

Imperial Diasporas and the Search for Authenticity

The Macanese Fiction of Henrique de Senna Fernandes

Esman's definition of a diaspora is that it is « a minority ethnic group of migrant origin which maintains sentimental or material links with its land of origin ». Once a diaspora takes over or forms a state and severs political and economic ties with its homeland, it effectively ceases to be a diaspora. The same may be said of diasporas which have lost the sentiment that attaches them to their homeland. Following this rationale, neither the British in Australia nor the Afrikaners of Southern Africa can any longer be considered diasporas (Hutchinson & Smith 1996 : 320). Cohen is less of an absolutist. For him, an imperial diaspora, which maintains ties of loyalty and deference to the mother country, can become what he terms a quasi-diaspora through a process of creolization, with new settlers marrying into the local community and/or actually turning against their homelands. The obvious paradigm here is what could broadly be described as the Latin American model (Cohen 1997 : 67). In the case of the creole community of Macau – the so-called *Macaenses*¹ – a reading of some of its Lusophone writers would suggest that its transition from being an imperial diaspora, with correspondingly strong sentimental links with Portugal, to Cohen's quasi-diaspora is somewhat equivocal. The notable exception is Henrique de Senna Fernandes, whose work reveals strong tendencies in that direction which will be analysed later on. However, before considering in detail the work of this *doyen* of Macanese fiction in Portuguese, we should pause for a moment to ponder on the extent to which the ethnic

1. *Macaense* or *Macaista* ? The community that broadly identifies itself as Portuguese-speaking and Catholic is referred to and thinks of itself as *Macaense*. There are of course minor debates as to who constitutes a real *Macaense*: some of the older families claim that the original *Macaenses* were of Portuguese/Japanese/India/Malay mixture, not Chinese. But nowadays, the binding factor is an affinity with the Portuguese language, religious institutions, plus certain other factors, such as a reluctance to give up Portuguese citizenship. For an excellent anthropological study of the Macanese, see J. de Pina CABRAL & N. LOURENÇO 1993. *Macaista* is a more limited term, referring essentially to the now defunct Creole « *Língua Macaísta* ». The majority community of Macau, including those ethnically Chinese who were born there, such as the current head of the executive, Edmund Ho, would not think of themselves or be thought of as *Macaenses*. Ho knows only a few words of Portuguese. He is a Macau Chinese. On the other hand, the former leader of the legislative assembly, Anabela Ritchie, is « physically » Chinese, but is Lusophone (or at least bi- and even tri-lingual, Portuguese/Cantonese/English), in her identification. She is a *Macaense*.

identity of the imperial diaspora in Macau coincides with and departs from Portuguese ethnicity.

For Anthony Smith, the most important factor in the survival of a particular cultural grouping is the cultivation of a myth of ethnic election. Such myths are usually based on religion, or on a « historic territory », a sacred land perceived as having been God-given to their common ancestors. Inherent in a myth of ethnic election is the memory of a golden age, a time beyond time when the ancestral culture was in its infancy, at the heroic phase of its formation (Hutchinson & Smith 1996 : 189-194). Applying Smith's ideas to the case of Macau, it is clear that for the Macanese, the golden age of their ethnic origin coincided with the era of the city's prosperity, when it was a vital link in European trade with China and Japan. Self-evidently, this era also constituted the golden age of Portugal. Macanese ethnicity is therefore closely associated with those myths that underpin the Portuguese sense of a chosen people, and which relate to their role in European maritime expansion, inter-oceanic trade, the discoveries, and the expansion of European culture, in particular Catholic Christianity, to the far corners of the Earth.

