

Candea, Matei. 2010. *Corsican Fragments – Difference, Knowledge, and Fieldwork (New Anthropologies of Europe)*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press. 202 pp. Pb.: \$ 24.95. ISBN: 9780253221933.

The island of Corsica has been described by ethnologists and anthropologists as being haunted by the idea of being different from Continental France and nearby Italy. In recent literature on the topic, this notion of a ‘voluntary Otherness’ inscribed into every cell of Corsican identity has been considered no longer in terms of an isolationism but as a way of relating the Self strategically to an Outside world. The Romanian anthropologist Matei Candea follows this line of thought in *Corsican Fragments*, a highly reflexive account on the fact of what does it mean to be Corsican. The volume, excellently printed and bound, adorned with an intriguing cover image, contains unfortunately a rather short and unspecific index.

Although initially based on a community studies approach, this book turns into a more abstract and post-modern direction in which the discussion of identity, cultural stereotypes and insider/outsider relations prevails. The chapters of this book are consequently organised in an unusual way referring to the abstract coordinates of ethnological experience such as ‘Knowing’, ‘Languages’, and ‘Space’. This anonymisation and abstraction of ethnographic reality (avoiding real names of places and persons) is not unproblematic and it leaves the reader often confronted with an abstract field which has lost a part of its poetic intimacy and tangibility. Candea’s style of writing tries to reconcile the literary qualities of an ethnographic diary with a complex analytical discussion. This multiperspective quality of subjectified anthropological writing has been far from being revolutionary since the works of Michael Jackson, and it does not convince in every detail. At times, the author submerges herself into an anecdotic-narrative style; at times, a hyper-relativist language complicates the reality instead of clarifying the issues. Moreover, these defaults are coupled with a rather naive astonishment in front of the ethnographic reality, which may be explained only partly by the relative inexperience of the young researcher when arriving on the island in 2002. Although Michael Herzfeld (one of the editors of the *Series New Anthropologies in Europe*) praises this book in a short comment on the back cover as ‘compellingly honesty and logic’, the reading of the book left me with heterogeneous impressions. Above all the dominant self-referentiality throughout the volume proved to be disturbing. Candea cultivates the exhibition of the self in Anglo-American research to such an extent that he leaves the locals themselves often in his own shade. It seems to be the experience of the researcher which counts, rather than that of the ‘Insiders’.

Unlike the ‘Athenian Anthropography’ of Neni Panourgia (1995), which clearly divides intimate personal experience and the objectified analytical point of view, creating a captivating parallel narrative, Candea tries to melt both into one. If this attempt was successful may be eventually judged by the reader.

The most convincing part of the book deals with the processes of gaining and negotiating knowledge. Here the author appears as an ambiguous ‘Insider-Outsider’, partially integrated into the village life of Crucetta, the fictive setting of the book. The author’s experience of trying to sell his wrecked car leads into a discussion about the term-

nological difference between *savoir* (passive knowledge) and *connaître* (active knowledge of persons and their networks). This chapter convincingly demonstrates the importance of social networks as a precondition for social acting. Particularly interesting is also the discussion of the social status of Maghrebians on the island, which in some respect mirror the inferior, orientalist status of Corsicans themselves in relation to the continental French. Observing the 'Arabs' therefore coincides for Corsicans with a self-referential look back into their own history.

The construction of Corsican identity is portrayed in Candea's book as a reversal of the usual anthropological paradigm: while the statist definition of citizenship and nationality appears as fluid, local identity concepts appear as fixed, almost uncontested entities. Apart from this insight one has the impression that this book is no more (and nothing less) than a general reflection on the social and symbolic constructions of similarity and Otherness. For someone who has recently re-read Ravis-Giordani's classical ethnographic account of shepherd life in Corsica (1983) characterised both by empirical clarity and a deeply felt ethnographic intimacy with the field, Candea's volume can only be subsumed as an ambitious but rather modest attempt to rewrite Corsican ethnography in the age of post-modernism.

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