenomenon, which

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<sup>61</sup> <http://tmn.blogs.sapo.pt/tag/telemoveis>

<sup>62</sup> This is not only an empirical evidence. Even if we don't have, for the moment, official statistical data available, the media gives us some unquestionable indicators: Portugal is, for instance, the country that has more Ferraris per capita, in Europe. The low cost automobiles companies complain about the decrease of the rates of sales, in about 20%, in a moment when Ferrari, Porsche, Lamborghini and Maserati representatives declare to regret not to be able to respond to all Portuguese requests. Cf. <http://antreus.blogspot.com/2008/09/portugal-visto-pela-ips-partir-dados.html>. (last actualisation: September 30th, 2008)

already affects Portuguese families in a profoundly structural way, and has led to alert campaigns aimed at restricting consumption and increasing savings. Data from 2003 showed that, at that time, Portuguese were in debt for more than 110% of their available income<sup>63</sup>. In this tendency increased in the last few years...

#### **Figure 1- EU DGP *per capita* (2005)**

It is a fact that, during the Salazar Dictatorship and even afterwards, savings did in fact sustain the Portuguese economy. But these were mostly derived from the savings received from emigrants all over the world, who were thus preparing for their return home. Today, not even this income is available any longer.

Saving or applying capital in productive economic activities is not, in fact, a structural trait of the Portuguese: the entrepreneurial benefits of small or even very small companies, mostly related with the textile industry, all over Northern Portugal are a well-known fact, usually resulting in luxury automobile fleets, while the companies persistently neglect to reinforce their capital or renew their technological equipments.

In our opinion, this is the same attitude that characterised the Portuguese business men from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century: primarily because most of them were not, in fact, real business men. They were more often members of the aristocracy (the merchant gentlemen to whom Vitorino Magalhães Godinho refers, who entered the overseas business as crown officials and military corps or as a result of the crown's policies of redistribution or privileges), or came from a seafaring community, which was socially reinforced by group privileges conceded by the crown, and by individual privileges and titles, given by the king, that made them "Cavaleiros fidalgos" ("Noble Knights"). These dynamics promoted these agents to a different social status with other social demands for social representation, in terms of attire, household, composition of their houses, and so on... The fact is that Portuguese society resulted from a setting where a capitalist and business world intersected with a traditional aristocratic and hierarchical society, in which social promotion and social recognition kept demanding that the frontier between those who lived by their hands (the third state), and those who enjoyed noble status (either by inheritance or by concession) were constantly overcome...

This is, perhaps, the reason that led us to discover an almost absolute lack of visible and measurable indicators of the economic and financial projections of overseas expansion. If we visit all the coastal cities involved in overseas trade and navigation activities at the time, we can

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<sup>63</sup> Data from the Portuguese National Bank, in "Mundo Português". Available in [http://www.mundoportugues.com/artman/publish/portugal/article\\_000187.shtml](http://www.mundoportugues.com/artman/publish/portugal/article_000187.shtml)

identify a battery of small cathedrals (more precisely small to medium-sized churches) built in the Manueline style of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. We can identify some urban buildings, such as Town Halls, Misericórdia (Charity institutions) houses, some Customs Houses or even some individual houses, founded by the dynamics studied. But we won't find, even after further research, signs of reinvestment of merchant capital in new structures of production or even in technical logistics. In Portugal, we lack testimonies of complex shipyards, even though Portugal was pioneering in shipbuilding. We lack, in Portugal, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, evidence of works in seaports, or even structural investments in bridges, roads or simply, ducts, needed to improve seaport logistics as merchant trade posts<sup>64</sup>. We also lack testimonies of the transformation units of sugar, cotton, tobacco, located in seaports or seaport hinterlands, as in the case of England. In fact, through the transference of merchant capital to industrial-based activities, seaports should also be centres of economic growth for an extended hinterland, on which it depended, on the one hand, and also from which it has resulted, on the other. In fact, the maintenance overtime of a seaport as an economic centre depend on its ability to tap the resources of the hinterland and also its capacity to develop local industries, to supply colonies with metropolitan products as well as process colonial goods<sup>65</sup>. Neither of these processes can be documented to Portugal.

In this framework, the exodus of New Christian capitals, knowledge and networks from Portugal to other European or overseas territories became a major problem in the commercial efficiency and financial capacity of the Portuguese entrepreneurial fabric. This was due to socio-political reasons we won't analyse here, but new Christians communities were, in fact, the strongest merchant and financial ones, strengthened moreover by internal links of endogamic and family and group solidarity, and by the sense, and the effective experience, of social exclusion... This is another topic we won't be able to explore here, which deserves further research.

