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(Re)Inventing "Realities" in China

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## “China Wahala”: the Tribulations of Nigerian “Bushfallers” in a Chinese Territory”<sup>1</sup>

ISABEL MORAIS

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### *Résumé*

Recent scholarly studies and media coverage have primarily focused on China’s increasing presence and sometimes asymmetrical engagement with Africa in tandem with the new trend of Chinese migration to that continent. Yet, the inverse flux of Africans to China and the emergence of African communities in Southern China over the last decades is influencing some areas of the Pearl River Delta Region, and changing the fabric of cities like Guangzhou, Macau and Hong Kong, in a way without precedent. There are representations or exotic descriptions from some mass circulation magazines and newspapers on the infamous Chungking Mansions in Hong Kong or the so-called “Chocolate-city,” an area centered around Hongqiao, the village-district and Canaan market in the city of Guangzhou, with its arcades and strip malls filled with ethnic businesses and transnational migrants. In Macau, significant concentrations of African population of different origins are also seen in the “Papa pun” commercial center or in downtown areas. Despite many studies devoted to the “ethnoburbs” in other latitudes, only very recently, these entrepreneurial African communities in

Mainland China are starting to become worthy of serious scholarly attention. Yet, there is total absence of studies dealing with the presence of more and more African students and the cultural manifestations of African communities well portrayed in the new African cinema, in music produced by Afro-Chinese bands or even singers.<sup>2</sup> Besides a continuing inward flow of transient Africans who come to China for business on a regular basis, a significant number of settler African traders, particularly Nigerians, have already married local Chinese women, set up families, autonomously run their businesses without recourse to Chinese intermediaries, and established a web of informal and formal committees representing their home nations and states, to solve disputes while maintaining personal and business links with Africa. Besides, those emigrant 'bushfallers' who are coming to China solely for business purposes, a new form of "silent" migration of Nigerians comprising students from different backgrounds is enrolling in higher education institutions in the Macau Special Administrative Region of China. These students are coming to pursue their studies or to seek a job to pay their student fees at the margin of the PRC scholarship and stipend programs for visiting African students that were popular in China in the 1960s and mid-1970s as part of CCP's foreign policy for Third World aiming friendly relations with Africa. Today, these "transnational" Nigerian students are in their own way affirming their identity and difference, in southern China, in particular in Macau SAR, thanks to their network of multiple interrelations across nation-states from Africa to Asia and to a combination of perseverance, zeal, and gentleness without subservience. Although they have not been targets for the hostility and even violence like the Shanghai incident of July 1979 or the Nanjing protests in December 1988 at Hehai University targeting African students, today these Nigerian students are facing more subtle forms of ethnocentrism and legal discrimination from immigration laws to daily practices, which always try to associate their citizenship to problematic or easy stereotypes of scam or colour.<sup>3</sup> Yet, at the same time, everything seems to indicate that these newcomers are quick adapting and finding new forms of negotiating their social integration in the Chinese local society which in turn is offering more opportunities.

This paper is part of a more ambitious project which aims to assess the new forms of migration from Africa to China and from China to Africa as well as their impact and contribution of globalization.

First, this paper considers why and how Macau has evolved from a Portuguese outpost where slavery was an institutionalized commodity to special administrative region of China where a new urban African community, mostly composed by Nigerian students, is in formation due to opportunities and rapid changes occurring in the region in the first years of the twenty-first century, by comparing the new to old African communities of students and business people/migrant workers from former Portuguese colonies (Angola, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Guinea-Bissau, and Mozambique). Finally, borrowing the title from a sequel movie with the same title of the promising New African cinema, the paper focuses on the "China Wahala" or the troubles of these Nigerian students through their tales of their experiences of racism(s) and their negotiations and responses which radically contradicts not only the slogans of cultural diversity propagated by the official discourse and tourist channels as these Nigerians are confronted daily with often dramatic situations ranging from indifference and ostracism to exclusion.

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## *Texte intégral*

# Introduction

. "In time there would no longer be a dead silence when slavery was spoken of, and the subject became central in a new understanding of what Europe was."<sup>4</sup>

Where are your monuments, your battles, martyrs?  
Where is your tribal memory? Sirs,  
in that gray vault. The sea. The sea  
has locked them up. The sea is History  
[...]  
the lantern of a caravel,  
and that was Genesis.<sup>5</sup>  
Derek Walcott, *The Sea is History*

1 Recent scholarly studies and media coverage have primarily focused on China's increasing presence and sometimes asymmetrical engagement with Africa in tandem with the new trend of Chinese migration to that continent.

2 Yet, the inverse flux of Africans to China, and the emergence of mainly Western African communities in Southern China over the last decades is influencing some areas of the Pearl River Delta Region, and changing the fabric of cities like Guangzhou, Macau, and Hong Kong, in a way without precedent. Some residential and business areas of Guangzhou, like Dongpu, Dengfeng Jie, and Yongping Jie have been designated "Chocolate Cities," in a clear allusion somehow reminiscent of so-called Chinese "ethnoburbs" in Los Angeles.<sup>6</sup> These ethnic clusters of African-owned shops of a majority of Nigerian entrepreneurs in what were once exclusively Chinese shopping malls are rapidly expanding and receiving scholarly attention.<sup>7</sup> Also on China's music and sports realms, for instance, in 2009, the cases of people of mixed ancestry like the Shanghainese Lou Jing, the first Afro-Chinese finalist to a TV singing contest, and of Ding Hui, the national team volleyball player, have received widespread attention throughout the media and blogosphere in People's Republic of China, sometimes with clear racist overtones and epithets acknowledging that miscegenation, identity, and race are becoming debatable issues in China.<sup>8</sup>

3 Although the presence of Africans in China seems a quite recent phenomenon and a few recent studies emphasize that "novelty," their presence dates back to the first contacts between China and the Arabic/Islamic world. In the particular case of Macau, a long-standing Portuguese settlement, there was a steady presence of Africans dating back to the earliest period of European expansion in the Far East until nowadays.<sup>9</sup>

4 Chinese records, travel accounts, and fiction works indicate the presence of African people back to the Tang dynasty (608-907) when Arabs and other Muslims controlled the maritime and slave trades from East Africa to China and to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) when the Chinese sent maritime expeditions to East Africa.<sup>10</sup>

