

Richard PRICE, *Inside/Outside: Adventures in Caribbean History and Anthropology*,

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This text comments on the recently published (2022) personal and intellectual autobiography of Richard Price. It summarises the work of Richard and Sally Price on the development of anthropologic, culture and historical studies of the 70's of the 20th century – 2000. It also discusses the role of (auto)biography within anthropologic studies. Finally, the text explores the possibilities of using some of the concepts and approaches (such as creolization) outside the study of history and culture of the Caribbean.

In Central Europe, Richard Price and his wife and academic partner, Sally Price, are less known than among North American and Western European communities. This may be due their long-lasting focus on the Caribbean and the history of the Atlantic. Their approach to the treatment of topics such as processes of cultural change, identity transformations, or political appropriation of cultural heritage – if not the concrete case studies that they analysed – is certainly generally applicable. Since the 1960's, Richard and Sally Price have systematically combined long-term anthropologic field research in various regions, mainly in Surinam and Martinique, with analyses of historical sources and, especially in the case of Sally Price, museum studies and art history. They have created their own explicitly subjective and reflective academic writing style which is innovative and influential. It combines different sources without giving preference to any of them and takes into account the views of the respondents as well as those of the researcher.

Richard Price wrote his autobiography in 2020, in his new home in Florida, during the first year of the isolation caused by the Covid pandemic. This was shortly after the Prices decided to quit their jobs in academia (though they continue to work in the academic field) and move out from their homes in Paris and Martinique where they had lived for several decades. The text is remarkable from several points of view. It offers an explanation and additional impetus to researchers in the fields

of (post)colonial and cultural studies. It provides a broader context for the cases that Richard and Sally Price presented in their monographs and scholarly articles. It could, in fact, be viewed as a form of additional testimonial source, supplementing those collected by the Prices, and valuable especially with respect to the dramatic transformations which the Caribbean communities have undergone in the past decades and which the couple have been studying.

The title of the autobiography may indicate the notorious emic and etic approach in anthropology, the insider and outsider perception of cultural behaviours and practices (though it has never been explicitly said by the author). It might also refer to a quote from a lecture by Claude Lévi-Strauss who was Price's mentor during his early studies in Paris (1963–64). Lévi-Strauss noted that “anthropologists must adopt a perspective that places them outside their own cultural tradition without ceasing to be inside it while trying to enter into the most intimate essence of the observed culture that will always remain inaccessible to them”.¹ Finally, it may be seen as a reminder that once an anthropologist has tasted the challenges and charms of life ‘elsewhere’, he or she can never feel entirely ‘at home’ when returning from a field experience.

Understanding cultural transformations

There is no need to give a full account of Richard Price's life. It would only repeat what was written in his memoir. The text is rather conservatively organized – strictly chronological and balanced as far as the space dedicated to the individual chapters of his life is concerned. Price lists numerous places of residence and an even more impressive number of friends and acquaintances from around the world, academia and beyond, and intersperses them with political events, from the Pearl Harbor attack to the presidential election of Donald Trump. Yet, there are topics which recur. The first is Richard Price's constant, universal fascination with humanity and its diversity in the broadest sense of the word. It seems that far more than a professional, “dispassionate” view that anthropolo-

¹ ALBERT DOJA, *Celebrations of Lévi-Strauss's Heroic Legacy*, Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (N.S.) 26/2020, p. 868, quote in RICHARD PRICE, *Inside/Outside: Adventures in Caribbean History and Anthropology*, Athens 2022, p. 51.

gists often take of the object of their study, he shows insatiable desire to understand diverse human experience, to come to terms with new situations and new cultural contexts, and to enjoy the process of discovery. Several encounters with cultural “other” apparently left a lasting impact on the author – the people on the streets of New York, where he spent his childhood, visit to the Hopis and Navajos in the Southwest of the United States at the age of sixteen, being “mesmerized by this brush with peoples whose lives seemed so fundamentally different from my own.”² We get to know his impressions from the first fieldwork in Peru, Mexico, Martinique, and especially from Suriname, which marked a turning point in the careers of Richard and Sally. This was brought about by a study of Surinameese Saamaka, one of the “Maroon” groups – i.e., descendants of the fugitive slaves from the colonial period who established themselves as independent groups in Suriname interior and whose language and culture have evolved into a unique set of configurations over the centuries.

