

Cristina ROLDAO (ISCTE-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa)

8 octobre 2018, 14-16h, salle 111, INED: 133, boulevard Davout, 75020 Paris

Title

Lusotropical blindness: Challenges of ethno-racial data collection in Portugal

Abstract

Until the end of 2017, the Portuguese state, faced with the demands of the Portuguese black movement and the recommendations of international organizations on the need to have ethnic-racial data to combat racism, argued that it could not be done because it was unconstitutional. However, in practice and in different ways, this collection has been made and is made by different institutions (hospitals, schools, police, social security services, etc.), without expliciting the goals and ethical principles that must be guaranteed. In 2017, the government established a working group that is currently discussing the introduction of questions about the ethno-racial background in the Censuses 2021. Being a critical observer of this process, but also part of this group, in this presentation I discuss some of the current challenges to the collection of ethno-racial data in Portugal, that have become evident in the process of constituting this working group; in the public speeches of the representatives of the state that lead this group; and in the discussions that have been held within it. These challenges reveal how even if we have advanced to a recognition of the need for this type of collection, a "Lusotropicalist" imaginary persists, legitimating, at the same time, the idea that Portugal is a country of ethnic-racial harmony and, if there is racism, it is not a structural issue, but a punctual one.

Discussant

Graziella Moraes Silva (Graduate Institute, Geneva)

NB : ce compte-rendu de séminaire a été rédigé à partir des notes manuscrites, nécessairement imparfaites, prises par Juliette Galonnier lors de la séance. Il est possible que des erreurs ou des approximations s'y soient glissées.

NB: these seminar proceedings derive from the hand-written notes taken by Juliette Galonnier during the session. Imprecisions and mistakes may have slipped into the text.

Notes taken by Juliette Galonnier

I want to share with you some of my experience on the debate in Portugal and also learn from you how this thing is done in other places internationally. The current debate in Portugal has to do with color-blindness, the refusal to see race. It is not about Republicanism as we may think it is, but rather about lusotropicalism, which is the way Portugal relates to the world.

There are historical ghosts that continue to inform the debate today and explain this lusotropical denial of race. The term “lusotropicalism” was coined by Gilberto Freyre to describe how Portuguese relate to the world. There is this idea that we are kind of “mestizos” in Europe and that we are therefore able to relate to the rest of the world better than other Europeans do. Widespread miscegenation in the Portuguese colonial world created a perception of Portuguese as “nicer”, more “willing to mingle” with colonized populations, a representation that erases the violence towards black bodies, especially female. This also ignores the fact that colonial power was enforced through relations with mixed-race people, who often acted as intermediaries.

The authoritarian regime called Estado Novo that ruled Portugal from 1933 to April 25, 1974 needed to relegitimize its authority and its colonial presence in Africa after WW2. Decolonizing struggles were starting and Portugal had to change its narrative. It renamed the colonies “the ultramarino”. Even though there existed social stratification along racial lines (with blacks, whites and assimilados who were catholics and lived in the same areas as white people), they changed the narrative to promote the idea of a “multiracial” nation and the idea that Portugal, after all, is not a small country. And the people who are in power now in Portugal were raised with this narrative. There is also the idea that the Portuguese colonization was different from the British one, where people were segregated. The Portuguese claimed they mingled with other people and never saw color. It is ironic for a country that had so much to do with slavery to develop a narrative on “benign colonization”.

People also tend to think today that Portugal never collected data on race and ethnicity, which is untrue. In the colonies, the Catholic church was collecting registers on the population and used categories like preto, branco and mulatto in the 19th century. In the 20th century, we have tables from the INE (National statistical institute) using these categories, which is ironic given how staunchly they refuse it today. In the 1940s, they stopped using the word “race” and

starting talking about “somatic types” with a differentiation between “civilized” and “uncivilized” peoples. These categories however were used in the colonial empire, not on Portuguese territory itself. In the 1950s, there still were these categories of somatic types and levels of civilization. In the 1960s and 1970s, too.