The Macanese sense of identity is based, then, on two accepted notions. The first is that of loyalty to the mother country, the most tangible historic instance of which was the city's non-recognition of Spanish sovereignty during the Habsburg dominion of Portugal between 1580 and 1640, subsequently acknowledged in the title conferred on the city's council and governing body, the Leal Senado. José dos Santos Ferreira's evocation of the loyalty of the Macanese therefore had its roots in a significant myth of history originating during those crucial sixty years :

« O povo é a sua boa gente, o insigne povo macaense, aquele que, ao longo de quatro séculos, de geração em geração, com desvelo, orgulho e firmeza, sempre deixou realçada a vontade irreduzível de se conservar português e tudo fez por honrar e engrandecer Portugal, sua Pátria »².

The Loyalty to a Distant Homeland

From the idea of loyalty to a distant homeland, it is only a small step to the second notion of a people chosen to defend the legitimacy of the imperial presence. The role as legitimisers of Portugal's presence in the region is therefore an integral part of Macanese identity, and is expressed in a number of ways. The pedigree of descent from original settlers and seafarers is, to some extent, woven into the novels of Senna Fernandes, and serves as a hidden example to be followed in the redemption of his young heroes. Deolinda da Conceição, writing in the early 1950s, cites the nineteenth-century *mestizo* « hero » of the Baishaling (in Portuguese, Passale(o) incident, Vicente Nicolau de Mesquita, as a symbol of Macau's spirit of resolve against those who « *alguma vez atentaram contra a liberdade e a independência desta terra* » Mesquita was, of course, consciously or not, acting on behalf of the interests of the Portuguese Crown in defending its « legitimacy » in the

2. The quotation is taken from Ferreira's introduction to the Portuguese version of his Macanese dialect novella, *História de Maria e Alfêres João* (1987) : 4, but was originally published in his *Macau di Tempo Antigo* (1985).

area. For António Conceição Júnior, the Macanese upheld the legitimacy of the Portuguese presence, « *porque aqui nascemos falando em português* »³, while Ferreira exalts Macau's role as a base for disseminating the true (that is, the « legitimate ») faith :

« *Não terá, por certo, sido em v.o que Deus fez dela o fulcro da irradiação da fé cristã, iluminando-lhe as portas por onde saíram os denodados evangelizadores que palmilharam terras inóspitas em busca de almas esquecidas na treva e sequiosas de luz* » (Ferreira 1987 : 4).

Deolinda da Conceição refers to the Macanese as worthy descendants of the original settlers who « *aqui vieram trazer o facho da civilização ocidental* ». Thus far, their fervent identification with an imperial mission hardly differentiates these Macanese writers in their attitudes from those of more predictably colonial writers.

The fault line begins to appear when an imperial diaspora's legitimacy is no longer recognised, or is forgotten by the mother country, or runs the risk of losing its status as a result of political change usually involving the need by the mother country to decolonise, relinquishing power to an indigenous majority, or to accede to the historic claim over territory by a larger neighbour. The history of European decolonisation is littered with imperial diasporas that have appeared to stand in the way of developing relations between the metropolis and rival claimants to the territories inhabited by those diasporas. In the Macau of the 1950s, when the traditional relationship between Portugal and its colonial possessions was coming under international fire, Deolinda da Conceição felt the need to remind the mother country of the qualities that made the Macanese worthy Portuguese citizens, more equal to the mother country than any other colonial inhabitants. On the other hand, they were clearly not metropolitan Portuguese, which begged the question of how they saw themselves in terms of a regional identity. The answer lay in their mixed origin, but it was an origin which, like the Lusotropicalism of Gilberto Freyre – then very much in vogue – did not detract from their sense of being Portuguese⁴ :

« *Descendente daqueles primeiros filhos de Portugal que aqui vieram estabelecer-se, o macaense tem, é certo, nas suas veias sangue de outras gentes que habitavam esta terra ou que para aqui foram trazidas mas, longe de o depauperar, esta circunstância valorizou-o grandemente* » (Conceição 1950 : 7).

Written at a time when the colonies of European imperial powers, particularly in Africa, were beginning to press for political independence, Conceição wished to distinguish between the Macanese and their fellow colonials in Angola and Mozambique, by reasserting the old ties of loyalty and legitimacy :

« *Macau, verdadeiro canteiro de Portugal transplantado para estas terras do Oriente, e mãe querida dos seus filhos que desejam, para sempre e unicamente, ser considerados filhos mas filhos legítimos de Portugal* » (Conceição 1950 : 7).