5 Throughout the centuries of the Portuguese maritime in Africa and Asia, Black African slaves became one of the commodities in the Portuguese maritime trade with China. The number of Africans in the South China region increased, thus becoming a constant from the second half of the sixteenth century, namely, coinciding with the arrival of the Portuguese

navigators, the latter aiming at a large-scale maritime trade with China.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese, in particular, in the coastal areas, were the first to be exposed to foreigners at times that many African slaves, including women, were brought to Macau. With time, the territory eventually achieved a great importance due to its diverse commerce, including its slave trade, with China and Japan. The significance of that commerce is attested by the fact that Macau subsidized other colonies such as East Timor, and even Lisbon itself, particularly during the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth-century. This declined significantly in later centuries, but a curious commonality amongst historical perspectives of the colony is their isolation from the vast Portuguese colonial context. The history of Portuguese colonization ignored this colonial reality avoiding any references to colonial practices in Macau, and all topics that were related to slavery in general.<sup>12</sup> There have been relatively few studies of the Portuguese slave trade to Southeast Asia and China, and in general the African Black slave trade of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is notably underrepresented in the literature on slave-trading enterprise.

6 Amidst international efforts to raise awareness on slavery and slave trade in the present context of resurgence of colonial memory, through publications of large numbers of historical works and development of projects of memory, Portugal, unlike several European, American and African countries, has yet to fully address its historical and moral responsibility on the human traffic (either Black African slavery or Chinese coolie trade).<sup>13</sup>

7 Portuguese scholarly research has not only neglected the Atlantic slave trade, only a smaller body of research focuses on the African slave or even the Chinese coolie trade, and fewer sources mention black slaves in China. Since the 1970s, particularly in the last decade before the transference of sovereignty, a considerable body of studies on Portuguese Africa and Macanese history has emerged, but no study has systematically analysed the interconnections between colonialism in Africa and in Macau. Numerous cultural publications in both Portugal and Macau have been published, but they have rarely addressed the types of relationships that were established between Macau and Africa. Moreover, work in the field is most often focused on historical aspects of the territory itself and its relation to China, and is isolated from the wider context of Portuguese colonial history. Charles Boxer remarked that “Macau’s political dynamics remain obscure [...] analysis has tended to focus on stereotyped views of power relationships in the enclave that have seldom been subject to more serious academic treatment.”<sup>14</sup> Only recently, due to the intensification of China’s involvement in the Portuguese-speaking countries, there has been an interest in exploring those connections.

## **II Africans in Macau: A Silent But Constant Secular Presence**

- 8 Although contacts between China and Africa were officially established in 1897 with the establishment of a consulate in South Africa, direct contacts between Chinese and Africans in Macau or with the Portuguese African colonies lasted throughout the centuries.<sup>15</sup> Interrelations between the Portuguese and other Westerners who settled in Macau and successive migrations of Chinese, other Asians, Africans, and even South Americans gave rise to the fascinating and multifaceted community, the Macanese, who today are only proud of their ‘Portuguese whiteness.’ There were also exchanges that grew out of interaction between China and other Portuguese African colonies, mainly Mozambique, through slavery and the coolie trade. As one writer describes, “Macau in the early seventeenth-century had a distinctly African flavor.”<sup>16</sup> From the earliest days of Macau, Chinese and Portuguese sources, although sparse, tell of slaves of different origins, mainly Chinese and African. The Macanese writer Estorninho considered as Macanese those of mixed Afro-Asian or Portuguese descent.<sup>17</sup> Most Africans were assigned as galley slaves in the great trading ships that sailed from Macau to Portugal’s posts in India and Japan, while others were employed in various private households or at Jesuit establishments.
- 9 European powers systematically included Africans in the wars waged to preserve the colonial order, and Portugal was no exception. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Portuguese merchants and clergymen were encouraged to allow their slaves to settle personal disputes and to act in wars against other European powers as an advanced guard, like when the Dutch attacked Macau in 1622 and there was a scarcity of Portuguese and Macanese men who were away engaged in sea trade.<sup>18</sup> After their victory upon the Dutch, they were granted freedom for their almost suicidal loyalty, and went on to contribute to the ethnic mixture of the Macanese community. Some Africans, however, served under Chinese forces or pirates and became known as “Black Daredevils” or were reported by Chinese authors as enticing local Chinese to steal their Western masters.<sup>19</sup> Even after the abolition of slavery in every Portuguese possession in 1878, throughout the history of Macau, the Africans have maintained a presence in Portuguese enclave.
- 10 In the nineteenth-century, Landin soldiers from Mozambique were enlisted in the Portuguese colonial army to serve in Angola, Timor, and Macau. They arrived in Macau in 1912 and the company’s main job was to guard the Macau–China border or the governor’s palace. Between 1920 and 1949, the Portuguese authorities faced Chinese population’s opposition to the Landin security forces due to an incident. In 1922, riots broke out after one member of the Mozambican garrison accidentally knocked over a Chinese child. From 1948 onwards, sources indicate that the African army composed by soldiers and caporals from Mozambique, Guinea, and Angola amounted to 500 were distributed in several garrisons at the Guia Fortress, Ilha Verde, and in the islands of Coloane and Taipa.
- 11 The Portuguese army used Macau and these African troops as a training or transitional post for troops from Mozambique or Angola for half a century. As late as the 1975, when the Portuguese empire started collapsing, Mozambican sentinels who remained in Macau

for a two-year commission were a common sight not only on duty as sentinels at the Portuguese governor's palace but also when they were off duty and went shopping, traveled by rickshaws, or visited the *Rua de Felicidade* (Happiness Street), a narrow old street located at Macau's infamous red light district famous for the "sing-song" girls. When the *Estado Novo* fell in April 25, 1974, the Macau's Independent Territorial Command (Comando Territorial Independente de Macau) was abolished, and all the African soldiers left the territory.

