



TOURISM IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH
HERITAGES, IDENTITIES AND DEVELOPMENT



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SHOW-CASING THE PAST: ON AGENCY, SPACE AND TOURISM

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In this paper, I wish to contribute to an understanding of the linkages between tourism, space and power, in order to explore how these aspects relate to peoples' spatial practices. Using a diachronic approach to tourism, this paper argues that in order to understand tourism phenomenon we cannot do without three intertwined categories: time, space and power. Indeed, understanding spaces of tourism is closely related with depicting their multiple layers of fabric weaved through the passing of time. Based on ethnographic research (Pires 2012), empirical focus is focused in analysing practices of production and appropriation of space in Malacca (West Malaysia). The main data collection techniques consisted of direct observation (during three intensive periods: August and September 2006; June to September 2007; October 2008 to April 2009). Secondly, in articulation with observations, semi-structured interviews were conducted to residents, restaurant managers, tourists and local leaders. Thirdly, archive research in public and private archives (located in Portugal, Malaysia and Singapore) was done extensively from 2006 to 2011). Types of documents analysed consisted of texts, photographs and souvenirs.

Historical references trace back the city's origins to around the year 1403 of the Christian era (Chew 2000: 50). Malacca's growing importance in the complex network of trading activities in the Malay Archipelago made it fall under the colonial rule of European powers

– Portugal, the Netherlands and England, respectively – from 1511 to 1957. The city's contemporary urban cartography still reveals the historic thickness of these successive colonial occupations by European powers. One of the city's main icons is 'Santiago's Gate' – the ruin of a 16th century Portuguese Fortress. Malacca's history as major trading emporium of the Straits of Malacca, has led to its listing, as UNESCO World Heritage City in July 2008, together with the city of George Town (Penang), also in the Straits of Malacca, West Malaysia.

On the outskirts of the city lies the *Portuguese Settlement*. The place is also named *Kampung Portugis* (in *Bahasa melayu*), and *Padri sa Chang* (in the Creole language spoken locally); comprising an area of approximately 28 Acres of land, it has an estimated population of 1200 residents (personal communication with Regedor Peter Gomes, 27th August 2006).

The village was 'born between 1926 and 1934 as a quite literary fabricated entity resulting from the philanthropic efforts of two priests' as the nucleus of residence of the 'Malacca Portuguese' (O'Neill 2008: 55). The group is also known as *Kristangs*. Following O'Neill 'Today, the term *Kristang* has three meanings: (1) the Creole spoken by the Malacca Portuguese, (2) a person of the Catholic Faith, or (3) a member of the ethnic group of Portuguese Eurasians' (O'Neill 2008: 56-57).

My paper aims to deconstruct how Malacca's Portuguese settlement's spatial story has been re-scripted by people in contemporary times (from 1929 to 2009). Under post colonial government, tourism has been set to be one of the country's major development strategies in recent years. Depicting Malaysia as 'Truly Asia', tourism promotion policies are targeting tourism markets located in Asia and the Pacific, with a focus on China and Southeast Asian countries (ASEAN), on the one hand, and the Middle East, on the other hand. European fluxes of tourism movements are also targeted, even though they are less relevant in the statistics than the former categories. A clear example of Malaysian official tourism narratives this is frequently viewed in advertisements in American televisions, such as CNN.

The paper is structured in four moments: we start by framing the colonial production of Space and the empirical context; continue analyzing how the Portuguese Settlement is (re)presented in official tourism narratives; we then move on to address some of the aspects present in peoples' appropriation practices; and I finally end with some (in)conclusive remarks.

From Colonial Space to 'Heritage Village'

Place names may tell us a lot about appropriation and significance of spaces. Regarding the present case, the *kristang* designation of the place is *Padri sa Chang*, meaning, literally, *The Priests' Land*. Indeed, Malacca's Portuguese Settlement exemplifies a process of colonial production of space, in the 20th century. This was done, in a close alliance between British Colonial Government and Christian (Roman Catholic) Missions. And, especially, through the mediation of some catholic missionaries, whose agency is the object of evocative remembering in the local museum. Located in a small room inside the Portuguese Square, the museum was opened in 2000 by the Regedor's Panel, with the main purpose of hosting the visit of the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (Paramount Ruler or King) of Malaysia. Its' collection of objects and old photographs was gathered through donations by Eurasians (Personal communication with resident Michael Banerji, 31st August, 2007). History, daily life and collective celebrations are the three main themes represented at the museum.

