

# Macanese Family Genealogies

## Memories and Identities

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Today, what remains of that old Macao so full of personality, with its large stately homes perched over large gardens shaded by vetusts leafy trees, some of which, in the summer, covered up in flowers, especially the *flames of the forest* and the *frangipanes*, of such sweet perfume? Uncharacteristic, the city is buzzing, although, like any other big metropolis, stacked in a small space, with a fever of living, that only gold and pleasure manage to foster.

Ana Maria Amaro, *Das Cabanas de Palha às Torres de Betão*.

Badaraco family. New Year's Eve in 1954.



Much has been written about the rich history of Macao but less attention has been given to its equally fascinating present. Macao today is a place where sociocultural change is observable on a daily basis. Learning more about this city and its inhabitants is increasingly urgent.

On 20 December 1999, Macao was handed over to Chinese administration under the ‘one country, two systems’ policy, after which it became a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China (Macao SAR). The Luso-Chinese Joint Declaration concerning Macao’s future, signed in 1987, initiated the negotiation process between the Portuguese and Chinese authorities, marked by close collaboration and a smooth transition of the longest-lasting overseas territory under Portuguese rule. Based on that document and in much the same way as nearby Hong Kong, the Macao SAR was constituted as a region with a high degree of political autonomy, with a local government and its own law (Macao Basic Law), that provides for 50 years to the come the maintenance of the same economic, legal, social, and cultural systems operating during the Portuguese administration, including Portuguese as the second official language of Macao.

Ever since its establishment by Portuguese merchants during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the city of Macao, strategically located on the south-east coast of China to the west of the Pearl River Delta, has been associated with the development of world-wide trading routes, and was a point of intersection between many different interests, peoples, religions and cultures. Macao was the major *entrepôt* for trade between China, Japan, India and Europe for almost a century (1543-1639) before the Dutch and the British took over the Portuguese

trading routes and Macao was gradually replaced by Hong Kong when it come under British rule. Macao was also the centre for Catholic missionary activities in China and Japan, and in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the first church and college of the Jesuits in China was built here. The surviving façade of St. Paul’s church bears testimony to Macao’s great importance in the history of the dissemination of Catholicism, and of Western knowledge of Chinese and Japanese cultures and languages. This imposing stone façade designed by an Italian Jesuit with the assistance of Catholic Japanese refugees in Macao, with its biblical quotations in Chinese and missionary saints’ statues, is today represented as the symbol of the city and constitutes the principal World Heritage touristic attraction of the Macao SAR.

Despite the important achievement for Macao’s heritage in having been recognised by UNESCO, the exponential economic growth of Macao was due to liberalisation of the gaming industry in 2002, and Macao’s subsequent conversion into the gaming capital of the world. The history of gaming in Macao is as old as its foundation and, from the beginning, is related with the fact that Macao is the only place in China where gambling is legal. This recent unprecedented success is primarily due to China’s more flexible procedures in granting individual tourist visas since 2005, the encouragement of pro-gambling policies by the local government, ample foreign investment, and the millions of tourists, mostly from mainland China, who visit Macao. As well as the promotion of its historic streets and residential areas, and its Portuguese and Chinese buildings classified as World Heritage in 2005, Macao is also promoted as a modern World Centre of Tourism and Leisure.

In Macao’s current post-transition period of sovereignty and power, and following the recent establishment of the Macao SAR, I tried to understand how Eurasian Macanese (individuals and community), historically associated with the Portuguese colonial project in Macao, have been reacting— in their multiple positionalities between ‘themselves’ and ‘the others’—to the profound impact that this major change has had on their group dynamics.

The question of origins is a central theme to building any ethnic identity, since it involves not only defining the group as such compared to other groups, but also the cultural definitions that each member of the

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group defines individually. The confrontation between different definitions of identity tends to weaken the strength of evidence and therefore the legitimacy of each alternative, meaning that in a multi-ethnic and a multicultural context like Macao, the issue of origins is more emphatic, and generally, contains a considerable emotional content. Memory scholars such as Bloch (1998) or Sperber (1985) emphasise, precisely, that all narratives about the past should be understood considering the ‘character’ of the society in which they have been currently narrated, as well as the effect that the construction of the subject and the nature of the kinship system have on these narratives.

My purpose in this paper is to analyse the particular configurations of Macanese identity as they are experienced and produced by people and families through their memories. Is the Macanese identity contextually achieved through activities performed in the present, or is it given as an essence automatically inherited from the past, or is it the product of instrumental strategies of social reproduction? How can the study of biographical and collective memories contribute to an understanding of the Macanese phenomenon, and what can this relation tell us about the process of ethnic and cultural Macanese identity?