12 Under Salazar's dictatorship during the *Estado Novo*, Portugal kept using Macau as another colony but the country had not diplomatic links with the People's Republic of China since the Communists took the power. Despite of that, from 1950 and until the independence of the Portuguese colonies in mid 1970s, Angola and Mozambique were the major export destinations from the Macau's industries facilitated by a free-duties policy. Simultaneously, after the Asian-African Conference held in Bandung in 1955, China started forging strong links with Africa in several areas by supporting African independence. In the 1960s, liberation and anti-colonial movements (FRELIMO, in Mozambique, UNITA and FNLA movements for Angola) inspired by the Maoist theories and revolutionary literature, gained strong political, financial and training support from the People's Republic of China against Western powers. Zhou Enlai visited several African countries in 1963 and the PRC fully supported and offered concrete cooperation and credit to a number of aid and infrastructure projects (for instance, the TAMZAM railway project between Tanzania and Zambia). As part of this cooperation, in the 1960s, academic exchanges and scholarship and stipends program brought many African students to study in China to study technology and sciences. However, most of the students returned home within a year or two due to poor living standards, lack of social opportunities, and the political environment. The Chinese government restored the African scholarship program in the mid 1970s and began sending African students to universities outside of Beijing.

13 After Portugal's African colonies gained independence, during the decolonization process, from the 1975s to the 1990s, a considerable number of Africans of different ethnicities, Black, Mulattoes, and White Africans "retornados"(Portuguese for those who "returned" to the motherland or more specifically those who chose not to live in the independent colonies) fled directly the former Portuguese colonies or after a short stay in Portugal, came to Macau in search of work, mainly in the civil service. In the 1987s, a considerable number of Black African students who were granted scholarships for the University of Macau also came to the territory. Generally speaking, these students were younger, more political motivated than the "retornados," enjoyed strong economic and political connections with the former leaders of the movements of liberation who became heads of state in the independent African countries. The majority graduated in Law, returned to their countries to serve in senior leadership and political high positions while others settled withy their families in Macau where they still practice at local law firms or in

the local administration.

- 14 During the 60s, 70s and 80s there were constant incidents involving students from different African countries in China which culminated with the 1988–89 Nanjing Anti-African protests when Chinese students took to the streets to protest against the government's inadequate handling of the alleged murder of a Chinese by an African student. Many of these students returned to China while a few from the Portuguese speaking countries came to Macau. During the so-called “transitional period” ( período the transição) from 1987 to 1999, a few Africans doctors from the Portuguese speaking countries graduated from Universities in China and who spoke both Putonghua and Portuguese came to Macau and were employed at Macau’s health services.
- 15 This paper aims to locate African Diaspora in Macau as part of a more ambitious project which aims to assess the new forms of migration besides the African trading communities from Africa to China and from China to Africa as well as their impact and contribution to globalization. It revolves around life stories or narratives of Nigerian students living in Macau in recent years after the enclave’s transference of sovereignty. It is based on personal and familiar stories within individual biographies and on the migrant themselves through conversational interviews from about fifteen students from a Macau’s higher education institution.
- 16 The interviewees were encouraged to relate their experiences, expectations and difficulties as Africans in a special administrative region of China praised by its multiseccular multiculturalism. Based on interviews and observation, we hope to make this community more visible by unveiling new dynamics in the migratory fluxes to Macau but also by exposing the challenges they are facing. We argue that the reciprocity should prevail in economic and cultural exchanges between China and the African countries. In the particular case of Macau, perhaps due to emphasis on the enclave as a privileged platform in the economic interchanges between China and the Portuguese-speaking countries, somehow, the Africans from other countries, specially from Anglophone states from Africa, including Nigeria, are facing more difficulties in coming, living, and working in Macau SAR., aggravated by the lack of consular services, the language barrier, and the dominance of the Sino–Portuguese language and cultural matrix which is in practice contradicts the official claim of Macau as a multicultural or international place.
- 17 Although Macau is a predominantly Chinese community, the term multiculturalism and other similar concepts are constantly evoked under the premises of its multiseccular history and the presence of people from different nationalities. Yet, neither the Portuguese administration or nor the Chinese government have never attempted to address the issue of multiculturalism through appropriate legislation. Therefore, the celebration of multiculturalism is practically confined mainly to tourist initiatives aiming to promote the Macau’s exotic or cultures through popular festivals of traditional dancing and music, traditional gastronomy more associated to the Lusophone nature of Macau.



18 First, this paper considers why Macau as a special administrative region of China has evolved and has being slowly converted into a new urban African formation due to opportunities and changes occurring in the region in the first years of the twenty-first century, then, it compares the new and old African communities of students and business people/migrant workers from former Portuguese colonies such as Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique. Then, borrowing the title of a sequel movie with the same title of the promising New African cinema, the paper focus on the “China Wahala” or the troubles of these Nigerian students through their tales of their experiences of racism/s and their negotiations and responses which radically contradicts not only the slogans of multiculturalism and cultural diversity propagated by the official discourse from the PRC’s central and local governments and tourist channels as these Nigerians are confronted daily with often dramatic situations ranging from indifference, ostracism to exclusion. Finally, we argue the Sino-African cooperation should include cultural aspects, mainly the implementation of international exchanges of African and Chinese students.

### III Macau: A Not so ‘City of Dreams’

“They are Macua  
And eat raw meat.  
[...].  
Congo nurse,  
[...].

Goes to the drugstore to buy soybean paste,  
The Chinaman gives little  
The nursemaid wants more,  
China dá-le chacha,  
The Chinaman beats her  
The nursemaid shouts: Aiô!  
[...]  
White women are innocent,  
Catherine  
Brunettes may pretend  
Black woman is abusive’  
Catherine  
Revenge always asks for.  
[...]  
Whoever marries to black  
Has got little feelings.  
What matters if he is black?

