CHAPTER NINETEEN

COLONIAL SOCIETIES IN ASIA

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INTRODUCTION

The societies of Iberian origin that emerged in Asia from the sixteenth and seventeenth century obviously reflect the paths taken by the Portuguese and Spanish empires in this vast space that extends from the Cape of Good Hope to the Japanese archipelago. Considering its scope and “precocity”, it is not surprising that it was Portuguese Asia that created and moulded—since the turn of the sixteenth century—the overwhelming majority of such societies (Subrahmanyam 1993). Imperial Spain acquired limited control over some areas of Island Southeast Asia (namely the Spice Islands) and nurtured unrealistic plans to seize continental kingdoms like Cambodia and Siam. Needless to say, the most relevant Spanish colonial project in Asia was the Philippines, an imperial venture that began to take shape in the 1560s and 1570s (Headley 1995; Reed 1978). In the late sixteenth century, the Spaniards toyed with the idea of gaining access to China and Japan, their biggest (if brief) achievement being the foundation of a colony in Northern Taiwan (1626–1642), “la isla Hermosa” (Borao Mateo 2009; Andrade 2008). Also, the threads woven from the 1520s onwards between Southeast Asia and the New World raised Spanish interest in the Pacific islands, particularly the Marianas, which became a political-cum-religious objective in the last third of the seventeenth century (Coello de la Rosa 2016).

The political and institutional layout of the Portuguese empire in Asia was defined primarily by the foundation of what is known as the Estado da Índia in 1505, an entity governed by a viceroy, who was dependent on Lisbon, and with its seat in Goa (conquered in 1510 and the capital city since the 1530s) (Santos 1999). As to the Spanish empire, everything centred on Manila (founded in 1571 and made capital city in 1582), the base of power of a governor who answered to the Viceroy of New Spain resident in Mexico City; in both instances, we are speaking of more or less prominent nobles serving as vice-reis and gobernadores, sitting at the centre of considerable webs of power which included family members and large coteries. These men resorted to war, information, and diplomacy to deal with the diverse Asian neighbours of Goa and Manila. Simultaneously, they had to look inwards in order to govern and discipline the colonial societies under Portuguese and Spanish
rule; to that effect, they had to either confront or compromise with several individuals, groups and institutions, Iberian, and Asian alike. Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas in Manila (g. 1590–1593) and the Count of Linhares in Goa (g. 1629–1635) are excellent cases in point (Crossley 2016; Disney 1985; Flores and Marcocci 2018).

The Carreira da Índia was the Estado da Índia’s umbilical cord to Lisbon, while the Galeón de Manila ensured the connection between the Philippines—“so remote and separated by the distance of so many seas from the body of this monarchy” (Sherley 2010, 183)—and New Spain, through Acapulco. Nueva España, in turn, depended on the voyages of the Carrera de Indias between Vera Cruz and Seville (Cadiz from 1679) in order to maintain itself in the orbit of España Vieja. Each one of these runs—whose ships represented, to a certain extent, a simulacrum of the presence of the colonial societies themselves—was extremely long, difficult, and dangerous; human lives, provisions, merchandise, luxury objects, and correspondence were frequently lost.

For someone who thought about the empire from Lisbon or Madrid, the objective was naturally to replicate in Asia the fabric of Iberian life. Just as olive oil, ham, marmalade, and lentils were sent abroad (Vasconcelos 2011, 68), so too councils, courts, fortresses, municipalities, brotherhoods, churches, and the Holy Office of the Inquisition were “exported” to these societies. These and other institutions were composed of thousands of captains and soldiers, bureaucrats and jurists, religious men, and commissioners (comissários); in other words, men who inevitably reproduced overseas the hierarchies and mentalities in which they had been educated. This society was characterised by a powerful martial, noble, Catholic, and masculine ethos with little space (especially in the Portuguese case) for Caucasian women and very much dependent on myriad indigenous servants and house slaves.

At the beginning there was a prevalent and somewhat ingenuous belief that one could govern colonial societies, which were thousands of kilometres away, constantly changing and hardly manageable, in the same way as one governed the Iberian peninsula. Indeed, the reinóis (men born in Portugal) who left every year for Asia and remained there, becoming casados (married settlers), were not a mere sounding board for Lisbon and soon developed their own unpredictable local connections on the ground in Asia. They were immediately exposed to (and entangled with) an enormous diversity of peoples, ethnicities, religions, and societies, which went well beyond the “familiar faces” of Jews, Muslims, conversos, and moriscos.

There were Ashkenazi Jews in Asia, but there were also Syriac Christians and Armenians, while the Sephardic Jews arrived roughly at the same time as the Portuguese; expelled from the Iberian peninsula in the 1490s, they would soon enter the Indian Ocean world via the Eastern Mediterranean, the Carreira da Índia, or the trans-pacific route from Mexico. Often under the guise of new converts to Catholicism (New Christians) but playing with different identities, they rapidly became wealthy and influential businessmen in several port cities of Iberian Asia, like Goa, Cochin, Manila, and Macao (Boyajian 1993). More visibly, there were many Muslims throughout maritime Asia, and they represented a diverse range of origins, branches, schools and practices. In addition to various peoples who were considered to be “without religion” (similar to those who had been encountered in sub-Saharan Africa and in America), millions of people professed religions that were
completely unknown on the Iberian peninsula, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. It did not take long for the Iberian colonial societies in Asia to reflect and absorb “the different ways, divergent from one another” (os costumes desvairados, uns dos outros desviados) about which Garcia de Resende wrote in 1532 with reference to India (Resende 1917, §62).

This chapter addresses the general features of these societies. Starting from the assumption that urban life was at the heart of these communities, the first section analyses the morphological, institutional, and social diversity of the cities where these societies developed. The second section looks at Iberian Asia in terms of its demography, the mobility of its population and the projects leading to the effective settling of certain regions in a permanent back and forth between state intervention and free choice. The third and final section returns to the cities and goes on to examine the tensions and contradictions found there between the social control imposed by political and religious powers and the resistance(s) to such restrictions, which inevitably raises the issue of the of identity-shifting for a myriad of peoples, groups and communities which composed Iberian colonial societies in Asia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Most of the material discussed in this chapter, which is largely based on analysis of individual case studies and micro-histories, comes from Goa, Malacca, Manila, and Macao.

