

RECENT TRENDS AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH IN LATIN AMERICAN HISTORICAL DEMOGRAPHY

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This report on the special sessions of Latin American historical demography, at the XLI International Congress of Americanists in Mexico City (2–7 September 1974), was prepared to present some current trends and research methods in the field. The sessions, held at the National Museum of Anthropology on 5–6 September, were preceded by an informal meeting of the participants at which the presentation and discussion of papers was organized. Elsa Malvido, coordinator of the special sessions, opened it with a few brief words of welcome.

SESSION I. METHODOLOGY, ANALYSIS OF CENSUSES, POPULATION DYNAMICS

Cecilia Andrea Rabell demonstrated that, although an important data source, parochial records present the serious problems of underrecording (*subregistro*) deaths, in general, and omitting infant deaths, in particular. The problem of underrecording infant deaths assumes particular importance in the study of demographic change in relation to life expectancy. For the study of mortality in the parish of San Luis de la Paz in Guanajuato, burial records showing the age of the deceased, even of infants only a few days old, were used. Bourgeois-Pichat's method was used to analyze mortality factors, dividing them into endogenous prenatal causes (determined by the environment, levels of economic development, nutritional factors—all difficult to measure) and exogenous factors (illness and accidents), that were generally indicated in the burial entry. The death registries of legitimate children of resident parents in the county seat of the parish of San Luis de la Paz for a seventy-year period were chosen to overcome errors during the years of mortality crisis and the consequent underrecording. The suitability of the Bourgeois-Pichat method to evaluate the data and the underrecording of infant mortality is considered by the author to be the most appropriate; it excludes aggregate analysis with a geometric projection base, used for similar studies with deficient parish records as a source of data.

An animated discussion followed the presentation of this paper. The participants indicated their awareness of the problem (common to most of colonial Latin America) of underrecording in parish records; but they also empha-

sized that, lacking others, these records are the most important source of data for demographic analysis of the prestatistical period, despite problems of omission, wrong entries, mutilation, dispersal, or loss. They cited examples of notable preservation of parochial archives (i.e., New Mexico) and discussed the possibility of demographic evaluations based on the combined data of tribute and parochial records and population counts.

Elsa Malvido explained the methodological problems of family reconstruction in Tula (1592–1813) as part of an unfinished, interdisciplinary project on that region. The methods used in English and French studies, with an analytical base of parish records for family reconstruction, are not wholly applicable in the selected area because certain factors imposed by the colonial system affected indigenous family organization (adoption of Spanish names, population dispersal, etc.) and make family identification difficult. Data are processed by mechanical computation of individual numbered cards; sixty-seven columns tabulate data taken from parochial records (name, Indian and Spanish surnames, sex, age, legitimacy, ethnic group, place of residence, etc.). In order to codify names, indigenous surnames, and place of residence, two alphabetic directories were formed.

Vivianne B. de Márquez explained some problems in analyzing nineteenth-century Mexican censuses, evaluating the data they yield, and comparing them with existing state censuses, all of which impose criteria of selection, compilation of data, and analysis of diachronic series at regular intervals. Incomplete censuses, those that do not reflect increases or decreases in population, those that present exaggerated variations, and published censuses that are mere population counts or estimates of population are eliminated. The observed variants are related to political, economic, and social history at a national level, but the hypothesis of similar population trends (*método de razones*) is rejected unless conditions are homogeneous, which is hardly probable in the nineteenth century. Simple interpolation (arithmetic average of two populations) was also rejected for its lack of flexibility. To sum up, the methods used for this demographic analysis are based on (a) linear regression, that permits the homogenization of data, (b) percentile changes applied to towns and cities not affected by large population modifications, (c) coefficients of general changes, and (d) graphic logarithmic representations of demographic curves.

