

# **Identity Ambivalences of the Eurasian Macanese: Historical Dynamics, Political Regimes and Food Practices**

In *Lusotopie* 19(2): 263-284

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1163/17683084-12341760>

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## **Abstract**

This article focuses on the phenomenological experience of identity ambivalence arising from the Eurasian Macanese community through their phenomenological experience of identity ambivalence. Our thematic framework includes the structural impact of colonial and post-colonial political regimes in Macao, historical influences on contemporary identity and sociocultural expressions of creolisation. It is argued that the Macanese people illustrate the memory of the ambivalent encounter between the two extremities of the Eurasia (China and Portugal) which started in the 16th-c. and never ceased moving forces to the present day. Furthermore, in the context of fieldwork with the Macanese community in Portugal, an ethnographic approach helps reveal the ambivalent dynamics of similarities and differentiation with respect to food practices and commensality as expressed over dinner by a group of close friends in Lisbon.

**Key-words:** Eurasian Macanese; Identity Ambivalence; Sociocultural Creolisation; Decolonisation and Citizenship; Food and Commensality.

## **Ambivalences Identitaires du Macanais Euro-asiatiques: Dynamiques Historiques, Régimes Politiques et Pratiques Alimentaires**

### **Résumé**

Cet article présente une étude de cas des macanais euro-asiatiques – ethniquement et culturellement métissés – du point de vue de l'expérience phénoménologique résultant de leur identité ambivalente. Les questions traitées ici englobent les forces structurelles des régimes politiques coloniaux et post-coloniaux à Macao, les influences historiques sur les identités contemporaines et les expressions socioculturelles de la créolisation. On fait valoir que les macanais représentent la mémoire d'une rencontre ambivalente entre les deux extrémités de l'Eurasie (Chine et Portugal) qui depuis le XVI<sup>e</sup> s. jusqu'à nos jours n'ont jamais cessé de mesurer leurs forces. Dans le cadre d'une enquête de terrain menée auprès de la communauté macanaise au Portugal, l'approche ethnographique a aussi permis de révéler les dynamiques ambivalentes de similarité et de différence en matière de commensalité et de pratiques alimentaires exprimées par un groupe d'amis proches lors d'un dîner à Lisbonne.

**Mots-clefs:** Macanais Euro-asiatiques; Identité Ambivalent; Créolisation Socioculturelle; Décolonisation et Citoyenneté; Alimentation et Commensalité.

## **A Identidade Ambivalente dos Macaenses Euro-asiáticos: Dinâmicas Históricas, Regimes Políticos e Práticas Alimentares**

### **Resumo**

Este artigo analisa o estudo de caso dos macaenses euro-asiáticos – indivíduos étnica e culturalmente mestiços – do ponto de vista da experiência fenomenológica resultante da sua identidade ambivalente. As temáticas aqui exploradas abrangem as forças estruturais dos regimes políticos coloniais e pós-coloniais em Macau, as influências históricas sobre as identidades contemporâneas e as expressões socioculturais da crioulização desenvolvidas. É argumentado que os macaenses representam a memória de um encontro ambivalente entre os dois extremos da Eurásia, um processo com início no século XVI e que nunca parou de medir forças até aos dias de hoje. Adotou-se ainda uma perspetiva etnográfica para abordar o conjunto de dinâmicas ambivalentes de semelhança e diferença em relação às práticas alimentares e de comensalidade, expressas por um grupo de amigos íntimos no decorrer de um jantar em Lisboa.

**Palavras-chave:** Macaenses Euro-asiáticos; Identidade Ambivalente; Crioulização Sociocultural; Descolonização e Cidadania; Comida e Comensalidade.

## Introduction

Macao, for the last 20 years, a Special Administrative Region of People's Republic of China (MSAR) and a product of "one country, two systems" Chinese policy that had determined the end of Portuguese rule in the territory and the last colonial possession of Portugal. Macao's geostrategic location on south China coast was decisive for the Portuguese settlement and its association with the development of worldwide trading routes, the dissemination of Catholicism in East Asia and western knowledge of Chinese and Japanese cultures and languages. The major tangible statement of Macao's history and cultural legacy – the Ruins of St. Paul's, with its stone inscriptions of East and West religious and cultural symbols in the surviving façade of this former Jesuit church, was chosen as the symbol of Macao and as the most emblematic monument of its historic centre inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2005.

Over the course of centuries, Macao thus became a melting pot of people and sociocultural influences from across the Portuguese maritime empire. This prolonged contact gave rise to a minority "creole group" resulting from an initial, permanent state of mixing and fusion (Havik & Newitt 2015), and one of the most significant categories of ethnic and cultural identity in Macao – the Eurasian Macanese. As a product of Portuguese colonial history in Macao, this community is profoundly attached to the territory and these ties are explicitly recognized in the most common Portuguese and Chinese expressions used to refer to them: local offspring [*filhos da terra*] and soil-born Portuguese people [*tusheng puren*], respectively.