IMAGINED ROMAN COLONIES, A HANDFUL OF "LOYAL CITIES", MYRIAD “CAGES” AND BANDEIȘ

Portuguese imperial Asia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a “floating” state based on dominion over—though frequently this consisted only of influence or even a simple presence—a succession of port cities located between Sofala and Nagasaki. The actual territory comprising Portuguese Asia was always limited, despite the interest shown here and there in a number of more or less utopian plans for continental occupation. Besides the lowlands (terras de baixo) of the island of Ceylon from the late sixteenth- to the mid-seventeenth century, this territory encompassed the Rios de Sena—the “Rivers of Sena”, or the Zambezi Valley—and the Província do Norte (“Northern Province”), a strip of land, measuring 215 km in length and 50 km in width, that was situated between Diu and Chaul in coastal western India, roughly corresponding to 5,000 km² during the time of its greatest extension (1560–1580). These territorial experiences, which continued beyond the seventeenth century and constituted special social laboratories, were secondary to the vital, extensive web of port cities that was woven during the first half of the sixteenth century. In addition to Goa, this maritime network counted Malacca (1511), Hormuz (1515) and Macao (1557) as nodal points. The most expressive and complex societies of Portuguese origin in Asia would come to flourish in these four considerably distinct and geographically distant cities. Other urban centres, such as Bassein, Cochin, or Colombo, could perhaps be included in this group. Nevertheless, the most representative examples coexisted with many other, more discreet examples, found among cities, fortresses, and simple settlements (povoações). These examples were systematically presented in word and image by various authors, especially by António Bocarro in his publication Livro das plantas de todas as fortalezas, cidades
e povoações do Estado da Índia Oriental (1635) throughout the first half of the seventeenth century (Bocarro 1992).

A number of Portuguese, however, were not impressed by what they read and saw in such works. For men such as Jorge Pinto de Azevedo, who wrote from Macao in 1646, it was necessary first to gain effective control of some key locations, such as the island of Ceylon, whose effective colonisation would transform it into the nerve centre of the Estado da Índia. Because of this belief, Azevedo considered the Philippines a model for territorial occupation and social control that should be followed in Portuguese Asia (Matos 1996, 474). Nearly half a century before Azevedo, Francisco Rodrigues Silveira—a “veteran soldier” who served in India between 1585 and 1598—had already advocated transforming Ceylon into a Portuguese colony, likewise praising the Spanish precedent of the Philippines (Silveira 1996, 146). Characteristically, Silveira made a distinction between colonisation by soldiers, who fought for the conquest of mainland areas (domínio da terra firme), and colonisation by merchants, who were satisfied simply with “trade and the utility of the sea” (o comércio e utilidade do mar). For this reason, he believed that the “necklace” of Portuguese settlements put on maritime Asia since the beginning of the century translated into dispersion and weakness; where others probably saw pearls, this author saw in these fortresses nothing but “pigeon lofts” (pombais) and “cages” (gaiolas), with defenceless Portuguese imprisoned inside them (Silveira 1996, 10, 201). According to Silveira, there was a distinction to be made between “dead fortresses” (the numerous stone fortresses, if inhabited, of the Estado da Índia) and “living fortresses”, that is, Roman-style colonies—populated by a “crowd of people”—which never became a reality in Portuguese Asia (Silveira 1996, 227, 230).

Contrary to the then prevailing perception of the Portuguese, the Philippines would never be Mexico or Peru and were far from constituting a “perfect” and highly populated colony, so much so that Madrid had even contemplated its alienation (Valladares 2001, 7). Characteristically, half a century after the foundation of Manila, someone such as Anthony Sherley could refer to the Philippines in his book Peso político de todo el mundo (1622) not as a colony, but rather as the key either to “the preservation or the loss of control over the Southern Seas, as well as of the profits from the Moluccan spice trade”. Sherley therefore privileged maritime commerce over territorial control, a position which would certainly disappoint Francisco Rodrigues Silveira.

The political and social life of the most important urban centres of the Estado da Índia were shaped by the actions of powerful local oligarchies whose authority, though with nuances in space and time, depended in large measure on control of two fundamental institutions. The municipal council, or câmara (Boxer 1965), constituted the first of these bodies, representing the cabildo, its Spanish equivalent (Alva Rodriguez 1997, Merino 1983). A câmara was created by royal decision whenever a Portuguese city was founded in Asia, usually receiving a formulaic title. Thus, in 1586 the settlement of Macao became the “City of the name of God in China” (Cidade do nome de Deus na China), to which was added, after the city’s recognition of the sovereignty of John IV in 1642, the distinction “there is none more loyal” (não há outra mais leal). In 1571, more than a decade before the recognition of Macao as a city, Philip II had conferred on Manila (through the Adelantado Miguel López de Legazpi) a similar title, which had to be confirmed in Madrid in
1574: “distinguished and ever loyal city of Manila” (*insigne y siempre leal ciudad de Manila*).

The structure and functioning of overseas municipal councils were modelled on those of specific metropolitan precedents, but their responsibilities (recognised or acquired) could be much more extensive, which helps explain the frequent conflicts with crown officials, including governors and viceroys. These municipalities were governed by a handful of men (*oficiais da câmera*), but there were instances in which the “people” had to be broadly consulted, and so larger assemblies—often translating into critical moments of crowd action—were held on those occasions. These were the *juntas do povo*, in the Portuguese case (Boxer 1965), which corresponded in Spanish Asia to the *cabildos abiertos* in which undesirable persons often participated, such as “poor soldiers, beggars, vagabonds and scoundrels, full of the greatest indecency” (Merino 1983, 355; Alva Rodriguez 1994).

The other fundamental institution to the life of Portuguese cities in Asia, as in the rest of the empire, was the Holy House of Mercy, or *Santa Casa da Misericórdia* (Sá 1997 and 2011). Established in Lisbon in 1498, this charitable lay brotherhood spread to all parts of the country and came to acquire significant influence overseas, being associated to the early steps of the main cities of the *Estado da India*. The
misericórdia also found its way into Spanish Asia; created by Portuguese merchants and committed to financing trade with Acapulco, there was a misericórdia in Manila since at least 1594 (Mesquida 2011). By receiving legacies, executing wills, and managing dowries, the Portuguese misericórdias in Asia truly shaped the communities where they were integrated. What is more, the misericórdia became a crucial institution as far the economic power and the social capital of the elite of Portuguese Asia is concerned. One of the main functions of the misericórdia consisted on the repatriation to Portugal of the goods and inheritances of those deceased overseas. The respective source material is fascinating, and it allows one to better understand the social world of the Portuguese living in Asia as well as the nature of the ties with their families back in Portugal—a world made of credit, commodities, slaves, exotic objects, and ordinary “things” (Amorim 1991; Sá 2016).