SESSION II. ANALYSIS OF COLONIAL CENSUS REPORTS, DEMOGRAPHIC SIMILARITIES IN FRONTIER ZONES

This session opened with a presentation by Alicia V. Tjarks on the demographic, ethnic, and occupational structure of New Mexico in 1790. The many deficiencies of local census reports and summaries required analysis and comparison of all existing sources, from the first relatively complete and reliable statistics for New Mexico, given by Villaseñor y Sánchez, to the "Revillagigedo census." In the analysis of total population, all data provided by population counts, reports of ecclesiastical *visitas*, and census reports were used. These were divided by geographic district and tabulated by ethnic groups. When comparing the total population figures (1749–90), a very slow demographic evolution can be observed.

This development was restricted by an absence of immigration and by the pressure of many negative factors that turned New Mexico into a depopulated frontier.

This paper also examined why New Mexico contradicted a characteristic common to other frontier societies—the predominance of male population. The adult sexual proportions showed a high male infant mortality rate that reduced the male surplus. A population pyramid illustrated the short life expectancy of New Mexicans. Data on the marital status of the population, given by the census reports, were shown to be misleading since, in many cases, they “disguised” concubinage (this can be seen by comparing the data with baptismal records). The author concluded that this problem is not an isolated or exclusively New Mexican one, but a common fact of frontier societies inclined to temporary unions and licentious life styles. Other aspects analyzed were the size of nuclear (complete and incomplete) families; endogamous and exogamous marriages; fertility ratios; and the ethnic structure, that showed a clear predominance of the white or Spanish element over the half-breed population. The report on occupational structure also showed that, at the end of the eighteenth century, the province of New Mexico remained in a pastoral state, concentrating most of the population in primary sector activities.

René Salinas Meza, in a second paper on demographic trends in frontier areas, presented the Chilean case from 1740 to the end of the eighteenth century. The data furnished by the documents consulted—approximately fifty censuses—are the most reliable for the estimation of population. However, they need to be complemented or rectified by data from parish records. The abundance of material permitted the comparison of demographic trends in rural and urban areas. The unit of the census was the household, whether inhabited by the nuclear or the extended family. This made possible the identification of family nuclei, the determination of the ethnic structure of the population at a local and regional level, and the analysis of the distribution of property. The second part of the presentation referred to the use of the *matrícula* of 1749, in which the *vecinos* appeared listed with the household as the unit of census. Thus, indices of masculinity, family structure, and composition of the population by age could be obtained.

The discussion that followed the presentation of these papers centered on the significance of census reports and parish records for the analysis of frontier populations that, in general terms, presented similar characteristics at both extremes of the continent. Some of the demographic constants of the frontier, compared by Tjarks and Salinas, were seen as a result of the slow evolution of the population, determined by physical and economic factors and by the constant state of war against the Indians: The short life expectancy (40–50 years), the characteristics of family structure (a high number of extended families in the non-Indian population), early marriage, masculine remarriage, a high percentage of infant mortality, similar indices of fertility, and projection of epidemics and mortality crises from distant urban centers to the frontier.

SESSION III. JOINT OXFORD-SYRACUSE POPULATION PROJECT, DISTRIBUTION AND STRUCTURE OF THE POPULATION OF SPANISH AMERICA, 1750–1800

The session opened with the presentation of two complementary works whose objective was the utilization of census reports from the Bourbon period in Spanish America (1750–1800). These censuses were taken in all the colonies, but that of 1776 acquires particular importance because it was taken almost simultaneously, thus compiling demographic data that present homogeneous and modern census criteria. David Browning emphasized the relevance of these sources to other previous incomplete ones (such as population counts and registration figures) whose purposes were different and which do not permit comparative evaluations at a general and continental level.

The types of data being collected, stored, and analyzed present methodological problems because of (a) the varied locations of the material, scattered in local, national, and Spanish archives; (b) the lack of uniformity in a great part of the census data; and (c) the diversity of dates on which the censuses were executed. These factors make codification of different local categories difficult. Nevertheless, the participants in the project insist that computerized analysis can simplify these problems and provide an overall view of the distribution and structure of population.

