

Portuguese Cultural Heritage in Southeast Asia:

The Eurasian Communities' Quest for Survival
16th to 19th Centuries ¹

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Abstract

Artikel ini membahas tentang warisan budaya Portugal di Asia Tenggara, dengan menekankan kepada pembahasan tentang komunitas keturunan Portugal dengan melatarbelakangi pada 3 (tiga) hal yaitu; perkawinan berbeda suku, proses terhadap pembentukan bahasa dari 'pertemuan' dua bahasa yang berbeda suku, khususnya di Malacca dan Batavia serta memperhatikan tiga faktor dalam melakukan identifikasi terhadap komunitas yang berasal dari perkawinan berbeda suku seperti, suku, bahasa dan agama.

Keywords: cultural heritage, history, creole

Recent academic studies have given special attention to the existence of Eurasian communities in Southeast Asia. Although these Creole communities were not considered in Portugal as an academic matter until the 19th century, the analysis of the acknowledged references to these groups allows us to comprehend the successive intellectual approaches to

¹ This article is based on a Special Presentation that took place at the Indonesian University on 13th June 2006. Some matters have been looked into afterwards, trying to answer some of the questions raised at that event.

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this topic and to be aware of the political and cultural atmosphere in which authors write. It is also possible to acknowledge how this particular element of Portuguese cultural heritage in Southeast Asia developed and survived throughout three centuries.

This is the starting point of this paper, which sets sail from the birth of one community of Portuguese descendants in Malacca in the 16th century, and investigates its contribution to the growth of cultural diversity of Southeast Asia. We then try to examine the first contacts between Portuguese and Indonesians and the case of the survival and death of the Creole language in Batavia in the 19th century.

For a better understanding of this historic fact, our main perspectives are framed by three specific features: *race*, language, and religion, thus trying to understand images and stereotypes constructed during an extended period of many years.

1. The Portuguese in Malacca, 1511-1641

Creole communities were born from the encounters between Portuguese and natives in 16th century Southeast Asia – particularly in Malacca, after its conquest by the Portuguese in 1511, but also in Batavia, Ceylon, India, Burma, and later in

Singapore in the 19th century. As it is common knowledge, it was forbidden for women to travel with men as they were not considered useful in contexts of war and, above all, because they distracted men.³ With the absence of European women, European men married native women, and this situation was encouraged by the Crown as part of Afonso de Albuquerque's political objective of the rapid settlement of the seaports of trade.

By then the Portuguese Crown was more interested in setting up a maritime trade network than in creating a true-bound empire and so preferred generally to maintain local customs.⁴ And like the Crown, Portuguese men accepted local practices, the only difference being that they also adopted them as theirs, and so they began not only to marry native women but also to turn slaves into their concubines, thus giving birth to illegitimate children who were often raised together with the legitimate Creole offspring.

³ Cf. Ana Maria Amaro, *Filhos da Terra, Macau*, Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1988, p. 14.

⁴ Cf. Luís Filipe Thomaz, "The Malay Sultanate of Malacca" in Reid, Anthony (Ed.), *Southeast Asia in the Early Modern Era. Trade, Power and Belief*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1993, p. 70.

Consequently, we can say that it was due to extra-matrimonial relations that there was such a prodigious birth of *Mestizo*,⁵ and we say prodigious because it is said that the Portuguese population in Malacca was so small, as was the case in most of the

settlements of the Portuguese vast and far-flung maritime empire.⁶ This community would live mainly in the centre of the town within the walls, though we know that by the end of the sixteenth century there were already four parishes located around the town, which suggests that the Portuguese were already extensively disseminated among the larger Asian population.⁷

