

***The Convict and the Colonel.* RICHARD PRICE. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998. xviii + 285 pp., illustrations, notes, source notes, illustration credits, references.**

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Imagine colonial Martinique, circa 1925. Universal suffrage (for men) has been declared, and elections are tense times when the powerful planter class will do anything to maintain control. When the people from the municipality of Diamant go to vote, they find the polls closed. Breaking into *Le Maire*, the mayor's house, they find the ballot box stuffed with votes for the local bigwig, Colonel Coppens. In the ensuing melee, 12 local men are killed along with the colonel. Now imagine Medard Aribot, a colonial-day Robin Hood who remains uninvolved in the political events while dispensing stolen treasures from his hideout cave where he carves magical objects, including a bust that strikingly resembles Colonel Coppens. Sent to the notorious penal colony in French Guiana for stealing—but also, people claim, because he carved the impertinent likeness of the now deceased colonel—Medard returns 25 years later as the convict. He regains his solitary existence while living on the outskirts of town and carving marvelous objects; he has become a touchstone in local fishermen's minds for their experience of colonial oppression.

These two images of the convict and the colonel provide the scaffold around which Price's remarkable tale of memory and forgetting in postcolonial Martinique unfolds. "Time," Price muses, "is like an old-fashioned Martiniquan concertina," and the task he sets for the book is to "expand the instrument, reopen those folds, to play some of those 'old-time' mazouk and béguines," Antillean dances that are rife with clarinet riffs (p. xi). The result is an exploration of Medard's memory and its peregrinations in 1990s Martinique. The important question that Price explores is "how one generation's powerful historical metaphors could so quickly become the next generation's trivial pursuit" (p. 157). In order to answer this question, Price draws on historical archives, oral testimonies, old field notes, personal memories, Caribbean poetry, and selective entries from a review written with Sally Price of a recent *Guide Gallimard*, along with his personal experience of late-20th-century Martinique. The result of Price's careful interweaving of different sources is a story about the contradictions inherent in memory—the collective memory of rural Martinique embodied in objects like Medard's carving of the colonel and the personal memory of the anthropologist.

In part one Price draws on different kinds of memory narratives—memories of the event among local residents; the writings of the celebrated Martiniquan poet and man of letters, Césaire; and historical accounts—to create a snapshot of the political and social scene of Martinique in 1925. Price recounts the war at Diamant, following his informants and the colonial archives by portraying the events "etched in bi-partite form, the Left on one side, the Right on the other" (p. 23).

In the second part of the book, Price follows Medard's historical trail. As in his book *First Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), an excavation of historical memory of Surinam's maroons, this part of the book is devoted to uncovering the historical memories of people who, according to experts (in this case a plethora of well-known Caribbean poets and writers), do not have any. Price's quest for Medard's memory takes him to Medard's carefully carved, but now ramshackle, gingerbread house and leads him to talk to people who knew Medard. The portrait that emerges is of a solitary man living on the outskirts of a respectable, poor society, a man whom people both pity and admire for his suffering at the hands of French colonial authorities. With Medard's exile to French Guiana, oral memory trails off and Price retreats to the archives, where he draws on histories and literary accounts to depict what Medard's life in the penal colony might have been like. In taking the reader through a fascinating search for Medard's memories, the first two parts of the book crystallize a collective memory for colonial Martinique and record it in written form.