Similar to other Portuguese Eurasian communities (Cahen et al. 2000; Daus 1989; O'Neill 2000), the Macanese has derived from prolonged interethnic marriages mainly between Portuguese men with women from different Asian origins,

established in Macao since the 1500s. They also developed a creole culture (Pina-Cabral 2002) manifested in their traditions and customs, music and lifestyle that have inspired the emergence of strong identity markers, such as, an almost extinct creole language in Macao,<sup>1</sup> a “fusion cuisine” (Jackson 2004) and its associated commensality practices.<sup>2</sup> Adding the fact that, during colonial rule, most Macanese have remained Portuguese citizens and educated in Portuguese schools, while

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<sup>1</sup> The creole Patuá almost disappeared as a language of daily communication among the Eurasian Macanese. This fact was related to its association with a form of mangled Portuguese spoken by the popular classes and the fact that it was a language used at home, especially by women. Greater access to education and academic training, imparted in the official Portuguese language, meant greater opportunities to embark on careers as civil servants in the Portuguese administration of Macao and a progressive loss of their ancestral creole language throughout the centuries. Though, all my informants keep using the Patuá in song lyrics and recipes names and whenever they want to make fun of something or someone.

<sup>2</sup> Macanese culinary is inspired by traditional Portuguese cuisine, combining spices and ingredients from Africa, India, Japan, and a range of other countries from Southeast Asia with local Chinese ingredients and cooking style influences. This creole cuisine of Macao has remained mostly private and deeply associated with the different genealogical backgrounds of the families who cook it. In festive occasions, Macanese delicacies are served in the format of a *Chá Gordo* buffet, which consists in an early dinner served for a large number of guests and includes a variety of snacks, hot dishes (mainly meat dishes) and sweets all eaten together (Jorge 2004; Lopes 2007; Silva 2016).

simultaneously fluent speakers of Cantonese (the dominant Chinese spoken language in Macao) and deeply knowledgeable of local culture, allowed them to play a fundamental part as intermediaries for Chinese interests with the Portuguese administration (the two dominant groups of Macao's colonial society). Their professional occupations and social status were thus closely tied to the enclave's social context where ethnic group belonging was not imposed on Eurasians by the fact of their physical appearance, but was largely the outcome of personal options influenced by historical circumstances and political regimes, in contrast, for instance, to neighbouring Hong Kong, where Eurasians were clearly distinguished from the British (Lee 2004; Pina-Cabral 2002).

In keeping with Teng's argument on how Eurasian hybridity illuminates the notion of racial proximity between the East-West binary, i.e. the notion of being "not-white" but also "like-white" (2013: 12), I here maintain that Macanese identity formation embodies an ethnic and cultural hybridity condition structured around the same self-identification notions. Moreover, I argue that the Macanese have continuously learned how to perform ambivalent positionings as an intrinsic part of their identity manipulation and specific strategies for integration and differentiation, indispensable for the survival of the community itself and for the running of Macao's colonial model, which was based on the great contradiction: whilst remaining Chinese soil, Macao was ruled by the Portuguese.

This article purposes to analyse the ambivalent configurations of Macanese identity as they are experienced and produced by social actors through their actions and statements. Is the Macanese identity ambivalence contextually achieved through activities performed in the present, is it given as an essence automatically inherited from the past, or is it the product of current instrumental strategies of social

reproduction? These hypotheses will be addressed taking into account the empirical material collected from my ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Lisbon between 2010 and 2012 within a Macanese informal brotherhood of relatives, friends and former classmates from Macao high schools attended in the early 1960s, living in Portugal.<sup>3</sup> Since 2002, the group has been organizing events to bring together Macanese friends and relatives based in the country, to celebrate Catholic and Chinese festive dates and to offer homemade Macanese food – the only occasion to eat it outside home – when the party venue is the Macao House in Lisbon. All year long, other smaller reunions among close friends are also taking place in a regular basis and often around the table at one of their favourite Chinese restaurants. One of those meals, this time at a Portuguese traditional food restaurant, is further described to illustrate the ambivalent condition inherent to the Macanese considering individuals' food and commensality practices and its permanent redefinitions within the constraints of this specific social interaction.

## **1. Conceptualizing Ambivalence**

The literature conceptualises “ambivalence”, from the standpoint of an individual experience, as the coexistence of contradictory and mixed feelings or emotions stemming in part from countervailing expectations about appropriate single actions

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<sup>3</sup> The group consisted of about 50 members, aged between 55 and 72, with an average informant age of 63, who moved to the metropolitan Lisbon area in different periods between late 1960s and early 2000s. All names of persons and places used here are fictitious in order to preserve informants' anonymity.

(Smelser 1998; Weigert 1991). At a social level, it helps to explain people's inconsistencies and ambiguities in accordance with their social recognition rather than with their personal characteristics. Much of the concept's sociological application implies conflicting denotations and volatile experiences mostly treated as resulting from the contrasting social pressures exerted on social actors (Coser 1966; Merton 1976; Yair 2007).

Recent efforts to reformulate the existing conceptualisation of ambivalence have placed the emphasis on both social relations and individual agency as structurally created contradictions experienced by individuals' ambivalent condition in their interactions with others. Intergenerational family ties research points to the advances made in treating ambivalence as a "multilevel phenomenon that requires ongoing negotiation" (Connidis 2015: 91) in order to understand the intricate dynamics and contradictions of family life. In all formulations, transversal to extensive applications of the ambivalence concept, we may note the emphasis on its usage as an analytical tool embedded in a theoretical framework that allows us to deal with situations of manifest contradictions in which there is no observed correspondence between cultural assignments and shared actions. However, publications on ambivalence applied to ethnographic case studies are still scarce (exceptions for Gaspar 2015; Lyons 2004; Mitchell 2002), particularly considering actions as eating together within groups of people linked by long-term relationships.