3. Taken from his preface to mother's Deolinda da Conceição collection of short stories (CONCEIÇÃO 1995 : 12).

4. Freyre visited the Portuguese territories, including Macau, in 1952 at the invitation of the Portuguese government. His impressions are recorded in FREYRE 1953.

Behind such protestations, however, there was a deep sense of insecurity, a feeling that the post-war world was going to bring about changes that would sooner or later have an impact on Macau's time honoured status. Indeed, a number of developments would take place during the course of the 1950s to confirm such fears.

A Deep Sense of Insecurity

In the political arena, Salazar's transformation of the colonies into overseas provinces in 1951 was seen by many as a last ditch attempt to row against the current of history and the trend towards decolonisation. Nearer to home, Indian pressure on Portugal to negotiate the handover of its Indian enclaves, culminating in the invasion of Goa, 1961, was followed within five years by shock waves in Macau from China's cultural revolution, which severely buffeted the confidence of many of its loyal citizens. Socially and economically, the massive influx of migrants from the Chinese hinterland and the changes to Macau's urban skyline resulting from the spillover of Hong Kong's post-war construction boom, contributed to the general sense of insecurity. In terms of the expression of Macau's specific identity and of Macanese ethnicity, there was only one direction possible, and that tended to be backwards into the more peaceful, even bucolic realm of memory.

Deolinda da Conceição's opening description of her city is positively edenic, and seems to foretell the even greater changes ahead. The emphasis on natural beauty, light, the contrast between verdant hills and calm waters, suggestive almost of an island – possibly the Camonian « Ilha de Amor », the spiritual qualities inspired, all speak of a paradise :

« A Natureza, com mão pródiga, distribuiu-lhe encantos diversos : o mar calmo à sua volta, colinas verdejantes a reflectirem-se nas águas mansas que lhes ficam ao sopé, dias claros e tardes luminosas. O por do sol nesta terra bendita tem encantos que seduzem, uma espiritualidade inequívoca que lança nas almas sedentas do belo o bálsamo precioso duma paz de espírito que consola » (Conceição 1950 : 7).

Ferreira's depiction bears a remarkable similarity, but brings together in more explicit fashion, the notion of a loyalty that goes back into history, and the suggestion of a lost golden age associated with the carefree eternity of childhood nurtured in the beloved, caring and patently feminized « Mãria » that is Macau, and which complements the pride felt in the remote fatherland – the « Pátria ». It is Macau the « *nobre e fidelíssima filha de Portugal* », which is the « *terra de sonhos da nossa infância despreocupada* ». Significantly too, Macau, symbol of feminine constancy, will remain the homeland of the Macanese, independently of changes wrought by the ideologies of men, a reference to its impending devolution to China : « *Macau será sempre querida e bendita, quaisquer que sejam as ideologias que norteiam o empenho e os caprichos dos homens* » (Ferreira 1987 : 4-5). In suggesting an ultimate loyalty to place – to a « Mãria » – both Ferreira and Deolinda da Conceição are putting political loyalty – the legitimacy of the « Pátria » – lower down the order of priorities⁵.