Under Portuguese influence, socially speaking, these *Mestizos* would assume an intermediate cultural space between European and Asians in cosmopolitan Malacca. Besides being ethnically different from all other communities, they had their Christianity that distinguished them from all Asian groups, being a fundamental feature of Portuguese Expansion as it was. In fact, by then even the commercial competition for the popular spices "(...) assumed a religious flavour and Muslim traders who played a significant role in the trade of spices between Melaka and the Mediterranean suddenly found themselves being barred from the major emporium in the Straits of Melaka and quite a few major ports

⁵ Two words are commonly used to designate the members of these communities: Creole and *Mestizo*. The latter was originally connected to the idea of *race* and domination in the Spanish conquest of America. In Asia, it was first used by the Dutch to name the children of Portuguese men and native women that were left behind after the conquest of the city, in 1641 (*Mestize*). As to the word Creole, originally it referred to the offspring of European parents born in Latin America or in Asia. Nowadays it is used for both the language and the cultural identity of the Euro-Asians. It is important to say that by the time of their appearance, both terms gained a negative and ambiguous connotation, which recently they lost. Cf. Isabel Tomás (Introdução) in Sebastião Rodolfo Dalgado, *Estudos sobre os Crioulos Indo-Portugueses*, Lisboa, CNCDP, 1998, p. 14; Jacques Audinet, *Le Temps du Métissage*, Paris, Les Éditions de L'Atelier, 1997, pp. 41-8; Brian O'Neill, "Multiple Identities among the Malacca Portuguese", *Revista de Cultura*, n.º 4, Macau, Instituto Cultural de Macau, 2002, pp. 86-91. Besides these, one can find reference to other names either for the language or the ethnic designation, like Eurasian in Singapore, Kristang in Malacca, Burgher in Sri-Lanka, amongst others. Cf. Myrna Braga-Blake, *Singapore Eurasians*, Singapore, Times Editions, 1992, p. 13; Chan Kok Eng, *A Study in the Social Geography of the Malacca Portuguese Eurasians*, Kuala Lumpur, University of Malaya, 1969, p. 3 (unpublished M.A. thesis).

⁶ Cf. Luís Filipe Thomaz, *Early Portuguese Malacca*, Macau, CTMCDP and IPM, 2000, p. 97.

⁷ Cf. J. Villiers, *Portuguese Malacca*, Bangkok, Portuguese Embassy in Thailand, 1988, p. 16.

along the coast of India."⁸

Furthermore, much before the work of evangelization began with the arrival of missionaries, one could already find in Malacca new Christians that were the women whom the Portuguese men married, and that had been persuaded to accept the Christian faith.⁹ Then, with the arrival of the Jesuits the number of Christians increased very rapidly. And together with the Christian faith, Portuguese culture and language were adopted by these converted.

Nevertheless, we must mention that a few years before missionaries and conversions did their part of the job in this spreading of the Portuguese language, trade and commerce already contributed to the creation of a Creole language -the "Pidgin". Pidgins are languages that are easy to learn, for the purpose of immediate communication, especially when languages, like Arabic, are no longer used. While the new language was only used in trade routes, it did not define a social or a cultural space.¹⁰ It

was only when it was learned and spoken by the children as their mother tongue that it delineated a restricted social space.¹¹ This means that when we refer to the Portuguese language we imply all these variations since its formation as a Pidgin to the development of the Creole and the use of the Portuguese language as it is spoken in Portugal.¹² As we all know the usage of a specific language in a group doesn't only serve the purpose of communication, it is part of a cultural identity that the groups exhibit, like a symbol. The existence of a language means the prevalence of a cultural universe and its very own structures of imagination and symbolism. And it is easy to understand that one can live without religion but not without a language.¹³

However, by that time, religion was like an identity card to the people. So in mid-16th century, the Portuguese adopted strict laws for the conversion of the Hindus and the Muslims, and

⁸ Radin Fernando, *The Metamorphosis of Luso-Asian Diaspora in the Malay Archipelago, 1640-1795* (unpublished), p. 3.

⁹ Cf. Luís Filipe Thomaz, *Early Portuguese Malacca*, p. 98.