In regard to postcolonial and ethnically diversified societies, ambivalence is associated with processes of creolization and reveals not only individuals' ties with colonial contexts implicit in the emergence of creole groups, but also their specific strategies of inclusion and exclusion and high degree of identity manipulation (Knörr 2014). Extending the ambivalence analysis to the evolutionary narrative of historical

continuity applied to the context of transient values and hierarchies in Macao will, therefore, help to apprehend how the Macanese identity ambivalence – as well as their linguistic ambivalence – reflects both the origin and the permanent redefinition of the community over time and in relation to social changes. Reproduced formally by political powers and social elites, ambivalence in Macao also exemplifies what Knörr called “national ideologies on unity” within the framework of postcolonial nation-building, i.e. different ethnic groups should now be able to transcend ethnic differences and embrace a national identity (2014: 37).

Considering food and commensality practices as strong sociocultural and ethnic identity markers (Anderson 2005; Augustin-Jean 2002; Brulotte & Di Giovine 2014; Goody 1982; Kerner et al. 2015; Kershen 2002; Sutton 2001), which may reflect ongoing individual attachments to different identities as well as to various social positionings within the same socioeconomic and political context (Chan 2010; Chapman & Beagan 2013), they constitute a privileged field for observing collective ambivalences such as those noticed during dinner with the Macanese. The event illustrates how, through the manifestation of contradictory attitudes and behaviours towards Portuguese food, the group developed a “dynamic situation of identification and differentiation” (Pina-Cabral 2010).<sup>4</sup> Throughout the meal we witnessed the

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<sup>4</sup> Pina-Cabral who also witnessed a similar situation which he describes as “extremely ambiguous and potentially dangerous but also, ultimately, rewarding” (2010: 176), focuses his discussion on the manipulation of the first-person plural in the Portuguese and Cantonese languages carried out by a Macanese police officer with whom, among other Portuguese and Chinese guests, he shared a meal in Macao.



ambivalent nature of the Macanese identity grounded in their: (a) undefinition, since they are neither ethnically nor culturally either Portuguese or Chinese; (b) control of both Portuguese and Cantonese languages; (c) “capital of Portuguese-ness” historically acquired (Pina-Cabral & Lourenço 1993); (d) new forms of affinities with Chinese culture; all four characteristics enabling the Macanese to have access and to live in both Portuguese and Chinese sociocultural worlds.

## **2. Eurasian Encounter in Macao**

Macao’s recent historiography has consecrated the “Macao formula” (Fok 1996) to explain the continued Portuguese presence in the territory. Despite the remaining lack of consensus among Portuguese and Chinese historians about any accurate version of Macao’s settlement, these oscillating between lease and donation of the land to Portuguese merchants who reached south China coast in the sixteenth century. The most accepted version is that of Beijing court strategy concerning its economic interests derived from customs duties on the products marketed in Macao, as well as, the Portuguese military defence of the region, repelling invaders, rebels and pirates (Loureiro 1999). The fact is, still today, Portuguese rule of Macao’s territory constitutes a topic of ongoing research. The process in every way resembles that of the Portuguese expansion itself, which was never monolithic and instead floated forwards in accordance with the existing currents and crosscurrents and the hegemonic trends of pressure groups. Surely it can be said that the Portuguese *modus operandi* differed from the other European powers who similarly established a presence in the Far East.

This differentiation was achieved by means of forms of economic, financial and political management based on a decentralized system that was already evident

in Macao early as mid-sixteenth century with the constitution of the Holy House of Mercy and the Municipal Council (Boxer 1965). These colonial institutions closely followed the pattern of institutions in Portugal but subsequently evolved and underwent changes. Brockey (2008) suggests that Portuguese colonial cities, from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century, as cultural and political spaces constituted and shared common bases to support missionary activities and serve as commercial entrepôts in a vast geographic area, enjoying considerable autonomy in relation to central Portuguese power, their particular characteristics and locations inevitably affected local forms of religion and trade that developed in each of these cities. In Macao, one of these distinctive aspects stemmed from a strategy of political and diplomatic relations, i.e. adapting different forms of integration reflected in local networks and in the use of prevailing local procedures (Boxer 1969).

The chronology of Macao is also punctuated by relevant political and social events, the most significant resulting of the collapse in the negotiating equilibrium between the Portuguese governing class and the Chinese elites, namely when the peculiar informal mediation concerning the governance of Macao disregarded Chinese interests in the territory. To mention two of these impactful events: the 1-2-3 Riot (1966/7) and other incidents that were part of the Chinese Cultural Revolution after which Portugal's capacity to govern independently was undermined and since then made by a system of complex negotiation with the mainland Chinese authorities; the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration concerning Macao's future, signed in 1987, which has determined the collaboration of both countries in the transition of Macao's sovereignty to the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the establishment of the MSAR on 20 December 1999. In the years leading up to the inevitable reintegration of Macao into China, the future of its citizens seemed to be uncertain; not only for the

Macanese, but even for the Chinese who, despite claiming sovereignty over the territory did not want to lose the benefits derived from the Portuguese administration (Morbey 1999).