THE MACANESE [*MACAENSES*]

Macao is a complex space, both from a historical and a present-day perspective. It is a border town dependent on the balance between different political forces, and has undergone great transformations over the past decades. Its place in the future is uncertain, but it would seem that the political powers involved in drawing up this future have had the foresight and imagination to predict that Macao will continue its life as a crossroad of cultures, of societies and of economic systems. Macao also has been a melting pot of people and sociocultural traditions from Portugal and China, but also from Southeast Asia, and has played a central role in the history of this contact by acting as a gateway between them.

The product of this long period of contact gave rise to one of the most significant categories of ethnic and cultural identity in Macao—the Macanese [*Macaenses*]. The very nature of Macanese identity has been marked by a certain degree of ambivalence: the Macanese community is not only the product of processes of

inclusion and exclusion that developed in time in relation to the external conditions motivating people’s interests; its boundaries have also remained undefined and diffuse, lying between distinct social universes.

The Macanese emerged out of complex and prolonged biological and sociocultural blending of Europeans (mainly Portuguese men) and Asian women (mostly Malay, Chinese, Indian, Japanese and Timorese), settled in Macao since the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards. This gave rise to a Eurasian physical appearance and, even though they remained Portuguese and Catholic, they created a life style that had a distinctive identity. This has inspired the development of a series of seemingly ‘mixed’ sociocultural markers such as a local language—the *Patuá*, a specific style of ‘fusion cuisine’, and a traditional outlook on the economic and social conditions that constituted their

Badaraco family in the 50s.



long-term environment. Another characteristic of the Macanese people is that they tend to be fluent in both Portuguese and Cantonese local language, but literate only in Portuguese.

Although the large numerical majority of the population is ethnically Chinese, the Macanese are deeply associated with Macao’s identity and history. These links are explicitly acknowledged in the Portuguese term most commonly used to refer to them: *filhos da terra*, or children of the soil or, *tou-saang pouh-gwok-yahn* or soil-born Portuguese, in the Cantonese language. The Macanese, living in relative isolation from mainland Portugal from the late 1500s to the 1800s developed, as has been said, a local Creole culture by the integration of a series of influences that reached them from the whole of the maritime world of Eastern Asia, providing them with their own lifestyle, their own traditions, their own language and cuisine, and their own professional occupations traditionally associated with local government. In the relatively frequent moments of economic stagnation, the reliance of the community on its ethnic monopoly and on its central role as intermediaries for Chinese interests with the Portuguese administration was always essential for its survival in Macao. However, in a tiny and politically unstable place such as Macao, and with a limited number of job vacancies, a Macanese diaspora began to form already in 1842 (Montalto de Jesus 1990 [1902]), with many Macanese moving to Hong Kong first, and later to Portugal, Brazil, Western Canada, Australia, and the San Francisco Bay area. A realistic estimate would suggest that today there are no more than 7,000 Macanese living in the Macao SAR, which is around 1.6 per cent of the total population (Morbey, 1990), when it is estimated that the number of Macanese settled in other parts of the world is around 150,000 individuals (Xavier, 2013). There is also a constant flux of families between Macao and the areas where the Macanese diaspora has been formed, giving the Macanese community a transnational character.

The Macanese Creole community always allow for a wider margin of ambiguity, where ethnic group belonging is not externally imposed on Eurasians by the fact of their physical look but is largely the result of personal identity options. Portuguese dispositions towards ‘racial’ matters have always differed considerably from those that characterised the

British Empire in its heyday. For this reason it is still important today to draw a clear distinction between ethnic relations in Hong Kong and in Macao. As old Macanese people say: ‘A Portuguese *mestiço* was called Portuguese. An English *mestiço* was called half-caste’ (Pina-Cabral, 2002, p. 22).

This explains why until 1970s, it was common in Hong Kong to distinguish clearly between Europeans, Eurasians and Portuguese. The latter category comprised mainly the offspring of Macanese families and resulted from centuries of cross-ethnic intermarriage (Boxer, 1967 [1963], 1992 [1969]). From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century on, nevertheless, the Portuguese colonial administration was progressively installed and the Macanese, in order to retain their privileges that distinguished them from the Chinese community, had to downplay their Creole culture, and integrate into mainstream Portuguese culture. Thus, their Creole language first became a domestic language and then disappeared altogether in less than a century. Their cuisine, one of the oldest ‘fusion cuisines’ in the world (Jackson, 2004), only survived within some families and is prepared and consumed merely on special occasions.