It is in the last part of the book, where Price follows the transformations of Medard's memory in 1990s Martinique and sets these changes within the context of Caribbean colonial experience, that readers find the keenest insights into the contradictions of making memories in a colonial setting. Drawing on his field notes and letters written during his first field trip to Martinique in the 1960s, Price creates a snapshot of what Medard's Martinique might have been like and sets Medard's image within a Caribbean theatre of madness. Today, massive French efforts to modernize Martinique counter Medard's memory as a critique of colonial power relations, leading to what Price laments as the "post-carding" of the past" (p. 173)—the sanitization of the past to make it suitable for bourgeois consumption. Price decries this loss of a heroic history that he identifies as more true to rural Martiniquans' sense of themselves in the world. In contrast, he also documents continuities amid the rush of state-imposed change (the most striking being the Martiniquan joke about the man who returns from France having forgotten Creole, only to abruptly remember it when a crab bites his toe, and he cries out "sa ka modè!" "It bites! It bites!"—a joke that was also documented by Frantz Fanon in his scathing chapter on the negro and language in *Black Skins, White Masks* (Grove Press, Inc., 1952). Similarly, the story of Medard's memory remains unfinished, and the book ends with the possibility that Medard's memory—and the subterranean history of anticolonial struggle for which it stands—may be redeemed.

Part of what makes this book so compelling are the tensions between Price's own desire to find a certain kind of memory and his keen insights into the fact that memories do not necessarily work the way one might wish. As Price clearly shows, this fact does not mean that the possibilities of a redemptive memory are foreclosed. So, like all good books, this one leaves the reader wanting more and thinking about how the dialectic of remembering

and forgetting in any historical situation is open to change. Some readers may dismiss Price's nostalgia for the world he knew as a neophyte anthropologist as a highly romantic search for local resistance. This honest nostalgia, however, raises fascinating questions about how any anthropologist's affective attachments to and memories of a long-term field site/home mediate what he or she wants to see.

After all, how many long-term fieldworkers are not nostalgic for places as they first knew them? Do many anthropologists secretly want to find heroic traits in the people they study? It is precisely Price's sensitive juxtaposition of the ethnographer's personal memory with collective memories of Medard that illuminates the shifting historical framework of anthropology alongside that of its subjects. Price accompanies his textual exploration of memories with multiple photos, including Medard's bust of the colonel and a postcard of Medard's house, making the postcarding of the past particularly tangible. Filled with insights that are at once theoretical, methodological, and ethnographic, *The Convict and the Colonel* is required reading for anyone interested in colonialism, memory, and contemporary Caribbean societies.

**Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History among an Andean People.** THOMAS A. ABERCROMBIE. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998. xxviii + 603 pp., illustrations, notes, glossary, references, index.

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In this ambitious and wide-ranging volume, Thomas Abercrombie conjoins reflexive ethnography and reflexive history to explain the historical genesis and ongoing vitality of what the author calls an Andean "interculture" that binds together Bolivia's ethnically and culturally (not to mention politically and economically) divided society. While he admits the reality of cultural difference and social stratification, Abercrombie successfully debunks the existence of separable indigenous and Hispanic cultural streams, a notion found in postcolonial bourgeois nationalism, militant ethnic identity politics, and romantic anthropological theories of resistance. Through a close analysis of ritual practices among the K'ulta of highland Bolivia, he demonstrates that K'ultas strive "not so much to keep incompatible 'Andean' and 'Western' orders apart as to bring two kinds of powers within a single cosmic order into controlled contact with one another" (p. 113, emphasis in original). Abercrombie brings theoretical sophistication and solid ethnographic description to an ongoing critique of previous approaches to hybrid Andean cultural formations. As a further bonus, the case for this intercultural understanding of what it means to be K'ulta is strengthened by historical research demonstrating the antiquity and malleability of such processes of hybridization.

Although the replacement of a simplistic "idols behind altars' resistance paradigm" (p. 25) with a

more productive focus on the dynamic complementarity of Spanish and Indian cultures is perhaps Abercrombie's most important contribution to Andean studies (and to postcolonial studies), it is only one of many arguments woven through the text. Another concerns the relationship between modes of historical consciousness, or social memory, in colonial and postcolonial situations. Abercrombie recounts a historical narrative of the formation of the colonial interculture and demonstrates the role in that process of contests over the form and content of historical memory. That is, he shows how the Spaniards attempted to suppress certain (principally nonlinear) kinds of memorialization, such as ritual activity or the knotted cord texts known as *quipus*, in favor of more recognizable modes of remembering like oral narratives or the Spanish system of writing. This imposition of historical consciousness, which Abercrombie calls the "colonial relandscaping of Andean social memory" (p. 213), was creatively appropriated and actively contested by native Andeans. Their alternative memories and modes of remembering appear refracted in archival accounts of social movements such as the Taqui Oncoy (song-dance of sickness or the Pleiades) and religious innovations such as native Eucharists using home-brewed corn beer in place of wine.