He has a good heart  
He catches dirt wind,  
Becomes of the colour of fruit.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> This earliest collection of popular verse in *patuá* of the Eurasian community of Macanese from the nineteenth century has curious allusions to the Africans in Macau and reveal how the Macanese perceived people with dark skin. Popular Macanese theatre in *patuá* from the twentieth century also includes mocking references to their presence.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>20</sup> The Macuas from Mozambique, one of the ethnic groups who were brought as slaves from Mozambique to several geographical areas in the world from the Caribbe to Asia and their eating habits were satirically portrayed in the verses. Some of these Macanese perceptions are somehow similar to early Chinese’s cultural observations on the “barbarians” as they measured foreigners’ eating habits according to their relative degree of civilization.<sup>22</sup> Other verses allude to the presence of the African female slaves which existed in great number at the Macanese and Portuguese merchants households and who were frequently victims of the abuse from their from masters and mistresses. Another curious allusion is the ambivalent attitude towards interracial marriage that was either criticized or accepted. What Chinese sources reveal, in fact, is how Chinese, Macanese, and Portuguese viewed those with dark skin and how these perceptions were perpetuated over time. Nowadays, in Macau it is still easy to find that the toponymy of the city, places of memory, for instance Mong Ha Hill (once popularized as the “Black Devils or “Black Ghost Fortress.” where a fort was converted into a barracks for one of the African Portuguese garrison stationed in Macao), popular legends (the defense of the city from a Dutch attack was led by the priests with the help of African slaves in particular of a woman who fought fiercely in the seventeenth century), and even hybrid gastronomy (Macau’s famous African Chicken) reveal the spark of memory still perpetuated the presence of Black Africans in the collective imagination of different segments of the population in Macau. This combination of places, stories and sites occupied by black Africans and other slaves should be accurately identified and preserved because they are of great heritage interest and assert its role in Macau’s collective memory.

<sup>21</sup> Although these sources do not provide information about what actual African slaves experienced in China, they are a valuable source because they reveal how Chinese, Portuguese, and Macanese viewed first what Chinese people imagined, and later, what they knew about African countries and their inhabitants. The widespread cultural perceptions of people with dark skin are a clear indication how some Chinese, Portuguese, and Macanese viewed them and, despite the eventual changes through time, these negative or ambivalent perceptions might still influence current attitudes on African citizens.

<sup>22</sup> Living in Macau’s stratified society, the *cafres* (Africans) were the last step in the social scale in Macau and they were satirized in *patuá* verses by the Creole community. Pina-Cabral describes this “characteristic as ‘the dynamic of despise’ — a process through

which a person, feeling that he or she is the object of prejudice, attempts to shift the burden of that prejudice onto some other person.<sup>23 24</sup> The Macanese folk verses reveal notions of class, gender, and racial discrimination widespread within the Macanese community in regard to successive waves of Africans from the black slaves to the Landin soldiers, as the authors tended to identify with and support the dominant European group, and despised other cultural ethnicities as white completion was highly appreciated and the colonial elites strived for “whiteness.”

23 In the eighteenth-century, two Mainland Chinese, Yin Guang Ren and the Magistrate Zhang Ru Lin, visited Macau and, while in the Portuguese enclave, they became of color and class divisions.<sup>25</sup> These Chinese envoys reported that Macau’s ladies and their Black Africans were placed at the lowest scale on their report.

24 Recent studies on contemporary Africans in China, for instance, have changed over time from emphasis on the urban ghettoization of the African communities to the relevance of immigrant entrepreneurship as “bridges in the processes of Africa-China socio-economic integration.”<sup>26</sup>

25 We argue that in Macau, the Africans from Portuguese-speaking countries, unlike other African immigrants, actually benefit from their background and continue to enjoy a preferential treatment by the local authorities and are particularly privileged by the academy under Chinese rule. This favourable situation is reinforced by the existence of solid mechanisms of cooperation between China through Macau with the Portuguese speaking countries. These privileged relations with the Lusophone world that reinforce “the uniqueness of Macau vis-vis Guangdong and Macau” can contribute for the fact that majority of those Africans who are coming to Macau are disproportionately from Portuguese colonies and to less extent from other African countries. <sup>27</sup> It seems that they do not encounter the same levels of discriminations, since they are perceived to be part of the historic legacy.

26 Africans originally from outside the Lusophone world, in particular, the Nigerians, the largest African group, express concern that they are subject to exclusionary admissions policies at local academy. .

27 Despite ostracism and the lack of reciprocal incentives from the central and local governments, the Nigerian students seem to be able to start carving out a niche in Macau’s society throughout academic and more broadly participation in the local society. Macau, as a long standing and renowned place influenced by the early Portuguese expansion, predisposes a favorable climate for multiples and interethnic encounters. There is clear evidence that Chinese women are much open minded and eager to be associated or involved with Africans. Although a significant number of our respondents has intermixed unions or liaisons with Chinese women from the Mainland, Macau, and Hong Kong, this does not imply a complete acceptance and integration. Yet, these unions have also been met with more opposition from Chinese males and several communities in Macau

continue to perceive the Africans and other people in terms of racial differences, skin colour, and social status still prevailing.

## **“Bushfallers” in a Chinese Territory**

- 28 The research participants were from both genders but they were predominantly males who were all born in Nigeria and are currently enrolled in a private university in Macau. They belong to different ethnic groups, religious creeds, and socio-economic backgrounds. Through conversational interviews, they presented their own accounts of when they came to Asia and then settled in Macau, and what it meant to be a Black African student in Macau’s post transference of sovereignty period. The result is a fascinating kaleidoscope of cultural attitudes against a Chinese backdrop with still many traits of colonialism where these different Nigerian students wrestle with issues of education, language, and racism, and speak about their lives, hopes, achievements, and disappointments. Their thoughts as they reflected on how they saw themselves, how they felt that they were seen by society at large, and how they wanted to be seen. Their recollections helped to construct the history of this emergent community and fill the void left by newspaper accounts and official reports.
- 29 The flow of the Nigerian Diaspora has been mainly to English speaking countries like the United Kingdom, Canada, and the United States. But during the first decade after Macau’s transference of sovereignty to China, Southeast Asia, mainly Hong Kong, Macau, and ultimately China are becoming the most popular destinations for these “bushfallers,” a term which has become common in different African speaking countries to refer to those Africans living in the Diaspora.
- 30 Several factors might have influenced the interest of many Africans coming to China in the post-Tiananmen period. First of all, the PRC started taking initiatives with special emphasis in developing Sino-African business and trade links. In 1979, China hosted a major China-Africa Seminar on Economic Reform, and attended the Southern African Development Co-ordination Conference ( SADCC) in Zimbabwe in 1993 and the first Sino-African Forum was held in October 2000 with the presence of forty-four countries, where it was signed the Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China – Africa Co-operation.<sup>28</sup> Other initiatives include the establishment of 11 Investment Development and Trade Promotion Centres in Africa and it has become common that every year the first official overseas visit from Beijing leaders is to Africa. From 2003 onwards, Chinese official statistics, estimate that the percentage of Africans in Guangzhou has been growing at 30-40% annually, the African population is around 100, 000 with a large majority of Nigerians involved in small business.<sup>29</sup> 2006 was declared the Year of Africa and on 12 January 2006, Beijing unveiled its first white paper on its relations with Africa, China’s African Policy, elaborating a detailed plan for long-term ties with Africa covering economic,