Since the ‘Macanesation of Macao’s Administration’ policy [*Macaização dos Quadros*] implemented since the governorship of Garcia Leandro (1974-1979) and, with the passing of the years, particularly during the government of Carlos Melancia (1987-1990), Macanese people assumed a growing number of leadership positions in the Administration (previously mainly occupied by the Portuguese), the Municipality and in liberal professions, and played a central role as intermediaries for Chinese interests with the Administration as lawyers, solicitors, secretaries, etc. This control of the State apparatus has given the Macanese a position of social and economic security that distinguished them from the other local community, the Chinese. As such, association with the Portuguese Administration has been a central tenet of Macanese ethnic interests.

The fate of the Macanese has always been inseparable from the basic and original contradiction that lies at the heart of Macao’s social and political life: the fact that, whilst remaining Chinese, Macao was a territory administered by the Portuguese with its specific practice of what Clayton calls a ‘sort-of sovereignty’ (2009, p. 51). This means that, although the Macanese hold Portuguese citizenship



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within the territory, they have twice lost their rights of sovereignty, both at the time of the ‘1, 2, 3’ (1966/1967) incident related to the Chinese Cultural Revolution that had established the People’s Republic of China’s overlordship, and later, with the military coup which took place on 25 April 1974 in Portugal, when the Portuguese democratic authorities declared that Macao was ‘a Chinese territory administered by Portugal’ (1976 Portuguese Republic’s Constitution). In the Luso-Chinese Joint Declaration concerning Macao’s future (1987) it became evident that the balance of forces had changed considerably. The Macanese started preparing themselves for living in a region run directly by a Chinese Administration under the ‘one country, two systems’ policy. From then onwards, the Portuguese and Chinese authorities started collaborating closely to organise a smooth transition to a Special Administrative Region of People’s Republic of China in December 1999.

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Surprisingly, the years before Macao’s handover were a period of incomparable prosperity in the city. Deng Xiaoping’s policies of opening up the Chinese economy, the growing number of Chinese visiting Macao’s casinos, and finally, the Portuguese investment in a full modernisation of the city’s administration, helped the Macanese succeed in renovating their ethnic monopoly and reconstructing themselves as an ‘administrative elite’ in Macao (Pina-Cabral 2000, 2002). The new Macanese generation that had come into power in the newly prosperous Macao diminished its identification with Portuguese culture and started

cultivating Macao’s unique new discourse of identity. In fact, during the pre-transition period, a massive campaign was launched by the two states—the Portuguese and the Chinese—praising the ‘glorious past’ of Macao and recreating Macao as a ‘unique place’ in China, a product and symbol of the cooperation and cultural sharing between ‘the East and the West’. Part of the evidence is heritage promotion through institutions such as museums, folklore societies and other educational establishments, which are playing a formative role in the Macao SAR’s nation-building process.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

My Ph.D. long-term fieldwork was conducted from March 2010 to September 2011 within a restricted number of Macanese families, the Food and Drink Party [*O Partido dos Comes e Bebes—PCB*] brotherhood, and the Macanese diaspora. Since the research universe was very scattered, considering the large number of Macanese living abroad and the constant flux of people between Macao and their host countries, web communication and online practices among community members became extremely significant, and constituted one major part of my doctoral research. The use of digital methods and virtual ethnography on the Internet allowed me to follow-up on the Macanese diaspora spread all over the world, on virtual social networks—mainly *Facebook*, other social media, websites and blogs.

A pillar of anthropological research since Malinowski’s classic prolonged fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands (2002 [1922]), participant observation continued to serve as a basic methodological practice during my ethnographic fieldwork. It was used in three field locations—Lisbon, Macao, and the Internet—concentrating mostly on public events such as festivities, celebrations, association meetings and other associative activities, family rituals, translocal social practices, and the flow of information on the web. Though much has been written on studies conducted on the Internet, there have been very few analyses of the integration of the Internet into qualitative research approaches. Jones’s book *Doing Internet Research* (1999) was one of the ground breaking works exploring both theoretical and practical issues involved in Internet research;



Anok family in the 50s.

another was *Virtual Ethnography* (2000) by Hine, which emphasised the profound need to study the Internet both as a cultural product as well as in its cultural context. A third important work is *Internet Communication and Qualitative Research* (Mann and Stewart, 2000), which defined the Internet not only as a data gathering instrument in qualitative research, but also as a research field. Participant observation in these situations also involved note-taking (Sanjek 1990), occasional recording of ‘actions’ *in situ* and in Internet communication groups, and the snapping of photographs/videos. In-depth interviews were concentrated on a limited number of key informants. The selection of interviewees included individuals of different ages, genders, and occupations. My main guidelines were the still relevant and useful classic by James Spradley (1979) on the ethnographic interview,

as well as more recent manuals: Davies (1999), Denzin and Lincoln (2011 [1994]), and Kvale (2008 [1996]).