Despite the imperial rhetoric, the loyal and noble cities of Asia were not always loyal and noble, and local oligarchies often resisted the authority of the Estado da Índia. In Macao, the legitimacy of the city’s first captain-general (Dom Francisco Mascarenhas, 1623–1626) was seriously questioned by the municipal council, to the point that they stipulated “that no one, be they married settlers, soldiers and outsiders, should comply with his orders” (Teixeira 1969, 357; Boxer 1968, ch. 6). This dispute would repeat itself countless times in Macao with different protagonists in the following decades (Flores 2001, 72). Manila likewise showed resistance to the adoption of royal decrees and, during moments of tension between the cabildo and the governor (as occurred after the death of Governor Gonzalo Ronquillo in 1583), the “collective fury of the people” was real (Merino 1983, 137). Even in Goa, open opposition to viceroys and governors was not rare and these conflicts invariably reflected fights between personalities, families, and factions (Flores and Marcocci 2018).

Characterised by rich and complex human relations, urban Iberian societies in Asia constituted microcosms marked by recurrent incidents of violence. At the end of the seventeenth century, a Jesuit wrote with reference to Macao that “when the lands are smaller and the inhabitants even less, people are prone to disunity and sometimes even to much hatred: Macao is not without some contagion of this plague” (Flores 2001, 109). For the violence between members and groups of the white elite, one need only read the diary of a seventeenth-century viceroy of the Estado da Índia to grasp the quantity and variety of the conflicts present in a city such as Goa (Linhares 1937–1943). There was also violence outside the “four walls” of the imperial capital, since in India, as another contemporary viceroy put it, “the lands are full of fugitives from justice and evildoers, and the justice system is helpless in these cases” (Pato 1880, 156). The power of bandos—groups of Portuguese residents or factions of casados, accompanied by their “armies” of slaves and making uncontrolled use of firearms—shaped the life of most cities of Portuguese Asia. Malacca constitutes an exemplary case (San Antonio and Vivero 1988, 92–93; Pinto 2012, 200–202), as does Macao, where the conflict which opposed Pero Fernandes de Carvalho and Jorge Cerqueira (and their respective bandos and armed slaves, who were often involved in trouble and skirmishes) occupied space in the correspondence exchanged between the viceroy and the king in 1627 (Flores 2000, 242).

In addition to violent conflicts between white settlers, there was interethnic and racial violence through the segregation of non-whites and even of mestizos (Boxer...
Religious and social violence was based on the exclusion of non-Christians, or more specifically, non-Catholics (Xavier 2008). There was also violence against slaves and domestic servants, who were largely Asians and Africans living many kilometres away from their families and communities. There was likewise violence against native women, both slaves and non-slaves (Seijas 2014), and against Portuguese women and noblewomen: in Goa in 1611 Dona Margarida de Mendonça was abused by the fidalgo Nuno da Cunha, a drama which is known thanks to her own report on it (Boxer 1975, 115–116). Four decades later, a casado from Macao was accused of mistreating his wife, who would eventually die from the “blows that he had given her”, but the aggressor ended up going unpunished (Boxer 1985, 134). Stories of adultery and family tension are not lacking in the cities of Iberian Asia and significant cases are known from seventeenth-century Manila (Manchado López 2006). In 1590 in Mylapur, “a ‘rich, powerful and well-connected man’ kidnapped the wife of another settler, and held her captive within his house”, an instance of individual aggression which revealed the power of the clans of Portuguese settlers of this port on the coast of Coromandel (Subrahmanyam 1990, 66).

A place like Mylapur—which had been transformed in 1607 into the Portuguese city of São Tomé de Meliapor and benefited from the symbolic power of hosting the bones of St. Thomas the Apostle—formed part of a vast network of rather autonomous Portuguese settlements in the Bay of Bengal (Subrahmanyam 1990, 47–67; Zupanov 2005, 87–110). This is the region that Winius (1983) associated with the growth of a Portuguese “Shadow Empire”, though Subrahmanyam (1990) prefers to use the concept of an “Improvised Empire” to understand the very same reality. In any case, we are referring to the power of private interests which often surpassed the authority of the Estado da Índia as well as a process of “Asianisation” of a considerable number of Portuguese who for a number of reasons physically and mentally distanced themselves from the orbit of formal empire represented by Goa.

In this way, many Portuguese settlements (povoações) and bandéis (singular form bandel, from the Persian bandar, port) developed over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Bay of Bengal, in an arc that extends from Nagapattinam, in southern Coromandel, to Chittagong, in eastern Bengal, in which the intriguing and long-lasting case of Hughli should be highlighted (Flores 2002). There was also a second arc of “informal” influence to the east of Chittagong, stretching from lower Burma to southern Vietnam, in which the port of Siriam and the Portuguese bandel of Ayuthaya were prominent. If for the same period we exchange the vast Buddhist kingdoms of the continent for the small Islamic states of insular Southeast Asia, the picture would be similar. It is possible to reconstruct an intricate network of Portuguese communities, or mestizo communities of Portuguese origin, from Malacca to the Moluccas, which helps us understand the life of a number of sultanates from the region, and even explains the early years of “turbulent Timor” (Boxer 1968, ch. 11; Andaya and Andaya 2012; Hespanha 2019).

Rudimentary forms of institutional organisation of communal power, created in emulation of the most prominent cities of the Estado, but governed by a more spontaneous and less regulated structure, can be identified in some of these povoações and bandéis. Instead of formal city halls (câmaras municipais), there were merely assemblies of the “elect” (eleitos) or “prominent men” (homens principais), who acted as representatives of the community (Subrahmanyam 1990, 65, 73, 77–79,
87). The same thing occurred with the Holy Houses of Mercy, which existed in many Portuguese settlements in Asia that never became cities and even in “settlements that ceased to be part of the Portuguese Empire” (Sá 2008, 149). The Holy House of Mercy of Nagasaki is interesting in this respect for there was a strong Catholic, and more specifically Jesuit, influence in this Japanese city, where the Estado da Índia had no formal presence. In fact, no native Portuguese men served on its board and, in 1602, all of its officers were Japanese Christians, including the provedor (purveyor), a certain “Dioguo Riúfa” (Elisonas 2008, 82–84). But the “Shadow” or “Improvised” empire was also composed of simple freelancers, who were not necessarily integrated into Portuguese and Catholic communities of Portuguese origin that emerged to the east of Cape Comorin. These freelancers were found almost everywhere (there are significant examples in the Safavid and Mughal empires, in the Deccan sultanates and even in Ming-Qing China), frequently in the service of local sovereigns and taking advantage of their panoply of skills, whether real or imagined. They likewise worked for the English and Dutch, as was the case with the “black” (i.e., mestizo) Tomás Dias, who made a reconnaissance mission to Central Sumatra at the end of the seventeenth century for the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Dias wrote a report on the expedition in Dutch, addressed to the “Honourable Sirs” of Malacca, but during his voyage he had the opportunity to speak in Malay with the ruler of Minangkabau, who considered him to be “his courtier” (Barnard 2013). These kinds of people, whom we will follow more closely in the third part of the present chapter, caused innumerable problems for the Estado da Índia, namely to its very demographic balance. There is an estimate from 1685 (in João Ribeiro’s Fatalidade Histórica da Ilha de Ceilão), which, though certainly exaggerated, counted 5,000 Portuguese living east of Ceylon.

