

CULINARY RESISTANCE?

por

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Abstract: Can James C. Scott’s model of *resistance* be extended to the field of cuisine? To what extent can a group *resist* through food and cooking? This paper poses these two queries within the context of a Malaysian foodscape: the *Kristangs*, or Portuguese Eurasians, of polyethnic Malacca. A series of cultural “worlds” has architected this multicultural Creole group and includes Indian, Chinese, and Malay worlds in action prior to the arrival of Portuguese colonos in 1511, as well as the later Dutch and British colonial regimes. By simply persisting, or enduring, the group is also resisting; cuisine comprises a key element in this persistence. By sidestepping the dominant/dominated lens, we can focus more clearly on the group’s positive strategies of resistance through cooking. One major implication for Action Theory is that they have practiced the Art of Resisting via the Art of Persisting.

Key-words: Polyethnic Malacca; cuisine; persistence.

Resumo: Será que o modelo de *resistência* elaborado por James C. Scott poderá abranger o campo da culinária? Em que medida um grupo oferece *resistência* tendo na base a comida e a culinária? Neste artigo colocam-se duas questões no quadro duma paisagem alimentar presente na Malásia: trata-se dos *Kristang*, ou euroasiáticos portugueses, que vivem na Malaca poliétnica. Um conjunto de “universos” culturais formou a arquitetura deste grupo crioulo multicultural, que absorveu elementos indianos, chineses e malaio antes da chegada de colonos portugueses em 1511, assim como mais tarde com a presença colonial holandesa e britânica. Persistindo e perdurando, o grupo foi resistindo: a culinária forneceu uma peça-chave para essa persistência. Ao contornar a visão dominante / dominado, pode-se focar com mais precisão a estratégia de resistência positiva deste grupo assente na culinária. Uma das implicações maiores para a Teoria da Ação é eles terem desenvolvido a arte de resistir por via da arte de persistir.

Palavras-chave: Malaca poliétnica, culinária, persistência.

This short paper poses one direct question: can James C. Scott’s model of *resistance* be extended to the field of cuisine, or the anthropology of cooking?

A second corollary query I pose is: to what extent can a group resist through food and cooking?

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I look at a Malaysian foodscape, specifically the Portuguese Eurasian population of Malacca (*Kristangs*)², whose cuisine is situated within a complex and quintessentially “multicultural” poly-ethnic context. Although cuisine was not one of my key research areas, my concern with the historical overlapping of identities accumulated by this Creole group did of course heighten my attention to “cultural” details of apparel, cooking styles, dance, music, and oral literature. The key issue here concerns two levels: a) are we dealing with an *overall stage* of social relations between a dominant Malay majority and a dominated Kristang minority³, and b) are we confronted with a *foodways stage* which is characterized by a hierarchy of a dominant/dominated nature? These are two quite different interrogations: my research has dealt with the first (a), but I am curious about the second (b).⁴

Finally, we recuperate a few stances from some time ago which question the usefulness of the category “ethnic group”. Earlier work by Georges Castile (1981) and Sharon Gmelch (1986) stressed the value of the concept of *cultural enclaves* as well as *travelling groups* such as tinkers, artisans, and gypsies, whose characteristics do not always fit well into slots of “ethnicity” or “ethnic identity”. I am developing the concept of the *relic enclave*, linked to Gupta’s notion of the *relic state* in India (2014); I intend to expose the mid-20th century process through which the authoritarian New State in Portugal attempted to turn the Malacca Kristangs into a relic population. To do this, one must consider pushing aside altogether – or at least temporarily – the notion of ethnic group. We might simply ignore it, in favour of a more fruitful idea of a *Creole group*, this latter entity being the product of successive superimpositions of epithets and identities over the centuries (Stewart 2007).

² Fieldwork among the Kristangs (pronounced *Kristáng*, with stress on the last syllable) was conducted over a 15-year period – certainly not in a short-term, one-time “hit-and-run” style – during 6 forays: one year in 1994, followed by visits of 1-2 months in 1995, 1998, 2001, 2007, and 2009.

³ A constant comment of Kristangs directed at this majority group and confided numerous times to me – a veritable hidden transcript! – was the following: *natibu, ngka bong!* (a mild slur, of difficult translation, directed at indigenous ethnic groups in Malaysia). Kristangs threaten to disinherit a son or daughter inclined to marry a Malay, and those who do so are considered renegades. However, Kristangs will specify: they consider Malays very pleasant workmates and in general “a gentle and generous people”, but “when they invade our intimate family or religious spheres” they are kept at a distance. It is precisely within these latter two backstage spheres that the Kristangs exhibit such vehement reserves.