I also made use of biographical methods grounded in multiple autobiographies within a restricted number of Macanese families. Because the family is a small social system, it lends itself to the holistic approach and it is in this context that the relationships between cultural and individual factors can best be observed. The preference for these methods follows from the fact that they tend to decrease the element of investigator bias and offer more efficiency by reducing the subjectivity of one *ego* alone. These methodologies can also preserve the emotional satisfaction and understanding that the anthropologist experiences in working directly with his subjects (Lewis, 1961). The relevance of this gathering of biographical memories is that social structures and



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events are endowed with complex meanings. They do not depend on any given unavoidable ‘nature of things’, but are a product of social action, and this is always undertaken reflexively (Davis, 1999). The autobiographical memories are, in this sense, bearers of factual notions, but are also a depository of reflections. That is why the shape and content of the oral record are so important to the recognition and knowledge of how people become who they are.

BIOGRAPHICAL METHODOLOGIES APPLIED TO THE PCB

In this essay I shall explore, using biographic methods applied to ethnographic research, the topic of how social representations of Macanese identity are interpreted and disseminated through memory,

1<sup>st</sup> Communion. Badaraco brothers in the 50s.



Xavier family in 1955.

and what kind of memories are associated with that identity.

Being the Macanese identity an eminently subjective reality and difficult to define, I choose to interview individuals who belong to different families and integrate the brotherhood of Macanese people: the Food and Drink Party [*O Partido dos Comes e Bebes*—PCB]. I had followed up the PCB group for twelve months and attended all its events and reunions that took place in Lisbon. PCB was organised in 2002 with the aim of bringing together the large number of Macanese living in Portugal, for conviviality as well as, in their own words, for ‘remembering the taste in eating our food, speaking our language and get back to our old Macao, that brought us together in the past and in the present’.<sup>1</sup>

PCB is constituted by the founders, the organising committee, colleagues and friends, about 50 members in all, and normally they have a calendar of Portuguese and Chinese festivities they like to celebrate in the same way they used to do in Macao, and where good Macanese food is always the biggest attraction. These commemorations are kept private, since the PCB presents itself as a closed group, not only for ‘outsiders’ like myself, but also for anyone for whom the fact of being Macanese *per se* does not grant direct access. These outsiders should first be invited to attend. Perhaps a remnant from their previous professional roles in the Public Administrative functionalism—or merely, as they say, ‘a joke’ (the original term used was *uma brincadeira*)—the fact is that the informal associativity PCB reclaims, has an organisational chart describing its different functions and audiences. Therefore, it

is necessary to request superior approval in order to obtain access to this ‘family’ and ‘universe of friends’, which is in fact, in the end, a ‘private universe’ with ‘private identities’.

However, the PCB has a website *GentedeMacao.com* and the *PCB Magazine* newsletter-blog that are loaded and updated with all information that relates to Macao, the Macanese community and PCB events and celebrations: for example, individual and group photographs, Macanese recipes, *Patuá* Creole songs and literature. One can note an obsession with the registration of ‘private’ characteristics which are then ‘made public’, made known, and remembered, as if this small group represents the ‘last Macanese’, the last ones performing these acts, the last ones to preserve the Macanese tradition, language, cuisine, habits and customs. Therefore, they feel obliged to leave these

memories of their memories, because beyond them ‘*nothing of this passes by*’, as was repeatedly said to me.

I applied three biographical methodologies to key informants: (1) The *genealogy* used as a form of strategic diagram, highlighting my informants’ practical kin (consanguineous, affinal, and spiritual) with whom more intensive social relations are maintained and lubricated (Bamford and Leach, 2009); (2) *Brief biographical portraits* based on the interviews and genealogies already recorded (O’Neill, 2009, for a literature review on *life-histories*). The use of this method did not intend to converge on complex and lengthy classical life-histories of some individual egos, but rather to illustrate informant’s reconstruction processes of life pathways and their interpretation of the world—with all the emotional expressions and subtleties of oral narrative—sometimes intersecting

Boyol brothers in 1967.