¹⁰ Cf. *Idem*, "A Língua Portuguesa em Timor", *Actas do Congresso sobre a Situação Actual da Língua Portuguesa no Mundo*, 2nd Ed., Lisbon, ICALP, Diálogos-Compilação, Vol. II, 1990, pp. 313-346.

¹¹ Cf. Alan Baxter, *A Grammar of Kristang (Malacca Creole Portuguese)*, Canberra, Australian National University, 1988, p. 5.

¹² Cf. Alan Baxter, "Kristang (Malacca Creole Portuguese) - a long-time survivor seriously endangered", *Estudios de Sociolingüística*, Volume 6, 1, Vigo, Universidade de Vigo, 2005, p. 1.

¹³ Cf. Amin Maalouf, *As Identidades Assassinas*, 2nd Ed., Lisbon, Difel, 2002, p. 146.

as Schouten¹⁴ would later say:

*"(...) for the growth and increase of Malacca's population the example of Romulus was followed. Everybody and anybody was allowed to enter the city as free vassals of Portugal irrespective of nationality or their being criminals, provided they were converted to the Christian faith; otherwise they would be deported to Goa, Macao or Manila, where they would be sold as slaves without any consideration or mercy, unless ransomed."*¹⁵

Despite the efforts to guarantee a strong population in Malacca, with inhabitants linked primarily by the bonds of Catholic Faith, it never exceeded 1.5 millions, which still wasn't enough. And so Portugal lost Malacca, leaving behind "(...) a small community of Eurasians, still conserved, loyal and uncomplaining, in the fold of the Catholic Church and a few such articles of European culture as a torture-chamber, bullets, forks, tables, cupboards, pins and velvet and a hideously shapeless jacket not yet discarded by Eurasian, Malay and locally born Chinese women."¹⁶

And this is mainly how in 16th century Malacca, which was by far the most important port held by the Portuguese after Goa and Macau, a new ethnic group was born with its own religion and language. At the same time, in other places, contacts between the Portuguese and the natives went on.

As concerns Indonesia, the contact between the Portuguese and the Indonesians began right after the conquest of Malacca, in December 1511, with a voyage to the Moluccas. The expedition was headed by António de Abreu and it sailed along the coast of Sumatra, Java, Bali, Lombok, Sumbawa and Flores, and from there to Banda. One of the commanders of the boats - Francisco Serrão - would eventually be shipwrecked and be rescued by the people of the Island of Ambon. He would later be sent to Ternate, where he would become the Sultan's counsellor especially in matters of war. There he would die in 1521, leaving behind a Javanese widow and two sons.¹⁷

At the same time, in the North of the Island of Java, in Banten (Sunda), the Portuguese would sign an agreement with the Sultan authorising them to arrange a trading-centre in

¹⁴ Schouten would be the new commissioner in Malacca, right after the conquest of the city by the Dutch.

¹⁵ Schouten in R. O. Winstedt, *A History of Malaya*, 2nd Ed., Kuala Lumpur, Marican & Sons SDN. BHD., 1986, p. 97.

¹⁶ R.O. Winstedt, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

¹⁷ Cf. António Pinto da França, *Portuguese Influence in Indonesia*, Jakarta, Gunung Agung, 1970, pp. 8,9.

that city, where the Portuguese merchants could remain every year, waiting for the monsoon.¹⁸ Later, in 1522, the Portuguese would sign another treaty, this time in Jakarta, with the local Prince. The agreement allowed them to put up a trading-center and a mark (*Padrão*), which testified the presence of the Portuguese in that city. It was also there that both Dominican and Franciscan fathers would build their missions and churches, which unfortunately would be, later on, destroyed.¹⁹ All these contacts - religious and of trade - would result in the appearance, in Batavia as in Malacca, of *Mestizos* that would carry on, for years to come, their difference towards the other communities, by being Catholics and speaking a Creole language.