political, educational, scientific, cultural, environmental, health and social cooperation, as well as peacekeeping and security. China's new strategic partnership with Africa was also unveiled at the November 2006 Beijing Summit of the Forum on China and Africa Cooperation (FOCAC).

31 In the particular case of Macau, in October 2003, the People of Republic of China's Ministry of Economy created the Permanent Secretariat to the Forum for Economic and Trade Cooperation between China and Portuguese-speaking countries in Macau ("The Macau Forum") which is financially supported by the Macau SAR government.<sup>30</sup> The edge that Macau possesses to function as a business platform between the Mainland and the Portuguese-speaking countries has been recognised by the organisation of "The Forum for Economic and Trade Co-operation Between China and Portuguese-Speaking Countries" held in Macau every year.<sup>31</sup> They have maintained links with Portuguese-speaking countries in business, culture, and tourism; Macau looks forward to becoming the business and service platform between these states and the Mainland through "Economic and Trade Opportunities Chinese-Speaking Countries" and a business matching database established to create wide space for co-operation. Most imports are allowed to enter Macau freely without tariffs being levied. The "Macau Forum" supports the creation of associations with the Portuguese-speaking countries, the organization of the Macau's Festival of Lusophony, international fairs, visits of commercial delegations, projects courses for workers from areas in economy, tourism, and nursing. Visitors from Portuguese-speaking countries, including top officials to the Mainland, routinely stopped over in Macao. In 2009, Vice- Minister of Commerce, Jianj Zengwei, led a trade and commerce delegation to visit Portugal, Angola which integrated Macau.

32 China's new policy towards Africa allied to the recent economic prosperity of Macau attracted a lot of attention overseas. The gambling liberalization created in 2000 in Macau favored the economic boom in the gaming, tourism, and construction sectors, thus attracting many newcomers. This factor was one of the motives that led many of our respondents to choose to come to Macau and that is probably one of the reasons they would like to remain if they were offered more incentives.

The total number of Africans or a person of African origin, comprising white Africans, is less than 500, being the majority from the Portuguese-speaking countries (Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, Sao Tome and Principe and East Timor). These different groups of Africans are easy to discern in the city, especially during the annual Lusophony Festival, which has become a tourist attraction and receives funds from the "Macau Forum" and other governmental bodies. During this Lusophone event, many Black and white Africans wear their African clothes, organize musical and cultural events, and showcase African gastronomy. The majority of these Portuguese-speaking Africans were former civil servants under the Portuguese administration who remained or returned to Macau after the transference of sovereignty. These Africans who became

Macau's permanent residents are well adapted and participate actively in the promotion of their respective countries. They received financial support Macau SAR government to create or reactivate associations aiming to foster the relations between their respective countries and China.

33 The Nigerian students are quite different from those Africans who first came to China, since the latter were much more politicized or had strong economic and political connections with the former leaders of the movements of liberation who became heads of state in the independent African countries. All of them considered China a temporary place to stay and study as they planned to go back to their countries. Among the last cohort of Nigerian migrants to Macau one notices that there are more and more educated Nigerians migrants of both sexes and drawn from different ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The growing wealth of the middle class in Nigeria which is expected to increase, has contributed for a great number of international student enrolments. In Nigeria, despite the oil resources, there are limited or non-existent economic opportunities as manufacturing industries are extremely deficient and the great majority of every-day consumer goods are being imported. More and more Africans have recently turned their attention to China, Hong Kong, and Macau and are trying to get visas permits under a limited quota and sometimes they have to wait for one year. Those who came are very much business oriented and have no plans to establish themselves longer in the territory or China. However, the recent Nigerian migrants to Macau, although they are impelled to improve their socio-economic status and wish to return, they want above all to get a diploma from local higher education institutions. Yet, if they were given job or academic opportunities in Macau after completing their studies, they might be tempted to remain in the territory.

34 Nowadays, when many of them arrive as false pretence tourists, as it is rather difficult to rent apartments they choose to go to live at illegal guesthouses in the infamous residential buildings exactly right across the Macau's Migration Office. Before leaving their home country, the great majority of who choose Macau has not heard much about Macau, except for its fame of prosperity and high standard of living; yet, they think that it will be as industrialized as like China and other booming economies in Asia, where they can easily secure a job to sustain their living while pursuing further postgraduate studies in full-time and/or part-time modes in the field of international, business, management, and political sciences. Most of the students who came from Nigeria to study in Macau at the Master of Arts level studies, in MBA for instance, hope to get future jobs in managerial positions or starting up their own business with China market as a starting link. Unfortunately, the local economy, based exclusively on the gaming industry, policy, and conceived perception of Blacks, in general and of Nigerians in particular, do not give them the opportunity of getting either a part-time or a full-time job to support themselves according to their professional expertise and training. Consequently, the local employment recruitment

agencies cannot help them in their career endeavors.

35 Nevertheless, despite the obstacles, this new trend of students is contributing to Macau in becoming one of the most popular destinations for Nigerians and other African students from English-speaking countries—an increasing tendency as the chain of members of friends and family from their own country can contribute for them to adjust easier. It is noticeable that Macau's Nigerian students keep close family and friendship connections with other country fellows who primarily live and work in the cities of Guangdong and Hong Kong's clothing export and import business.