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4<sup>th</sup> Year Primary School. Classmates. Pedro Nolasco School in the 60s.

and converging on *case-studies* (excellent examples of how useful this technique of *partial life-histories* or abbreviated trajectories can be are contained in Cole, 1991 and Watson and Watson-Franke, 1985); (3) *Family-histories* (Pina-Cabral and Lima, 2005) that integrate the previous two methods and allow focus on the extended relational context constituted around the ego, and his/her integration within the complex world of relationships where he/she belongs. This technique avoids a kind of isolated, individualistic, self-centred or self-valid speech, which has received Bourdieu's biographical illusion critique (1986).

## SELECTIVE MEMORY AND KINSHIP

Having a common past also entails some general sense of sharing a common present; descending from some common ancestor makes us feel somehow 'connected'. Therefore, history plays a major role in the way we construct kinship. Writing about kinship in the Chinese context, Brandtstädter and Santos (2009) call for an approach that focuses as much on what kinship 'is' as on what kinship 'does'. This instrumentalist approach develops the notion of 'metamorphosis' as a heuristic device to understand how kinship (however defined) is both embedded in and contributes to the reworking of the larger politico-economic and sociocultural processes. My article draws also on this theoretical emphasis on 'transformation' to analyse Macanese kinship and its increasing engagement with the complexities of the modern world, Macao SAR state formation, and global markets. One of the advantages of this approach is that it helps make clear how Macanese memory and family life are both an

object and a subject of metamorphosis—pointing not just to what is inherited or given from the past, but also to what is acquired in the present and aspired to in the future.

According to Nora (1989), the decomposition of *memory-history* has multiplied the number of private memories demanding their individual histories. Never before has so much been recorded, collected; and never before has remembering been so compulsive, even habit memorisation ceases to be central to the educational process. What we can no longer keep in our heads is now kept in storage. It seems that as collective forms of memory decline an increasing burden is placed on the individual, and now people prefer to devote more time to local, ethnic, and family memory. By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, genealogy had become the surest means of preserving the memory of one's ancestors and of enhancing the prestige of an aristocratic family. Every established group, intellectual or not, learned or not, has felt the need to go in search of its own origins and identity. Indeed, there is hardly a family today in which some member has not recently sought to document as accurately as possible his or her ancestors, thus transforming genealogical research into a massive new phenomenon. Genealogy owes its positions in modern cultural and social anthropology to the genealogical method, which will be the main focus of this account, giving it inevitably a bias toward British social anthropology. The genealogical method as a systematic or scientific account, whereby the 'blood' and marriage connections recognised by people being studied could be systematically recorded, provided the basis for terminological and semantic studies of kinship.

The genealogical method of kinship, as described in the introductory chapter of the book *Kinship and Beyond: The Genealogical Model Reconsidered* (2009), is a cultural construction of personal relationships in terms of inherited, biogenetic attributes. This collection of ten essays is the latest major and important work to call for renewed attention to the issue of kinship, especially regarding contemporary questions of how cultures relates to nature. The editors undertook a detailed review of kinship studies starting from Rivers (2011 [1914]), through descent theory, past Schneider's (1984) critique of kinship as a different field in anthropology, to recent studies, such as Bamford, 2007, Carsten, 2000, Franklin and

Mckinnon, 2001, and Leach, 2003. As they show, the genealogical model not only lingers in the work of anthropologists, but it also informs the way people of many cultures and in many contexts think about nature and culture. Similarly, I consider the genealogical method of kinship, namely, the way social groups are constituted through time and the role heredity plays in establishing various kinds of social identities, relevant in the analysis of family genealogical selective memory illustrated by my informants.

## MACANESE FAMILY GENEALOGIES

In all the interviews I conducted, I had as a criterion the interviewing of individuals who belonged to different families, in order to obtain a wider range of diverse family histories and relevant biographical information related to them. In this way, it was possible to 'escape' the *cliché* of 'traditional families' highly prestigious in Macanese society for holding a public image that combines a sense of 'Portuguese-ness' that more clearly defines the Macanese community in historical terms (Pina-Cabral and Lourenço, 1993; Pina-Cabral, 2000, 2002). Generally, we refer here to the few families one is used to seeing mentioned in classic literature about Macao. Anchor identity in the past becomes, then, a

legitimacy element for the public image of traditional families, and is diametrically opposed to those families who do not have the same family background. This fact can frequently weaken family members' position and their self-image, leading to the questioning of their ethnic or personal identity.