Let's keep our track on the external representation of wealth and social. This wasn't, and this isn't in fact, an exclusive structural behavioural pattern of individuals. The Portuguese state reproduced it at a larger scale. The Hieronymus Monastery (Mosteiro dos Jerónimos), the Belem

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<sup>64</sup> Databases available in the webpage of Hisportos project: <http://web.lettras.up.pt/hisportos/>

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, DEVINE, T.M. - *The Tobacco Lords, 1740-90*, Edinburgh: University Press, 1990; SACKS, D. H. - *The Widening Gate: Bristol and the Atlantic Economy, 1450-1700*, Berkeley and Oxford, University of California Press, 1991; JACKSON, Gordon - "Glasgow in Transition", in *Glasgow, Vol. I: Beginnings to 1830*, ed. T. M. Devine and G. Jackson, Manchester: University Press, 1995; POWER, Michael - "Politics and progress in Liverpool, 1660-1740", *Northern History*, 35 (1999): 119-38; POWER, Michael - "Creating a port: Liverpool 1695-1715", *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire & Cheshire*, 149 (2000 for 1999): 51-71; ASCOTT, Diana E., LEWIS, Fiona and POWER, Michael - *Liverpool 1660-1750: people, prosperity and power*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006; MORGAN, Kenneth - *Bristol and the Atlantic Trade in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Tower (Torre de Belém), and the Tomar Monastery (Mosteiro de Tomar) reveal the wealth of the Portuguese crown and the Military Order of Christ; much as King Manuel I's embassy to the Pope in 1520 intended to reveal to the world the Portuguese Monarchy's imperial status, even if his king was not recognised as emperor by international law. The same way that the Mafra Convent became a symbol of the wealth of John V's kingdom, sustained by Brazilian gold, in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the same way that the Belem Cultural Centre was built intentionally, in the midst of high national controversy, to receive Portugal's European Union Presidency in 1992<sup>66</sup>. In the same way that the western area of the Lisbon riverbank was structurally transformed to accommodate the 1998 Expo. In the same way that eleven football stadiums, most of which excessive in dimension for Portugal's needs and publics, were built to accommodate the Euro 2004. In the same way that Porto's city centre was completely disrupted and some Metro lines were finally put in place, with the pretext of European funding, provided on the occasion of Porto-European Capital of Culture 2001. In fact, at that time, the town was more the capital of shipyards...

The Portuguese state demands opportunistic and supportive incentives, first from the Holy See in Rome, now from the European Union, much as Portuguese citizens demand incentives and compensations from the Portuguese State, ever since they want to risk, or effectively risk and lose. Even if these mechanisms are part of the system, of the capitalist system at an worldwide level, it seems, however, that the Portuguese have created, ever since the Early Modern overseas expansion, a structural and never-ending dependency on external stimuli, external capital injections, external motivations, external initiatives and keep structuring their entrepreneurial initiatives based on external references and external capital...

What I'm trying to argue is that there is a structural lack of strategic thought, of strategic planning; of business ethics and political vision, that leads Portugal, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as well as today, to look for opportunistic ways of obtaining external funding and wait for external miracles that casuistically resolves some of revenue problems; that periodically inject some capital and economic dynamism, which everybody knows is momentary, precarious and will not be able to create sustainable economic development or generate employment. These features seem to keep driving the Portuguese population to "other worlds", where, in fact, they are globally well

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<sup>66</sup> The Belen Cultural Centre was built in 1988 and concluded in 1993. It was conceived to siege the Portuguese EU presidency, and to welcome, later on, cultural initiatives, as it does nowadays.

accepted, sufficiently integrated, and where they achieve the wealth patterns they could not find in Portugal. Wealth patterns which they still show, again, in large houses, often in rural and poor environments, and big cars that still populate a vast number of small villages all over the country in the Summer time...

I am, certainly, being simplistic in this panoramic analysis. In fact, in the last twenty years, different strategic policies have proposed other priority for national investments: “selling” the natural features of the territory, “selling” the sun and the sea, and more recently, “selling” the natural and historical heritage, the environmental potentialities, and “selling” the friendliness, the welcoming nature of the Portuguese people to tourists, appears to be one of the main strategic lines, that simultaneously aims to promote tourism and safeguard historical and natural heritage... But there is still a problem: even if these domains may be reproductive, in terms of wealth, Portugal remains mostly dependent on external markets, on external demand, on European and worldwide contexts of wealth or economic crisis...

We have to conclude. Other domains could be analysed in this intersection of the past and the present: the relation with alterity, with the other, with the difference, should be one of them... we leave it for another time and place ...

We are aware that, even those who are inclined to accept the validity of this analytical proposal could argue that the structural tendencies we presented here may have other historical roots, based on other historical contexts rather than on Portuguese overseas expansion. The fact is that those who deal with Portuguese historiography know that overseas expansion was the first “national” project, the first one that produced the mobilisation of the overall resources of a kingdom in long-term dynamics, and for this reason structured long-term tendencies...

I’m sure lots of comments and criticism should be consider that might make me produce a serious revision of this theoretical and empirical approach, but, nevertheless, I think it was worthwhile to try...