5. For an interesting discussion of these two, ultimately incompatible loyalties, see ANDERSON (1998 : 58-59).

Macanese, Portuguese, Chinese

Among the few writers who could be considered exponents of Macanese literature in Portuguese, it is the fictionalist, Henrique de Senna Fernandes, whose work most consistently reflects and expresses a sense of what it is to be Macanese as opposed to either Portuguese or Chinese. This is because the protagonists of his stories are almost entirely drawn from that community. Moreover, his concern for authenticity, either by exploiting local linguistic peculiarities in Portuguese, or by including specifically Macanese cultural references, distinguish him from what one critic has called the « asiáticas », that is, Portuguese who have settled in the city, and whose work reflects their experience of the East (Duarte 1995 : 36-38). His first work, *Nam Van* (1984), brought together short stories, some of which had previously been published in the local press in the 1970s. Some of the stories, notably, « A-Chan, a Tancareira », written when the author was a student in Coimbra in 1950, reveal the influence of Portuguese neo-realism and possibly even Brazilian regionalism, in a concern for the underdog, and for the depiction of the social determinants behind human behaviour. Most of the stories, however, contain a strongly romantic element which will be reproduced and developed in the love themes of his two subsequent novels, *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé* (1986) and *A Trança Feiticeira* (1993). His most recent work, *Mong Há* (1998) brings together reminiscences and tales which confirm the strongly autobiographical element that runs through all his writing. However, it is in his two novels that Fernandes has become an exponent of the domestic romance, and the particular importance of this will be discussed later in connection with the genre in other literatures.

The most consistent theme running through the fiction of Senna Fernandes is that of love across the social divide. Sometimes the love entanglement ends tragically, as in « A-Chan a Tancareira », in which the Eurasian offspring of a Portuguese sailor and a Chinese boat woman is taken from its mother and sent to Portugal. The story contains elegiac descriptions of Macau and its bustling waterfront life inspired by the author's openly stated nostalgia for his native city, and is underpinned by a symbolism associated with the sea that recalls some of the earlier fiction of Jorge Amado among others. Manuel, the Portuguese sailor stuck in Macau during the War of the Pacific, reasserts his freedom after the end of the conflict. For him, the sea is his path to freedom. For A-Chan, his lover, the boat woman who lives by ferrying sailors out to their ships in her sampan, the water is her prison and maintains her at the bottom of the social scale, ensuring that she can never be a partner to Manuel outside the exceptional circumstances which have thrown them together⁶. From this early fiction, Fernandes set off on the long road back to compromise and to the redemption of the Macanese.

6. Fernandes was not the only Macanese writer of the period to focus on the dislocation of the Macanese, torn between European father and Chinese mother. Deolinda da Conceição's story « A Esmola », *in op. cit.* : 27, is a powerful evocation of the drama of the mestizo in a colonial environment.

Two further stories reveal Fernandes's preoccupation with dispersal, rootlessness and loss of identity, approaching the subject from two different perspectives. « Chá com essência de cereja » is set in the Macau of the author's youth, and the first-person narrative relates the tale directly to an experience which is designed to typify the fortunes of the creolised people of Macau. The two main characters incarnate, to some extent, the destinies of the Macaenses during the middle years of the century, especially during the War of the Pacific, but possibly too down the centuries : the narrator is one of the privileged creoles who, through education, is cut out for a career as a lawyer or a civil servant, his childhood friend, Maurício, son of a metropolitan Portuguese and a local orphan girl, survives and ultimately thrives through trade and shady dealings. The fluctuations in Maurício's existence between extremes of poverty and untold prosperity, make him representative of those Macanese who have been thrown back on their own initiative to survive, who have been dispersed and scattered from a mother territory which has neither the physical space to fulfil their ambitions nor the resources to provide them with an adequate living. Maurício is, in every sense, an orphan of empire, but he is resourceful and the story ends on the positively redemptive note that will characterise the author's later fiction : Maurício is re-encountered in Japan, having married Yao Man, his youthful sweetheart from the war years, whose fortunes took her from prostitution to concubinage to widowhood, and to eventual salvation and happiness with Maurício.