The Macanese 'origins version' taken as a referent in my universe of informants asserts that Macanese people originated from miscegenation that occurred essentially in the early centuries of Portuguese settlement in Asia between Portuguese men and Indian, Malayan, and Japanese women. Macao traditional families married either Portuguese or among themselves. Marriage to Chinese women would only have occurred 'in recent times' (Amaro, 1988). However, this reclaimed 'mixed' ancestry in the Macanese self-definition is not always evident, as I shall demonstrate.

This is the version that strengthens the identification of the Macanese as the 'Portuguese of the Orient', denying their equidistance from Portuguese and Chinese ethnic groups. In the case of families whose members have achieved a relatively high level of education and/or political and economic success—in particularly the nucleus of families around which Macanese identity constructs itself in association with a specific form of community life, the so-called

3<sup>rd</sup> Year Primary School. Classmates. St Rosa de Lima College in the 50s.





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‘traditional families’—, this identification is even more clear as no reference is made to any relatives with Chinese ancestry. As we can see from Anabela’s testimony:<sup>2</sup>

Certainly, since the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century that there are Jorges in Macao—we could get back up till there—and there has always been a tradition passed from parents to children. There has always been a great connection between India and Macao because the Administration was initially in Goa and then went to Macao. There have always been family members connected to the Administration: Leal Senado [Loyal Senate], judges, lawyers... All of them are originally from Macao or India. My grandmother, her mother was from India even though she was born in Macao. Through the lineage of my grandfather, the Pacheco family is originally from Siam, but my grandfather was already born in Macao (Lisbon, 26 May 2011).

Throughout the interviewee’s family lineage description, it is quite evident that all her social identity is constructed on the basis of her belonging to a family

group, whose existence and significance are extended across generations; genealogy becoming an important element of legitimacy. The vast family genealogical knowledge my informant shows to have since the founding family member Jorge Álvares—a Portuguese merchant and the first European man reaching China and Macao in 1515—is the product of an extensive collective investment in family genealogy research and its transmission to successive generations. Thus, the social status of its members rooted in the family background prestige, which once demonstrated the existence of such historical ‘illustrious’ ancestors, is perpetuated through family memory and recognised by ‘others’ within the Macanese community.<sup>3</sup>

All my informants, whose family origins are founded in different contexts, had revealed having some kind of familial memory. However, this type of memory depends on the position, the lifestyle and the image of the social actors within the group that produces this memory. Scholars like Le Wita (1985) who worked with Parisian bourgeoisie families and Lima (2003) who carried out fieldwork on leading large business families in Lisbon, illustrate how familial

memory shape and composition may vary in terms of the depth of genealogical knowledge or the amplitude of collateral extension. In both cases, these families rely on an aristocratic ideal by setting up lines of descent. Having a deep genealogical memory is a crucial component to prove a family’s antiquity and works as an accumulated and transmitted capital throughout successive generations. Likewise, traditional Macanese families illuminate how family genealogy constitutes evidence of families’ prestige legitimacy since it demonstrates the existence of blended families from ancient Portuguese ancestors in the East.

In the shadow of what will be the ‘theory of origins’ more accepted by the group as a whole, for being associated with the foundations of Macao’s most respected families, the fragility of the Macanese identity is manifested in any different discourse on origins, which tends to be more subject to manipulations and ambiguities. Let us look at the following example given by Constança, 56 years old:

I do not know if I’m genuinely a Macanese person. I mean... I was born in Macao, right! But, I’m the daughter of a Portuguese Trasmontan father, who went to Macao to carry out the military service there, and of a mother that was born in Macao, so Macanese. But, my maternal grandfather was Portuguese and my grandmother—his wife—was Chinese from Mainland China (Oeiras, 19 October 2010).

Luso-Chinese lineage was usually unidirectional, occurring among Chinese women—generally from the less privileged classes—with the typical Portuguese sailor or soldier who went to Macao and there established a stable relationship and had children to whom he gave his surname either by marrying the mother or by choosing to recognise them legally. In Macao, during the colonial period, a man of Chinese descent would only marry a European or Macanese woman if he had abandoned his Chinese ethnic identity. All these cases that were reported to me refer to young children educated in a European cultural context, by parental choice or because they were orphans. In both cases, people were integrated into the Macanese community as individuals with no ties, not giving rise to ethnic kinship networks (Pina-Cabral and Lourenço, 1993). The next two testimonies from Tina (62 years old) and Paulo (61 years old), respectively, clearly illustrate this tendency:



Rosário family in the 70s.