⁴ Our interest in this theme arose with regard to pig-slaughters which we analyzed in a northern Portuguese hamlet in 1976 (O’Neill 1989) and again (albeit during a lightning visit) in 2009 (O’Neill 2011). We posed the query: over a period of 33 years, were these peasants simply preserving a tradition or, rather, resisting the dominant forces of the market and the State? Might they also indeed be *resisting*?

So, the key question related to Scott's model becomes: *is simple persistence a form of resistance?* Can a Creole group not be seen, by the simple fact of its surviving three colonial regimes, as resisting "assimilation" into the Malay mainstream? Or in classical language: can a minority, or an ethnic group, *resist via its own survival?* So, if we accept that resistance may include the process of persistence – or in Castile's terms, a group constituting an *enduring people* – then can we conclude that a group may resist (either entirely or partially) through foodways and cooking? Can we extend Scott's model in this way? Or are we, as it were, on the margins of Scott's model, trying to push it too far?

This extremely preliminary and exploratory analysis refers almost exclusively to one of Scott's volumes (1990) where the theory of resistance was most clearly expounded (reappearing, of course, in the 2009 study of resistant Southeast Asian mountain populations⁵); see below for a brief comment on some recent critics of that theory. Clearly, Scott's ample *opus* as a whole, right up to his most recent 2017 volume on the development of archaic States, is not our focus⁶. Note the key role played by Scott's first volume on the topic of resistance, stressed by Kastrinou-Theodoropoulou: "James Scott in 1985 published what was to become a breakthrough in studies of resistance: *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. An ethnographic catalyst in resistance studies, *Weapons of the Weak* shifts attention to everyday, ordinary, indirect strategies through which peasants play through symbolic sanctions with the limits of power imposed on them" (2009: 3).

⁵ See Paula Godinho's use of Scott's notion of "refuge zones" on the margins of national States (termed *zomia* for the mountain areas of Southeast Asia) in a border region of Portugal and Galicia, the *Couto Misto* (Godinho 2017: 159-227).

⁶ In recent years, Scott has been the object of two major seminar occasions in Portugal; the first of these, in April of 2012, entitled "The Art of Not Being Governed: James C. Scott in Iberia", was held in Lisbon at ISCTE-IUL, ICS, and the Universidade Nova (see the 2013 volume edited by Palacios Cerezales, Sá e Melo Ferreira, and Neves). The second, in June of 2016, entitled "Resistance and Empire: New Approaches and Comparisons", took place at the ICS. These constituted veritable interdisciplinary events, and Scott's presence at both provided multiple moments of critical debate and detailed discussion.

A MALAYSIAN FOODSCAPE

Let me spare you lengthy introductions to Malaysia or to the local social landscape of Malacca⁷. My purpose here is not to focus on ethnographic detail but on the theoretical link between the three terms *cuisine*, *resistance*, and *persistence*.

To all appearances, one is easily tricked into being led to a false observation: the overall foodscape in Malacca certainly inclines one to see “ethnic cooking” everywhere. Malays have these styles, while the Chinese and Indians have those. Obviously, Malays themselves, as well as members of other ethnic groups, will be able to identify regional differences in Malay cuisine, such as comparisons between Malacca Malay cooking and Kuala Lumpur Malay cuisine. However, the superficial observer fast learns that, for instance, categories referring to “Chinese” in Malacca may subdivide into Hokkien, Hakka, Teo Chew, Cantonese, Hainanese, and Liu Chew (to name only a few), while “Indian” groups similarly subdivide into Tamil, Gujarati, Malayalam, Bengali, and Punjabi Sikhs. In addition to the Creole Kristangs, there are two more complex Creole groups in Malacca: the Baba-Nyonyas and the Chitties. The Baba-Nyonyas (also termed *Peranakans* or *Straits-born Chinese*) are a Creole group of Malay-speaking ethnic Chinese resident in Malacca, who have over time developed their own dialect (Baba-Malay), and who are distinct from other Chinese groups. The Chitties (also termed *Chitty-Melaka* or *Straits-born Indians*) are a Creole group of Malay-speaking ethnic Indians distinct from other Indian groups. Their origins as the “descendants of traders” are obscure: for instance, while the first group is said to have arrived in Malacca between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, in the second case scholars locate origins either in the fifteenth century, during the Malacca Sultanate (1400-1511) (Dhorausigam 2006: 4), or more recently, not more than a century ago (Sandhu 1983: 193-4). Both groups are by now semi-exotic and underline