Nevertheless, the political proposal of a self-governed region consistent with its singular historical and cultural identity softened the transition and successfully underpinned the “one country, two systems” Chinese formula. The two decades that preceded Macao’s handover were, surprisingly, a period of incomparable prosperity in the city. Deng Xiaoping’s reforms of opening up Chinese economy meant that Macao would be the destination of a wholly new emigrant population eager to make a living and of an increasingly wealthier growing number of mainland Chinese tourists visiting local casinos. Finally, the Portuguese investment in the full modernisation of Macao’s public services, helped the Macanese succeed in renovating their ethnic monopoly and reconstructing themselves as an “administrative elite” (Pina-Cabral & Lourenço 1993). The new Macanese generation that assumed powerful socioeconomic positions in this prosperous Macao, began to downplay their identification with the Portuguese culture and gradually started cultivating new forms of interculturality instilled by the official discourses (ibid.).

During the transition period a massive campaign was launched by the Portuguese government, with the support of Beijing, praising the “glorious past of Macao” and recreating the city as a product and symbol of tolerance and cooperation between Europeans and Asians. The Macanese becoming thus the living symbol *par excellence* of this hybridity, and the ultimate expression of continuous exchanges between both cultures. Clayton’s study (2009) on the practices of sovereignty operating in Macao during the 1990s, describes how the promotion of the future MSAR was grounded in the historical identity of the territory, branding it as a major

trade emporium and a meeting-point between East and West. Emphasis was placed on the 450 years of a Portuguese presence that knew how to recognize Macao as Chinese soil, with its specific civilizational structure, framed as the first and last location with the longest lasting relations between two countries. The author argues that Macao was displayed as an example of “harmony, tolerance and multiculturalism” that could only emerge due to the specific practice, operational throughout the Portuguese administration, of a “sort-of sovereignty”, meaning a shared sovereign power marked by flexibility, compromise and ambiguity, in the end, a mode of governance unique in the modern world (Clayton 2009: 51). This subjective form of power that articulates specific symbols of the history, culture, experiences and desires of the collective subject, she states, managed to create an extremely coherent vision of a new Macao, which appears as quite meaningful to the Macanese living in the city and to others based in the countries where diasporic communities have been formed. This was the case of my interlocutors, for whom, as expressed by Pedro (with dual residency in Portugal and Macao), “there were some fears after Macao was handed over to China, but since nothing happened, on the contrary, living standards really improved ... nowadays I feel even more Macanese”.

The Macanese diaspora, dispersed all over the world, founded institutions in many of their host countries to serve as places of gathering for Macanese culture and leisure activities. The foundation of most Macao houses [*Casas*] also occurred through Macao’s transition period in the 1980s and 1990s, exception for the *Club Lusitano* that opened its doors over 150 years ago when the Macanese first started to migrate to neighbouring Hong Kong. Outside Asia, the oldest association was founded in 1959 in the USA, one of the most popular destinations for Macanese emigration in the years following the Second World War (Dias 2014). In 1993, the

meetings [*Encontros*] of Macanese communities had their first edition and the commitment to keep going taking place every three years was assumed. Called by my informants as the “pilgrimage to Macao”, since they have been attending all events, the *Encontros* started out as a partnership made by the Portuguese government to local Macanese associations and to the official *Casas* dotted across four continents. These combined efforts encouraged members of the different *Casas* to participate in the meetings and continue to return to Macao, for many of them, after decades of absence. Since the *Encontros* were launched many emigrants have been able to, on the one hand, strengthen their roots and links with the city’s new economic and political developments and, on the other hand, reactivate social and friendship networks and kinship ties. In the words of João, member of the Portugal’s *Casa*:

... the Portuguese administration helped create a habit of the *Encontros*, providing logistical support and some subsidies that helped reduce the cost of flights to Macao. This allowed many Macanese, absent from Macao for many decades, to return to their homeland ... I found there my schoolmates and even some family members whom I had not seen for 30 years.

The political powers of the MSAR have remained committed in supporting these Macanese gatherings and, since 1999, seven more events were hosted to promote participants’ closer bonds within themselves and with a collective memory of Macao as the homeland of Macanese people. This process of linking the homeland with diasporic communities, something that Darieva (2011) called “creative

cosmopolitanism”, is meant to constitute a new motivating force that can renew diaspora identifications and connections among second and third generations.

### **2.1. *Decolonization and Citizenship***

In order to advance further in my historical analysis, I draw attention to certain social structures and processes that serve as vehicles for the expression, for the exercise and for the never achieved resolution of public ambivalences. Among these feature the political organisations and the executive powers, capable of investing opportunities for converting feelings of ambivalence into single preferences and, somehow, delegitimising the ambivalence implicit in these acts.