2. The vicissitudes of the Luso-Asian communities, 1641-1750

However, as time went by, things changed, particularly when the Portuguese lost Malacca to the Dutch in 1641 and the city "(...) lost its importance as the collecting port of spices from the neighbouring islands and the port from which the spices were dispatched to Europe"²⁰,

although it appears that the Luso-Asian communities in both cities retained their position in regional trade intact and even prospered under the Dutch rule until the mid-eighteenth century.²¹

After the assault and conquest of Malacca, the Dutch would maintain the tendency to interrelate with the natives, many of them Creole women descendants from the Portuguese. We can observe this in a set of documents from the records of the Dutch Reformed Church in Malacca, particularly in one that refers the first baptismal registry, in 1642, that of the child of a Dutch man (Jan Harmens) and a Portuguese woman (Maria Gomes).²² And in these matrimonial relations lies the fundamental reason for the survival of the community, and furthermore for why the Portuguese cultural legacy wasn't erased from Malacca or Batavia, or other trade ports like Ceylon, for instance. In fact, two motives are usually indicated by most analysts, although a third one happened to be mentioned too, but only at a specific point of Portuguese history:

²¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 6.

²² Dato' Habibah Zon, *Disclosures from the Records of the Dutch Reformed Church in Malacca at the National Archives of Malaysia*, Kuala Lumpur, National Archives of Malaysia, 2003, p. 13.

¹⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 12.

¹⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 14.

²⁰ Radin Fernando, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

First, the Luso-descendant group assimilates some of the Dutch newly arrived in Malacca, mainly through marriage and the subsequent adoption of Portuguese language and the Catholic religion. And this will be evident, in the 19th century, when the Malacca Portuguese community still includes members with Dutch surnames.²³

Second, there was a need felt by the Dutch to use the Portuguese language in evangelization and in trade, mainly because of the strong usage of both Creole and Portuguese in the vast number of Portuguese establishments governed from Goa (from Hormuz in the Persian Gulf to Ternate in the spice islands, and from Sofala in Mozambique to Nagasaki in Japan)²⁴ closely connected in South and Southeast Asia, that facilitated the dense population movement;

One third motive has also been pointed out, and that is the acceptance of the *Mestizos* by the Portuguese and the subsequent integration in the Portuguese social environment, creating a greater cultural and even sentimental bond, as some authors defend, though others, like Alan Baxter, consider that more than racial

tolerance, there was a political need of the Crown to find labourers and to give a permanent character to the Expansion in Asia, with a loyal population, available for defence, as it turned out to be, and adapted to local circumstances (the *Casados*).²⁵

And so, as a group, the *Portuguese* grew stronger during Dutch rule. The former offered itself as an intermediate group that could mediate conflicts between the Dutch and some of the minorities present in Malacca, like other *Mestizos*, Indians or Javanese. As a result, the community grew larger and in 1678, according to statistics, the 5000 inhabitants of Malacca included 1469 Portuguese

²⁵ Cf. Alan Baxter, *A Grammar of Kristang (Malacca Creole Portuguese)*, p. 5. The author bases his statement in Ian A. MacGregor, "Notes on the Portuguese in Malaya", *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 28 (2), 1955, pp. 9-12. Baxter thinks that the survival of the Portuguese language in Malacca, and in other Dutch establishments, like Ceylon or Batavia, results directly from the fact that the Portuguese were the first European people to arrive and to emphatically mark their presence. Besides, during the Portuguese occupation, Malacca was in contact with a vast number of fortified trading posts and garrisons governed from Goa, as we have said, reinforcing the use of the language. But the main reason why the Portuguese language was never supplanted by the Dutch is that it was to be used, together with Malay, for trade relations and for evangelization by the Dutch themselves.

²³ Campos Guimarães e Cabral Ferreira, *O Bairro Português de Malaca*, Porto, Afrontamento, 1996, p. 44.