36 Using Macau as a basis for their studies, some of these Nigerian migrants turned students have also been applying successfully to other higher institutions in the region such as Japan and the Asia Pacific region. Although subjected to visa and other legal constraints, they are showing strong signs that they are able to adjust rapidly, to understand either Cantonese or Puthonghua, and to be involved in joint-research projects on China and Africa with other people from their country of origin if given the right opportunities. The majority of Nigerian students in Macau share common dreams with their country fellows who depend exclusively on business, they are interested to open a trade company, and be involved in the China African trade. Yet, Macau it is not the CITY OF DREAMS that the tourist propaganda claims and many of them and their families imagine.<sup>32</sup> And in some cases they are even prey of some unscrupulous countrymen turned student recruiters who deceive innocent students and their families in Nigeria by presenting a false side of Macau as a safe heaven where their basic needs can easily be sustained. In fact, as Macau's new immigration restrictions targeting citizens from six African and South Asian countries were announced in 2009, it seems that between the official discourse of cooperation both in the PRC and the Macau Special Administrative Region of China with African Countries and reality there is a great gap.<sup>33</sup>

37 First of all, all the respondents complained about the lack of reciprocity in the PRC's emigration policy. The process of getting visas for Chinese is much easier than for those Africans who apply for a visa to come to China. Besides, in the particular case of Macau, a former Portuguese colony, people from Portuguese speaking countries have been getting their resident permit with ease but the case of persons from other African countries, especially, the case of Nigerians, is more complicated. In the case of Nigerians married to Chinese citizens according to PRC law, the spouse is denied the one-year permit. Other African countries have been getting their resident permit with ease but the case of Nigerians is different. Even when a Nigerian is married to a Chinese citizen according to Chinese law the person is still being denied the one-year resident permit that the Chinese government gives to people in that category; rather, they will renew the person's visa every three months in the case of Nigerian. Wives of Nigerians who have a resident permit can never claim through her husband's residency. Spouses who wish to come to China should apply and get a one-month visiting visa or otherwise will be there as illegal alien.

- 38 Despite the lack of research on Chinese attitude towards Africans today and of the tensions, our respondents who speak Puthongua pointed that in many on-line forums, for instance, sina.com, a popular Chinese Web site, and chat rooms it is quite common to find racists comments, and stereotypes about Africans.
- 39 On a daily basis at the universities, these students regularly encounter discrimination in nearly all facets of daily life in Macau. Even among their fellow students and teachers but, for personal reasons, they always declined to comment about it. They reported racially-motivated obstacles when looking for work (which is 99% impossible to have one) or a home to rent, when dealing with colleagues or some school officials. They also experienced discrimination when entering cafes, restaurants, shops, or are seated on the buses.
- 40 Initially many Africans in Macau, including Nigerians, who were interviewed lamented about their inability of getting Chinese girlfriends even after residing here for more than one year in Macau. But in recent times, some of them have been able to get beautiful Chinese girls as their girlfriends but still have the difficulty of getting the “dream woman” they would have loved to marry. They justify it as a result of still negative perception of Blacks and, pressures from friends and family members who oppose to intermixed unions especially with Black Africans. Some expressed the idea that having a relationship with a Chinese girl has been greeted with mixed feeling. At first, the girls are difficult to get along with. According to one interview, this attitude should not be perceived as racism but rather as an influence of the Chinese culture that inhibits them from socializing with aliens. Most of our respondents consider that, despite of Macau being considered an international city, Chinese people in the enclave find it difficult to get along with a foreigner as local Chinese having been confined to a particular environment from birth without any opportunities of experiencing a different environment which could have provided considerable exposure. They gave as an example the fact that it is very easy to know among the Chinese who has lived in other countries in the first few minutes of initiating a conversation considering their openness and the willingness to answer to questions. Some feel scared due to their mindset about Africans. Basically, this is based on the information acquired from Chinese media depicting Africans with all sorts of vices. However, the last group considers language as a great barrier to effective communication; hence, local Chinese shy away from foreigners because the medium of communication will be in English.
- 41 Despite these bottlenecks associated with having a relationship with Chinese girls, our respondents’ experiences have shown that Chinese girls are more stable and tolerable in a relationship than the African girls. For example a Chinese girl will handle more maturely a situation whereby she finds her boyfriend cheating on her than an African girl who might go physical if not controlled. Chinese girls who have African boyfriends have given good commendations about their experience prompting some of them to share that they will



never go back to a Chinese guy because some of them are “boring, prefer to play the games and above all are not romantic at all according to some Chinese girls. The majority of the girls with African boyfriend are eager to get married. However, there are two hurdles: first, it is the refusal of the Chinese family accepting a marriage with an African. In a recent case it was a parent’s unwillingness to give away their only daughter in marriage to a Nigerian whom they feel might someday decide to live elsewhere. Another incidence was a situation where a Chinese girl was threatened to face excommunication from the family for marrying an African. The second hurdle to marriage between a Chinese and an African is the problem of adaptability of a Chinese girl to another country with a different culture. Contrary to the wild perception of the Chinese, acknowledging that Africans get social status and other benefits through marriage, Africans on the other hand are not disposed to get married so easily to a Chinese girl. So many Africans have the plan of going back to their country after their education and experience they acquired here. Africa as a continent is in need of development and a lot is expected from those who have lived in developed and developing countries to bring back their wealth of experience to shape a sustainable development model for the continent. Most Africans are skeptical about a Chinese wife migrating with them back home as the environment is completely different. However these impediments have not in any way deterred the ever growing relationship between Chinese girls and African boys.