Taking for example the PRC nationality law resolution proclaimed on 29 December 1998 applied to permanent residents of the MSAR from 20 December 1999 onward and considering the “historic backdrop and current context in Macao”, it was proposed that all people born in Macao ethnically Chinese would be, by rule, eligible for Chinese citizenship without losing either their foreign Portuguese passports or their full rights as permanent residents. The holders of Portuguese ID documents, the law determines, can use them outside China and Macao, however within the limits of the national territory, who is ethnically Chinese cannot identify him/herself as Portuguese citizen. Omissions were made for Macao-born inhabitants of Chinese and Portuguese descent with Portuguese nationality – where Eurasian Macanese can be included, or at least a substantial number of them, although the term is never mentioned in the law – who were required to decide between Portuguese or Chinese nationalities without losing their rights as MSAR citizens. This measure would have represented the solution found by the Chinese authorities to resolve the ongoing negotiations disputes with Portugal around the nationality of

Macao residents with Portuguese identity documents (130,000 out of a universe of 355,000 inhabitants) who decided to remain in Macao after its return to China.

Nevertheless, as Clayton (2009) pointed out, critical reactions to this concession in the nationality law applied to MSAR residents emerged from both sides of the fence. Chinese-language newspapers in Macao, at that time, reported severe criticism towards Beijing government for adopting a “bland and even generous law” regarding the Eurasian Macanese who, during the long history of Portuguese rule in Macao, were frequently associated both with the colonial regime and its racial discrimination and intolerance in relation to the Chinese community. From the Macanese side, citizenship decision-making was felt by many as an attempt to erase everything they represented, such as the legacy of a permanent Portuguese presence in Macao in all its existence: whether genetic, educational, linguistic, religious, cultural or merely by the use of Portuguese names. In their understanding, the central government was imposing the recognition of *local offspring* either as foreigners in their own homeland, rejecting their access to an active political participation, or as like any other national citizen, if they decided to apply for Chinese nationality, erasing all their secular existence in Macao (2009: 121-129). Reference was also made to the exclusion, in this classification, of those Macao-born residents who consider themselves and are commonly identified as Macanese, even though, they have no Portuguese ancestry.

The nationalisation process for Macanese who decided to continue their lives in the MSAR<sup>5</sup> thus became a critical moment in the period of negotiations and

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<sup>5</sup> Statistical data on the years of 1991 and 2011, shows the resident population in a minority distributed according to such ancestry: Chinese and Portuguese; Chinese

preparations for the handover of Macao. It gave rise to prolonged discussions between Chinese and Portuguese authorities and, outside the arena of the formal negotiations, within the Macanese elite, since the Chinese negotiators had stipulated that representatives of Macao society would not participate in the negotiations and this principle was always upheld (Mendes 2013). While the PRC's decision allowed the Macanese the choice of obtaining another nationality it also serve to underscore the identity ambivalence of the Macanese by enabling them to disavow a legitimate adoption of Chinese citizenship, not for reasons of blood or belonging to the land but due to the nature and the legacy of the Portuguese presence in Macao, of which they were an integral part. It is this ambivalent potential of the Macanese – someone who can opt and choose, who have the freedom to make decisions, but are subjected to a vigilant and distrustful exam because their adhesion has been compromised from the outset – that was underscored in this political attempt to overcome ambivalence and promote uniformity in Macao society. It is now understandable how the implementation of China's citizenship resolution sought to redefine, neutralize and pacify hitherto paradoxical situations and resolve public ambivalence. We can actually draw a parallelism concerning the standardisation of MSAR-born inhabitants implicit in the PRC nationality law, and the process of constructing a unique identity

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and non-Portuguese; Portuguese and others. Eurasian Macanese could fit in any of these categories which collectively add up to a number of between 5,000 to 6,000 individuals, without any significant variations regarding the numbers of Macanese living in Macao before and after 1999. Available from: <https://www.dsec.gov.mo/Statistic.aspx?NodeGuid=3c3f3a28-9661-4a5f-b876-83d8b3eade28>. Accessed 18 January 2019.



for Macao. Just as the law contemplates individuals of Chinese descent as Chinese nationals (even when blending Chinese and Portuguese ethnicities and/or holding Portuguese identity documents), so does the political hegemonies set out to incite in Macao heterogeneous society some homogenised and shared identity by suppressing ethnic differences and embracing the identification of all as national citizens (Zandonai 2019).

Macao's sovereignty model highlights how, within the same framework of Bauman's argument, the duty of resolving ambivalence falls upon the people who are in the ambivalent situation. This is true even when the phenomenon is socially structured and the status of being "strange" is assumed, bringing with it "its attendant ambiguity, with all its burdensome over and under-definition, carries attributes which in the end are constructed, sustained and deployed with the active participation of their carriers: in the psychological process of self-constitution" (Bauman 1991: 75).

### **3. Macanese Identity Statements**

The nationality law of PRC applied to permanent residents of the MSAR after the handover, as mentioned, proved to be a fraught process for the Macanese. The concept of nationality contained in the Macanese self-definitions quickly extends beyond a mere juridical and political status of being a Portuguese citizen. Rather, their identity documents provide a symbolic bond with Portugal endowed by their narrative of origins, by their Portuguese language and education or Catholic religion. All these aspects are assumed as the link that unites and partly defines the Macanese both before and after the end of Portuguese rule in the territory.