One of the colonial agents evoked at the museum is the Portuguese priest *Fr. Álvaro Coroado (1879-1944)*. Fr. Coroado's main pastoral activities are less well known than his agency (and successful mediation practices). In a joint alliance of the Portuguese and the French Catholic Missions of Malacca, they negotiated with the British Resident Commissioner, with a view to obtaining a residential area for low-income Portuguese Eurasians. This symbolic patronage is, up until the present day, quite visible in the local name of Malacca's Portuguese Settlement, '*Padri sa chang*' ('Priests' land').

Data collected from interviews with residents and local leaders (in 2007 and 2008) confirms that the social appropriation of space by the first settlers occurred during the early 1930's, giving rise to the physical and social construction of the *Padri Sa Chang* in the following decades. An enduring marker of its colonial production, are street names (named after Sailors and Colonial Agents).

In the early 1950's, the gradual process of social construction of the place for tourism, would slowly begin. Another colonial agent would be closely engaged in this process: Fr. Manuel J. Pintado (1921-1994). A major part of this missionary's agency was directed towards the introduction and promotion of Portuguese folklore among the local community of Portuguese-Eurasians, a task he organized for the first time in 1952, for the visit of a Portuguese Overseas Minister (Commander Sarmiento Rodrigues) and was developed since then.

This process of stereotyping Portugal (in Asia) through folklore, would be reinforced in the following decades, with the Portuguese missionary's own mediation as an (informal) tourist guide for Portuguese (and other European) visitors. His agency in the diffusion of Portuguese folklore among Malacca's Portuguese Eurasians holds the significance of an enduring marker of stereotype building, directed toward a process of emulating 'Portugal', from colonial to post-colonial times. A detailed analysis of this pattern of emulation can be found in O'Neill (1995, 1999, 2008). Renato Rosaldo's reflection on *imperialist nostalgia* (Rosaldo 1989: 68-87) may be useful here. This author proposes a dismantling analytical strategy for the study of ideology and agency, where Manuel Pintado's action clearly seems to fit. Following the missionary's own words: 'Father Pintado [...] revived the Portuguese culture in Malacca, by introducing to the Malacca Eurasians, the folk songs, dances and costumes of their forefathers. Today, this ethnic revival in Malacca, has become one of the many tourist attractions of this country and has gained Government support and recognition' (Pintado 1989: ix).

Indeed, the *Kristangs* themselves would creatively integrate this *new* Portuguese identity, [expressed through folklore], as a dimension of their ethnic identity. This process of symbolic appropriation would prove to be successful, in terms of identity politics in post-colonial Malaysia. Also, it would provide economic revenue during the 1980's and 1990's, when tourism process started to grow more vigorously in the city. Meanwhile, the neighbourhood's physical environment would start to reflect this identity rhetoric: in 1984, a *Portuguese Square* was built. This spatial transformation would bring relevant changes in the built-form and appropriation practices in *Kampong Portugis*. Locally, the decision to build the new equipment gave rise to residents' contestation. The main reason was the place chosen for the new equipment: the *Padang* (the open public space where the people of the place gathered for leisure activities). The open, empty space of the *Padang*, facing the sea, would give birth to a volumetric building, which would soon become a marker for the tourism appropriation of the community.

The destruction of the *Padang* would make a rupture with in long time relationship to the place, but gave way to a new spatial, exogenous, marker. The *Square* was planned under regulation of the National Government of Post-Colonial Malaysia, in cooperation with the Portuguese Government. Designed to resemble a Portuguese Plaza and Market, near the Malacca's seashore, its built form also holds meanings of a leisure and touristic borderzone with multiple

uses. Material collected from interviews infers the square would soon be appropriated by the *Kristangs*, becoming a place of gatherings for both tourists and locals. Its' uses, though, were regulated since the beginning: it was a place to eat Portuguese local food (at the restaurants existing inside it), and to watch, (on the local stage), weekly performances of Portuguese Folklore, by one of the several cultural troupes of musicians existing in the community. There is also a community museum, and, in an adjacent building, a Community Hall, used for religious practices. Finally, near the entrance, there is a souvenir shop.

