Os saberes das nossas memórias: A comida e a etnicidade Macaense (Flavours of Our Memories: The Macanese Cuisine and Ethnicity)
by Fernando Sales Lopes
(Macau, Instituto Cultural do Governo da R.A.E. de Macau, 2017)

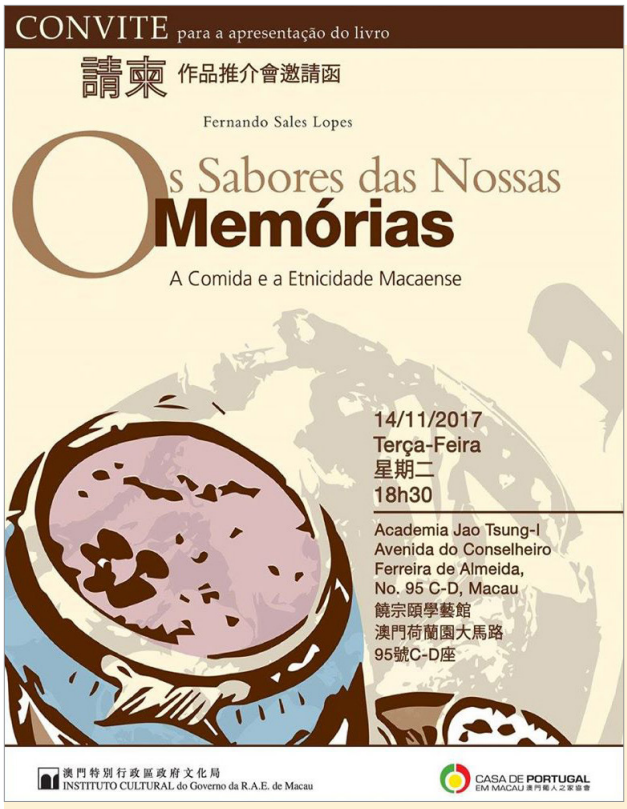
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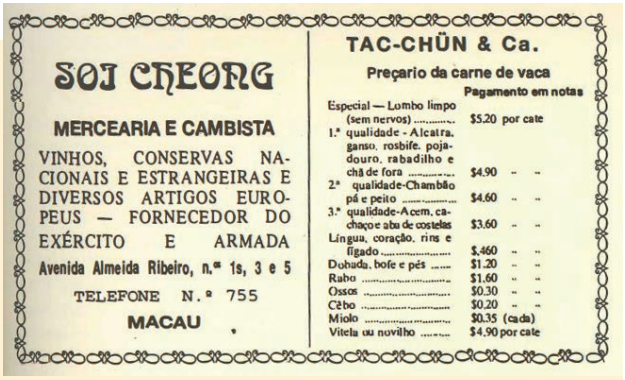
Benjamin Nelson's theories of historical sociology bring us close to the idea of 'intercivilisational encounters' put forward by Johann P. Arnason, supported by the argument that the three ways in which the world is constructed are wealth, power and meaning. With reference to the last mentioned parameter, Clifford Geertz defines culture as a network of meanings that brings individuals together in a society. Taking this as a theoretical framework, Fernando Sales Lopes' book on Macau can be considered as a case study. In his outstanding contribution to global micro-history, the author eschews the discourse of great narratives in comparative history that is characterised by a high level of abstraction, in which the real voices and the will of human beings disappear. As an alchemist of Macanese memories, Sales Lopes is fully aware of the fact that a thorough investigation based on sources is essential to define, specify and contextualise the scope and the limits of contacts on both ends of the intercivilisational encounters continuum. In this way, he lends voices to concrete actors, their memories and agencies, which have very often been disregarded and



marginalised in historical narratives, but which play an important, yet still underrated, role in the reconstructive modelling of global processes.