The theme of dispersal, wanderlust and orphanhood is given its fullest expression in the novella, « Candy », a tale of love, separation and dislocation, set against a background of Macau and Hong Kong between 1943 and 1970. Recounted through a sequence of flashbacks, it is a story of a chance re-encounter between two former lovers, years after their youthful affair had come to an abrupt end. Candy is a Hong Kong Portuguese (a euphemism for a Eurasian of Macanese origin), who spent the war years as a refugee in Macau after being raped by a Japanese soldier. In her flight from poverty and insecurity, she married an Englishman after the War and has become a pillar of Hong Kong high society. The narrator is a Macanese who, dissatisfied with the limited employment opportunities of Macau, has lived in Brazil since the end of the War, and while in transit in Hong Kong on a first visit home in 1970, encounters his childhood sweetheart, the once flirtatious Candy. The meeting enables them to recall the distant days of their affair, and in particular, the narrator to know that as a result of a final tryst between them, a baby daughter had been born, later given away by the mother to a couple in Canton. It is suggested that their daughter might even be the young girl in a *cheong-sam* who passes by as they stand outside the hotel where they have had lunch together. Once again, we have a story of two dislocated products of empire, whose love is destroyed by the fatal hand of history. Equally, it is a tale that evokes the vulnerability of Macanese identity, its potential for dilution through migration and the adoption of other cultural values. Candy and the narrator are on a cultural knife edge : their lost daughter has been re-absorbed by Mother China, he has joined the Brazilian melting-pot, Candy has abandoned her Luso-Chinese heritage, based essentially on language and religion, in order to be accepted into the British colonial elite. The lack of any resemblance to her in

her two blond sons serves as a metaphor for her dislocation and loss of heritage. Cultural sacrifice has therefore been the price paid for social mobility and material security :

« – *Conquistei tudo isto... um lugar ao sol. Tenho tudo para ser uma mulher feliz. Mas eu devia ter casado contigo.*
 – *Não digas isso.*
 – *Sim, era uma vida diferente, mas eu não estaria só, sem a minha gente... sem a minha fé verdadeira. Sabes porque estes filhos não se parecem comigo ? E sabes porque não tenho uma filha ? É um castigo... » (Fernandes, *Nam Van* : 105).*

Subsequent work by Fernandes reveals an evolution away from themes of dispersal, but significantly the historical setting of his later work is more remote, prior to the great upheavals of the middle years of the century that were such a watershed in the modern history of Macau, engendering transformations that changed the physical and human face of his native city. *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé* was Fernandes's first novel. By the author's admission, it began as a short story based on a tale told him as a child, but with the addition of other tales, developed into a longer, more ambitious fiction, a family saga set at the turn of the century, with strong elements of theatricality, underlined by the references to the *subir do pano* (« the curtain rises ») at the beginning, and the *cair do pano* (« the curtain falls ») at the end. The first part of the novel focuses on the experiences of the hero, the handsome and charming Chico Frontaria, and his fall from privileged son of an old patriarchal creole family to penniless and diseased destitute, a trajectory resulting from dissolute living and his squandering of the inheritance left him by a doting aunt. Chico has the sort of complex ancestry typical of old Macanese families, with forebears from Portugal, Goa and southern China, but there is a sense that the family has declined since its heroic past, and that Chico represents the culmination of this process. The second « act » switches to the heroine's story. Victorina, like Chico, is a *mestizo* woman, but of slightly more recent pedigree : on her father's side, she descends from a snobbish and hierarchical family of Portuguese origins (her father had been disowned for marrying beneath his station), her mother is the daughter of a Filipino of slightly mysterious and, therefore in the eyes of society, disreputable background, being the son of a nationalist in the former Spanish colony. Pablo Padilla is a one time agent for Chinese emigration, and now a herbalist who administers Chinese medicines and ointments to all those desperate enough to consult him. Victorina is as plain as Chico is good looking, and like him, is left to fend for herself as a virtual orphan, being only saved from destitution by her father's godfather, a wealthy but humane outcast, shunned by Macanese society because of his bohemian habits, who makes Victorina the beneficiary of his will. The final act brings these two outcasts together : Chico is taken in by Victorina and cured as a result of the medical knowledge she has inherited from her father. The fact that this knowledge is rooted in traditional Chinese practice is a pivotal element in the valorisation of the Chinese heritage which is a feature of Fernandes's work. Once cured, Chico embarks on a process of redemption through the humbling effects of hard work and assumed responsibility which are eventually rewarded by his reintegration into his family and a happy

marriage to Victorina who has proved his salvation.