⁷ The Portuguese Settlement – an urban neighbourhood whose inception dates back to 1926 when two Malacca priests managed to reserve a seaside patch of land from the British municipal government for the purpose of joining in one space the “poor predominantly fishing families of Portuguese Eurasians” scattered around the city – had a population of 588 individuals in 120 households at the time of my last visit to Malacca in 2009. Another 53 structures were annexes to these households, thus totalling 173 domestic groups. Some 2000 more Portuguese Eurasians are resident elsewhere in the city, and estimates place the number of Kristangs in Malaysia as a whole at around 15,000. Most residents of the neighbourhood speak Malacca Creole Portuguese, or *Kristang*, a Creole language (not a dialect) also spoken in Singapore and Macao (Baxter 2012). The *bairro* also contains a Canossian convent which grants part of its space to a secondary school, and a series of about a dozen seafront restaurants. These restaurants – complemented by a number of mobile foodstalls set up and taken down constantly on an hourly or daily basis throughout the *bairro*'s streets – are a significant tourist attraction.

Malacca's purportedly multicultural tourist landscape: the Chitties, concentrated in one neighbourhood, exhibit their own temple, while the Baba-Nyonyas, more dispersed, run a Heritage House as well as a number of restaurants. Curiously, Baba-Nyonya cuisine has obtained greater fame, but within the group itself, there are various styles of Baba cooking. Both of these Creole groups occupy minority social niches very comparable to the Kristangs.

So, do all these subgroups have their own *uniform* cuisines? I would seriously doubt this.

Now, let us link this context of ethnic groups and cooking to Scott's theory of resistance. Speaking of agrarian societies and the appearances of unanimity in his now classic volume *Dominance and the Arts of Resistance*, Scott had this to say:

“Feudal lords, the gentry, slave masters, and Brahmins, for example, partake in a cultural integration, reinforced by marriage alliances, social networks, and office, which extends at least to the provincial if not the national level. This social integration is likely to be reflected in dialect, ritual practices, *cuisine*, and entertainment. Popular culture, by contrast, is rather more locally rooted in terms of dialect, religious practices, dress, *consumption patterns*, and family networks” (1990: 55; my emphasis).

Both cuisine and consumption patterns are mentioned, albeit not in isolation but together with other factors. Can we indeed look at cuisine at all without first situating it within a wider local context? Clearly not. But let us try our best to *avoid the ethnic lens*. This would involve receptivity to local variations and particularities. But more importantly, it would necessitate shunting to one side the entire notion of “ethnicity”. Why insist on umbrella categories such as “Malay”, “Chinese” or “Indian” at all?

Milner (2008) develops a scathing analysis of the horribly simplistic and useless nature of the umbrella ethnic terms such as ‘Malays’, ‘Chinese’, or ‘Indians’ in Malaysia. His insistence on using guarded quotation marks for these groups also applies to our analysis of the ‘Kristangs’. One curious fact is that although Malay cuisine seems to vary only regionally, the two broad categories of Chinese and Indian cooking are quite varied internally, as are the religious practices and languages of these groups. In contrast, the three cuisines of the smaller Creole groups – the Kristangs, the Babas, and the Chitties – are more uniform. This may say something about the dominant group (Malays) and the local dominated ones (these three Creole populations).



Figure 1: Malay wedding lunch on the outskirts of Malacca (photos by the author).

It would seem obvious that we are dealing with a historical emporium city, characterized by much borrowing and mixing (Sandhu & Wheatley 1983; Sarkisian 2000). Tourism also has much influence; the Kristang neighbourhood – the Portuguese Settlement – is itself a booming tourist site, in which the attractive epithet of “Portuguese food” has been now for some decades a key element in Malaysia’s tourist industry. The vast majority of Portuguese tourist visitors, sadly, miss most of this complexity in their usual 2 or 3-hour lightning tours. Expecting to find European Portuguese food in the menus of the dozen or so restaurants in the *bairro*, they become rapidly depressed that these menus are predominantly in English with a few words in Malay, and not in Portuguese. In the “Chicken” column of one menu, for example, the dish termed *Curry Davel* (at other times, also termed *devil curry* or *kari debil* in Creole) is one of the Kristangs’ preciously guarded recipes, nonexistent in any other Malacca restaurants.⁸ A kind of identity-politics

⁸ Kristangs warn visitors that this dish is so spicy that local Indians from Malacca find it “too hot” for their taste. Some residents thus explain this via the adjective “devil” in the dish’s epithet *devil curry*.

dish, one might speculate. This detail falls quite outside the typical Portuguese tourist's superficial interpretive schemes.