Then, we entered the era of the post-colonial myth of colorblindness: one eye wide shut and the other eye making racial profiling. The idea that it is unconstitutional to collect data on race and ethnicity became widespread. The only data we have, which is based on nationality, demonstrates the existence of serious ethno-racial inequality. People from African countries are ten times more likely to be incarcerated than Portuguese people. This is an important finding. The way we frame the data has an impact: most of the time, the tables we find only make comparisons between various groups of migrants, but we rarely relate it to the Portuguese population itself.

The Constitution forbids the collection of data on union affiliation, religious beliefs and ethnic origin, unless special authorization is granted. Yet, we collect data on religion since 1981 and there are absolutely no issues around it. And we know that conceptually race, ethnicity and religion are very close concepts. The State says that it does not collect data but the Comissão para a Igualdade e Contra a Discriminação Racial (CICDR) actually does collect data. But this is actually often taken as an excuse not to include such questions in the census. The INE says: “we don’t collect data ourselves but we use the data that other people produce”. There are also forms used by the police that feature the concept of “unalterable characteristics”. Social services also count Roma peoples and families and you can find this kind of data in the archives of social security. In hospitals and healthcare, they do it too: in maternity services, they collect data on the race of the mother and they have permission to do so from the National Data Protection Commission. So we are making a lot of data collection already but we are not using it to fight against racism or ethno-racial inequality.

In this context, change has come not from academics but from social movements. Most academics are against the collection of data because they say it essentializes race, it fragments society and it allows the State to intrude into people’s private lives. There are big debates within the academic sphere: collecting data on race and ethnicity would imply going beyond social class as the sole factor of stratification and going beyond discrimination complaints by considering that not all discrimination is reported.

The UN in 2006 had made recommendations to Portugal to collect data in order to be able to monitor ethno-racial inequalities. But the Portuguese State usually responded that Portuguese society was not racist (only a few rotten apples here and there) and that it could target ethno-racial inequality through indirect social measures. Yet, in 2017, following pressure from the UN and Black social movements, the government had to position itself publicly and said: yes, we are going to collect this kind of data and put together a group to reflect on it. I was invited to be part of the group. This was ambivalent for me because I was simultaneously an academic studying these topics, a member of the group and a member of Afro-descendent groups.

The initial problem was that no representatives from social movements were invited to be part of the group. It was only intellectual and academic. But we insisted to say that this was not only an academic discussion, but a political and technical issue. The main question to be answered was: data for who, and for what? Another problem was that the group was part of

the High Commissioner for Migration but we think that race issues should be decoupled from migration issues: migration is taking too much space in this debate. One last problem was that the group thought that data would be used to make a map of ethno-racial diversity in Portugal. But our point of view was that we don't need data to make a portrait: we need it to make policies against racism and ethno-racial inequality, which is a different objective. So we wrote an open letter about these different issues and we asked that representatives from social movements be able to join the Commission. For Afrodescendants, Mamadou Ba from SOS Racismo was able to make the bridge to bring people in. But we couldn't get representatives from the Roma and from the migrants. For Roma people, it was the Roma Communities Observatory that was in charge of making connections, which is a State structures. Similarly, for migrants it was the Observatory for Migration. This was hard because these structures did not want the data in the first place.

What were the topics discussed in the group? On many issues, there was no consensus. The first issue was: collecting data for what? To me, this is not just an issue of data collection but a political agenda issue. How to solve ethno-racial inequality? In Portugal, quotas already exist for women and disabled people, but not everyone is ready to embrace ethno-racial quotas.

Second, there were tensions between race and migration studies: should issues of ethno-racial discrimination be managed by migration state bodies or by a new equality body?