²⁴ Cf. J. Villiers, *op.cit.*.

against 145 Dutch, amongst others (588 Malays, 547 Indians, 426 Chinese, 102 Bugis and 1607 slaves).²⁶

These numbers, according to some authors, are of great significance especially if we consider that the census was taken after years of religious persecution, although we can find different academic positions as to this issue. We don't have enough time to discuss it, but the bottom line is that, as we have said, the Dutch found in the Creole group the women they needed for marriage and for procreation, and they themselves adopted the Catholic religion, which is why religious persecution was not continuous. It stopped, for instance, in 1710, when the Catholics were allowed to construct the Church of St. Peter, as a result of the financial help of a Dutch benefactor - Franz Amboer.

It is nonetheless interesting to mention that we can uncover one of the moments of religious prohibition through a document from the records of the Dutch Reformed Church in Malacca, already mentioned. In fact, in the *Resolutiën Book of 1718-1740*,²⁷ we

can read that "(...) a woman by the name of Leonora Laban was not allowed to attend the *Avondmaal* (the Lord's Supper) as she was said to have led an *ergerlijk* (provocative) life. One of her crimes was that she had brought her child to the *Paapsche* (Catholic Priest) to be baptized."²⁸ In another document, we can see how the Dutch tried to convert the Malays to Protestantism, translating a part of the Bible - the Gospel according to St. Mathews - to Malay, and training Malay speaking clergymen, but without much success we must say.²⁹

It is important to note that these years of persecution may have provoked an increase of the numbers of Luso-descendants in Batavia, due to the escape of some of the members of the Malacca community to this city by this time.³⁰ Batavia - where the

²⁸ Dato' Habibah Zon, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

²⁶ Cf. R. O. Winstedt, *op.cit.*, p. 120; Ronald Daus, *Portuguese Eurasian Communities in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989, p. 9.

²⁷ The *Resolutiën* contain the registries of the Protestant Ecclesiastic Councils, between 1694 and 1825 and are divided in four tomes.

²⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*.

³⁰ Cf. Campos Guimarães e Cabral Ferreira, *op. cit.*, p. 44; Alan Baxter, "Portuguese and Creole Portuguese in the Pacific and Western Pacific Rim", in Stephen Wurm, Mühlhäusler and Darrell T. Tryon (Editors), *Atlas of Languages of Intercultural Communication in the Pacific, Asia, and the Americas*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1996, p. 306.

²⁶ Cf. R. O. Winstedt, *op.cit.*, p. 120; Ronald Daus, *Portuguese Eurasian Communities in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1989, p. 9.

²⁷ The *Resolutiën* contain the registries of the Protestant Ecclesiastic Councils, between 1694 and 1825 and are divided in four tomes.

Creole language was already spoken and where one could find a Portuguese Church - had been founded in 1619.³¹

So as we can see, the Catholic religion, during the Dutch governance, was one of the important identity ties of the Malacca Portuguese. Having analysed the ethnic and the religious factors and the role they played in the survival of the community during the Dutch presence in Southeast Asia, let's now see what happened to the Creole language in this period. In fact, connected to religion, as we have said, was the Portuguese language as both Portuguese and Creole were used for evangelization equally by Dutch and Catholic Priests. The latter came secretly from Macau, during the years of religious prohibition.³² Last but not least, there was a proliferation of religious associations, like the fraternity of the "irmang de Greza", which is a Dominican organization that played a fundamental part in the preservation of the religious traditions and in the continuation of the cultural identity of the community.

As we have said, by this time, the Creole was still the only means of communication of the members of the community, but it was also used by other ethnic groups, mainly in trade, like the Malay, the Indian and the Chinese, and moreover by the Dutch themselves. This is especially noteworthy when one thinks that during this period these people had no contact whatsoever with Portugal or with the Portuguese language from the Metropolis.