**DEMOGRAPHY, MOBILITY AND “HUMAN ENGINEERING”**

The Iberian colonial societies in Asia suffered from a chronic shortage of “whites”, a situation which would impede any imperial plan of effective control. The numbers available for Portuguese Asia during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are insufficient, fragmentary, uneven and even contradictory, which makes it difficult to accept the validity of any single estimate. Nevertheless, it is probable that the Portuguese population of the Estado da Índia numbered about 7,000 around 1540. The difference in numbers between those who arrived every year in Goa and those who left it to return to Lisbon was likely consistent with a cumulative increase of the Portuguese population in Asia. The number in question varied annually, depending on the decade, between 150 and almost 700 persons, but this estimate does not consider the mortality of whites on the ground. This figure would have been considerable since in Goa’s hospital alone between 300 and 400 soldiers died annually at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Coates 1998, 125). Be that as it may, the demographic outlook of Portuguese Asia would not have varied significantly in the long run, for in the 1630s the numbers continued to indicate approximately 7,000 Portuguese living in Asia, including religious men (Subrahmanyam 1993, 216–224).

Similar to other places such as Luzon and the other islands of the Philippines occupied by the Spanish, Manila never counted a significant white population.
Despite the differences in models of colonisation between Portuguese and Spanish Asia, as well as Portuguese perceptions of these differences, it was true that it took a long time for the number of vecinos to increase and stabilise in the Philippines. For example, no more than six Spaniards lived in Vigan (Villa Fernandina) in 1591 and Antonio de Morga confirmed in 1609 that “it is depopulated of Spaniards, very few live there” (Morga 1997, 297). Although Morga himself counted 600 houses inside (intramuros) of Manila on this occasion, the census realised a quarter of a century later mentioned only 265 vecinos, a number which would fall in the second half of the seventeenth century (Merino 1983, 26–36). Nevertheless, it is necessary to recognise that in some cases, such as happened in the Philippines through the encomienda and the repartimiento—both systems implying the existence of forced labour and the payment of tribute (“Oh castillas [i.e., the Spanish], qué es lo que nos queréis? … Porqué nos pedís tributo? Qué os debemos?” a native peasant of Cainta asked as early as 1574) (Alonso Álvarez 2003, 13–14)—a small number of settlers and colonists was enough to cause a devastating impact on the native population, leading to its drastic reduction (Newson 2009; Seijas 2014).

With the intention of increasing or stabilising the white population (or at least a Catholic or simply Christian population), strategies were put into practice that implied the forced circulation of people between Portugal and Asia, within the Estado da Índia itself, and between Spanish America and the Philippines. In many cases, we are faced with actual exercises in “human engineering” involving women and men, slaves and free natives. The island of Ceylon provides some of the most illustrative examples of this practice. In order to populate the recently conquered peninsula of Jaffna in the extreme northeast of the island, the Viceroy Dom Constantino de Bragança (r. 1558–1561) insisted in vain that the Portuguese settlers of São Tomé de Meliapor should move there. Similarly, there were various attempts to make the Paravas—a fishermen caste from the southern tip of India which had converted to Christianity as early as the 1530s—transfer to Ceylon (Flores 1998, 274). These forced movements of communities, which, however, did not actually come to pass, must be seen together with the forced circulation of a myriad of individuals and reference need only be made in this regard to the peripatetic existence of thousands of slaves in Iberian Asia (and beyond), moving about at the mercy of the market, the value attributed to their skills and the whims of their successive masters. To these practices, one should also add projects of “biological manipulation”, which, as we will see, reveal as much naïveté as racial prejudice. Such strategies assumed the decline of certain groups, such as unmarried women (single women and widows) and religious men. In each case, attempts were made to minimise the number of people who, from the point of view of imperial demography and of urban colonial societies, were completely unproductive.

Degredados—who paid for their crimes with long exiles in areas of conflict such as the island of Ceylon or regions such as the Zambezi Valley, whose population the Estado wished to increase—were often pressed into service to meet the needs of war in Portuguese Asia. Some of the Estado’s frontier cities, such as Colombo and Daman, were transformed into lands of exile (coutos de homiziados) (Coates 1998, 115–135). At the same time, since the initial plans to bring colonists to the Philippines from Spain and Peru failed, many convicts were regularly sent to the Philippines from Mexico on board the Manilla Galleon during the seventeenth
century, a practice which would intensify substantially during the following century (Mawson 2013; García de los Arcos 1996). There was some immigration of married couples to the Philippines, but this does not seem to have resulted in real demographic growth. Widows, widowers, single men, and minors represented half of the 626 white persons living in Manila in 1634. According to the same census, married couples without children corresponded to roughly 59% of couples in the city, while widows and widowers without children accounted for 60% of total widows (Merino 1983, 57–58).

In the Portuguese case, the emigration of families to Asia was rare, since the Estado da Índia was originally conceived as a space for white men, a world of warriors and bureaucrats more than of merchants and settlers. Nevertheless, an intriguing parallel can be established between the encomenderas of the Philippines and the donas of the prazos (land grants) of the Zambezi Valley with reference to the granting of land to women and succession by the matrilineal line and the immense power this represented (Manchado López 2011; Rodrigues 2000). Farther east, in Macao, it was not rare in the seventeenth century to encounter widows holding significant economic power and social influence. These were businesswomen, including mestizas, who still had to face countless obstacles. Such was the case with the japoa Isabel Reigota, daughter of a Portuguese, Fernandes Reigoto, and widow of Francisco Rombo de Carvalho (Penalva 2011, 115–142). The trajectory of Catarina de Noronha, a central figure in the life of Macao during the final 30 years of the century, is better known. Widow of the magnate Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo, who will be discussed in more detail below, Dona Catarina arrived in the city in 1670. She was the owner of several ships and managed without too much difficulty to survive the economic crises that cyclically devastated Macao during this time. When she died in 1701, she left a considerable fortune, including many objects, which constituted an eminently mobile form of wealth. This kind of wealth accumulation was typical of those such as Dona Catarina and her husband who lived as itinerants (Flores 2001, 114–115).