Third, there was a debate between those who wanted to include a question in the census and those who wanted to make a specific survey separated from the census, in which more questions could be asked. But the Black collective did not want a special survey. Being in the census has more meaning because the census is how the nation conceives itself. States collect data about very specific things and things they consider important. So this was an issue of symbolic power.

Fourth, there are challenges of administrative data collection: if you have a question in the census, then you must have it everywhere in administrative services. This generated some concerns about schools: are schools going to categorize children? isn't it going to provide ground for more discrimination?

Fifth, there was also a fear, particularly among INE staff and technicians, of delegitimizing the census. If people refuse to answer the race/ethnicity question, then it opens the room to refuse to answer more questions. People from INE were always bringing this up and they worried about it. They suggested putting the question at the very end of the census questionnaire so that it does not affect the rest.

Sixth, this group is not creating a lot of connections with international bodies that do this. That for me is concerning. Many national bodies are present in the discussions (State secretary for equality, High Commissioner for Migration, Roma Communities Observatory, etc.) but the international bodies that recommended it in the first place are not.

Seventh, there is also the issue of categories: what categories to use? Afrodescendants, Blacks, Portuguese Blacks, Afro-Portuguese, Descendants of Africa? The problem with some of these words is that they bring back the issue of migration and diaspora, that we are trying to avoid. The problem with Black is that people do not want to use for themselves a racialized category. "Preto" is an extremely derogatory word in the Portuguese context. There is also the question of where to place mixed-race people and the "retornados" (pieds noirs): they were half a million, and they have a special relation with Africa. They don't see themselves as traditional Portuguese people.

Eighth, Until now, there has been no discussion of Roma, Asian and Arab categories (these last two populations are of recent migration and we know that the issue of race mostly surfaces in the second generation). They are not represented in the group. The problem is that if only Afrodescendants are pushing these debates, then you have a legitimacy problem. Black people, for the most part, are immediately recognizable as Black. But Roma or Arab people can pass as whites, and so having to say it in the census can create fear.

Discutante: Graziella Moraes Silva

In Portugal, you find the three big trends that also inform census issues in Latin America:

First, there is global pressure for racial statistics, from the UN, from the EU. When this happened in Brazil, there was a big push against it: the government talked about imperialist pressure, pressure to imitate the US model, they said “this is not for us”, but at the same time the State had to be accountable towards international organizations and this opened up a space for social movements to ask for it.

Second, we see the central role of Black social movements. We also see the importance of left-wing governments. In her study on Brazil and Colombia, Tianna Paschel shows that the relationship between social movements and the State is more important than the relationship between social movements and their constituencies to push for policies. It is therefore important to look at the alliances between Black social movements and the government. In addition, in Brazil, there is an alliance between Black movements and scholars, which does not seem to be the case in Portugal where most scholars are against the introduction of a question.

Third, we need to stress the role of bureaucrats: they don't seem to be very happy about this in Portugal but at the same time you pointed at other places within the State that use these statistics. The State is not a homogenous entity. Are there dialogues between different fractions of the State?

Finally, I was interested in your comment that racial statistics are not meant to create a map of ethno-racial diversity, but should be used for public policy. I agree but at the same time I see statistics as a way of making ethno-racial inequalities visible. And to do that you need to know which categories will make these inequalities more visible. Having race in the census is important symbolically but it may be complicated to include it if you don't know how people are going to react. This is where a survey can be relevant. In 1970 in Brazil, race was excluded for the first time from the census. People said it was because of the military government. But actually it was also because some bureaucrats at IBGE thought that the question was not working. There were debates around this within IBGE. And to show that inequality exists and that it is necessary to measure it, they decided to make a survey. So having a survey might actually be the best way to stop discussing categories. If the goal is policy, then it is less a question of identity but a question of which categories work best.

Réponses

We are discussing the possibility of doing a small survey, a sondage. We will ask people: do you think race and ethnicity matter in people's lives and as factors of discrimination? Do you think data on this should be collected to measure discrimination? In which categories do you recognize yourself? We won't make this study public, because we don't want it to determine everything we do, but it is just to take the temperature on these issues.