Although the difference between the Portuguese descendants and other communities was particularly clear due to these three identity factors, that is *race*, language and religion, it appears that their ethnic *classification* varied in the ports of trade from record to record depending on the judgement of the harbour master in each case. An alteration in the word used to identify one person could sometimes testify a change in social status, for better or for worse. For instance, Radin Fernando mentions the case of a regular Portuguese trader, Joseph de Andrade, who "(...) was at first referred to as a Portuguese (on his outgoing entry on 18 March 1697), a burgher on his next appearance in the records (incoming entry on 17 January 1707), then as a black (between 1714 and 1715) and finally as a *maardijker* (1719). A few years later Joseph de Andrade appeared as a

³¹ Cf. David Lopes, *A Expansão da Língua Portuguesa no Oriente durante os séculos XVI, XVII e XVIII*, Barcelos, Portucalense Editora, 1936, p. vii.

³² Cf. Manuel Teixeira, *Portugal em Singapura*, Macau, Imprensa Nacional, 1985, p. 154.

black or native burgher."³³ The author is of the opinion that "there are many more instances like this in the harbour-master's records, which seem to suggest a gradual social ascendancy of Portuguese descendants in Melaka in the second half of the seventeenth century"³⁴, although this may also be a sign that "the original Portuguese inhabitants in Melaka appear to have lost their identity in the process of being assimilated into the local community."³⁵ Regardless of the contradictions revealed by these data in the ethnic identification of Portuguese descendants, they also prove that "the Luso-Asian community managed to adjust itself under the new circumstances and conduct small-scale trade between ports in the archipelago alongside other ethnic groups well into the mid-eighteenth century."³⁶

3. A time of transformation, 1750-1950

Apparently, it was only after the mid-eighteenth century that the biggest changes occurred when the Portuguese descendant traders lost

their position of glory to the rival trading groups of Malays and Chinese, skilful as they were in the small-scale activity across the archipelago.³⁷ The fact that the position of splendour occupied by Malacca in the maritime trade route was transferred to Batavia by the Dutch after its occupation is not indifferent to this course of events.

It all began when the United Netherlands Chartered East India Company (the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* - VOC), some years after its founding in 1602, established its headquarters in Batavia (modern Jakarta). It was also in Batavia that the Dutch positioned the Ecclesiastic Council from which all the Churches of Malacca, Ceylon, India, Timor, Java, Sulawesi, and the Cape of Good Hope, were managed.

Despite being the capital of the Dutch Empire in Asia, both politically and religiously speaking, and although there are signs of an effort made by the Dutch to teach Christian values to the youngsters first in Dutch, and then in Malay, finally, as of 1664, the Dutch would recognize that the Portuguese language was the language of communication of both free men and slaves, allowing it to be used by the Protestant preachers and by the Portuguese community in their

³³ Radin Fernando, *op.cit.*, p. 10. Fernando speaks of burghers as "full-blooded or mixed European", blacks as "swarts", and *maardijkers* as "free inhabitants". Cf. *Ibidem*.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

³⁷ Cf. Radin Fernando, *op.cit.*, pp.12,15.

religious ceremonies.³⁸ Furthermore, in Batavia one could find five Churches: one of them gave mass in Dutch, two in Portuguese and two in Malay,³⁹ which is particularly significant in showing the important survival and usage of the Portuguese language.⁴⁰ How can this be explained?

According to De Vries,⁴¹ the Dutch language did not win its way in Batavia for four different reasons:

- 1) The Creole language, which he calls "Malay-Portuguese", was the language of communication from Madagascar to the Philippines;
- 2) It was the language used by the VOC itself in contacts with both Asian and Euro-Asian people;
- 3) In most families, children were raised by slaves that spoke the Creole;
- 4) The Protestant Church in Batavia used the language to give the Mass.

³⁸ Cf. David Lopes, *op.cit.*, pp. 106-7.