We are far from the early years of the Portuguese presence in Asia when women were prohibited from travelling to India, a situation which evolved towards a controlled movement of women between Lisbon and Goa. Since the middle of the sixteenth century it became common to send a limited number of orphans from Portugal to the Estado with the intention of obtaining marriages to reinóis, but that strategy did not produce tangible results (Coates 1998, 223–274). Once in India, it was absolutely necessary to avoid the “King’s orphans” (órfãs del Rei) to become “brides of Christ”. Many of the Portuguese women living in Asia—both the newly arrived orphans and the resident widows—aspired to religious life. Founded in the early seventeenth century (1606–1610), the Augustinian Convent of Santa Mónica de Goa was these women’s favourite destiny, whereas those looking at the convent from the viceregal palace did not usually like what they saw. The crown decided not to replicate the experience in Portuguese Asia, but a group of ten Franciscan nuns arrived in Manila in 1621 to establish the Convent of Santa Clara in the city (Alberts 2013). This convent’s demographic and social impact on the life of Manila was probably similar to Santa Mónica’s in Goa; five years later, the cabildo was vocal against the admittance of new nuns to the convent (AGI, Filipinas, 27, N. 138, fls. 741r–742v). Still, the nuns of Santa Clara found ways to “multiply” themselves;
some moved to Macao, where they founded in 1633 a convent with the same name, which did not take long to attract the daughters of some of the most prominent Portuguese residents of the city (Penalva 2011).

It is, therefore, difficult to determine with precision population figures for whites in Iberian Asia. The estimates for the principal cities of the Estado da Índia are almost always vague, which makes a systematic presentation of the available data unwarranted. Two elements should be emphasised, according to what we know: on the one hand, we are dealing with an intricate human and social landscape, which is reflected in complex and imprecise classifications: moradores, casados—often distinguishing casados brancos from casados negros—soldiers, men of arms (casados and soldiers counted as one), castiços (born in Asia of Portuguese descent), and mestiços. Among mestiços, there is ample regional terminology to consider, including manamuzungos in east Africa, topazes in South-East Asia, and jurubaças in the South China Sea. But the term jurubaça designated mestiços as well as Chinese Christians in Macao, while the interpreters and translators in the service of the Portuguese were also frequently called topazes and jurubaças.

Miscegenation, which was practiced as a regulating instrument of imperial demography, particularly to ensure population balance in a colonial city or conquered region, was much discussed among the Portuguese in Asia. There were those, such as Francisco Rodrigues Silveira, who were completely opposed to it. According to him, the colonisation of the island of Ceylon could not be achieved without white women from Portugal, which would avoid the “degeneration” resulting from “mixture” with the natives (Silveira 1996, 219–222). Others, such as Jorge Pinto de Azevedo, advocated effective colonisation of Macao based on the coupling of Portuguese men with Chinese women. Mixed marriages, but “whites”. In his view, the pairing of people with the same skin colour ensured the longevity of their offspring: “white children are born of both castes, and these have more chances to survive than in other parts of this Orient” (Matos 1996, 244). In 1651, resigned to the improbability of receiving soldiers from Portugal (reinóis), the captain of Macao expected at least to see the military power of the city reinforced with 500 cafres (black Africans), for slaves from the coast of east Africa would surely “fight as whites do”. The way in which the cafres had fought alongside their Portuguese masters to repulse the attack of the VOC on the city in 1622 was reflected in the judgement of Captain João de Sousa Pereira. On this critical occasion, the Portuguese did not even hesitate to praise the bravery of a black female slave who, “dressed in the clothes of a man”, killed some Dutch soldiers (Penalva 2011, 29–30). She was Macao’s version of Catalina de Erauso (1592–1650), the Basque Lieutenant Nun (la monja alferez) who lived and fought in Chile and Peru (Erauso 1996). However, what the captain of Macao wanted to avoid at all costs was being sent “little mestiços from Goa” (mistisinhos de Goa), people with no courage that “turn into monkeys when the going gets tough” (que com os frios se fazem bugios) (Boxer 1985, 134).

These and other cases show how, from the end of the sixteenth to middle of the seventeenth century, the strategies of war and settlement within the Estado were based on firm convictions about race and gender. In order to prevent colonisation from becoming synonymous with “degeneration”, it was imperative to choose Portuguese women and ignore native women. Even with reference to domestic service in a city such as Goa, the ouvidor geral do crime (chief criminal judge) Jorge
de Amaral e Vasconcelos could write in 1651 to his brother who lived in Portugal that “the work of one white woman from that Realm [i.e., Portugal] is worth more than that of twenty born here”. The absence of white servants (*criadas*) in the capital of the *Estado da Índia* was offset with the purchase of blacks from Mozambique, “whose skills are difficult to match” (Vasconcelos 2011, 71). The reasoning of the *ouvidor* from Goa regarding domestic service was entirely similar to that of the captain of Macao regarding military service: in the absence of Portuguese soldiers, it was necessary to recruit strong *cafres* and avoid weak *mestiços*. They favoured black men who fought like white men, as well as black women who fought like men (and sewed like white women, according to Vasconcelos).

But there were also people who enthusiastically supported miscegenation, such as the anonymous author of a report on the conquest of Ceylon written in the first half of the seventeenth century. He noted that

> in this island there are many sons of Portuguese, or *mestizos* born in Ceylon, who are great knights, and they master the native language, and have more knowledge and experience than the natives themselves; and are very much acquainted with all those scrublands.  

(BPE, CXVI/2–3, fls. 67r–67v)

At the end of the century with the need to colonise the *Rios de Sena*, some people recommended simply “to bring there white men, as well as natives from India, because white women are worthless; their offspring does not survive” (Flores 1988, 66). A religious figure expressed this position in 1697 after the failure of the colonisation plan for the Zambezi Valley, launched by the crown two decades earlier. Conceived initially as “white” colonisation—based on the sending of soldiers (preferably from the Alentejo, who could more easily adapt to the climate), craftsmen, women “capable of propagation”, married couples, and families from Portugal—it was perceived early on that this was not an adequate solution. In 1680, the region had no more than 50 white men, and complaints were already openly expressed that Lisbon had allowed the departure of “forced, inexperienced and incapable people, together with plagues of widows” (Flores 1988, 62–65).