In 1988, *Kampung Portugis* also became a Gazetted Heritage Village, and would start to be represented as one of the symbolic places of Malacca's cultural heritage. In line with it, the spatial and symbolic appropriation for tourism and leisure purposes has been followed by a land reclamation process of the seashore. This motivated the building of other spaces: an 'Open-Air Stage, and a Car-Park, facing the *Portuguese Square*. Further away, near the seaside, a new food court, *Medan Selera* – locally known as *The Stalls* – would soon compete with the *Portuguese Square* as the main place for eating Portuguese food. Residents' perceptions of *Medan Selera*, when compared with the Square, refer that this space holds the added value of having a much broader sea view over the strait of Malacca, *Selat Melaka*). Across this food-court, the empty car park is filled on weekends and feast days, with dozens of cars. Many of the vehicles have Singaporean car plates, disclosing leisured mobilities and short stays. Across the car park, the 'Open-air Stage', is now the main place for musical performances, informal local leisure practices, and the symbolic centre for community gatherings. Not far from it, lays the *Portuguese Square*. Previously built just across the seashore, the land reclamation process has put it further inland, as another new portion of the seashore was to give way to new reclamations.

In 2000, political changes in the management and ownership of the *Square* were also in the way. The *Portuguese Square* had been under administration of the Malaysian Government, from 1984 to 2000, when it came under the management of the local community leaders, the *Regedor's Panel*. [According to historian Gerard Fernandis, 'The *Regedor* is a Portuguese word which means the administrator. In this context it means the headman of the Portuguese Settlement. The position was set up when the Portuguese Settlement began in the 1930's and the *Regedor* acted as a liaison man as well as an agent for the government' (Fernandis 2004: 291)]. This action of the *Regedor's Panel* was preceded by complaints concerning abandonment and low

Figure 10.1 Portuguese Settlement Plan



Source: Private Archive of George Bosco Lazaro, Portuguese Settlement, Malacca, ca. 1979

maintenance of the equipment. The complaints, made by *Kristangs* themselves, were supported by tourists (who were asked, by the *Regedor's* staff, to fill in enquiries with suggestions on 'how to improve the place'). The *Regedor's* agency was directed to trying to acquire the governance of the place, from State Government. On the other hand, however, the owner of the building (Malaysian Government) would soon stop the patronage (and the funding) of cultural activities in the place, but would keep the ownership of the Square. Consequently, since 2005, there have been no longer weekly cultural shows in the *Portuguese Square* stage, (despite the references to it in official promotional brochures). Unless tourists book it in advance, the *Square* (and its stage) are empty performative places.

In 2006, six more acres of seaside land were reclaimed by the Malaysian Government, for the building of a Hotel (named after the Portuguese capital, *Lisbon*). The design of the new building slightly resembles the structure of the *Portuguese Square*. Locally, the opening of this Government-owned Hotel (in June 2007) has given rise to open contestation and debates over ownership and appropriation of public space. Located near the symbolic centre of community gatherings, the

Plate 10.1 Portuguese Settlement



Source: author, 2008

Hotel is perceived as a space of alterity. Indeed, local reactions to *Lisbon Hotel* (seem to) vary between indifference and passive rejection. Social access is restricted and the building's gated entrance of the poses a physical, as well as social boundary.

Within the Settlement's social space, there are several formal and informal groups involved in the process of identity making. The *Regedor's Panel* is the formal structure that rules the compound, and to whom the leadership is recognized by the political structure of the country/city. But there are other institutions and groups also visible locally and influencing the identity building process. Three examples that deserve being mentioned are the Malacca Portuguese Eurasian Association, the Funeral Association and the Residents' Action Committee. The main aspect of all these groups is their rootedness in the social life of Malacca. Differing from the context described before is the case of association *Korsang di Malacca*, a foreign Association (based in Portugal) which, in recent years, has also made itself visible in the compound, through a project of promotion of linkages between Eurasian and Portuguese identity. This group and their agenda are beyond the scope of this paper.

The Settlement in Official Tourism Discourses

In this sub-section, I will address, process of indexing of the place by official tourism discourses. Official Discourses emphasise the economic and political dimensions of Tourism activity. According to the chairman of Melaka Tourism Committee, Tourism 'plays a very important role in energising the nation's economy to keep it dynamic (*Melaka Tourism*, sd: 4). State and Federal government highlight Melaka as the *locus memorie* of the nation, (quite visible in the marketing slogan 'Visit Historic Melaka means visit Malaysia').

Within this rhetoric 'landscape', the Portuguese community is a portrait: one piece among the multicultural and «Colourful heritage» of the nation's past and present: [quoting Melaka Tourism Guide] 'Today, the descendants of early Portuguese live in a community called Portuguese Settlement'. Historical references highlight the original name of the place, *Padri sa Chang* (Priests' Land) and the two missionaries whose agency enabled its founding, in 'the late 1920's' (*Melaka Tourism*, sd: 4).

In the national context, celebrating the 50th Birthday of Independence in 2007, the Malaysian Federal Government has launched a tourism campaign (Visit Malaysia Year 2007) within

which Malacca's Portuguese Settlement is also represented. Mirrored images reflect some of the politics of representation.