In the following photograph, note that in this Kristang luncheon meal accompanying a Catholic baptism, there are two dishes with an apparently “Chinese” look to them. Questioned concerning this, the Kristang family would answer something like this: “*Seng, akeli massa china, mas kuzinyáh kristang! Nus sa pratu!*” (Yes, that is Chinese-style mee, but it's our own Kristang cooking! Our own dish!).



Figure 2: Kristang luncheon table in the Portuguese Settlement of Malacca, following a morning baptism.

So, in conclusion within this point, our local panorama seems to suggest an “ethnic” group which has preserved its own style of cooking (obviously having borrowed aspects of Malay, Chinese, and Indian styles), while at the same time projecting an epithet of “Portuguese cooking” for tourist purposes.⁹

⁹ It is important to note the existence of Kristang cookbooks, the most complete being that of Celine Marbeck (1998), herself simultaneously a Portuguese Eurasian and Dutch Eurasian.

Can we view this foodscape as *persistence*? And can we include Kristang cuisine within the group's collective strategy over time of persisting as an "enduring people" within this highly multicultural city? Need we use the ethnic terminology at all? Might we avoid using an ethnic lens at all? Can we view the Kristangs as a Creole group, persisting through time as astute negotiators, mediators, and translators? Have they not, indeed, cleverly avoided having been assimilated into, or gradually erased by, the mainstream majority Malays? Have they not managed to preserve a certain modicum of their own semi-autonomous social space?

Why not pose the question: have they not also preserved their own *foodstage*? Clearly, it is not easy to term this "stage" as either a frontstage or backstage; on the one hand we see a *restaurant* = *frontstage* situation, and on the other, a context of *domestic cooking* = *backstage*. Yet this image might not do justice to the complexity of Malacca's local cultural, linguistic, and religious kaleidoscope. So our main point is: yes, cuisine does play a key role in persistence. And, yes, this point is even clearer if we avoid an ethnic lens and apply a *Creole lens* instead.

PERSISTING IS RESISTING

Let me now present you with the nucleus of my argument, which I hope will clarify some of these issues. I propose that 10 "worlds" have been the major influences in the formation of this Creole group. For simplicity's sake, I have divided these worlds into three major periods (let me remind the reader that my objective in these lines is solely to argue, not to delve in excessive detail into a case-study). The term *worlds* does not follow directly from classic meanings such as Immanuel Wallerstein's well known world-systems, Peter Worsley's three worlds, or Nigel Rapport's and Joana Overing's idea of world-views (2000: 394-404), but rather from the concept of "figured worlds" developed by Holland *et. al.* (1998). Holland and her colleagues deal with "practices and activities situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, *culturally constructed 'worlds'*: recognized fields or frames of social life" (1998: 7; my emphasis), derived from Bourdieu's notion of interlaced social fields or *champs*. These *figured worlds*, following Bourdieu, of course, must be defined carefully in each specific case, just as the interrelations between various semi-sutonomous "fields" must also be described. But they are not homogeneous: in this case, an "Indian world" would necessarily incorporate diverse ethnic groups, possibly indicating lower-level worlds in each case. No mechanical association between a "world" and an ethnic group is intended. Thus,

a broad Chinese “world” might incorporate many figured worlds within itself.¹⁰

The three main periods are: a pre-1511 one, with Malays, Indians, and Chinese prevailing; when the Portuguese arrived in Malacca in 1511, with a total of some 1000 men¹¹, they entered not merely a “Malay world”, but a Chinese and Indian world as well.¹² Marriages were not contracted over the following decades solely with Malay women, but an array of spouses from other regional and ethnic origins. These three “worlds” lay aside a number of “underworlds” existing alongside them: other groups such as Peguans (Burmese), Javanese, Philipinos, etc. These parallel worlds were less visible and less numerous but nonetheless existant, thus preventing us from viewing the “contact” situation as one limited to a European invader (Portugal) and one indigenous group (the Malays). The Portuguese did not arrive within only one homogeneous ethnic world, but a number of them.

