

George E. Marcus and Fernando Mascarenhas:
Ocasão: The Marquis and the Anthropologist, A Collaboration.
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How have the roles of cultural elites such as the Portuguese nobility changed during the course of the twentieth century? How does the contemporary Portuguese nobility view itself and how might it wish to present itself within Portuguese society today? George E. Marcus and Fernando Mascarenhas's book *Ocasão: The Marquis and the Anthropologist, A Collaboration*, begins to explore these and other complex questions concerning contemporary nobility in Portugal. *Ocasão* traces a remarkable correspondence between George E. Marcus, a distinguished American anthropologist and professor and Fernando Mascarenhas, Marquis of Fronteira and Alorna and president of the Fundação das Casas de Fronteira e Alorna. The book is part of an ethnographic study of contemporary Portuguese nobility that emerged from a seminar organized by the Institute of Social Sciences (ICS), University of Lisbon, and held at the Palácio Fronteira in October of 1997. The close to two hundred letters and email messages cover a period between March 1998 and July 1999. These are supplemented with writings that reveal some of the results of fieldwork, such as interviews and meetings conducted in Portugal in the summer of 1999. There are some subsequent communications as well as English translations of Mascarenhas's *Sermon to My Successor*, and the Fundação das Casas de Fronteira e Alorna's Charter Preamble.

What results from the correspondence is a number of discussion threads that reveal as much about a scholar's methodology as they reveal about the intended subject. It quickly becomes apparent that Marcus intends to involve the marquis as an engaged partner rather than assuming the role of a distant unbiased observer merely recording and interpreting the marquis's activities (or his writings, in this case). At times we are offered brief glimpses into Marcus's own life with references to his family, his administrative duties and his role as an anthropologist. This form of reflexivity may be a useful methodological model not only for anthropologists but also for scholars in other disciplines, since it allows for some flexibility in the development of the study (in terms of topics pursued, et cetera).

The letters reveal the personal history of the marquis through his anecdotes and memories. They discuss how the marquis understood his position as a child and as an adult, his decision to create his foundation, his interpretations of his family's history and his personal memories of

childhood, familial activities, habits and customs. The letters also reveal the marquis's grappling as to whether he should become personally involved in a broader effort to raise the public profile of nobility in the country. These personal memories and thoughts are layered against other letters that discuss historical and contemporary issues confronting the Portuguese nobility (as interpreted by the marquis). These issues include the notion of *casa* (house) versus *linhagem* (lineage), the bestowing and recognition of titles, the public profile of the nobility and their attitudes toward current and recent past politics. What results is an intricately woven discussion revealing how a Portuguese nobleman views the nobility's past and present within Portuguese society.

The correspondence is augmented by periodic textual interjections by the writers, written long after the letters were sent. These interjections alternately fill in some of the information that was not noted in the original messages and consist of updates concerning certain subjects mentioned in the original letters. This subtext is itself interesting in terms of what is (and is not) discussed by the writers. As a result, we encounter another layer of dialogue that adds to the weaving of this sustained exchange.

The book's framework, which consists of a series of letters, offers some unique challenges for the reader. For example, the limiting of the majority of email exchanges to those that occurred directly between Marcus and Mascarenhas results in little discussion concerning Portuguese noblewomen. The supplemental writings (and a couple of emails) begin to address some issues regarding noblewomen, such as women's changing roles within the family, as well as some examples of noblewomen as titleholders, but these are brief interludes. By publishing the emails chronologically and with little editing, there is some movement between discussion topics, with the result that some subjects remain unresolved, only to be discussed briefly several letters later, or not at all. In other cases, certain topics are discussed and then reexamined at different stages of the exchange. The minimal editing also results in the inclusion of all topics, whether they are broader contextual issues or more mundane details, such as the discussions concerning the use of rental cars during Marcus's impending research trip. It is appealing, however, to follow the development of a relationship through a sustained written dialogue with its many nuances and its mixture of topics.

The layering of the book's various themes might appeal to those whose interests lie outside of cultural anthropology, such as those interested in contemporary definitions of social class structures, or those interested in issues concerning the intertwining of history, memory and biography. *Ocasião: The Marquis and the Anthropologist, A Collaboration* offers us a glimpse of contemporary Portuguese nobility, as well as a biography of a Portuguese nobleman, while demonstrating the possibilities and complexities of collaboration as a research methodology. As the book shows us, the art of research may very well be awaiting us in our email inboxes.