Amor e Dedinhos de Pé is a novel written well within the nineteenth-century tradition, at the transition point between romanticism and realism. Its involved, romantic plot belies a strong ethnographic intent on the part of the author to portray the cultural interfaces that traditionally existed between the « Cidade Cristã » and the Chinese quarter. These two communities were territorial and cultural. The Portuguese and Chinese worlds rub shoulders and influence each other on their outer fringes, but are essentially foreign and impenetrable to one another. For the creole heroes, used to the privileges of their tiny colonial world, the Chinese quarter is the only place where they can hide from the prying eyes of their own community. It is therefore an escape from where the process of redemption may begin, but it is also a world full of mystery and strange sounds. It is, in a sense, a Rubicon that has to be crossed in order to be a true Macanese :

« *Da rua subiam todos os rumores duma cidade chinesa, os pregões dos vendilhões ambulantes, o estalar de tamancos nas pedras da calçada, o estralejar de panchões votivos, a plangência do alaúde do ceguinho, oferecendo-se para "cantar" a sina. Estava ainda em Macau, mas já muito longe de tudo que lhe era familiar* » (Fernandes, *Amor e Dedinhos de Pé* : 210).

Another aspect of the cultural interface which the author examines is that of language. Chico, a descendant of early settlers and various admixtures, speaks fluent Cantonese but cannot write it. On the other hand, as a man of little formal education, his written Portuguese is full of grammatical errors, and it is suggested that his natural spoken language is the creole dialect of Macau. Chico's attitude towards erudite Portuguese is as ambivalent as his attitude towards the repercussions of Portuguese politics which reach the territory in the form of rivalry between monarchists and republicans prior to the revolution of 1910. He regards them as largely irrelevant to his own needs, while preserving a natural respect for established authority. He is, then, in every sense, a man between two worlds whose only point of reference, given his limited knowledge of language and the outside world, is the tiny borderland of Macau.

In his most recent novel, *A Trança Feiticeira*, Fernandes tackles a subject hitherto only hinted at previously. The romantic entanglement in the first novel, was between *mestizo* couples, but in this later work, a romantic liaison across the division between the « Cidade Cristã » and the Chinese quarter is idealised against the historical setting of Macau in the 1930s.

Like Chico, Adozindo is a creole of Portuguese, Dutch and Chinese descent. Like Chico, his education is rudimentary, sufficient for him to carry on the family business. His family, while not rich, is well off, representative of a bourgeoisie which is unconscious of the changes that are going to erode its influence with the influx of huge numbers of migrants and refugees from the mainland from the 1940s onwards. Adozindo's upbringing therefore takes place in a type of creole paradise, a time beyond time because not subject to the chronology of change :

« *Habitado a mimos e confortos, encarava o futuro com ligeireza, porque o futuro seria igual ao presente e ao passado. Era a segurança da "era patriarcal" que havia de ser destruída, com o ataque japonês à China e logo a seguir, pela Guerra do Pacífico* » (Fernandes, *A Trança Feiticeira* : 11).