## Conclusion

- 42 This research suggests that literature on Sino-African relations has focused more on strategic, economic, diplomatic, and political issues. There is, therefore a need for more research on the perceptions the Africans have regarding the Chinese and on the ones that the Chinese have on Africans.
- 43 Contrary to the official discourse, the situation of African students in China was never peaceful. In the 1960s, 1970s, and in 1980 there many incidents involving African students which led to deportation and to formal protests from a few African government officials and the Organization of African Unity. The PRC government publicly denied criticism and responded at the racial attitude that many Chinese had towards African students could not be characterized as racism.
- 44 While nowadays racial incidents involving African students in China did not have the repercussions of the previous decades, African students, in particular Nigerians, in both Macau and Mainland China, continue to feel subjected to prejudices despite the official discourse of praising Sino-African relationships which do not focus on a program of integrating foreign minorities.<sup>34</sup>
- 45 What we see in Macao is stereotyping in terms of traditional and outworn labels and

so-called identities, negative labeling, exclusion, and marginalization with reference to the Nigerian students—taking the university as a system in miniature, a microcosm of a macro-social phenomenon in Macau. The ideology taught in China and the silence on ideology in Macau lets ideology be perpetuated, so that, when a visible difference occurs, people cannot handle it or refuse to handle it at all. The evidence of racial discrimination in Macau may be attributed to old racial stereotyping and elitist values dating back to a past when those who were dark were linked to servitude and denigrated but also to colonial legacy still very much associated to Gilberto Freyre’s *Lusotropicalism* which in name of a pretense of “racial harmony” obliterates issues of racism in Portuguese speaking countries or areas of the world.

46 The experiences of the Nigerian at the hands of official channels (e.g., immigration) and the experiences of culture clash shows the introversion of locals and their reactions to difference, racism (or its modern-day mediation by all sorts of other strands).

47 The irony is that, in Macau, which is often talked of as a multicultural community, actually multiculturalism in the same way means a combination of cultural rejection and marginalization. Multiculturalism is defined as different cultures coexisting in Macau but there is a total absence of social awareness in order to avoid racial discrimination. Contrary to the Macau’s government’s claim that the enclave is a “harmonious and multicultural society,” the state governance and the migration department office are not sensitive to the needs of aliens and there is not a generalized practice of a culture of acceptance.

48 Previous studies in other countries have shown that language barriers is one of the obstacle for immigrants with poor English language proficiency but in Macau which boasts to be an international destination, those who do not speak either Chinese (Cantonese or Putonghua) and Portuguese are denied basic public services. Although is not widely spoken, Portuguese is the second official language alongside Chinese in the public administration and the legal system.

49 For instance, all the information provided by the Macau’s Migration Services, including in its website, is in both Chinese and Portuguese. These language barriers and immigration papers can always represent a problem but in the particular case of Macau’s complex immigration system, language barriers experienced by immigrant groups deprive most of the prospective international students from an easy enrolling at higher education institutions.

50 Regardless of their education, expertise or training, African immigrants, on average, and Nigerian students in particular are still perceived with suspicious as there is no recognition of the varieties of culture and benefits of African Diaspora. Racial hierarchy is still present and entrenched in Macau’s society as a combination of colonial legacy, the local Chinese imaginary, and the construction of a “harmonious society” in based on the principle of “one country, two systems,” proclaimed as one of slogans the Macau’s government.<sup>35</sup>

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## Notes

1 The word "Wahala" is an expression used among Nigerians meaning "trouble" which became popularized in other African countries. The title of this paper "China Wahala" is borrowed from a Cameroonian movie with the same title in perhaps homage to the Nigerian cinema. "Bushfaller" is an expression originally from Cameroon which became popularized in Africa to refer to Africans who had migrated.

2 Wei Li (1998). "Anatomy of a New Ethnic Settlement: The Chinese Ethn suburb in Los Angeles." *Urban Studies* 35 (3). 479-501. <<http://usj.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/35/3/479>; Accessed 2009-01-08>.

3 "Chinese Students Continue Protests Against Africans." *Washington Post*; December 30, 1988. <<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1P2-1298037.html>>. [accessed 20 December 2009].

4 Edward Said. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1993: 96.

5 Derek Alton Walcott (1930-) is a Caribbean Nobel Prize winner poet and playwright. <[http://www.poetryconnection.net/poets/Derek\\_Walcott/7728](http://www.poetryconnection.net/poets/Derek_Walcott/7728)> [accessed: 20 December 2009].

6 The term "ethn suburb" was first coined in 1997 by Wei Li in a paper on the Chinese in Los Angeles, US. Wei Li. Op. cit.

7 Bertonecello, Brigitte, and Sylvie Bredeloup, "The Emergence of New African "trading posts" in Hong Kong and Guangzhou, China." *Perspectives* 1 (2007): 94-105. A recent study states that the majority of Africans in China, especially in Guangzhou, is originally from West Africa, mainly from Nigeria (77%), followed by migrants from Guinea, Mali, Ghana, Senegal, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo. On the whole, more West Africans are found in the African population in Guangzhou. Adams Bodo, "The African Trading Community in Guangzhou: An Emerging Bridge for Africa – China Relations," presented at the China Quarterly Workshop, School of African and Oriental Studies, University of London, September 25 - 28, 2008.

8 Lou Jing was one of one of Shanghai's five finalists for "Let's Go! Oriental Angel," a TV singing contest American style show. Ding Hui (1989- ) from Hangzhou, of South African and Chinese ancestry, joined the China's national volleyball team. See "Oriental Angel' Triggers China Race Row." November 13, 2009; <http://www.theage.com.au/world/oriental-angel-triggers-china-race-row-20091113-ie71.html> "Ding Hui: Still Chinese, Still Black, Still Playing VolleyBall". <[http://shanghaiist.com/2009/11/05/ding\\_hui\\_still\\_chinese\\_still\\_black.php](http://shanghaiist.com/2009/11/05/ding_hui_still_chinese_still_black.php)>. [accessed 20 December 2009]

9 Bodomo, op. cit

10 Julie Wilensky. "The Magical Kunlun and 'Devil Slaves:' Chinese Perceptions of Dark-Skinned People and Africa before 1500." *Sino-Platonic Papers* 122 (July 2002).

11 Jorge Álvares, a Portuguese *feitor* (treasurer) in the Chinese tributary port of Malacca (today Malaysia) found shelter on the shores of Lantau Island (now part of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region) in 1513.

12 Here I echo Pina-Cabral's justification for classifying the colonial period as running from 1846 to 1967: the formal terms of the government were, despite efforts to the contrary, inevitably expressed in a colonial mode and ethnic relations in the city had a 'colonial' character. João Pina-Cabral, *Between China and Europe*, London School of Economics Monographs on Social Anthropology. Berg, New York/Oxford, 2002, p. 226, n. 3.