My grandmother was of Chinese origin; she was adopted. Her origins lose themselves like this, there is no data. Thus, she was Macanese with Chinese origin (Lisbon, 30 September 2010).

My father was Chinese, but he was adopted and raised by a lady who was the sister of a priest in Macao, therefore, my father was educated in the Portuguese culture and language from birth. He could neither read nor write Chinese and spoke Chinese very badly; the same happens to me (Almada, 10 July 2011).

Similarly, children born of a second parallel family and not legitimised by religious marriage, usually with Chinese local women, were often recognised as offspring by their Portuguese or Eurasian fathers and incorporated into the Macanese community. Even in cases where, before the death of the father, there was an avoidance relation between different households, after the patriarch’s death most of these children were recognised and supported by the legitimate family ‘siblings’ and operated as favoured networks of relations. Alberto’s (68 years old) testimony confirms this practice among Macanese families:

My father had two families: one with my mother with whom he had three children, and another with a Chinese lady. With this lady he had four children .... I only knew my stepbrothers and stepsisters when I came to study at the university in Portugal. Actually, I already knew about them, but it was always an illegitimated family. When I came here to study, I went once—after five or six years—on holidays to Macao, and it was during that time that I met them as my

Procession Nosso Senhor dos Passos in the 50s.





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‘siblings’. My dad had passed away so they were left orphans. It was my older brother, who was living in Macao, who provided their financial support, took care of their education.... My siblings and me are all older than our half-brothers and half-sisters. Obviously, I still maintain ties with them (Lisbon, 27 October 2010).

Another example of the Macanese community’s centripetal force in different moments of Macao’s history, is the people who are considered by everyone to be Macanese despite the fact that they are not the result of the miscegenation between Europeans and Asians. That is the case of Vitória (63 years old):

My dad was from a family originated in Ecuador, from Guayaquil Township, and my maternal grandparents were all Chinese. I cannot say I am a Luso-descendant person, because I am not! It just happened I was born in Macao and so did my grandparents and my parents, although they had nothing to do with Portuguese people nor do they spoke Portuguese language. My paternal grandparents, they were so proud of their Ecuadorian origins that, I believe, they always spoke in Spanish or in Patuá Macao’s dialect. Also my parents—both of them—were born in Macao (Oeiras, 11 October 2010)

Studying today the knowledge Macanese people have about their family relationships, through the analysis of brief family genealogies I elaborated for every one of my informants, we can find evidence that these individuals do not function as vehicles for family ties. There is a generalised amnesia with regard to the recognition of kinship ties of Chinese children who were integrated in the community as Macanese. We also came to the same conclusion following our reading of *Famílias Macaenses* (1996)<sup>4</sup> genealogies by Jorge Forjaz. In the introductory note to the study of the Macanese family’s genealogies, where the author refers to the historical sources consulted, namely, parish records and personal letters he wrote to different members of these families requiring biographical information, we can read the following comment:

Once in a while ... there was someone who expressed displeasure, not wanting his or her name featured in the book, apparently for not appreciating their Oriental inheritances. I did what they asked me to and eliminated them

radically (Forjaz, 1996, Vol. I, p. 30, free author’s translation to English).

I draw your attention to the fact that these data can only be understood if situated in relation to the age of my informants—all between 55 and 70 years old, the average being 63 years old. These are, therefore, relations established during the Portuguese colonial period, during which the Macanese community succeeded in renovating their ethnic monopoly and reconstructing themselves as an ‘administrative elite’ in Macao’s Administration. In the sense of a social entity, the Macanese community can be characterised as *agglutinative*—it allows the creation of a single unique ethnic identity and a feeling of participation in a unique community mutual interest for individuals whose family origins are founded in different contexts.

## CONCLUSION: UNIQUE ETHNIC AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

I started my paper proposing the analysis of Macanese identity through social representations as they are experienced and produced by people and families through their memories, and what kind of memories are associated with that identity. I am interested in social actors’ modes of perception of events of the past in order to understand the mechanisms and long-term dynamics of memory transmission and the passage from individual representations to social ones

Numerous academics have explored the ways in which social factors may combine to affect the patterning of memory (Connerton, 1989; Zerubavel, 2003). There has also been much debate about the extent to which individual memory may assist in codifying the materials of remembrance. In his classic work on ‘collective memory’ (1992), Halbwachs characterises memory as a filter of past events that tends to preserve only those images that support the group’s present sense of identity. The theory of ‘collective memory’ expresses the notion that a society really can have a ‘memory’. What Halbwachs did not notice was how individual memories can come together to form a group memory through the medium of actual interaction. Nevertheless, this does not mean Halbwachs had not recognised the interaction between the individual and collective dimensions of memory. In fact, he points out

that there are individuals, as members of a group, who hold the memories and so, each individual memory is considered as a point of view of the collective memory; thus, this point of view depends on the different social positions he or she occupies within the group and in relation with other social spheres outside the group.