Second, the arrival of Portuguese colonos in 1511, with Afonso de Albuquerque, inaugurated an extraordinary array of intercultural mixtures and miscegenations, first with the three major groups mentioned above, and later with the aforementioned Creole populations of Babas and Chitties. Note that each of these groups possessed slaves, so that a sort of “underworld” of non-marital unions between some of the Portuguese colonos with these women also characterized the scenario. The initial decades from 1511 to 1580 saw the formation of both the Kristang Creole language as well as the Creole social group of Portuguese Eurasians, which gradually became distinct from the Portuguese colonos, although in terms of perception the former group, as equally “Catholic” as the latter, would have been seen as simply “Portuguese” as well.¹³ These mixtures continued into the later period following 1580, during Spanish dominion of the Iberian Peninsula ending in 1640, up to 1641, the date of the Dutch seizure of Malacca from the Portuguese. And we should not forget the “shadow empire” so poignantly portrayed by the historian George Winius (1983), on and beyond the margins of the formal

¹⁰ Holland *et. al.* cite an article by Bourdieu on social space and groups (Bourdieu 1985); Bourdieu’s notion there of “social world” seems of a higher order than his more lower-level notion of discrete spheres, such as the political field, the juridical field, the economic field, etc. Holland’s use of the notion of figured worlds thus lies close to Bourdieu’s concept of *champs*.

¹¹ This watershed date (1511) was preceded by the arrival – and tribulated flight – of Diogo Lopes de Sequeira two years earlier, in 1509. This was in fact not an entirely “Portuguese” army at all, as historians’ estimates indicate some 700 Portuguese colonos and approximately 200-300 collaborating Indians (Gaspar Rodrigues & Oliveira e Costa 2011: 40; 56). So much for so-called ethnic homogeneity.

¹² See Acharya (2013) for a penetrating analysis of the influence of Indian culture throughout Southeast Asia, well prior to Chinese or Islamic influences.

¹³ See Baxter & de Silva (2004: vii-ix) for a short but penetrating summary of these decades of Creole formation.

administrative Portuguese empire, where an additional array of mixtures will have occurred between renegade Portuguese traders and women from yet other ethnic origins in these outlying regions. I will term these two periods as, successively, a Portuguese world and a Eurasian world. Put another way, the religious category of “Catholic” agglomerated myriad ethnic categories within itself, thus flagrantly homogenizing an otherwise extraordinarily varied potpourri of mixed linguistic and cultural groups. Thus, the fourth and fifth worlds associated with the arrival of the Portuguese and the formation of a Eurasian group *did not constitute a typical classical model of contact between a European group and an indigenous group, resulting in a new Creole group*. Rather, the “mixes” were multiple.

Third, two colonial worlds follow, after which came another two worlds which we might term “postcolonial” in nature. From 1641 up to 1824¹⁴ Malacca was controlled by the Dutch, and during this time intermarriages between (predominantly) male settlers from Holland and Kristang women were common.¹⁵ The Kristangs were seen now as “partially European” and in certain ways not totally Asian. Then, from 1824 up to the independence of Malaysia in 1957, British dominion evolved, also involving myriad marriages between (predominantly) British male settlers and Kristang women. At this time, as from the moment that Portuguese dominion ended and Dutch dominion began, the now Creole Portuguese Eurasian population – still called “Portuguese” by the Dutch – will have ceased to receive Portuguese members sent directly formerly from Portugal to Malacca. In Castile’s terms (1981), the group might now be seen more clearly as a “cultural enclave” rather than an ethnic group. Not a politico-administrative enclave (such as Gibraltar, Ceuta, or Melilla today), but a *cultural* enclave geographically situated in one country (Malaysia) but culturally and mentally harking to a “homeland” quite far away (Portugal). These two colonial worlds – the Dutch and British regimes – are thus our sixth and seventh “worlds”.

Two postcolonial worlds follow, the first a kind of revanchist Portuguese world from the approximate date of 1948, and the second a new postcolonial world beginning in 1957 with Malaysia’s independence from Great Britain. We have described these processes elsewhere (O’Neill 2001, 2008, 2013), the essential point being that a kind of subtle folkloric “colonization” of the Malacca Kristangs initiated just before the 1950s with the penetration of Portuguese folklore at the hands of the authoritarian State, followed by an internal form of “colonization” at

¹⁴ Albeit with brief treaty arrangements between Great Britain and Holland in the early nineteenth century.