Richard Price’s early encounters with the varieties of Caribbean cultures inspired him to pursue the study in the processes of “acculturation” and “creolization”. He elaborated on these topics already during his first employment at Yale but fully developed them especially after 1974, when he moved to Johns Hopkins University to found and (at the beginning) chair the Department of Anthropology. Based on his experiences from the field as well as reactions to some intense discussions linked with the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s, Richard Price radically reformulated the anthropological understanding of cultural changes and (dis)continuities, especially in the field of study of Afro-American cultural manifestations. The essay which he published with Sidney Mintz, his colleague from Yale and Johns Hopkins universities, a ground-breaking study on the “birth of African American culture” (1973), sparked extensive and sometimes heated debates in academic circles, as the authors were accused of denying the preservation of African cultural heritage by succeeding generations of African Americans.³

² PRICE, *Inside/Outside*, p. 1.

³ The text was presented in 1973 and published in limited number of copies in 1976; „properly“ it appeared as SIDNEY W. MINTZ, RICHARD PRICE, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*, Boston 1992. See also the follow-up study by RICHARD PRICE, *The Miracle of Creolization: A Retrospective*, *New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 75: 1–2/2001, pp. 35–64.

Contrary to previous interpretations, Price and Mintz did not see change as a “stain” on the ideal cultural form, but rather as something inherent in all human societies. In discussing particularly the cultures that emerged from the slave economies of the New World, they emphasized the creativity of African slaves and their descendants that had given rise to new cultural and social forms. In this way, they also emphasized the discontinuity of cultural transmission between the old and new homelands and the influence of the specific environmental and cultural conditions of the American continent on new sociocultural formations. This contradicted the previous discourse on African American cultures, based on the work of Melville Herskovits who suggested that the transfer of the “original” cultural traits from Africa to the Americas was almost unmitigated.⁴ Mintz and Price, on the other hand, argued in favour of a more historical approach that would contextualize specific cases of cultural transfers and transformations.

The controversy about the extent to which enslaved Africans and their descendants retained aspects of their original cultures and to which they created new cultural and social forms in the Americas have continued ever since. In these discussions, the concept of “creolization”, originally taken from linguistics, became prominent.⁵ Mintz and Price were not pioneers in using the term (in fact, it did not even appear in the 1976 edition of their essay). However, the word became very important to them in the following decades. In short, “creolization” refers to the creative processes in the mixing of languages and cultures as a result of European overseas colonization, which led to the emergence of new, site-specific cultural forms and collective identities.⁶ Contrary to the notion of acculturation, creolization did not mean “change of culture” (i.e. the notion of a culture as a coherent whole, albeit susceptible to a transformation into another whole), but variability as part of any socio-

4 MELVILLE J. HERSKOVIST, *The Myth of a Negro Past*, Boston 1941. For the important contribution of Herskovits to the study of the anthropology and history of Afro-Americans – as he opened this previously ignored field for scholarly study, advocating the very notion that African Americans had their proper history and culture, see SIDNEY W. MINTZ, *Melville J. Herskovits and Caribbean Studies: A Retrospective Tribute*, *Caribbean Studies* 4: 2/1964, pp. 42–51.

5 For the original meaning, see for example ROBERT HALL, *Pidgin and Creole Languages*, Ithaca 1966.

6 SHU-MEI SHIH, FRANÇOISE LIONNET, *The Creolization of Theory*, in *The Creolization of Theory*, (eds.) Shu-mei Shih, Françoise Lionnet, Durham-London 2011, p. 2.

cultural development. It involves both innovation and preservation of existing cultural features. It involves both innovation and preservation of existing cultural features. Importantly, however, in the cases for which the concept was formulated, i.e. the cultural formations of the Caribbean and other non-European settings – these processes took place in colonial settings. Thus, as Stuart Hall summarized, “creolization always entails inequality, hierarchization, questions of domination and subordination, rule and slavery, control and resistance. Questions of power as well as questions of interconnectedness are always involved.”⁷

This is why some scholars – Mintz among them – have questioned the usefulness of transferring creolization outside the geographically and chronologically specific environment of the New World.⁸ There have been some useful modifications, however. Uwe Hinrichs applied this concept to the study of the Balkan languages, seeking not only to show their complicated nature, which resulted from multiple layering, transmission and adaptation, but mainly to introduce the motif of power imbalance and pervasive violence into the study of Balkan cultures.⁹ The editors and contributors of the 2015 anthology had a similar motivation, focusing on the mixing of cultures in contemporary globalized Europe and the creative potential of various social actors to rehabilitate loss and recreate their social and cultural identities (but also to point to the historical roots of contemporary Europe in its colonial, imperial past).¹⁰

Atlantic history and beyond

In addition to studying cultural change, their repeated long-term stays with the Maroons also resulted in Prices desire to show that non-Euro-

⁷ STUART HALL, *Creolité and the Process of Creolization* (2003), repr. in *Creolizing Europe: Legacies and Transformations*, (eds.) Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez, Shirley Anne Tate, Liverpool 2015, p. 16.