The focus on this struggle over what is remembered and the way in which it is remembered ties together the book's disparate parts. In order to bring together ethnography and history, as well as to produce both objective and reflexive forms of each, Abercrombie divides the text into three parts, each of which could be a book unto itself. He calls the first part an "ethnographic pastoraie" (p. 28), including two chapters that detail his experience of fieldwork in K'ulta and a third chapter that gives ethnographic substance to the notion of an intercultural matrix. These chapters are engagingly written and could be used to introduce students to the nature of ethnographic fieldwork. The reflexive tone of these chapters demonstrates the positionality of fieldworkers and the partiality of the knowledge they generate with a minimum of posturing and jargon. The narrative is structured by the trope of discovery: the ethnographer seeks the authentic, private heart of the native culture, while his interlocutors work to keep him at the public margins of their society. Yet rather than simply underscoring the authority of the anthropologist, this narrative is critical in intent. The expectation of arrival at the essence of native society is foiled by the realization that both public and private, town and hamlet are integral parts of the local social system. To neglect the Christian, urban, Spanish-inflected dimensions of life in K'ulta, Abercrombie argues, is to seriously distort its meaning.

In part 2, the author shifts from ethnography to history. Although Abercrombie suggests that K'ultas' own ways of remembering constitute an "authentic 'ethnohistory'" (p. 123), he reviews several centuries of documentary evidence to reconstruct a history of K'ulta that, he admits, differs radically from that of its people. In addition to presenting K'ulta history in an accessible form, Abercrombie accomplishes several aims through the historical chapters. First, he salvages hidden forms

of Andean social memory from the Spaniards' myopic collective. Despite the colonizers' attempts to distance themselves from their subject, the author's tenacious approach to the past heterodox forms of native memory. Abercrombie's accounts of ritual practices and social memory as novel adaptations of social memory consciousness" (p. 17) onward, Abercrombie explains how the colonial culture introduced early forms of social memory here is the author's decision to use indigenous expressions of memory as a means of resistance. The novel's *generis* forms of resistance are not smokescreens for a more conventional religious practice. Third, the author's conventional history against the background of K'ultas' own history. Here again, the denaturalization of the Spanish appropriation of Christianity in K'ulta.

In the third part of the book, Abercrombie notes the argument in a new way. He argues that the modes of remembering that have been developed in K'ulta are not just modes of remembering but also modes of ritual practices. The formality of the early colonial rituals, whose tight, authoritative structure is a result of the formalizing language of the colonial project, is a form of flexibility of part 1. After a narrative about a solar-cycle, Abercrombie discusses Earth's prehuman, uncivilized beginnings of K'ulta. Abercrombie goes on to show how dual cosmological principles are remembered through their ritual and practical forms. The tension of this principle is a result of the libations and sacrifices which comprise the Andean cosmology. Abercrombie successfully demonstrates how the libations discussed in part 1 are a form of native Eucharist. Abercrombie explores in exquisite detail the ways in which this libation is the finding that such activities are interlaced activities in K'ulta. Together the two parts of the book form a comprehending whole. The history of K'ulta life, and the search for the core of indigenous culture, are ethnographic and historical.

While this magisterial work provides information and ideas, it also has weaknesses. The interweaving of the two parts of the book are never fully counterhegemonic uses of the ethics of speaking for others. The sophisticated combination of historical research and ethnography is a significant contribution to scholars of Andean and of the juncture between the two.