Who is the Macanese? What does it mean to be Macanese? Questions like these have emerged within the community in the wake of Macao's handover to China

and gained public dimension. These were also inevitable questions to ask my interlocutors and, it must be stressed, however much is shared among themselves, their answers proved that there is no unanimity of opinions or interests regarding how each one feels as part of the same Macanese “imagined community” (Anderson 2006 [1983]). Macanese self-identifications subjectivity is largely the result of both personal preferences and collective belonging to an open-ended group of people with whom they feel connected and share, in part, the same interests. The excerpts from the interviews that follow, show that informant’s identity statements are associated with sociocultural identifications encapsulated by notions of cultural dispositions that can be traced in family trajectories and social strategies. Paulo’s testimony illustrates how personal options can be framed, for instance, by a Catholic and Portuguese education that allowed him to maximize his job opportunities in Macao.

I am a Macanese person, born and raised in Macao ... My father was a Chinese man adopted and raised by a lady, sister of a priest in Macao. He was educated in the Catholic culture and in the Portuguese language from birth ... he worked for the Portuguese government of Macao ... The same happened to me, until the day I chose to be integrated into Portugal’s public sector and come to live here.

Another example are individuals just like Vitória, who are considered by everyone and by themselves to be Macanese, despite the fact that they are not the result of intermarriages between Portuguese and Asians. However, she attended Portuguese schools, grew-up with many Macanese and developed social interactions based on

networks of crisscrossing links of long-term interpersonal identification that link people and families together.

My dad was from a family originated in Ecuador ... and my maternal grandparents were all Chinese. I can't say I am a Luso-descendant person, but I am Macanese! I was born in Macao, I studied at Portuguese schools and all my friends are Macanese.

In my informants' answers we can notice how they approached the questions from the point of view of the place of birth, followed by education and professional occupations, all three items being appointed as strongly linked to Macanese identification. In Macao's late colonial period the Macanese, educated in Portuguese schools and universities and with a broad everyday life context on the Cantonese culture and language, succeeded in occupying the intermediary positions within the public sectors and in liberal professions, allowing them to reconstruct the Macanese community as an "administrative elite" (Pina-Cabral & Lourenço 1993). This was most the case of the so-called traditional families, whose members have achieved a higher level of education and/or political and economic leadership positions. Anabela identifies herself as descendent of one of these families, which she describes as rooted in a historical illustrious Portuguese ancestor and in the social prestige of family's succeeding generations.

Certainly, since the beginning of the seventeenth century that there are Jorge [surname] in Macao ... There have always been family members connected to

the government and to the Municipal Council [Leal Senado], they were judges and lawyers ... also people holding positions in the Holy House of Mercy.

Tina, in turn, sought to demarcate the Macanese from the Portuguese through the profound ties and roots to Macao that, according to her, only possible for someone who was born and lived in Macao for most of their life.

... due to having lived in Macao, incorporated a way of living that is not part of them ... these are the Portuguese from here and they have no roots there ... Macao is my homeland, those are my roots ... I and all of Macanese have always considered ourselves to be Portuguese and we have always been Portuguese citizens, but we are different from the Portuguese here.

The deep links to the territory and to the history of Macao, materialized in the notion of land-born, are feelings emphatically manifested by the Macanese when it comes to self-identifications. Alberto defines these emotions as "... so strong that no one can understand the Macanese without understand his/her attachment to the land ... Macao is the beginning and is the end".

Among my interlocutors there is also a consensus that "the Macanese are something more". This "more" is then defined as a reference to a certain ancestry, and mostly, to a lifestyle that follows certain sociocultural practices – such as food and commensality – something that Herzfeld (1997) named "cultural intimacy" of group self-knowledge and self-display. Mena states it clearly:

To feel like a Macanese is not only because we were born in Macao nor by having mixed blood and mixed appearance, nor because of our Portuguese ancestors. Well ... all of that is quite important to define us but more important is to live like a Macanese ... We have our own traditions and customs ... one of the strongest is definitely eating together.

### **3.1. *Around the table***

Attending Macanese events made it clear how the act of eating together is mandatory and expresses bonds of solidarity, alliance and complicity among the participants that are linked together by friendship or familial relations of long-term acquaintance. Over a year since the beginning of my fieldwork with the Macanese community and there I was taking part of that special occasion: eating with a restricted group of thirteen close friends at the welcome dinner for Francisco that had just arrived from Macao.

Francisco descends from one of the most renowned traditional Macanese families. Like his father, he graduated from a Portuguese university and has succeeded professionally as a lawyer in Macao. He is also the leader of three Macanese associations that represent the most visible expression of this small community in Macao. Francisco's visits to Lisbon are always awaited with great expectation in keeping with his role as a leading figure within the Macanese based in Macao and in the diaspora. Once the date was set up, Vitória was in charge of booking the venue and inviting the guests for dinner. Vitória is one of the many nostalgic Macanese who left their hometown, family and friends at a very young age and is certainly among the most active people in promoting Macanese togetherness in Portugal. She was my host within the Macanese community in Lisbon since I

started my research and in this particular occasion, she asked me to choose the restaurant where we would meet Francisco.