Adozindo, destined for a marriage within his own community and class, is expelled from his paradise when he falls in love with a Chinese water carrier, A Leng, seduced by the tangible symbol of her attraction, her long braid of hair, which is also the mark of her social position and traditional culture. For her own transgression, A Leng is also expelled from her community, centred on the figure of the *Abelha Mestre*, her employer and surrogate mother, and on the quarter of Cheok Chai Un, an area that, in the words of the author, « *foi até os princípios dos anos 1960, mais ou menos, um bairro muito típico que o progresso dilacerou* » (*ibid.* : 3). As in previous tales by Fernandes, the young hero and heroine are banished from their respective communities and have to start the world again. They are, in many ways, the Adam and Eve of a new Macau that will emerge in the post-war years, based on a far more explicit compromise between Portuguese and Chinese cultures : A Leng is baptised and married in church, but only in order to aid her husband's reconciliation with his family, and she never abandons her old beliefs. Adozindo becomes a link between the two cultures, adapting as he does to A Leng's world : he takes a job working for a Chinese trader, he eats Chinese food, he buys his wife a *cheong-sam* when his fortunes begin to change, and his children are brought up to speak both parental languages. In bringing the novel to its happy conclusion, in which A Leng has been re-integrated into her community and the by now respectably bourgeois Adozindo is at last reconciled with his father, it is therefore fitting that Fernandes should resort to a typically Chinese piece of symbolism : Adozindo is out flying a kite with his children and is watched from a distance by his estranged father. In the heat of the contest with a rival kite flier, the father steps forward to offer his advice, and this marks the beginning of their reconciliation. In traditional Chinese culture, kite flying is an activity akin to shedding one's guilt and ill fortune, which is why it is as much an adult occupation as it is a child's. Adozindo's kite flying therefore releases his past guilt and sheds his misfortunes, while also reconciling him with his father who, by participating in the competition, releases his own⁷.

It is, perhaps, not surprising that the novel was turned into a successful film, sponsored by both the Macau and Chinese governments, and produced and directed by Cai Yuan-yuan (1997). The love interest, involving as it does a proletarian heroine and a member of the ruling class who, to some extent, commits class suicide, would have appealed to both the Chinese public and the authorities, and recalls the remarkable success of the Brazilian soap opera, *A Escrava Isaura* in China in the 1970s, based on another literary work, in which a slave woman gains the love of an aristocrat⁸. Equally important is the fact that *A Trança Feiticeira* is a politically correct novel within the context of the diplomatic negotiations between Portugal and China over Macau's transition and immediate future. It asserts the contribution of both cultures to Macau in making it a bridge between East and West, it even suggests the value of Confucian ideas with regard to family and filial piety and honour, and in so far as the young heroes are agents for change, this change is evolutionary and respectful of the prevailing social and political order.

In its fundamental characteristics, however, the work of Fernandes, and especially his most recent novel, bears more than a passing resemblance to

7. See, for example, GOMES (1953 : 256).

8. GUIMARÃES (1873) is widely considered Brazil's classic anti-slavery novel.

the domestic romances of Latin America's foundational fiction. According to Doris Sommer, nineteenth-century fiction in Latin America, with its chaste heroes desiring equally chaste heroines for productive unions, serves as a metaphor for the emergence of a new, liberal bourgeoisie, unencumbered by past prejudices and deriving influences from the best qualities of its Iberian and indigenous inheritance. Such romances are driven by desire and passion, usually involving the mutual attraction of opposites, rather than by social imposition or convention. Sommer sees the heroes of these romances as feminized, sharing in the sublime feelings of their beloved heroines, until such a time as the union has been achieved, and more traditional male and female roles are assigned (Sommer 1993 : 16). It would not be hard to apply Sommer's observations to the fiction of our modern-day Macanese novelist. Emphasis, in the beginning, is placed on Adozindo's physical beauty :

« Orgulhava-se do sedoso dos seus cabelos encaracolados, em ondas, do seu nariz caucásico, do redondo dos seus malaras de costela chinesa, dos lábios apolíneos e da fileira magnífica dos dentes. Afinal, orgulhava-se de todo o seu aspecto físico. Terminados os cuidados com os cabelos, a vestimenta e os sapatos, narcisando-se ao espelho, murmurava com sincera convicção : – Oh, Deus, obrigado por me fazeres tão bonito ! » (ibid. : 10).

A Leng, for her part, is financially independent and earns her own living for much of the story, until her hero has proved himself by soiling his hands in work, at which point she assumes the role of wife and mother, and swaps her clogs for high heel shoes. Moreover, in chivalresque manner, an important part of the hero's redemption is the need to defend his beloved's honour publicly. The process is remarkably similar in Fernandes's first novel : Chico's spoilt, narcissistic boyhood is followed by disgrace and expulsion, and harmony is restored through redemption and the acquisition of family responsibility and manly virtues.

