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[Review] *Tradition in the frame: photography, power and imagination in Sfakia, Crete* by Konstantinos Kalantzis

James Hundley

Immediately upon reading *Tradition in the Frame*, the reader is transported to the mountains of the Aegean Sea where Kalantzis unfolds layer after layer of paradoxes and tensions and, as good ethnography should, works to explain how they are resolved and mitigated. There are numerous levels to the ‘framing’ of the book, referencing the title: Greece in the broader context of the European Union and the “debt crisis;” Crete within Greek national discourse; and Sfakia, the rugged region of southwestern Crete that sets up much of the productive tensions regarding authenticity, tradition, and the role of photography in mediating them. Sfakians occupy a precarious position with expectations of appearing “traditional” – a term the author situates within the well-established literature – and embracing modernity.

This book speaks to numerous audiences, though undergraduates would find it challenging: theorists engaging the interplay between tradition and modernity; scholars of Greece and the role of Crete in the Greek national imaginary; and those who experiment with visual methods within ethnography. This review focuses primarily on the latter.

From the beginning, this rich ethnographic text wonderfully illustrates how Sfakians use visual media in a productive capacity while nevertheless being captive to the use of imagery to speak about Sfakia; power mediates these tensions. Kalantzis adeptly shows how “photography’s framing entails ruptures and may involve unpredictable dynamics that defy the dominant description” (9). To do this the author presents the argument in three parts. Demonstrating how place matters in the social production of Sfakian identity, and how this contrasts with Greek urbanity, the author enters

Sfakia via a photograph. Praise of the image, a rugged and mountainous landscape, captures both local and tourist attention. The rough and harsh landscape is one means by which Sfakians, particularly men, proudly separate themselves from their Cretan neighbors as well as the wider Greek population; however, the mountains also provide a tension between the Sfakia of the past and that of the present, also mediated through photography. Sfakian resistance to Ottoman occupation sets up a recurring theme of the respect for the past, its relationship to the landscape, and how the photographic medium brings this into the present. The coffeehouse, another recurring and dominant site for encountering the largely male, Sfakian world, is another place of productive tension and a layer in the tensions among the urban/rural, male/female, traditional/modern, highland/lowland, and past/present.

The second section of the book begins to connect “the photograph” with power and history. Greek corporations have appropriated the image of the Sfakian man, dressed in black with a moustache, as a representation of the Greek self for use in a variety of products. Thus, the Greek imaginary borrows the timeless and rugged Sfakian man as emblematic of the nation which elicits a vexing response. These representations of a rugged past legitimize Sfakian claims to identity while also challenging their own use of the past in conversations about modernity.

Section three is the strongest; Kalantzis explores “how Sfakians engage modernity – the bundle of material objects and social relations that pierce their claims to tradition” (14). The strongest parts of the book, in this reviewer’s opinion, occurred when the author illustrated how the different levels, such as the supranational and the local, became intertwined and shaped the production of authenticity through the visual domain. EU subsidies for infrastructure that rerouted major roads around Sfakian villages enabled shepherds to manage flocks closer to their homes rather than having to walk the rugged mountains which produced lamentations of loss of tradition. The “debt crisis,” a term the author cautiously uses, is effective in showing how the Greek appropriation of a rugged rurality has political uses which can reshape social relations on the island. Temporally, the photographs taken by a well-known artist known as Nelly in the first half of the twentieth century showed how locals praised the men in the images for their roughness while lamenting the present seen as morally and physically degraded by many.

At times the author highlights a paradox – the challenges locals have with managing the categories of both the modern and traditional in a space where the past is both glorified and subverted in the present with the celebration of modernization. When it comes to the national and supranational dimension, however, I wanted there to be more development of how the EU and Greece shape Sfakian lifeways. One major goal accomplished with this book is to rethink how the use of visual methods can challenge the Orientalist paradigm in a way that extends beyond diminishing or exoticizing the Other. It is the repeated use of multiple chapters centered on visual imagery that presents numerous productive tensions that successfully develop this conversation. Photography throughout the book includes not simply a snapshot of an individual or location. The use of decades-old photographs that adorn the walls of private homes or public coffeeshops enable the author to present the tensions between the Orientalist gaze of the tourist postcard and snapshot with the meaning imbued from within Sfakia

as a “valorized...embodiment of the past” (169). But it is not simply photographs that push the visual envelope throughout the book; chapter five’s engagement with a film shot in Crete expertly conveys the issues surrounding representation, power, and the ways locals mediated and subverted the expectations of the film crew by resisting calls to perform their Sfakian identity on command. Filmmaking, in addition to photography, becomes a venue for the contestation of Orientalism.

The book will undoubtedly appeal to scholars working in Greece, particularly those who rely on Herzfeld’s work, whose fingerprints are omnipresent, in the handling of issues of both rural and urban modernity and authenticity. Those looking to explore how to incorporate visual methods in unexpected ways will find this book particularly useful; in fact, the dedication to the use of photography to explore the myriad tensions between past/present, traditional/modern, Crete/Greece, while situating this all within a larger framework of Europeanization is a welcome model.

James Hundley is an assistant professor of anthropology in the Department of Sociology & Anthropology at Rowan University and was formerly the program coordinator for the Global Studies program at Binghamton University. His research examines the Canada/US border, particularly after the events of 9/11, and how this affects cross-border politics, governance, and sociocultural institutions. His previous work partnered with the Coast Salish Tribes and First Nations who remain split by this border and the strategies they deploy to overcome obstacles of division.

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