The people populating this chapter almost always had a weak connection to the land, lived mostly in port cities which depended on maritime commerce, and were extraordinarily mobile, following business opportunities throughout maritime Asia. Understandably, they owned more mobile property than landed property, but even their landed property was subject to a good deal of “circulation” too: the storehouses (*boticas*) of Father João de Espinhoza in Macao changed hands at least four times between 1623 and 1654 (Flores 2000, 240). In extreme situations, the decadence of a city or even the extinction of a *bandel* could cause considerable movements of populations. The economic decline of Portuguese Malacca, followed by its loss, provides a good example. Its gradual transformation into a “fortified ghetto” after the foundation of Batavia (1619) made it a much more militarised city, dependent on married settlers, soldiers, and slaves and less often frequented by merchants (Pinto 2012, 186–187). The Dutch conquest of Malacca in 1641 caused many Portuguese settlers in the city to transfer to other sultanates in the region. Some moved to Palembang in southern Sumatra, “making themselves”
Malay and serving as intermediaries for business with Batavia; this was the path taken by men such as Pascoal Rodrigues de Andrade and Valério Gentil, the first secretary-ambassador in the service of the Pangeran sultanate and the second shahbandar (master of the port) of Palembang, after having been personal secretary to the king of Cambodia (Dumenjou 1992; Fernando 2004). Others decided to live and do business on Makassar (South Sulawesi), but Dutch control of this sultanate from 1667 forced them once again to change “home”. They eventually settled in the Buddhist kingdoms of continental Southeast Asia, namely, Siam and Cambodia (Halikowski-Smith 2010). This forced mobility which characterised Iberian Asia after 1640 also affected women and religious women. Following the “Restoration” of 1640, and the declaration of loyalty that Macao had made to John IV two years later, the Spanish residents of the city, including the nuns of the Convent of Santa Clara, were expelled. On their way back to Manila the ship wrecked, and the nuns landed in Cochinchina, where they found their way into the local court (Alberts 2013, 161–169).

**BETWEEN SOCIAL CONTROL AND IDENTITY-SHIFTING**

As can be seen, the crown and Church hoped that the codes of conduct and forms of sociability followed by their vassals and believers in Asia were in accordance with the “Iberian canon”. The clothes that they wore in Manila and in the cities of the Estado da Índia, as well as the books that they read, the feasts they attended (from the celebration of royal events and religious festivities to the bullfights and alcanzias), the weddings they celebrated, the religion they professed (including the manifestation of miracles, visions, dreams, and prophesies), all of this was supposed to replicate the life of any contemporary city of the Iberian peninsula.

In the same way as the chapter of this volume dedicated to “Asians in the Iberian World” demonstrates, a rigid legal and moral grid was adopted to classify the heterogeneous human landscape of Asia. It was an imperial regime framed by an overarching Catholic order that proved highly effective due to an impressive “army” of secular and regular clergy. The latter were particularly influential. From Soqotra to Taiwan, hundreds of (mostly) European missionaries in the service of various religious orders—Jesuits, Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, and Discalced Carmelites—competed among themselves to convert natives professing other religions as well as to transform local “heretical” Christians into “good” Catholics; they often succeeded in changing other people’s identities and regulating their daily lives. State and church stipulated who was a vassal and vecino, citizen and foreigner, true believer and infidel, Christian and gentile, slave and free, “chino” and “indio.” A highly delicate exercise, this “arranging” of people into “drawers” entailed choices which at any moment disclosed a set mental framework and revealed much ignorance about the outer world. Take the emblematic case of the “Indian” slave Pedro, originally from Pegu (lower Burma), a land that the judges from Madrid—among other geographical imprecisions and various cultural misunderstandings—confused with Peru (Van Deusen 2015, 212–216).

The continuous presence of Iberians and other Europeans in Asia and their systematic interaction with societies from various cultural zones between the Swahili Coast and the South China Sea contributed to the permanent transformation
and increased complexity of identities. These identities became more flexible and unstable—among the Portuguese and Spanish who had become “Asianised” and the Chinese and Malay who had become “Iberianised” there are many nuances to consider. Such a human labyrinth made it considerably more difficult for those who held positions of authority and had to define affiliations clearly from an outsider’s perspective. Thus, somewhat fictitious identities were constructed, identities of individuals, groups, and communities from which the European observer excluded himself peremptorily, often falling back on the antithetical game of “us” and “them”. But how would we classify the sangley Juan Felipe Tiamnio, resident “in the town of Minondo [Binondo], outside the walls of the city of Manila”, who in 1685 possessed silver reliquaries painted with the figures of Jesus Christ and Our Lady of Guadalupe (patron of Mexico), but who also read books “written in Chinese characters” whose contents are unknown to us today (Gil 2011, 765–772)? How would we explain the fact that in Malacca, the head of the Hindu community (bendahara, bendara) in the 1570s and 1580s was Dom Henrique, a Muslim who converted to Christianity and married the granddaughter of “Meale”, a Muslim prince exiled in Goa whom we will meet again later in this chapter? And what about the head of the Muslim community (tumenggung, tomungão) in the same city who during the 1610s was a married Christian called João Lopes de Amoreira (Pinto 2012, 212–213)?

Malacca, similar to the other cities we have been discussing, had an enormous variety of ethnic, “national”, religious and social identities which constituted fertile ground for paradoxes and ironies, such as those above, making it difficult for civil and religious authorities to regulate and control them. Places such as Goa attracted a considerable mobile population, beginning with many Europeans, who, coming from a number of different origins, visited, lived in, did business in, and wrote about the capital of the Estado during this period (Lobato 2012). Among the most notable examples, all from the period of transition between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, we should mention the Dutchman Linschoten, the German F. Cron and the Flemish brothers Coutre. The attitude of the imperial authorities towards them—towards some of them, individually, and the communities to which they belonged as “foreigners” (even though many of them married Christian women in Goa)—was not consistent. The “foreigner” João Cavaly Ferrari, who lived in Macao with his wife Catarina Pinta, was accused in the 1620s of “trading and communicating with the Dutch” (Flores 2000, 242). It is no accident that the Reportorio—a list of almost 4,000 cases judged by the Inquisition in Goa between 1561 and 1623—contains a sizeable number of cases against Europeans, including Spaniards, Italians, French, English, Dutch, Germans, Flemish, Russians, and Greeks. But it should be recognised that this same document lists many people from almost every region of Asia, from Eastern Christians pertaining to different churches and traditions to those who converted to Catholicism, here identified by their Portuguese names (Reportorio 1623). Among these converts we find many women from various geographical origins and if we add to this data the places of birth of the nuns who lived in the cloistered convent of Santa Mónica de Goa during the seventeenth century, we have to recognise the diversity and extraordinary mobility of women in the Portuguese Asian empire (Coates 1998, 258–270, esp. 266).