Foundational fiction in Latin America usually involved a compromise between city and country, the capital and a rival region, between settler and native. For Fernandes, progress involved a rejection of conservative patriarchy in favour of something more liberal and open. Both novels suggest the desired emergence of a modern creole bourgeoisie, more tolerant in its attitudes, more responsible and hard working in its ethic, but which never loses its peculiarly Macanese personality which has issued from two parent cultures. Significantly, at the end of the novel, A Leng comments to her husband :

« – Reintegraste-te no teu meio, finalmente... »

To which he replies :

« – Julgo que sim. E tu também, ao meu lado. No entanto, jamais completamente, pensou ele. seriam sempre rebeldes, porque independentes dos cânones estritos de dois mundos » (ibid. : 162).

Like most romantic literature, the message of Fernandes's two novels is both progressive in its expression of values of liberalism and tolerance over snobbery, sloth and patriarchy, and nostalgic for a past, before the era of current modernisation, when the uniquely Luso-Chinese identity of Macau was somehow more secure. It is worth repeating – for the author emphasises the point on a number of occasions – that the novels are set well

within the first half of the twentieth century, before the vast influx of refugees resulting from the Japanese invasion of the 1930s, the Revolution of 1949, and the post-war repercussions of Hong Kong's boom upon the author's beloved native city and culture. Modernisation has propelled Macau into a more impersonal, more global age, and Fernandes's work is as much a rhapsodic recollection of its past traditions as it is of his own youth, and in this sense, his attitude accords with that of the other Macanese writers mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

Fernandes's notion of authenticity is directly linked to, and indeed strongly dependent on his authority as an omniscient narrator, as well as on his personal identification with the stories, confirmed by the autobiographical element and by his appearance in the stories in a number of ways : in the prologue or the epilogue, as a first-person narrator, while in one instance, his family's house is featured. Fittingly, Fernandes re-emerges in a cameo role at the end of *A Trança Feiticeira*, to bring the story of Adozindo and A Leng up to date, after his return from studying in Coimbra in the early 1950s :

« Regressei oito anos depois. A Cidade do Nome de Deus conservava-se estruturalmente intacta, sem os arranha-céus nem os automóveis de hoje. Uma coisa, porém, me desiludiu e entristeceu. Os cabelos das mulheres chinesas, fosse qual fosse a condição, expunham-se ou direitos ou frisados, segundo os penteados ocidentais. Em parte alguma, detectei tranças feiticeiras, em meneio ritmado, como serpentes tentadoras » (ibid. : 180).

Writing on the Return to China

Writing on the eve of Macau's return to China, Fernandes turned his back on the office blocks and neon signs of his native city, and focused on a period when it was both more Portuguese and more traditionally Chinese. His is a message of what Bruce King terms re-ethnification, a response to rapid social change. Whether King's further comforting statement that « most societies keep their difference as they modernize » proves true remains to be seen (King 1996 : 23-25).

Finally, if Fernandes recognises Portugal's cultural contribution to this corner of the Far East, his fiction never glorifies in any way an imperial mission. His characters are Macanese, whose world is contained in their tiny spit of land, with its unique cultural blend. For this reason, the absence of any reference to either the benefits or evils of colonialism make the work of Fernandes the most consistent example of an autonomous literary voice from Luso-Chinese Macau. There is one further interesting development in his fiction : it is fitting that A Leng, the heroine of the author's most recent novel, an active agent in the emergence of a modern creole bourgeoisie, should have blotted out the memory of the tragic A-Chan, passively watching her *mestizo* offspring leaving for assimilation into the distant metropolis. In so doing, he has re-asserted the positive importance of China as a partner in the forging of a modern Macanese identity. In a sense, then, although the novels of Senna Fernandes are set in the past, they provide an emotional escape route into the future.

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[Les sous-titres sont de la rédaction]