³⁹ Cf. Dato' Habibah Zon, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁴⁰ In a letter sent to the Directors of the Company in Amsterdam, in 1674, the Governor of Batavia, Maetsuyker, communicated how deeply worried he was over the great usage of the Portuguese language in Batavia. Cf. De Jonge, *De opkomst van het Nederlandsch gezag in Oost-Indië*, VI, p. 125, quoted by David Lopes, *op.cit.*, p. 106.

⁴¹ J. W. de Vries, "Het Nederlands in Indonesie, I - Historische achtergronden", *Neerlandica extra muros*, n.º 41, 1983, pp. 50-56, quoted and translated by Luis Filipe Thomaz, "A Língua Portuguesa em Timor", pp. 329-30.

In addition, the author mentions that both Malay and "Malay-Portuguese" were used as official languages in school, and even at home given the high number of crossed marriages between Dutch and Creole women.

As to David Lopes, the strong dissemination of the Portuguese language in Batavia may be explained by the action of the *Mardykers*, who were already mentioned in this article through the work of Radin Fernando, though he uses a slightly different word - *Maardijkers*. According to Lopes these men were originally slaves from Malacca and Bengala, and also from the Coromandel and Malabar coasts that switched to Protestantism after being freed from their slave condition. In Batavia, they were the core of the Portuguese community, and spoke the Creole language and apparently grew immensely in number, especially after the conquest of Malacca and Ceylon by the Dutch, and the more they grew the more they used Creole.⁴²

However, the prestige of the Luso-Asian communities and the use of the Creole language started its descent around 1750, at the same time that Malacca lost its leading position

⁴² Cf. David Lopes, *op. cit.*, pp. 107-108. The author bases his opinions in De Haan, *De Portugeesche Buitenkerk*, pp. 13-14.

as the centre of the Luso-Asian community in the archipelago; some members of the community probably shifted their operations to other major port cities such as Goa or Macau, which became more attractive to them as the long-distance trade between Europe and China expanded and succeeded⁴³ and "numerically stronger communities of Malay and Chinese traders had clearly ousted the Luso-Asian traders engaged in regional trade between numerous ports in the archipelago."⁴⁴ As years went by, the Malay language started to supplant the Creole at the same time that more and more people from Java, Samatra, Bali, and Sulawesi attended the Portuguese Churches in Batavia. With the Luso-Asians either leaving or being assimilated by the larger Oriental communities, there was no reason for using the Creole language in Church.⁴⁵

And later, at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, after years of survival and glory, the life of the Portuguese descendants would again be changed by the evidence of a new power arising in Southeast Asia, by the time the British conquered Malacca, which happened

right after the occupation of Holland by France. One fascinating detail is that the British would be received by the Governor of Malacca, Abrahamus Couperus, the day after the conquest of the city, and there are registers of how his wife "(...) was dressed in a mixture between the Malay and the Portuguese."⁴⁶

And although the British would state that "(...) the marriage of our soldiers to native women is a matter of such consequence to posterity that we shall be content to encourage with some expense",⁴⁷ they did not show much support or high opinion for the Malacca Creole community in the 1827 census where they state that:

"The inhabitants that come next under consideration are the Siraes or native Portuguese - these are the remains of the once large population of Malacca who are now dwindled to no more than 2.289 souls. Although the ancestors of this race originally intermarried with the native women their descendants are now separate and form by Customs and habits a distinct class. They retain in their countenance, the prominent features of their ancestors although in color, as dark as the natives and are, therefore, very easily distinguished.

⁴³ Cf. Radin Fernando, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁵ This matter was subject to open discussion in 1708 between two Protestant Priests that preached in Creole - Op den Akker and Thornton - and two that preached in Malay. Cf. David Lopes, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-112.

⁴⁶ Wong Lai Sim, *The Eurasian Population Of Singapore, 1819-1959*, Singapore, University of Singapore, Geography Department, 1962/63 (Unpublished).