⁸ For these critiques see CHARLES STEWART, *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, (ed.) Charles Stewart, London 2010, p. 4.

⁹ UWE HINRICHS, *Südosteuropa-Linguistik und Kreolisierung*, *Zeitschrift für Balkanologie* 40/2004, pp. 17–32.

¹⁰ ENCARNACIÓN GUTIÉRREZ RODRÍGUEZ, SHIRLEY ANNE TATE (eds.), *Creolizing Europe: Legacies and Transformations*, Liverpool 2015.

pean ethnic groups, traditionally described as “without history,”¹¹ indeed have their own sense of history, central to their identity, but also their own authentic and retrievable past. “At the time,” Richard Price noted, “many – if not most – mainstream Western historians (including colleagues at my own university) fervently denied that oral histories recounting 17th or 18th century events could be considered anything but a ‘myth’ or a ‘legend’. They argued that human memory was simply too fallible.” Therefore, his goal was to “demonstrate [...] that these Western historians have gravely underestimated the ability of people in illiterate societies around the world to pass on knowledge over the centuries, and to help bring to oral history the same degree of historiographical attention as the written word traditionally received.”¹²

The argumentation, which clearly opposed the views of such renowned anthropologists as Marshall Sahlins and Claude Lévi-Strauss, resulted in two books, *First Time* (1983) and *Alabi's World* (1990).¹³ The expression “First Time” referred to a period of slavery before the foundation of the refugee communities in the interior of Suriname. The first volume focused on this period, while the second, structured around the biography of a prominent Saamak leader at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, focuses primarily on the coexistence of Maroon communities with colonial society. In both texts Richard Price made the most of the potential of oral history and its opposition to “standard” historical sources, such as the Dutch administrative sources or the reports of the missionaries of the Moravian Church, i.e. the restored Unity of the Czech Brethren, re-established in Saxony at the time of the re-catholicization (an interesting link to Czech history).¹⁴ Neither of these testimonies takes precedence, nor does it seek to confirm or refute one by means of the other.¹⁵

Price admitted the problematic nature of oral sources – the inevitable tendency to fabricate, viewing things from a certain perspective, and

¹¹ Paraphrasing the title of ERIC WOLF, *Europe and the Peoples Without History*, Berkeley 1982; Wolf, of course, himself countered the “peoples without history” cliché.

¹² PRICE, *Inside/Outside*, p. 105.

¹³ RICHARD PRICE, *First Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*, Baltimore-London 1983.

¹⁴ For the Moravian Church, see J. TAYLOR HAMILTON, KENNETH G. HAMILTON, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum 1722–1957*, Bethlehem 1967.

¹⁵ See the comments of R. Price on his treatment of sources in R. PRICE, *The Miracle of Creolization*, p. 55.

their incompleteness. As he explained, in the period immediately following the abolition of slavery, land rights were established, as were the political structures on which subsequent leadership positions were based. Also “any dispute between clans – whether over land, political office, or ritual property – immediately evoked memories of the First Time.” As a result, “this knowledge became very perspective-based; the point of knowing about the events of the First Time was to be able to use it to support your clan. Such specific knowledge of the past thus meant power in a very direct sense; it allowed a degree of control over the vagaries of an unpredictable present.” Saamak’s knowledge of the First Time is thus le *savoir-pouvoir* in the Foucault’s very sense. The same is true, however, of the surviving archival documents Price used, each of which represents the “partial truth” of its creators with an attempt to equip the position of an individual or group in the struggle for domination in a colonial setting.

It is the innovative way in which Ricard Price collected and processed his diverse sources that makes *Alabi’s World* considered one of the foundational texts in the field of “Atlantic history” – a field that Ricard Price helped to establish. Atlantic history was established as part of the Johns Hopkins Program in Atlantic History and Culture, founded in 1973 with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. Proponents of Atlantic history – seen as both an analytical construct and an explicit category of historical analysis¹⁶ – focused on links within (not only) the Atlantic basin, seen as a connecting environment that enabled economic and cultural transfers between societies and continents.