David Robinson underlined several problems that have emerged from a preliminary analysis of several eighteenth-century colonial cities, such as using the urban parish as a census unit, the reconstruction of urban census-takers' routes, the location of residential units within blocks and on street fronts, and the mapping of urban and rural population by blocks and other units. Other aspects currently under investigation include ethnic distribution at the household level; occupational status changes; ecological variation at the parish or *barrio* level; and variations in residential unit population size among ethnic groups, occupational classes, and settlements of different sizes. The system of computer codification applied to this analysis divides each census unit card into seventy-seven columns in which geographic data take precedence. The final goal of this project is to produce an atlas of population distribution in Spanish America in the second half of the eighteenth century, starting with local population nuclei. The collected information is stored in a data bank to avoid duplicate research.

The Browning and Robinson papers led the participants into a prolonged discussion as to which localities should be taken into consideration and which methodology should be used to gather and computerize data. Various discussants criticized the applied criteria, contending that colonial demographic differences do not permit the application of similar research patterns. It was conceded that while valuable census data may be sacrificed, the objectives of the project are nonetheless of a useful demographic character.

SESSION IV. GENERAL DISCUSSION

The final session began by considering a paper by Armando de Ramón on the methodology used for a demographic analysis of Santiago de Chile in 1690 that

began with a survey of the urban plan. The next step was the collection of data furnished by parish books between 1675 and 1705, public deeds of property, slave and *peón* registries, inventories, and appraisals. The author reported that 25,000 individual file cards have been accumulated. Following the summary of the papers, presented by Jean-Pierre Berthe, the general discussion revolved around the importance of the different methodological approaches used. The analysis of demographic research techniques extended into matters of population characteristics during the colonial period.

The necessity of increasing comparative demographic studies as a general frame of reference for the process of local studies was emphasized. Also, the support of interdisciplinary studies by historians, geographers, demographers, and anthropologists, that would permit a more comprehensive approach to population movements and trends during the colonial and national periods, was recommended. The Tula Project, sponsored by the National Institute of Anthropology and History of Mexico, was cited as an example of this type of study. Other aspects considered were the importance and preservation of parish records and the application of mechanical methods of computation, valid for family reconstruction and demographic analysis.

The sessions represented an effort to bring scholars together and offer an opportunity for a wide exchange of ideas, even though complete agreement on those ideas might not be reached at the discussions. The continuation of an exchange of ideas among the participants and other colleagues was recommended as a basis for future meetings. The next will be the XLII International Congress of Americanists (Paris, 2–9 September 1976), where the main topic will be analysis of the 1776 census.

PAPERS PRESENTED

Session I. Morning, 5 September 1974.

Cecilia Andrea Rabell. Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad Autónoma de México. "Subregistro de defunciones infantiles."

Elsa Malvido. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México. "Problemas metodológicos de las reconstrucciones familiares de Tula, 1592–1813."

Vivianne B. de Márquez. Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, México. "Problemas metodológicos que presenta el análisis de los censos estatales mexicanos del siglo XIX."

Session II. Afternoon, 5 September 1974

Alicia V. Tjarks. University of New Mexico. "Estructura demográfica, étnica y ocupacional de Nuevo México en 1790."

René Salinas Meza. Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, Chile. "La explotación de padrones nominativos y la demografía de Chile colonial."

Session III. Morning, 6 September 1974.

David Browning, Oxford University. "Distribution and Structure of the Population of the Spanish Empire, 1760–1800: Identification and Retrieval of Data."

David Robinson, M. M. Swann, and M. D. Miller; Syracuse University. "Distribution and Structure of the Population of the Spanish Empire, 1760–1800: A Framework for Computer Analysis."

Session IV. Afternoon, 6 September 1974.

Armando de Ramón. Universidad Católica de Valparaiso, Chile. "Antecedentes para hacer un censo de la ciudad de Santiago de Chile, 1690." (A brief summary of this paper was distributed to the participants. Other research projects reported in the sessions, but not submitted in final form to the Congress' coordinators, are not included in this summary.)

General Conclusions of the Special Sessions.

- (1) Applicability of different methods in accord with existing data and the area of studies.
- (2) Necessity of increasing comparative demographic and interdisciplinary studies.
- (3) Investigation of parish records as basic sources for family reconstruction and population movement. Use of computer systems and team work. Need for financial support for demographic research.