Like a wise artisan, using the journalist's lens and the historian's craft, Sales Lopes excavates an archaeology of memory that I would dare to call an exercise in historical responsibility. The author, who has been living in Macau for over thirty years, once penned a poem *Flor de Lótus* (Lotus Flower), which was set to music as the anthem for the Macau Handover Cultural Session Closing Ceremonies on 19 December 1999. Almost twenty years later, Sales Lopes, by presenting a discourse based on oral history and extensive documentation, dusts off his own memories and reflects on a 'culinary triangle,' i.e. food, self, and the identity of a Macau in transition.[1] Interestingly, his book was published one year before Macau was officially designated a UNESCO 'Creative City of Gastronomy' in November 2018, becoming only the third Chinese city to receive such a title, alongside Chengdu and Shunde.

Evoking the 'taste of our memories' Sales Lopes connects with UNESCO's mission when analysing the symbolic value of food and using it as a medium for the reconstruction of a Macanese border identity that has already lost its vehicular language, *Patuá* (Plate 1). In his meta-narrative, a revealing aspect of his work is the indirect reference to a cultural factor that is structurally constitutive of all human beings, namely, melancholy. It is the topic of the dark and thick fluid,


SOI CHEONG

MERCEARIA E CAMBISTA

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	Pagamento em notas
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1.ª qualidade - Alcatra, ganso, rosbife, pojadouro, rabadilho e chã de fora	$4.90 " "
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3.ª qualidade-Acem, cachaço e aba de costelas	$3.60 " "
Língua, coração, rins e fígado	$.460 " "
Dubada, bofe e pés	$1.20 " "
Rabo	$1.60 " "
Ossos	$0.30 " "
Cêbo	$0.20 " "
Miolo	$0.35 (cada)
Vitela ou novilho	$4.90 por cate

Plate 1
Advertisement for the Macau grocery store 'Soi Cheong' in the magazine *Renascimento*, vol. II, 1943.
Its hybrid narrative is representative of Macau's plurilingual context. On 20 February 2009, the new edition of UNESCO's *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger* classified Patuá macaense as a 'critically endangered' language.



Plate 2
Portrait of a Chinese community in Macau dining on Santo Domingos Street (next to the Santo Domingos Church, Macau), by George Chinnery, c. 1836-8.
Source: Macao Museum (MM5119).

the black bile, that by circulating within the human body and causing moodiness and sorrow, conquered the social imagination, settling at the crossroads between art and ideas. Raymond Klibansky did not hesitate to point to melancholy as the quill that helped write the history of contemporary man's sensibility. Moreover, in China, melancholy (*chouxu* 愁緒) is reflected in cultural manifestations such as literature, poetry and painting (Plate 2), because solitude becomes weary of silence. Nostalgia, in the sense of a wish to return to the native land where a man can claim his identity, also dwells in the laments of those who are subject to territorial or inner exile.

Sales Lopes unravels the contradictory atmosphere breathed in Macau, where the crisis of disenchantment co-exists with a torrent of creative energy in which the melancholic hieroglyphs constitute a symbolic amalgam of the obsessions of Macanese society (Plate 3). National rupture paired with artistic splendour result, on a daily basis, in idiosyncratic and ethnic cultural manifestations such as the cuisine. Like a phantom thread, these point in transverse directions, illustrating



Plate 3
Advertisement for the Macau grocery store 'Soi Cheong' in the magazine *Renascimento*, vol. II, 1943.

a code of behaviour reflective of their individuality, a manifestation of the layers of their subjectivity and internal suffering, with their oddities, eccentricities and sense of festivity (Plates 4 and 5). The author leads us on a search for the lost roots of the Macanese community living in the diaspora, in the historical context of transition, in which the main actors live with uncertainty about the future and a strong feeling of being orphaned. Consequently, melancholy becomes a necessary point of departure in the search for identity flavoured by their own memories. The author carries out his analysis without falling into the trap of 'traditionalism,' which, as Klaus Antoni explains, would reduce tradition to a historical caricature resulting from the paternalistic manoeuvering of the state in its attempt to diminish tradition's sway. The gastronomy of Macau is an example of what Frank Dikötter called a 'pluralistic menu of modern society' that demonstrates how cultures and civilisations are not discrete and immutable entities, but instead have been subjected time and time again to external impacts and influences.