While the critics of the concept argued that it implied the existence of the “Atlantic” as self-contained and bounded entity (a fact made even more urgent in the atmosphere of the Cold War, when the “(North) Atlantic” acquired a distinct political meaning), or against the concept of Atlantic history as a mere rejuvenation of the more traditional imperial history of Europe,¹⁷ it brought the opportunity to transcend national boundaries in the study of colonial processes and especially their dynamic, ever-changing nature. brought about the possibility of transcend

¹⁶ JACK P. GREENE, PETER D. MORGAN, *Introduction: the present state of Atlantic history*, In *Atlantic History: A Critical Appraisal*, (eds.) Jack P. Greene, Peter D. Morgan, Oxford 2009, p. 3.

¹⁷ See, for example, the review by Bernd Hausberger of the volume Renate Pieper and Peer Schmidt (eds.), *Latin America and the Atlantic World/Essays in Honor of Horst Pietschmann*, in *Historia Mexicana*, 57:1/2007, pp. 279–291, which is, rather than a review, a polemic with the whole concept of Atlantic History.

national boundaries in the study of the colonial.¹⁸ In an effort to overcome the essentialist fixation on the Atlantic Ocean itself and its immediate coastline, the next phase of Atlantic historiography also focused on the Atlantic “hinterland” and the economic and cultural entanglements that extended far beyond the immediate areas of colonization.¹⁹ In this interpretation, the developments in the Caribbean had repercussions also upon the European interior, including the region of Central Europe.

Last but not least, the study of cultural creativity of the Maroons and the research in trans-Atlantic entanglements also led the Prices, and especially Sally Price, into the study of the artistic expressions of the inhabitants of the Caribbean²⁰ – and, also, in the ways this and other “primitive” art was perceived, presented, and commercialized in Europe and the USA. In this sense, two of her texts, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places* (1984)²¹ and *Paris Primitive* (2007)²² were of great importance. The latter in particular, exposing the scheming involved in the founding of the Musée Quai Branly, a museum that was supposed to be a showcase for the French government and its cultural policies, as well as the missed opportunities and the continued exoticization of non-European cultures, provoked a strong response from the academic community. While the case of France was of course peculiar, given its imperial past and post-colonial entanglements, the calls for the decolonisation of museums across the whole of Europe and for the initiation of a genuine intercultural dialogue in cultural institutions are also valid, perhaps especially for Central Europe. A unique reflection on the dilemmas of art collectors in the field is presented in collective semi-diary, semi-essay entitled *Equatoria*, which originated in the involvement of the Prices in collectioning in Guayana in the early 1990s, within the frame of the project sponsored by the French government. It brings to the fore questions regarding the

¹⁸ For the definitions and defense of this approach, see, among others, BERNARD BAILYN, *Atlantic History*, Cambridge, Mass. 2005.

¹⁹ See, for example, FELIX BRAHM, EVE ROSENHAFT (eds.), *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680–1850*, Rochester 2016.

²⁰ See, especially, the early monograph of SALLY PRICE, *Co-Wives and Calabashes*, Ann Arbor 1984, on the interplay between gender and art within Maroon society.

²¹ SALLY PRICE, *Primitive Art in Civilized Places*, Chicago 1984. The monograph was subsequently published in translations into Dutch, French, German, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese.

²² SALLY PRICE, *Paris Primitive: Jacques Chirac's Museum on the Quai Branly*, Chicago 2007.

construction of knowledge and “cultural impoverishment” of non-European peoples.²³

Subaltern voices, committed anthropology and academic freedom

The mention of *Equatoria* leads us to another topic, that is, the experimentation of the Prices with the literary formats and ways of expression in anthropological writing. From the beginning of their careers, these writers have stretched to the maximum the “poetics of representation”²⁴ of scholarly texts. Thus, in *Alabi's World*, Richard Price played with the different typesetting in order to “keep the voices in the book separate, rather than melding them together the way historians usually did. [...] Some critics dubbed all this ‘postmodern’, but for me, it was simply a way to present Native voices as seriously as those of Western people.”²⁵ Price also experimented with nonlinear narrative techniques, again to counterbalance the established Western way of presenting the past of the studied “objects”. Subsequent books of Richard and Sally Price were even more relativizing and personalized, in explicit contrast to the authoritative style of earlier anthropological monographs. Probably the most interesting volume in this sense is *Travels with Tooy* (2008), the result of their long acquaintance with the shaman Saamaka in Martinique. By combining small-scale storytelling with archival study encounters, the cultural dynamism and the daily struggles of subaltern actors to build and maintain their own identity and living space are again convincingly accentuated.