Macao is another important urban centre of the Estado da Índia which welcomed an eclectic Asian population: many Japanese, similar to what happened in Manila
(Tremml-Werner 2015) and Malacca (Pinto 2012); Koreans, surely “signs” of Japan’s invasion of Korea between 1592 and 1598; Bengalis, Siamese and a mass of men and women from the Malay world, almost always domestic slaves of the Portuguese (Flores 2000, 242). In addition, there were the muitsai and atai, Chinese children stolen or purchased from their parents who circulated like “merchandise” throughout the Estado da Índia or, alternatively, remained in Macao, serving in the houses of the Portuguese. Many muitsai converted to Christianity, took Portuguese names, accepted Christian marriages, and were often included in the wills of their masters, who presumably treated them as their own children. Of course, it is necessary to relativise the rhetorical language of legacies, though examples such as that of Manuel Gomes o Velho, who “bought a small girl of Chinese caste” to whom he gave the name of Maria “to raise as if she were my own child”, are innumerable (Boxer 1968, ch. 13; Flores 2000, 245).

Similar to other cities considered in this chapter, Macao relied on the work of these individuals and also depended on indigenous labour to guarantee the essential functions of the Estado, particularly political communication. This was accomplished by a “silent” army of copyists and secretaries (some Christian converts, others not) and, especially, by translation experts. In Goa, official interpreters of the Estado da Índia (línguas do Estado), mostly Hindu Brahmins proficient in various languages, could work without ever having to change religions or names throughout the seventeenth century (Flores 2015a). In Macao, oral and written translation was carried out by Chinese Christians (Gebhardt 2014), whereas the Audiencia (High Court) of

Image 19.2  Macao, Livro das plantas de todas as fortalezas, cidades e povoaçôens do Estado da India Oriental de António Bocarro (1635)
Source: Public domain/Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, Lisbon, Portugal

These professional writers and translators formed part of a “hybrid” elite (though they were not always biologically hybrid) composed of a plethora of individuals and groups. Among them were many exiled Asian princes, who lived under some sort of political and religious surveillance in Goa or Manila. Many of these princes converted to Christianity, sometimes leaving written testimonies signed with their Christian names, but one of the most interesting figures comes from among those who did not embrace the Catholic faith: the sixteenth-century Muslim Prince “Meale”, heir to the throne of Bijapur who saw his daughter “transformed” by the Jesuits into Our Lady of Overseas (*Dona Maria de Além Mar*) (Subrahmanyam 2011, 33). Side by side with these putative rulers in exile were *mestizo* intellectuals who were born and raised in the cities of Iberian Asia, often without ever having visited Lisbon, Madrid, or Rome. This was the case with the Franciscans Paulo da Trindade and Jacinto de Deus, both born in Macao and authors, respectively, of *Conquista Espiritual do Oriente* (ca. 1630) and *Vergel de Plantas e Flores* (1690) (Faria 2011; Xavier and Zupanov 2015, 172–189). For Manila, we have the sixteenth-century printers Tomás Pinpin and Juan de Vera (the first Tagalog and the second Chinese) and the eighteenth-century engravers Nicolau de la Cruz Bagay and Don Gaspar Aquino de Belen (Rafael 1993), not to mention an intriguing anonymous sixteenth-century hybrid work known as the Boxer Codex (Souza and Turley 2016). Manuel Godinho de Erédia (1558?–1623?)—Luso-Malay cartographer and mathematician who lived between Malacca and Goa—is another good example (Flores 2015b), as is Inácio de Brito, the Barnabite priest of Burmese ancestry who authored a history of the Portuguese discoveries in his native language at the turn of the eighteenth century (Guedes 1999). Finally, the city of Colombo offers us one of the most interesting cases: Dom Filipe Botelho. Botelho, who converted to Christianity and eventually became a religious man educated by the Jesuits, penned the *Jornada de Uva ordenada a maneira de dialogo* (1633), where he simultaneously “performs” as a loyal Portuguese vassal, devout Catholic priest and proud Sinhalese nobleman descended from the kings of Kotte (Flores and Cruz 2007, 104–106).

At first sight, the *mestizo* intellectuals—as well as the native interpreters and exiled princes—represent the triumph of an imperial order and the guarantee of its renovation and perpetuation. But the fact is that the life of these and other similar persons was filled with a permanent tension between different political, religious, and ethnic circles. The Iberian cities of Asia were subjected to effective forms of social control, which was manifested in the division of the urban space. In Manila, the Spaniards lived inside the walls while the local Chinese inhabited the *parián*, a “Chinatown” that changed location many times (and multiplied itself) over the years. Key to the demography, economy, and everyday life of Manila, the Chinese residents of the city constituted a fluctuating population that nurtured close ties with the motherland. Converted or not, the *sangleys* were seen with suspicion and prejudice by the Spaniards, who needed them as much as they ostracised them; hence the three *sangley* massacres that occurred in the seventeenth century (1603, 1639, 1686) (Reed 1978; Gomà 2012; Leibshon 2014; Gil 2011). Parallel to this, in Manila, was the distinction between “real citizens” (*vecinos efectivos*) and those
who, living “in this city and its outskirts, both Spaniards and mestizos”, are “people who do not really belong (gente que no hace vecindad) ...”, since most of them are married with mestizas, Indians and Bengalis” (Merino 1983, 115). Macao was also divided between the Christian city and the Chinese city, but far from Manila’s conflicts (Flores 2000, 244).

In Goa, if Hindu women living within the limits of the city became widows, then the goods of the deceased husband would be confiscated, while the children they had together would be taken away to be educated as Christians. Ramoji Shenvi Kothari—a Hindu Brahmin who served as língua do Estado for a number of decades during the seventeenth century—anticipated the problem in 1658, questioning (and contesting) Goa and Lisbon about the practice (Flores 2011). The same could happen in Malacca, which caused the Kelings—Hindu merchants in the city, originally from the Coromandel coast—to request in the 1580s “that neither the judge for the orphans nor the purveyors of the deceased seizes their goods nor makes an inventory of them nor interferes with their children, nor takes them away, or troubles them in any way” (Pinto 2012, 283).