By shedding light on these developments and encounters, we gain a deeper insight into what defines modernity and the values of tolerance it entails. Macau adds to the Middle Kingdom a historical and cultural identity of its own, shaped and borne by an influence involving all aspects of the history of Portugal: it is Cabo Verde and Goa, as well as Siam and Pegu, it is Sumatra, Java, Malacca, and it is Malay, Ceylon, the Moluccas, the Philippines and Japan. Thus, Macanese food, together with its flavours of the past that are to be preserved in the present, represents a stronghold of history and culture, but first and foremost it is an antidote to the post-truth idea of the 'global citizen,' the latter implying the dissolution of one's identity and one's 'ways of living,' values which are adequately addressed by Sales Lopes. Doubtless, the sinicisation of Macau would result in the silencing of the miracle of hybridisation, and forgetting one's memories would mean losing part of the world's memories. [Plate 6]



Plate 4
Banquet offered by a Macanese family to the Luso-Chinese community c.1962. Source: Fernando Sales Lopes, *Os saberes das nossas memórias: A comida e a etnicidade Macaense* (Macau, Instituto Cultural do Governo da R.A.E. de Macau, 2017), p. 96.



Plate 5
Dining table at the residence of José Vicente Jorge in Macau, c. 1930.
Source: Graça Pacheco Jorge, *A Cozinha de Macau da Casa do Meu Avô* (Macau: Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1992), pp. 10-11.

In dissecting the Macanese people's seemingly hedonistic dream about their authentic tastes (a dream that can be considered a result of the global transformation of desires), Sales Lopes, like an alchemist of memories, invites us to look at ourselves in the mirror, while at the same time offering us two reflections. On the one hand, there is the image of ethnographic construction, the search for identity and the recovery of collective memory that recalls the fascinating 'intercivilisational encounters' of the past (Plate 7). On the other hand, the author reveals another image, that of our own fragility, one of the most powerful engines of globalisation that was, is, and will be, melancholy.

ENDNOTE

1. The number of publications on this topic is very limited and focuses mainly on cookery books that aim to reconstruct Macau cuisine from 'family secrets' and thus are an exercise in experimental archaeology. Especially to be highlighted are the contributions of the Macanese, Cécilia and Graça Pacheco Jorge, and the Portuguese António Vicente Lopes, which are instrumental for Sales as source material for his own cultural and ideological analysis.



Plate 6
Graça Pacheco Jorge is a Macanese woman passionate about understanding and preserving her own cultural identity. Jorge has kindly shared with us a portrait of her 'Christmas table', showing cuisine inherited from her grandfather, José Vicente Jorge. The dishes are (clockwise): *Laranja Torneada, Coscorão, Formigos, Biscoitos variados, Ginetes, Empada de Peixe, Bolinhas de Amendoim, Virado, Rebuçados de Ovo, Alua ou Aluar, Badji, Pato à José Vicente Jorge, Molho para o Pato*, Christmas cake and *Fartes*. In keeping with tradition, this Macanese fare is displayed on an embroidered linen cloth with lace from Venice, and is served on nineteenth-century Satsuma tableware.
Source: Graça Pacheco Jorge, *A Cozinha de Macau da Casa do Meu Avô* (Macau: Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1992), p. 150.



Plate 7
Photograph of the 102-year-old Macanese, Dona Aida Jesus (right), who despite her age, continues to be at her restaurant Riquexó (Rickshaw) every night. It is a local institution, now run by her daughter Sonia Palmer (left).
Source: Dona Aida Jesus and Sonia Palmer, 2020