The 'cultural extraordinariness' of the place – and its touristic relevance – is central on one public space – Portuguese Square – and one event in particular: the Festival of S. Peter. Additionally, the place is also indexed with references to Portuguese space, cultural performances and gastronomy. Images of the Square in official propaganda discourses depict 'a square similar to the central square in Lisbon, Portugal.' (*Melaka Tourism* nd.: 4). In the *Malaysia Travel Guide*, the Settlement is also represented as a place 'where visitors can enjoy its lively square and eat Portuguese –inspired seafood. [To] Visit during festivals such as San Juan and San Pedro held in June' (*Malaysia Travel Guide* nd.: 19).

On the other hand, the Festival of San Pedro is indexed as a place in history, portraying a historical and colourful tradition:

'On 29th June every year, fishermen will honour their patron saint, St. Peter, a tradition kept alive for 500 years. Known as Festa de San Pedro, the festival relives the glories of old Portugal where gaily-dressed fishing-fleets participate in the blessing of the fleet [...], traditionally held off Lisbon. There will also be traditional music and dances' (*Melaka Tourism* nd.: 4).

In 2007, the Festival of San Pedro was enlisted in the official Programme of Visit Malaysia Year. The way the Feast is mirrored in national level celebration would draw the discussion to the symbolic and political meanings of this inclusion. Quoting the official brochure, going to 'Fiesta San Pedro [is to] 'Experience Portugal in Malaysia!' (*Visit Malaysia* 2006: np). The text also invites visitors to:

'Participate in a Festival unlike any other! Fiesta San Pedro or Feast of Saint Peter is a major annual celebration of the Portuguese fishing community. Get ready for a day filled with fun and delight as you watch traditional games, cultural performances, food fairs and a 'best decorated' boat contest' (*Great Events* 2007: np).

An '(Extra)Ordinary Place'?

Tourism 'is a practice of ontological knowledge, an encounter with space that is both social and incorporates an embodied 'feeling of doing'' (Crouch 2002: 211). I follow Chris Rojek's proposition concerning the role that myth and fantasy play in the social

construction of tourist sights. Used in the plural, the noun 'sights' refers, here, to 'noteworthy or attractive features of a town' (whereas, if used in its singular form, it would mean 'the faculty of seeing') (Pocket Oxford Dictionary, 1984: 697). Chris Rojek assumes '...the proposition that myth and fantasy play an unusually large role in the social construction of all travel and tourist sights. There are several reasons for this. In the first place, travel sights are usually physically distant from our ordinary locale. (...) Second (...) the cultural significance of sights engender representational cultures which increase the accessibility of the sight in everyday life; in theory we may speak of an index of representations; that is, a range of signs, images and symbols which make the sight familiar to us in ordinary culture. The process of indexing refers to the set of visual, textual and symbolic representations to the original culture. It is important to recognize that representational culture is not a uniform entity. Rather one might speak of files of representation. A file of representation refers to the medium and conventions associated with signifying a sight' (Rojek 1997: 53). According to this view, 'Methaphorical, allegorical and false information remains a resource in the pattern of tourist culture as an object of reverie, dreaming and speculation. In the social construction of sights this information can be no less important than factual material in processes of indexing' (Rojek 1997: 53). As such, 'A tourist sight may be defined as a special location which is distinguished from everyday life by virtue of its natural, historical or cultural extraordinariness' (Rojek 1997: 52). As a social category, 'the extraordinary place' spontaneously invites speculation, reverie, mind-voyaging and a variety of other acts of imagination' (Rojek 1997: 51). This brings into discussion, also, questions of agency and power, related to processes of labelling and appropriating space. I follow, here, Sherry Ortner's (2006) approach to conceptualizing agency: '(1) the question whether or not agency inherently involves 'intentions'; (2) the simultaneous universality and cultural constructedness of agency; and (3) the relationship between agency and 'power'' (Ortner 2006: 134). A more detailed theoretical analysis is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

In this section I briefly describe practices of appropriation of public space in the *Settlement*, during *Festa San Pedro* 2007. Locally, the *Kristang* community, through their representatives (the *Regedor's* Panel) elected the theme *My community, My country* for the 2007 celebration— [politically 'in line' with the state and federal government]. The spatial context of the celebration seems to be made of multiple centres, (gaining more or less centrality, according to the

time of the day). One observes the centrality of the 'Open Air Stage' (and surrounding area): this is the main public space and its festive centre and the central point of an intense economic contact zone. It is also a highly mediatized landscape. I will illustrate this fact by presenting two examples [taken from fieldnotes]:

Interactions on Stage: Tropa di Minino and Tropa di Malaca

In the first day of the *Festa* there was the debut of a new Cultural Troupe: «Tropa di Mininu» (Children's Troupe) was created by the local *Regedor's* Panel, with the aim of trying to 'secure' the socio-cultural continuity of Portuguese dances. In the debut performance, the thirteen *kristang* children, dressed in 'traditional' local costumes [made by local tailors], were asked to 'SMILE' (by their lady teacher), while entering the stage. This troupe was followed by the cultural group «*Tropa di Malaca*», whose leader is the *Kristang* musician Noel Felix. [I will not address here the structure and repertoire of the performances, as it is beyond the scope of this paper]. I would, however like to emphasise an incident that occurred on stage: while performing, *Tropa di Malaca's* musicians and dancers were interrupted twice, in order to enable a TV channel and their reporters to film their performance. The stage was now a shared space between musicians, dancers, photographers, cameramen, and the lady journalist.

Second: Procession & Boat Competition.

The Christian procession and blessing of the Boats (on the last evening of the Festival) is the second moment I would like to invoke here, as it was held among a massified crowd of visitors, journalists and locals. This was also a setting of photographic interaction between locals and visitors. Fishermen's Boats were decorated with various materials, and all presented logos by a national telephone company. Boat Competition winners received money, and the competition's judges were asked to evaluate each boat according to the following criteria: 'Cleanliness', 'Decoration', 'Significant Religious points', and 'Originality'. [In 2007, I was one of the judges. In the past, other foreign researchers were asked to evaluate the competition.]

Other central spaces, (practiced by both locals and visitors) located in the reclaimed land near the seaside were *Medan Selera* [locally named 'The stalls'] and a *Fun Fair* – occurring in a leisure playground area near the sea, and held for the first time in 2007.

At the periphery of all these spaces, one finds the [touristy indexed] *Portuguese Square*. In contrast to the centrality that is given to it in tourist official narratives, this is a rather abandoned social space. At the entrance, colourful signs indicate a museum (closed for renovation), some restaurants and a souvenir shop. However, the emptiness of the place only diminishes at meal hours or when the souvenir shop's loud music fills in the space (stimulating tourist consumption practices). Particularly, interviews with European tourists (twenty-two semi-structured interviews, 2007-2008) were carried out during festivals and also in occasions when there was not a public celebration in the settlement, with the purpose of knowing how they perceive the space of the Settlement. Most of the interviewees expressed a feeling of disappointment towards the space of the compound. Interviewees infer that their experience in the place is one of disenchantment. Experiencing the *real* place, is less pleasurable than imagining it, in an anticipated way. A general perception of emptiness is corroborated by the people of the place, and, specifically, by the *Square's* restaurant owners.

(In)Conclusive Remarks

Space 'is discursively mapped and corporeally practiced. An urban neighbourhood, for example, may be laid out physically according to a street plan. But it is not a space until it is practiced by people's active occupation, their movements through and around it' (Clifford 1997: 54). In the present empirical context, discourse and experience seem to be displaced. Regarding spatial identities, the *Kristang* imagine *Padri sa Chang* as the stage upon which social memory is constructed, where locality is 'produced', as well as a site for tourism performance both in local, national and trans-national contexts. It seems to be, also, a symbolic arena for negotiating place and identity and coping with the media and politics. Somewhere in-between, they are dealing with commercial activity, media exposure, and multiple agencies. David Greenwood's (1989) classic study on commoditization of culture is evocative, here, of the dense process of appropriation of this place, by multiple agents.

The symbolic appropriation of the village by the Malaysian Government, calls into the background, *Kristangs'* religious identity, and how their spatial practices are appropriated into national rhetoric by Malaysia's Islamic State. The *exoticness* present in the narratives about the place draws into discussion the making of a Christian ghetto, into a *touristic* place. European Tourists' disenchant

perception of the *Portuguese Square and Settlement*, may be helpful empirical tools in deconstructing the social meanings of emptiness, in tourist settings. The place of the *Settlement* in Official Tourism discourses brings into the context the relations between Power and Tourism, regarding processes of ideological investment in the construction of sites. There seem to be multiple ways in which governments have been interested in promoting and shaping Tourism. Indeed, state intervention and tourism regulation can be noticed throughout the history of such activity. From its colonial production to its post-colonial appropriations, this seems to be the case in Malacca's *Portuguese Settlement*. Analyzing Tourism, anthropologically, is all about reflexively unpacking these processes.

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