The Prices may be considered the first protagonists of “reflexive ethnography” which, since the 1980s, has challenged the existing authoritative way of presenting the “other” to Euro-American academics and the public. Reflexive anthropology acknowledged the cultural grid of researchers (or at least the part of the grid of which they were aware), their biases and pre-dispositions, the “emotional and intellectual baggage the anthropologists carry with them,”²⁶ and the ways in which they

²³ RICHARD PRICE, SALLY PRICE, *Equatoria*, London 1992.

²⁴ R. PRICE, *Inside/Outside*, p. 139

²⁵ R. PRICE, *Inside/Outside*, p. 139.

²⁶ RUTH BEHAR, *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology That Breaks Your Heart*, Boston 1996, p. 8. For the early discussion of the genre of ethnographic writing and the strategies of the researchers to furnish their authority and authenticity of

themselves discursively constructed the objects of their analyses.²⁷ The Prices also soon began to question their work ethics, the scientist's responsibility for his "informants" and the emotional attachment to them.

These concerns gave rise not only to a reflexive but also to an engaged, "committed" anthropology that sought not only to formulate theories but also to engage in policy-making and active advocacy. In the case of the Saamakas' this meant challenging the authoritarian government of Suriname. When Richard Price commented on his testimony as an expert witness on behalf of the Saamaka before the Inter-American court of Human Rights in 1992 (thanks to his engagement, the Saamaka won their case, receiving monetary compensation for the torture and murder of seven unarmed youths by members of the national army of Suriname),²⁸ he simply noted: "How can we give back something of value to the people who have welcomed us into their lives? They have, though unwittingly, helped us make careers and enabled us to live comfortably in the richest country in the world, while they have, at least in many cases, survived in precarious economic and political conditions."²⁹ This involvement marked the definitive end of the hopes of the Prices to return to Suriname after their dramatic deportation in 1985. Aside from the personal tragedies behind the "Aloeboetoe murders" for which the trial was held, and other instances of Maroon oppression, Prices' involvement had one important consequence. It highlighted the importance of ethnographic and historical testimony in the trial, and thus the reach of anthropological knowledge far beyond the ivory tower of academia.

As mentioned before, there are several recurrent topics in Richard Price's narrative of his life story. There is the fascination with cultural variety; the close engagement with the "informants" (or rather partners and friends from different locations) instead of their detached observation. There is a lifelong love for the Caribbean, its colours, warmth, music, and the sea. ("Being tropical people," Price remarked, "we suffered

their experiences: JAMES CLIFFORD, GEORGE E. MARCUS (eds.), *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley 1986.

²⁷ CATHERINE BESTEMAN, *In and Out of the Academy: Policy and the Case for a Strategic Anthropology*, Human Organization, 69: 4/2010, pp. 408.

²⁸ R. PRICE, *Inside/Outside*, pp. 185–186. See also the texts by RICHARD PRICE, *Executing Ethnicity: The Killings in Surinamee*, Cultural Anthropology 10: 4/1995, pp. 437–471; and especially *Rainforest Warriors: Human Rights on Trial*, Philadelphia 2011.

²⁹ R. PRICE, *Inside/Outside*, pp. 131–132.

during our one-year stay in Minnesota [1987–88]. While our friends at the university went jogging or fishing on weekends, we preferred to turn on the heat and listen to Caribbean music.”³⁰) There is the recurrent theme of academic struggles – the constant effort of the scholar as to how to translate the field research into teaching, material experience into text. And there is also the idea of freedom as an ideal form and a way of life. Standing as a counterpart to the Maroons, whose individual and collective identity is based on the idea of freedom and independence and the constant need to defend these values, there are the scientists who, despite achieving a tenure track at one of the most prestigious universities in the US, have chosen the difficult path of leaving the corporate academic community with its hierarchy and codes of conduct and becoming “freelancers” who accept short-term positions or work as independent researchers. This means that they occupy a position both inside and outside the system.

A detailed account of what preceded this decision – which culminated in a clash with Sidney Mintz, anthropologist and one of the founders of “Caribbean Studies” as a discipline in its own right, who became first a mentor, then a colleague and a close friend of Prices – and what followed, namely the “punishments” that the community imposed on those who chose to leave it, offers a close and in some ways disturbing insight into the working of (not only) the North American university system. A world where lifelong partnerships can be forged, but which can also be dominated by petty squabbles, rivalries and rants. In fact, the Foucaultian theme of the “politics of knowledge” reappears, albeit in a different context. It reminds not only historians of science but also its practitioners how crucial institutional backing is to intellectual development in different fields. This is another layer of Richard Price’s autobiography which adds to and problematizes insights into the theory and practice of (Caribbean) anthropology and (Atlantic) history.

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³⁰ R. PRICE, *Inside/Outside*, p. 138.