¹⁵ A tally of the marriage entries in the parish registers of one of Malacca’s two main Catholic churches (St. Peter’s Church) for the years 1768-1870 permits us to confirm this assertion.

independence, this time at the hands of the new Malay State. These will constitute the eighth and ninth worlds. In the eighth, a process of “freezing” the Kristangs as ancestrally Portuguese took place, through which they came to constitute – particularly in the eyes of Portuguese actors – a kind of relic people, to be exhibited as a type of human zoo, preserving archaic European Portuguese traits and, more insidiously, totally devoid of the myriad ethnic, linguistic, and religious influences of the nine worlds through which they had persisted. This is when the Kristangs were duped into believing that they formed part of the “Portuguese imperial race”. They became relics. The *bairro* then became a relic enclave. They were granted a kind of hyper-identity. I have termed this elsewhere *lusomania* (O’Neill 2003). Trouillot’s notion of “silencing the past” is relevant here (2002; 2003). In other words, a whole series of prior worlds – quite polyethnic in nature – would thus be silenced, or conveniently forgotten or downplayed, while the Portuguese link became homogeneously highlighted. Then, when an apparently postcolonial regime entered in 1957 (*Merdeka*), the Kristangs lost some of their relatively high status under the British, being shunted into a more “marginal” minority status.

The key point is that the Kristangs survived, adapted to, adapted within, and managed to *persist as a group* under the latter six of these nine quite different “worlds”, be these political, administrative, or simply cultural. The level of mixing that characterized these adaptations to colonial and postcolonial regimes is astounding, thereby preventing us from terming the group “Portuguese” at all particularly following the formative Creole period between 1511 and 1580. Stated in other words, the Kristangs have not only survived, but they have persisted and even flourished through strategic adaptation to a series of worlds; in none of these have they been, nor had they probably even desired to have been, “assimilated”.¹⁶ But does this mean that they have *resisted*? Let us conclude by trying to answer this query.

So, our question here is: after all the accumulated influences of these “worlds” piled one upon the other, *how can we still call these people “Portuguese”*? We must deconstruct the ideological strategy of the dominant group in Portugal since the 1940’s – one of convincing the Kristangs that they were indeed (racially) Portuguese. Or ethnically Portuguese? Perhaps an Empire’s strategy. Our preference for a Creole model, or creole terminology, *avoids the essentialism always lurking within the category of “ethnic group”*. That is why we are recuperating an alternative terminology: a relic enclave was fabricated by (distant but effective) representatives of Portugal, which contributed in fact to the persistence of the

¹⁶ On assimilation, see the still relevant observations of Lesser (1961).

group. But it was not Portugal, but rather the Kristangs themselves, who managed to persist and endure during the former 7 periods.

Did they resist by persisting? I would say, yes.

But first, let us not forget a tenth world: an ecclesiastical one. Since 1511, the Kristangs have depended on religious institutions and individuals. The role of the Padroado must not be underestimated (Chew 2000), and indeed may have had a decisive influence.¹⁷ The diocese of Malacca – created in 1557 but dependent hierarchically on Macao – shifted diverse times over the centuries to Macao, Burma and Thailand (1838-1841), Pondicherry, Lisbon, and back to Macao in 1977, remaining under Macao's jurisdiction following the spelling change in the designation of the diocese from Malacca-Johor to Melaka-Johor in 1985. In recent decades, priests in Malacca have come from India, Singapore, Portugal, China, or Malaysia. This ecclesiastical world has itself passed through numerous periods, but has provided a modicum of protection for the Kristang population, constituting – along with the kristang language – a pillar of their identities over time.

So, the question we pose again might be: can this long-term process of persistence be seen as constituting a form of resistance?

As some critics have noted, at times Scott's analysis tends to divide the social world into dominant actors on the one hand, and dominated ones on the other. Hasselberg stresses: "Within Scott's framework of power, almost every action can be labelled as resistance even if it is unclear what the impact of such resistance is and what exactly is being resisted" (2016: 142). Are things always so polarized? In the Kristang case, we must respond, no. The history of the Kristangs has not been one of constant, violent, or systematic exploitation or domination. Yes, they constitute a numerically rather insignificant minority within the Malaccan and Malaysian contexts, but their cultural and touristic role is considerable in exhibiting the nation's multiculturalism. So the question becomes: can we speak of resistance within less polarized scenarios? Can we analyze more subtle and even hidden forms of resistance, some of which indicate resistance to assimilation or nationalistic homogenization? My hunch is, yes.¹⁸

Perhaps a brief note on the word *resistance* is apposite here. One of the earliest analyses of the problematic of "resistance" had already warned of the danger of anthropologists' searching for or finding resistance universally: Brown

¹⁷ On the Padroado and the Malacca diocese, see also Hunt *et. al.* 1992, Rego 1978, and Teixeira 1957.