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

*These people are all poor and many live in wretched houses erected in that part of Malacca called Banda Hilir. (...) At Boongha Raya near the river's side they have a decent well built church, are bigoted Roman Catholics, and are regularly supplied with Priests who are sent for the purpose by the two colleges at Goa and Macao. They speak a language peculiar to themselves which may be dominated (sic.) as Creole Portugueze as the original has been greatly corrupted."*⁴⁸

This passage shows how the community had been reduced to some poor people that lived in wretched houses in Banda Hilir.

As we can see, *race*, language and religion were by this time the three factors that disguised a different group amongst others, together with customs and habits. The fact that the members of this community were Christians made them belong to the world-wide Christian community, but tracing descent from both Asian and European people and speaking a language that is based on a European language gave them a particular characteristic or identity, which was that of being Creole (Kristang, as they say in Malacca) or Eurasian.

Soon after, the economic power assembled by the British in the Malay

Peninsula would make many members of the Portuguese community leave their hometown and look for greener pastures in places like Kuala Lumpur, Singapore and Penang, giving birth to new communities but also weakening even more the Malacca Portuguese community.

At the same time, other ethnic groups gradually subsumed the Portuguese and their descendants who remained in Malacca and other port cities, like Batavia, until their original identity became invisible, except for their names and their religion.⁴⁹ And, finally, in Batavia, as time went by, the Creole would become the language of the lower classes of the *Mestizos*, disappearing rapidly during the 19th century according to de Vries and to David Lopes, and surviving only amongst the Christian community of Tugu, close to Batavia.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Because time doesn't easily erase cultural traces, luckily, times of decay were not times of defeat and new

⁴⁸ Dickinson quoted by Alan Baxter, *A Grammar of Kristang*, pp. 8-9.

⁴⁹ Cf. Radin Fernando, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁵⁰ Cf. J. W. de Vries, *op. cit.*, quoted by Luís Filipe Thomaz, "A Língua Portuguesa em Timor", p. 329; David Lopes, *op. cit.*, pp. 114-115. The latter refers the work of Schuchardt, *Ueber das Malaioportugiesische von Batavia und Tugu*, pp. 20-23.

changes would arrive, at least for two of these communities –the Malacca Portuguese and the Singapore Eurasians– during the 20th century, when the Portuguese dictatorship's politics towards Portuguese communities spread throughout Portuguese colonies and around the world, namely where the *Padroado Português do Oriente* maintained churches and parishes. As for Portuguese presence in Indonesia, in 1970 António Pinto da França would state that his book *Portuguese Influence in Indonesia* had had two main objectives:

*"(...) to identify and to record certain aspects of Portuguese influence in some of the regional cultures of Indonesia. These aspects which have miraculously survived for three hundred years are now being threatened by oblivion under the surge of modernisation, and with becoming just vague, indistinguishable elements. Secondly, I wish to awaken the interest of both Portuguese and Indonesian historians."*⁵¹

As we can see, the past is linked to the present by a constant cultural flow that nurtures relationships and creates bonds until today, but that

would have to be the subject for a different article...

In short, in this article, we concentrated ourselves in the subject of the Portuguese cultural legacy in Southeast Asia, particularly in the analysis of Portuguese descendant communities, and we did it from three specific points of view: the question of the interethnic marriages and their Creole offspring, particularly in the case of Malacca and Batavia; the main intellectual approaches made by authors to this matter across three centuries; and, finally, we looked into, and also recurred to three specific factors commonly used by these authors to identify the groups or communities born from those interethnic contacts: *race*, language and religion.

It goes without saying that although the study of Creoles or *Mestizos* is not new, as we could testify through this article, it has not been sufficiently worked into and our intention was not only to pay a tribute to these communities and their survival, but also to suggest and give way to new reflections and approaches to this matter. □

⁵¹ António Pinto da França, *op.cit.*, p. 6.

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