To welcome the guest, I thought it would be apt to suggest a restaurant serving traditional Portuguese food. Vitória agreed and quickly booked a table at the Repasto das Flores. On that summer evening in August 2011, all the guests arrived early at the venue excited to meet Francisco and competing for his attention with questions about Macao and their folks. The crisscrossed conversations, as it used to happen whenever the Macanese got together, were simultaneously in Portuguese and Cantonese languages and, here and there, it was possible to hear Patuá expressions followed by many peals of laughter. Once the assembled was gathered, we were invited to sit around a rectangular table, a commensality format that I never had experienced in previous meals with the Macanese those usually adopting a free style buffet or sitting at round tables. The individual selection of dishes by the diners exposed their embarrassment when they had to decide what to eat and then, even so, ignoring the immediate suggestion launched by Vitória on ordering and sharing different main courses. Each diner eventually chose their own food, mostly from the fish menu, converging to grilled horse mackerel and sardines or salted codfish [*bacalhau*] cooked according to different recipes. Once served, the food was being tasted in a cautious manner and in very small portions and some people reacted to the flavours by saying that food was not very familiar, without much taste or undercooked. Praise for the dishes was only incipient or non-existent in marked contrast to the flattering comments poured out on Macanese culinary or on Cantonese delicacies, which I heard throughout my year fieldwork and in every commensal event with the Macanese. The awkward situation that evening at the Portuguese restaurant made me realize the absence of Portuguese food on the

Macanese gastronomic scene; I had never had until then a Portuguese culinary meal with the Macanese. Another behaviour experienced during dinner was the way food would randomly circulate from one person to another with this practice differentiating itself from the previous intention and, in fact, resembling the type of manners that I usually observed in the course of Macanese or Chinese food meals with my interlocutors.

Some days after, I find myself meeting Francisco on his own and again for a meal, this time at the Ta Pin Lou Chinese restaurant. As the lunch evolves, Francisco weaves the following comment:

We have no doubts that our culture is a mixture, in fact, we insist that Macao is a fusion. In its origin is a very ancestral Portuguese aspect ... but we also have a lot of Cantonese and its influence is extremely important in Macanese culture. Look – Chinese food – we can't live without it ... Orientalism is part of Macanese culture and is inseparable from our community... Most of us have Portuguese nationalities, Portuguese names, we speak Portuguese. This has nothing to do with genetic inheritance, it is a feeling of belonging. The Macanese community inherits from the two worlds and transforms these elements into something only ours.

This remark came from a need that my informant seemed to have over explaining dinner's manifestations about Portuguese food that was expressed in contradictory, sometimes equivocal, ways as the commensals sought to deal with it. To hear his explanation, I would say that the informant availed himself of the very notion of

ambivalence inherent to the Macanese condition in order to present a plausible justification for individuals' successive paradoxical actions.

The argument developed by Francisco thus reveals the Macanese association with a certain Portuguese-ness that was the legacy of a distant past in Macao's history, which gave rise to the community. Nevertheless, it also clarifies that in their daily social lives the Macanese are closer to the "orientalism" of Macao either due the attachment to their homeland and because of the idea that they all share a part of that culture by enjoying Chinese food and mastering Cantonese language, in the end, by coexisting with it for centuries in the same narrow territory. This explanation claims that the Macanese space is derived from legacies inherited from both these worlds, which the Macanese transform into something new and unique. I borrow Bhabha's thought to analyse the so stated Macanese cultural positionality as a phenomenon that emerges in a "third space of enunciation" (1994: 37), a contradictory and ambivalent space that effectively witnesses the production of imagined "constructions" of identity. The author suggests that identity (cultural or national) is always hybrid, unstable, ambivalent and negotiated between the private interests and the public meanings ascribed to it in a given historical period.

#### **4. Ambivalence and Social Reproduction**

The Macanese ambivalence towards food attitudes and table etiquette, described above, enabled witnessing a series of interchanges showcased by the complicity within the group emerging from the recognition of their own strategic actions of integration and differentiation. Social actors' performance enlightened how they systematically relied on the manipulation of their ethnicity and of their sociocultural



practical knowledge in relation to the circumstances they faced and the reactions of those involved in the same social interaction.

In terms of their biography, the Macanese result from processes of creolization suggestive of long-term miscegenation and simultaneously living experiences in both Chinese and Portuguese cultural and linguistic historical dominant universes (but not exclusively), and these are the basis for their self-constitution and identity ambivalence. The role of “identity ambivalent” the Macanese play needs learning and acquiring knowledge and practical skills. While on the one hand the freedom it offers can give rise to a feeling of profound uncertainty among such individuals and being eternally condemned to not belonging completely to either of these worlds, on the other hand, it is valued as being evident and inevitable, further reinforcing their demarcation from non-Macanese and legitimising the Macanese ethnicity, ensuring the community can avail itself of various political or economic benefits and of public recognition.

The history of the Macanese – someone who finds him/herself straddling different hegemonies – represents the memory of an ambivalent Eurasian encounter launched in the sixteenth century that has been to this day in permanent revalidation with all the complexity and, apparently, contradictory identification processes this entails. By this I mean, Macanese relations to the Portuguese and to the Chinese have always been defined by inconstancy: the Macanese cultivating an identity (and linguistic) proximity, sometimes with Portuguese-ness, sometimes with Chinese-ness. Moreover, when asked about who they are, Macanese responses are, as we have argued, based on subjective personal choices with sufficient margin to switch direction to another identification target. Yet, as it was also noticed, the Macanese ethnicity has been structured around strong identifier elements such as food and

eating practices, language, education, professional strategy, citizenship and a strong sense of belonging to Macao.