¹⁸ Note the following assertion: "The hidden transcript is not just behind-the-scenes griping and grumbling; it is enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low-profile stratagems designed to minimize appropriation" (Scott 1990: 188).

thus speaks of “the discovery of resistance almost everywhere” (1996: 730).¹⁹ One year earlier, however, another pioneering figure (along with Scott) in the field of resistance studies – Sherry Ortner – had already pointed to the ambivalences and ambiguities of resistance that “emerge from the intricate webs of articulations and disarticulations that always exist between dominant and dominated” (1995: 190). But Ortner has also highlighted the crucial fact that the link between *dominator* and *dominated* need not be simply polarized or unequivocally static or predetermined: “resistors are doing more than simply opposing domination, more than simply producing a virtually mechanical re-action” (1995: 176-7). One of the most useful recent analyses of the word outlines an entire series of seven major types of resistance which might be discriminated (Hollander & Einwohner 2004).²⁰ The Kristang culinary resistance we are suggesting here might fall into these authors’ categories of “covert”, “unwitting”, or “externally-defined resistance”, which they characterize as “those acts of resistance that are neither intended nor recognized as resistance by actors or their targets, but are labeled resistance by third parties” (2004: 545). Or alternatively, we might strive to fill in a gap in resistance studies, by providing a novel example of one or the other of two ignored categories enumerated by Hollander and Einwohner: “We did not come across any published work on either ‘missed resistance’ or ‘attempted resistance’ ” (2004: 546).

Whatever the stance we choose, the references we have cited here – and they constitute only a few – have clearly demarcated a now well-established area of interdisciplinary *resistance studies*, as well as drawing our attention to some of the critical limitations of the dominant/dominated binomial, which has tended to reduce the notion of resistance to a small number of contexts of domination. We might add, nevertheless, that Hollander and Einwohner in particular have retorted that Scott’s array of *everyday* forms of resistance do not necessarily concentrate on visible, highlighted acts of resistance, but rather on a wide range of “hidden” or less apparent practices. Which begs the question again: not all acts of resistance are necessarily automatic reactions, but *positive actions* in and of themselves. Does this not invoke a wider Action Theory of a higher order?

Let us return now to the Kristang case. Building on much of Bourdieu’s legacy as well as Scott’s proposals jointly, we might view the entire “ethnic” question in a new and refreshing way. Have the Kristangs been simply passive victims?

¹⁹ I am grateful to Eddy Chambino for bringing this article to my attention during the conference in Idanha-a-Nova.

²⁰ Hollander and Einwohner make an even more hilarious statement than Brown’s on the scope of the term *resistance* – “Indeed, everything from revolutions...to hairstyles...has been described as resistance” (2004: 534).

Rather, they should be seen as conscious social actors. Have they lived in a ghetto? Rather, they can be viewed as an “enduring people” (Castile 1981; Klass 1988) employing strategies of persistence over time. Are they direct descendants of the Portuguese colonos (*lusso-descendentes*)? Rather, they are equally indo-descendants, sino-descendants, malayo-descendants, and euro-descendants (considering their mixtures with the Dutch and the British). Instead of frozen relics harking back five centuries to the original colonial contact period, why not interpret them as an expanding Creole group, an integral part of a city that was already for some time earlier a polycultural melting-pot?

Further, with regard to cuisine, Scott’s notion of hidden transcripts suggests a kind of *offstage cooking space*, removed from the more visible areas of restaurants, shops, stalls, and the public eye. Speaking of domination and hidden transcripts, Scott observes:

“..the subordinate group must carve out for itself social spaces insulated from control and surveillance from above. If we are to understand the process by which resistance is developed and codified, the analysis of the creation of these offstage social spaces becomes a vital task” (1990: 118).