13 After UNESCO launched the Slave Route Project in 1994, several countries like France, the United Kingdom, and South Africa took the initiative to recognize slavery and slave trade as crimes against humanity through commemorations, conferences, and state apologies. Yet, yet Portugal has neither publicly apologized for its role in the institutions of slavery nor even its pioneer role for its abolition. Several Portuguese academics have signed an on-line petition against the fact that during the first semester of 2009, the government of Portugal, and several Portuguese institutions as the University of Coimbra supported the organization of a contest to choose the Seven Portuguese Wonders in the World. The list of the sites to be voted included important slave trading outposts and warehouses on the route of the Atlantic slave trade (the Elmina Castle or the Castle of São Jorge da Mina, founded by the Portuguese in 1482, in present-day Ghana, the old city port of Ribeira Grande of Santiago Island (Cape Verde), and the San Sebastian Fortress (Mozambique). Yet, the organization of the contest omitted the history of these places despite the fact that nowadays the Elmina Castle is a museum dedicated to the history of the Atlantic slave trade and on the description of the Elmina Castle, it is said that this site served as slave's warehouse only after the Dutch occupation in 1637.

14 Charles Boxer. *Mary and Misogyny. Women in Iberian Expansion Overseas (1415-1815). Some Facts, Fancies and Personalities*(London: Duckworth,1975), p. 3.

15 Melanie Yap, and Dianne Man. (1996). *Colour, Confusion & Concessions: The History of the Chinese in South Africa*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.

16 Philip Snow. *The Star Raft: China's Encounter with Africa*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 38- 39.

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19 Ju Lin Chang. *Ou-mun Kei-Leok, Monografia de Macau*, trans. Luís Gonzaga Gomes. Lisbon: Edição Quinzena de Macau, 1979.

20 "Çã macuá/ Comê carne crua.[...]/Chacha di Congo, de melmissó[...]/Vai botica comprá missó,China dá pôco,/ China dá-le chacha,Chacha querê tanto,/ hacha berá: Aiô[...]  
/ Branca sã inocente,/ Cathrina/Morena capaz fingi/ Preta abusadéra, / Cathrina/ Vingança sempre pidi./ [...]

/ *Quim casá cô preto/ Tem pôco sentimento/ Masqui seza preto?/ Tem bom coração/ Panhá vento suzo/ Fica cor de jambolam*. Almerindo Lessa, "The Population of Macao". in *Review of Culture*, n. 20, 2nd series, p.79

21 Over centuries, the Macanese developed a rich culture. One of its characteristics is its distinctive language, the *patois*, which is rarely heard today, although ongoing attempts have been made in

Macau and the Diaspora to revive and enrich it through theatre, literature, and music. From the play “Romeu co Julieta,” by Adé: Romeu, ioi-sua ladú/ Iou-sua Romeu/ Cáfri landim/ Estunga ora, / Vem buscá iou? (Romeu, I am your sweet/ I am yours, Romeu/ The Landim Kaffir/ Has now arrived. / Is he coming to arrest me?). José dos Santos Ferreira. *Qui-nova, Chéncho* (Macau: Tipografia da Missão do Padroado, 1973). Landim is one of the linguistic and ethnic groups in Mozambique. Most of the African soldiers who came to Macau were Landins.

22 As Frank Dikötter notes in his work on the discourse of race in modern China, the barbarians in China were divided into two categories according to their eating habits, *shengfan*, “raw barbarians” or savage and rebellious who ate raw meat, and the *shufan*, or “cooked barbarians,” docile and submissive who didn’t. Frank Dikötter, op. cit. p. 9.

23 Pina Cabral. *Between China and Europe*. Op. cit. 144.

24 João Filiciano Marques Pereira, “Cancioneiro Musical,” in *Ta-Ssi-Yang-Kuo*, Série II, 1. 1901, 239-243.

25 Ju Lin Chang. Op. cit. 30.

26 Li Zhigang, Xue Desheng, Michael Lyons, and Alison Brown. “The African Enclave of Guangzhou: A Case Study of Xiaobeilu.” *Acta Geographica Sinica* 63 (2), 2008.

27 Moisés Silva Fernandes Quoted By José Carlos Matias, “Cementing Sino- Luso Relations”, *Macau Business*, October 2008.

28 Beijing Declaration of the Forum on China – Africa Co-operation; Beijing [zu.china-embassy.org](http://www.china-embassy.org); accessed 25 November 2009.

29 Guangzhou Daily quoted by Bodomo, op.cit.

30 With exception of Sao Tome and Principe because of its close ties with Taiwan.

31 In the previous ministerial conference of the forum in 2006, the member nations adopted the “Action Plan for Economic and Trade Cooperation” to boost cooperation between China and the Portuguese-speaking nations. The CPLP aims to reinforce the economic links between China and the Portuguese speaking countries representing a potential market of 200 million people. As of November 2009, more than 1,900 officials and technicians from Portuguese-speaking countries had participated in research and training programs in China since the establishment of the forum, far exceeding the goal of 900 set in the Action Plan. NewsGdcom News Guangdong. <[http://www.newsgd.com/news/PearlRiverDelta/content/2009-12/08/content\\_7141782.htm](http://www.newsgd.com/news/PearlRiverDelta/content/2009-12/08/content_7141782.htm)>. [accessed 10 November 2009].

32 The City of Dreams is a mega project under construction in a reclamation area between two of the Macau’s islands where one can find hotels casinos, and residential towers. The first part of the project was concluded and inaugurated in 2009.

33 Macau vai impor restrições de visto à entrada turistas de seis países. Lusa, 3 November 2009; <http://www.lusa.pt/lusaweb/user/showitem?service=310&listid=NewsList310&listpage=1&docid=10305889>; accessed 20 December 2009.

34 When this paper was delivered in Ohm in July 2009, there was an incident involving the Guangzhou police and illegal African immigrants which resulted in the death of an illegal African immigrant who tried to escape and jumped to his death. “Africans protests in Guangzhou After Nigerian Feared Killed Fleeing Visa Check.” *South China Morning Post* July 16, 2009.

35 “Macao’s Efforts Hailed to Build Harmonious Society.” Government Briefing and Spokesperson System, <<http://nanpin.china.com.cn/english/government/152523.htm>>. [accessed: February 10, 2010].

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