The PRC citizenship applied to local population after Macao's sovereignty transition to China, sought to reveal national ideologies of unity within the postcolonial identity-building framework. In this context emerges an implicit ambivalence regarding Chinese citizenship applied to Macao-born residents, especially to the ethnically mixed Macanese. As mentioned, the required decision-making from the Macanese within this context resulted in the lack of unanimity of views or of interests amongst them. To the Macanese, China's nationality law enforcement became even more delicate because of their relative freedom to make individual decisions that consequently increases their identity ambivalence.

While this aspect may also be reflected in the ambiguous nature of any ethnic group, my argument is that in the Macanese case the ambivalence is fuelled by the plurality of opinions concerning how individuals imagine themselves as making part of this particular community, albeit the strong sociocultural elements that binding members together. Likewise, new practices related to identity discourses based on the Macanese interculturality value have achieved extra importance in Macao's postcolonial context. These practices have to do with the first time ever made applications to intangible cultural heritage of two Macanese community cultural manifestations: traditional culinary arts and the Patuá theatre in creole language. Candidacies were held by Macanese local associations and the heritage safeguarding entities that managed to see both items recognized as heritage of Macao in 2012 by local and central governments (Gaspar 2015: 142-158).

Over the course of its history, Macao has been a crossroads of political-economic systems and emigrant communities that allowed the development of a

creole culture in the territory. It is also this concrete interpretation of history that aims to make Macao a unique place in China and empowers political actors in appealing to feelings of belonging and pride to be Macao residents. In nowadays' wealthiest gambling enclave in the world and one of the cities with the highest economic growth, Macao is reinterpreted as a Chinese destination with a cultural and linguistic legacy and a historical background of contact between the two extremes of the Eurasia continent (Goody 2010). Linking the past with the future converges fully in favour of a marketing strategy which frames Macao as a worldwide tourism centre. In the big picture, the fabrication of Macao's image as a linking platform of cooperation between the East and the West, China and the Lusophone world, totally converges in favour of the Chinese "belt and road" initiative of global economic development through the establishment of strategic business partnerships with European and Portuguese-speaking countries.

### **Conclusion**

The Macanese are nowadays discussing the maintenance and survival of their identity in live debates and on Internet social networks. Despite the plurality of opinions within the group, there is a new coming together of common interests striving for the alliance of the Macanese around practical causes like the safeguarding of the community's intangible cultural heritage. Major changes in the postcolonial Macao living conditions have motivated reflections about the future role the Macanese community should be playing both inside and outside Macao. Adaptation to these new circumstances, rather than threatening the existence of their identity, might represent an opportunity for their symbolic legitimacy at a time when the vaunted East-West multiculturalism of Macao is being openly crowned by

success and singularity. Representing this particular vision of the history of Macao, and confusing themselves with it, the Macanese have repositioned themselves ethnically, culturally and linguistically in the context of the MSAR as the community structural configuration takes on new shapes with the youngsters replacing their elder peers.

In this article, on the identity ambivalence of the Eurasian Macanese, it was also described a gathering of a small group of friends who shared a meal to welcome a community prominent figure in visit to Lisbon. Like many other reunions of commensality attended during my ethnographic fieldwork with the Macanese in Portugal, the meal has also proved that sharing food and eating together with people closely linked by personal and kinship ties of long-term interpersonal identification constitute privileged spaces of collective identity statements. The selection of this particular episode due to its unusual and unprecedented configurations, aimed to highlight social actors' identity ambivalence manifested over dinner with a restricted number of Macanese friends in a Portuguese culinary restaurant. The social interaction of those involved created a dynamic sequence of identifications and differentiations within the group and revealed the participants' individual and collective ongoing choices for convergence or demarcations regarding food appreciation and table manners. Likewise, it has exposed commensals' constant (but not necessarily intentional) manipulation of their ethnic attributes and sociocultural knowledge acquired throughout their lifetime in Macao crisscrossed cultural and linguistic worlds.

The fact that the Macanese are not, both ethnically and culturally, either Portuguese or Chinese, despite displaying considerable characteristics that might allow them to be identified as either, coupled with the lack of consensus and the plurality of opinions about how each one imagines themselves as members of the

Macanese community, reinforce their necessary identity ambivalence. Here, the ambivalence places emphasis on Macanese self-identification narratives grounded on the intricacy of their genealogical and historical backgrounds. Additionally, it was discussed how political powers can convert the ambivalence of social actors into single acts and exclusive preferences by handing down a national policy based on an ideology of unification. An example would be if a single identity project was imposed on the cultural and linguistic diversity that has always been part of Macao's society, signs of which were reflected in the effort to standardize citizens of both Chinese and Portuguese descent as Chinese nationals even when they apparently had the right to choose their own citizenship. Despite the legal resolution enabling the Macanese to become Chinese, China's nationality law applied to the MSAR caught them in a paradox of potentiality that ended up reinforcing the Macanese creole character and their inevitable identity ambivalence.

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### **Acknowledgments**

This work was supported by FCT, I.P., the Portuguese National Funding Agency for Science, Research and Technology under the Project [UID/SOC/04521/2019] and had also the support of the individual Postdoctoral Fellowship [SFRH/BPD/118787/2016]. Special thanks to Daniel Seabra Lopes, Inês Faria, João Galo, José Luís Sales Marques, Luís Fazendeiro, Nuno Domingos and Brian O’Neill, who commented on earlier versions of my manuscript.