For the categories, we have looked at the UK census, where they have many categories Afrodescendants/Black British/etc. Another model is to write Black from Capverdien

origin/Black from Angola origin/etc. but for me it is problematic because it goes back to this issue of migration. + we always leave an open category for people to describe themselves. We are going to conduct this survey to see if people recognize themselves in the categories and if the categories are not violent to them. We are also going to conduct focus groups with communities to discuss the concept: should it be ancestry? race? ethnicity? migrant background? What are the risks and opportunities of such data collection? We are going to ask people about these things.

We must submit our report at the end of the year. The census will take place in 2021.

Concerning stages: first, you make the portrait, then you have the policy. But if we do the census in 2012, the data will come out in 2022-2023. And then how do you build policies? You need to have an idea in advance of what you want to do. It is important to make a point NOW, because opportunities for meetings will be fewer in the future.

The discussions between administrative services are very limited. There is not a lot of space for these discussions. Same for academic bridges: not a lot of them. In Portugal, postcolonial studies make a lot of bridges at the international level, with Brazil and the US, but they are not really connected with the national context. Academic alliances should not happen at the individual level, but should be more structured: teams and centers should be devoted to these questions.

The fact that we have a left-wing coalition now in power is definitely an asset, but at the same time there is resistance from the marxist and class school. Some people on the right are actually more supportive of the categories. And social movements can be reluctant to engage with the State: there is always a risk of cooptation and some movements do not want to have anything to do with the state.

Questions dans la salle

Bianca Briguglio

I see a lot of echoes with the situation in Brazil. In both Brazil and Portugal, there is this myth of racial democracy. You are denying the problem so you can't tackle the problem. The use of data in public institutions can generate controversy but what made it possible for the policy to be built in the first place was data. It is not the data that creates the space for racism but it is the data that allows to address it. One example is the incarceration of Black youth and obstetric violence against Black women. Statistics were a tool to document this. In Brazil, we also have the same linguistic disputes: what word to use? what categories? The Black movement is still fighting on what word to use, it is a complexe dispute.

=> Réponse: Sometimes the portrait is there (for instance the data on the incarceration of Africans in Portugal has been around for years) but it does not mean that policies are made. So data in itself is not enough. It is necessary but not enough.

Juliette Galonnier

Do you think the question will eventually be included in the census?

I am curious about religion: why collecting data on religion is permitted and why religion as a category is seen as unproblematic while race is? In the US, it is the contrary: data is collected on race and ethnicity, but there is no way it could be collected on religion in the census.

Finally, how would you go about asking the question on race? Are you in favor of self-identification, like IOs recommend, or if the objective is to fight against racial discrimination,

could other ways of identifying people be used? Like the question: “how do you think others perceive you?”

=> Réponse: Will they do it? I don't know. For now, this discussion has been restricted to close circles of academics and activists. It will depend on how the public opinion receives it. It will also depend on what happens. In this moment, 18 police officers are in court for cases of racism. This is the first time it has ever happened in Portugal. A Black woman was also beaten and there have been many attacks against Roma. When these things come out, it creates a context to receive the issue of data collection. Why religion and not race? That is a good question. I think it is because there is a big majority of Catholics in Portugal. Religious diversity is so small that the minority religions do not represent a threat to Catholicism. The Catholic church is strong, both in numbers and in power, there are strong links with the State. I didn't study the process of how that question came to appear historically, but in the debates of the group, it came up: why do you have religion and not race? That was not a peaceful discussion. Patrick: well, there is an argument for it, which is that religion exists, while race does not! Cristina: that argument did not come up! I think it has to do with the Catholic church.

Yes, autoclassification is how we would do it. We always discussed it for it to be that way. But it is not the case in all administrative surveys: Roma classification in police files is not based on self-identification.