In the same sense Gillis argues, ‘identities and memories are highly selective, inscriptive rather than descriptive, serving particular interests and ideological positions. Just as memory and identity support one another, they also sustain certain subjective positions, social boundaries, and, power’ (1994, p. 4). Memories and identities are not fixed things as we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities. Memories help us make sense of the world we live in; and ‘memory work’ is always embedded in complex family, class, gender and power relations that determine what is remembered (or forgotten), by whom, and for what end.

I have pointed out that the Macanese community is illustrative of an agglutinative process of unique ethnic identity construction and of a unique mutual sense of community whose members’ family origins are founded in different contexts. Familial memories, truly genealogical chronicles where the past mixes with the present and the future is drawn, constitute a mental tool that people use and manipulate in order to compete for the hegemony over plausible and relevant discourses on memory within the community as a whole. Such memories also cause internal conflicts around the ‘legitimate’ reading of these individuals’ pasts, exposing them to greater identity fragility, which is filled by an active ethnic investment in the present.

The centripetal force that characterises the Macanese community and causes the reunion of different persons around the same purpose, has its epicentre in a common matrix of Portuguese education and, specially, of the Catholic religion. This being the base of community constitution, the magnet that maintains, reconstructs and renews itself is the ‘rediscovering’ of their unique ethnic and cultural identity, which overcomes the dispersive effects that could arise from the disparity of family origin contexts, through collective practices associated with the Macanese ‘way of being’.

I also stressed the intensity and regularity of PCB reunions in Portugal, even while remaining essentially private, as an important medium for allowing its

participants to achieve the necessary coherence for reconstructing their ethnic and cultural identity in the current situational context in which they now live. As an informant told me: ‘we turn to the past precisely to secure what the future can no longer supply’. So far, if there is anything the ethnography of the Macanese community in Portugal can tell us, it is that the past provides an imaginative resource for people struggling with the present, hoping to secure what will no longer be found in the future.

We can conclude that the Macanese community is a collectivity defined by reference to a common origin, an imagined and mutating entity, whose own continuity depends on the existence of agreements and negotiations amongst its members. These members are closely linked by personal or familial relations and by long-term personal acquaintance, and they build the present in terms of their past heritages and of the longings that the future inspires. It must be stressed, nevertheless, that however much is shared, there is no unanimity of opinions or interests within the community. **RC**

**Author’s note:** The present article was written based on part of my Ph.D. research project on the Macanese Eurasian community (2009-2013). This research could not have been possible without the funding support of the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT) Doctoral Degree Grant (SFRH/BD/40412/2007). Special thanks to my Ph.D. supervisors, Brian Juan O’Neill and Gonçalo D. Santos, who commented on earlier versions of my essay and helped me to improve its final version. Deep thanks are extended to Gina Badaraco, Juju Boyol, Zinha and Joel Anok, and Filipe do Rosário, who kindly provided all the photographs that have illustrated my article.

ESTUDOS DE MACAU

MACAO STUDIES

NOTES

- 1

This extract is part of the PCB website welcome message available in <http://gentedemacau.com/index.php?u=PCB&tr=36>, accessed 14 April 2011.
- 2

Anabela is 69 years old. All names of persons used in this article are fictitious in order to preserve my informants’ anonymity and the confidentiality of personal information.
- 3

It should be noted here that although the inquiry was focused in a brief family genealogy contextualisation, I was told the family history from their origins back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was clear that the intention of my informant was to describe her family to me, exclusively highlighting her most prestigious relatives, using systematic manipulations that could allow her to mention only those ancestors. In this particular case, I was also told about the
- 4

This is a genealogical study of 440 Macanese families consisting of three volumes with 3,500 pages, 245 chapters, and 250 images. The book, well-known among my informants, was recurrently suggested to me by them, and sometimes even used as an excuse for not going back to do the same exercise again. Although the work was recommended to me as a good manual for the study of Macanese family genealogies, especially in cases of ‘traditional families’ whose ancestors are well documented, according to them, exceptions are made for some inconsistencies and omissions regarding names and/ or personal information.

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