The key phrase is *offstage social spaces*. Cooking inside the Settlement’s households (Kristang cuisine) must be distinguished from the “Portuguese” cooking (tourist-oriented cuisine) evident in restaurants. In simplistic terms, “Portuguese” cooking characterizes public restaurants, while Kristang cooking remains semi-visible within domestic household spheres. Public transcripts, as Scott has so clearly emphasized, are quite different from hidden transcripts. And in terms of the myriad links between the Kristangs and the three major groups surrounding them – Malays, Chinese, and Indians – we might view the Kristangs as *culinary mediators* (Domingos, Sobral & West 2014).

The key point I make here is the following. The Kristangs are an expanding Creole group, never “endogamous” or inward-looking. They have managed to survive or endure over the centuries via a series of persistence strategies. We might try to avoid invoking Tylor’s infamous definition of *culture* as that bag of elements or traits as it were in the heads of individuals – here, these would include language and religion as major factors, but also cuisine, dance, oral literature, and apparel. We might conclude that the Kristangs (albeit “dominated” on the national and local stages) have *resisted by persisting*. Cuisine has constituted merely one among several of their strategies. They have been clever social mediators.

In terms of identity, or identities, the role of cuisine might be extended even further. As we cannot maintain that the Kristangs possess or “have” one

sole identity, but rather a series of superimposed or accumulated identities over the centuries, then one aspect that might be highlighted in our argument is: what weight does cooking have within the Kristangs' current identity? Of course, much depends on how we view the concept of identity (Bauman 2004). If identity constitutes more of a process than an attribute, then cuisine within the Malacca Kristang context might also be viewed as a long-term process, an integral part of the larger identity constructed and architected by the group through its various interactions with others. Here we might find Scott's notion of the "aggregation of thousands upon thousands of such 'petty' acts of resistance" (1990: 192). In this sense, if the "threat" of forced assimilation into the Malay majority has at times constituted an attempted form of dominance emanating from the Malays, then the Kristangs' response has been – within the culinary sphere – to parry this attempt and carve out their own social space. The same might be said of their religious and linguistic spheres, areas in which their "difference" from the Malays is pronounced. So in this case we might add: even if the Kristangs' position be quite remote from that of severely dominated groups such as slaves or untouchables, nevertheless, via cuisine and identity, we can highlight specific spheres in which they have *resisted* domination from above.

Another interesting point is the plethora of labels the group has accumulated. I have counted a total of 19, although some of these are archaic or used in solely academic contexts. One might separate the terms used by the group itself (endonyms) and those used by outsiders (exonyms). Among the endonyms, I have highlighted the three most common and consensual labels, *Kristang*, Portuguese Eurasian, and Malacca Portuguese. Now, instead of thinking erroneously of this multiplicity of names as a negative factor, why not consider it *a strategy for avoiding definitive fixation of labels*? Gypsies have used this strategy systematically in numerous countries (Sutherland 2001), and nothing prevents us from viewing the Kristang use of varying terms as a similar kind of identity-politics stratagem. Of course, for diverse reasons, the epithet "Portuguese" has clearly been used in recent decades as a European-directed label, and certainly has its advantages.²¹ So why not consider this multiplicity a positive act?

We have suggested extending Scott's model to the culinary sphere. (Actually, this is only one of many spheres in which the Kristangs have persisted.)

²¹ During my last visit to Malacca in 2009, I witnessed (and participated in) vehement debates among Kristangs themselves concerning the use of a hyphen in the two epithets Portuguese Eurasian or Portuguese-Eurasian, as well as disagreements about the meaning of the word *kristang* (some agreeing that it refers to the Kristang people, or *nasang*, while others insisting that it only refers to a Catholic person or to the Creole language – *papiá kristáng*).

What would Scott himself say about all of this? Are we elasticizing his model too much? The culinary stage appears to exhibit some characteristics which are not immediately visible as *dominant/dominated* elements. This nevertheless does not mean that they are irrelevant within a persistence model.

Can we manage to extend the model as well into a larger one of *Action Theory*?²² Bourdieu's legacy filters in many places into Scott's model, but can we apply an even more active model to the culinary field? Here we find a specific stage on which local actors – or *agents* if you will! – have succeeded very well in preserving their identity over the centuries. Why box them into an archaic *ethnic* list of “others” in the traditional Malaysian landscape of peoples? Why not grant them renewed energy, fame, dignity, and honour as a quintessentially astute, intelligent, clever, and resilient population which has, in exemplary fashion, *persisted and endured* until today?

Would Scott not agree that the Kristangs show us the Art of Resisting by way of the Art of Persisting?

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²² See here in particular Ortner's volume (2006).

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