Daniel Sabbagh

The Constitution says that it is forbidden to collect data on race, religion, etc. except if certain conditions are met. In Portugal it is in the Constitution, while in France it is the law. Why? Concerning the categories, could you include a box that says “none of the above and I disagree with the question”? Would it put the survey in jeopardy to include that box? At the same time it could help differentiate between people who reject the question as a matter of principle and those who do not reject it but cannot find themselves in the categories.

=> Réponse: The Portuguese constitution is very long and includes many issues. Issues of data protection are also in the law for data protection.

Concerning the option “I do not want to answer”, yes it is included. There is a box “I don't know/I don't want to answer”. Some people brought it up in the group, especially those who are against the introduction of the question. The problem is that you are delegitimizing your own question, creating a space for not answering. And why would you add this box for the question on race and not for other types of questions?

Yasmine Siblot

What happened in 2016? You mentioned it was a turning point.

Can you provide more details on the debate between race and migration studies?

=> Réponse: In 2016, Portugal was at the CERD and they were discussing the report of the government. Portugal was saying it didn't have a race problem and would target racism through indirect social policies. Afrodescendent collectives wrote an open letter to the government while it was in Geneva. It was a big event that put a lot of public pressure on the government. That letter went to the UN, to the FRA, etc. So the Portuguese government had to defend itself publicly. They identified several domains to fight discrimination and they said that this required data collection. They said that publicly. There is also the specificity of the left coalition in government: the various parties are struggling for space in the agenda of social movements and some are

willing to position themselves in favor of data collection. After the open letter, a lot of things happened: there was this case against 18 police officers, there were debates in academia, there was more attention from the newspapers. The State Secretary for Equality, Catarina Marcelino, said that “institutional racism exists”. She put a lot of pressure for the constitution of the group to happen. But then she was put out for other reasons (fires in Portugal). We have a new Secretary for Equality now and we don't know his position. There was also the Decade for Afrodescendants that was going on and Portugal had not participated in any way so that brought pressure too.

Concerning the debate between race and migration studies: some scholars say that you do not need to collect data on race because you can rely on migration data. But if you want categories that last to measure progress, you need to separate them from migration. There are also ties to assimilation theory: they believe that first and second generations will have problems but that these problems will disappear in the third generation. There are also issues of power between different academic fields: the High Commissioner for Migration invests and gives funding to research. This does not create a lot of space for race. In race studies, you need to address structures of power and migration studies tend to be less controversial. They always want to see race as something that is happening outside. We are always pushed towards the migration debate.

Béatrice de Gasquet

What category would you have in mind for the majority group?

=> Réponse: the majority group don't like to say they are “white”. They do not want to be in that position of privilege. But in daily conversations, they position themselves as white and this is how they organize the world. When interviewed directly, they say “oh people think I am Turkish” or “people think I am Roma”. But in daily life, they make distinctions between white and black. For me, the best is to do like in the UK: white/lusodescendants/portuguese origin, etc. You need the same logic as the other categories.

Irene dos Santos

Are there connections between Afrodescendent movements in Portugal and in Brazil?

=> Réponse: there are connections to the Brazilian Black movements but they are not institutionnalized. It is more through Brazilian Black students who come study in Portuguese universities. They bring a lot of the Brazilian discussion. So it is not organized but we follow each other a lot. I was recently at a meeting on Black women in Europe: Brazilians were not present and it was weird for me because I am so used to having their perspective in discussions. They are very strong with standpoint theory (where do you speak from?). This is not well developed in Portugal. In Portugal, African studies are an old parent of colonial studies and are mostly populated by old white men. It clashes with the positions of Brazilian students.

Graziella Moraes Silva

Do you envision multiple choice?

=> Réponse: this is not on the table for the moment.

Daniel Sabbagh: you have to see whether it is really useful. In the US, only 3% ticked multiple options in 2000 and only 5% in 2010. People have not used the option as much as we thought they would.