Examples of ethnic and social segregation inscribed in these urban spaces could be multiplied. But it is of more interest here to observe the distance between theory and practice and reflect on the numerous breaches of the system. In Hormuz, the Portuguese, to the scandal of many, lived side by side with Muslims. In Manila, the inside walls (intramuros) were not an absolutely impermeable barrier. In this regard, Macao furnishes a long and interesting list of cases since, as a Chinese text from the seventeenth century noted, it was usual for the Portuguese there to intermingle with the Chinese. In fact, the Portuguese frequently maintained houses outside the limits of the Christian city. In 1591 Simão Gonçalves possessed “a plot of land in China” where he lived. At the end of the seventeenth century, when the city already had walls, Nicolau Ribeiro de Carvalho, António Mesquita Pimentel, and Catarina de Vargas had houses (estâncias) “on the other side” (na outra banda) and paid tribute to the mandarins. The houses of the priest João Espinhoza bordered those of Luís Lopes, homem chim. Portuguese women, such as Francisca Pires, who had a son in Portugal, had meanwhile married in Macao—“at the Church’s door, like God commands” with Luís Figueira, homem da terra. And it was in vain that the municipal council repeated orders prohibiting the renting of warehouses (gudões), storehouses (boticas), and houses to the Chinese and forbidding “gambling between Christians and Chinese”. At the end of the seventeenth century, the Inquisition in Goa wanted to close the streets of Macao to Chinese ceremonies, but the municipal council—aware of the consequences of such a measure—adopted a more prudent posture (Flores 2000, 245).

When we switch our focus from Manila and the principal cities of the Estado da Índia to smaller urban centres or even settlements disconnected from the official imperial network, the sources available become more limited. However, it is here that individual examples of identity-shifting among the Portuguese become far more evident. The palette is rather varied, allowing us frequently to follow the transformation of loyal Catholic soldiers into chatins (traders), alevantados (rebels), and arrenegados (renegades). We can begin with a merchant-adventurer and political entrepreneur who had his own agenda, but still acted within the bounds of acceptability of the Estado da Índia. Francisco Vieira de Figueiredo (d. 1667), a man of
considerable influence not only in the sultanate of Makassar, but also in the sultanate of Golconda and in Timor, personifies such a figure (Boxer 1967). This is also the case with many residents in Macao, such as Bartolomeu Vaz Landeiro and Pero Vaz de Sequeira (Souza 1986, 36–45; Sousa 2010).

There were also those who broke with the Estado, though never completely, adventurers and rebels who often played both sides. The examples are abundant and rich: on Ceylon, an island that represents a sort of boundary between the formal and informal Portuguese empire(s), two interesting cases deserve mention, both from the 1540s: Duarte Teixeira de Macedo, “more loyal to him [i.e., the King of Kotte] than to his own King and Lord”, and Nuno Álvares Pereira, who had great influence over the king of Kandy—“if he knew the local language, he would rule the kingdom” (Flores 1994, 135). At the end of the sixteenth century, the power of Sebastião Gonçalves Tibau and especially of Filipe de Brito e Nicote at the court of Arakan was remarkable, while at the same time Diogo Veloso wielded influence in Cambodia (Subrahmanyam 1993, 151–152; Subrahmanyam 1990, 147–153; Guedes 1999). The Portuguese banzel of Ayuthaya assembled a group of figures with similar profiles with a certain Fernão Nabo Pessanha, “who is proud of being a mandarin of the King of Siam”, distinguishing himself at the end of the seventeenth century (Seabra 2004, 134). For Cambodia at this time, we should mention João da Cruz, who long served as “governor of the seaports” (Seabra 2004, 105). A canon founder and a mestizo born in Macao, João da Cruz and his son Clemente da Cruz enjoyed similar visible political influence in Vietnam (Manguin 1984). And even in Guangzhou (Canton), we find during these years a certain João Cortês, the “favourite” (privado) of the local governor (Seabra 2004, 87). The Portuguese “tribe”—composed of a plethora of adventurers, rebels, mercenaries, renegades, and, last but not least, sizeable mestizo Catholic communities rooted in several port-cities—soon became a recognisable “brand” in Southeast Asia (Halikowski-Smith 2011; Andaya 1995; Hespanha 2019).

The most charged colours of this palette correspond to Portuguese who abandoned their religion to become Muslims. These were men such as Fernão Rodrigues Caldeira, a renegade Portuguese resident in Masulipatnam and advisor to the Sultan of Golconda in the late sixteenth century (Subrahmanyam 1990, 132, 154). This phenomenon began early. In 1521, the anonymous interpreter of the first embassy of the Estado da Índia to the sultanate of Bengal encountered a Portuguese acquaintance in the city of Gaur. He was not able, however, to recognise him right away since this man—Martim Lucena—was wearing a “Moorish costume” on this occasion and looked “more like Mohammed than the mummy of him” (Bouchon and Thomaz 1988, 319). Lucena clearly personifies the challenges of identity-shifting that has concerned us in this chapter. It is clear that we could direct to him a challenging question that was asked in Shiraz (Iran) in September 1606 by an old Jew (who mastered the Portuguese language) to a Portuguese renegade from Goa: “My Friend: is your faith reflected in the language that you speak, or rather in the clothes that you wear?” (Amigo, vós credes como falais, ou credes como vestis?) (Serrão 1972, 118). Is a person’s identity defined by the language a person speaks—and by the community that embodies it—or by the customs that a person adopts, reflected in the clothes one wears?
CONCLUSION

The “Iberian stratum” in early modern Asia was simultaneously colonial, indigenous and “spontaneous”. In a few instances, especially in Goa and Manila, the imperial order emanating from the Iberian centre(s) was quite apparent. In many other cases the Portuguese and the Spanish were challenged by a wealth of dynamic societies stretching from the Swahili Coast to the South China Sea and found very little room for political domination and religious control; negotiation and dilution were the most frequent outcomes in these circumstances. What is more, this Iberian stratum—which was far from constituting a monolithic body—confronted but also interacted with several other Western groups, be they diasporic communities (Jews and Armenians), myriad European freelancers (the Italians, most notably), or especially agents of powerful trading companies like the VOC and the EIC. Needless to say, the Iberian stratum contributed markedly to the formation of intriguing social and ethnic puzzles throughout maritime Asia. As the authority of Lisbon and Madrid waned in the region from the late seventeenth century onwards, the local societies of Iberian extraction were to face serious difficulties but also rich transformations. This is however a different tale, one made of a different Asia (or many) and a different Europe.

ABBREVIATIONS

AGI Archivo General de Indias, Seville
BPE Biblioteca Pública de Évora

WORKS CITED


— Colonial societies in Asia —


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