

Richard Price: *Inside/outside: adventures in Caribbean history and anthropology*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press 2022. 256 pp., 41 photos

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Although “*Inside/outside: adventures in Caribbean history and anthropology*” is not an academic work in the strict sense, it is an engaging and thought-provoking narrative. It is the autobiography of the cultural anthropologist Richard Price, who, despite being a recognized and prolific scholar, was, in a way, forced to turn his back on his academic career. While this may not be an uncommon experience, it is rarely addressed openly. During the coronavirus lockdown, Price reviewed his private and professional life on the eve of his eightieth birthday. The strengths and weaknesses of North American scientific culture become apparent, but also the importance of family ties and circles of friends.

The grandson of a Russian-Jewish migrant (7), Price did not have a care-free childhood, but he was able to develop his own inclinations. The early sensitization to ethnic and social concerns can be traced back to friendships and experiences at school (9). His affinity for anthropology came from trips to the Navajo, Hopi, and Nez Perce reservations, where the sixteen-year-old boy nearly died in a car accident (1).

Price describes himself as having been a politically interested teenager in his high-school years. Anthropology grew in importance, despite his inclination towards several disciplines, including history, philosophy, literature and languages. Entering university, he travelled extensively, completing field studies in Peru, Martinique and Spain in the 1960s. In addition, he learned several languages in that time. In 1962, he married Sally Hamlin, who became not only his wife, but also a trusted colleague. At the beginning of his career in anthropological research, Price was forced to come to terms with different currents of thought. Post-war anthropology in the twentieth century had insisted on gaining insights into human evolution, and the studies of that time focused on isolated or traditional indigenous communities, avoiding those that showed signs of cultural assimilation or acculturation. He himself participated in projects on indigenous communities, but at the same time he developed his own focus on the Caribbean, creolized cultures and Afro-Caribbean populations. In 1963, he wrote a bachelor’s thesis on fishing

magic in Martinique (46), and in 1970 he received his PhD for a thesis on the Saamaka, one of several communities of formerly escaped slaves or Maroons (82), following extensive field research in Suriname. Price also devoted much of his later life to the people he insisted on calling the Saamaka, though they were known previously as Saramaka.

In between his projects he continued to travel extensively, including to Paris and Amsterdam, where he maintained an intensive exchange with colleagues. He does not shy away from volubly mentioning his contacts with important scholars and well-known academics, among them Claude Lévi-Strauss (47–54) and Aimé Césaire. Such contacts proved useful as when a tennis partner of French President Jacques Chirac got him permission to resume teaching at the University of Paris after the police barred him from doing so at a time of anti-immigrant policies (136).

In 1974, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore decided to set up a program on Caribbean studies and assigned Price to head it. A paper arising out of this post, “An anthropological approach to the Afro-American past: a Caribbean perspective”, co-authored with Sidney M. Mintz (Mintz and Price 1976), received great attention in the academic world, being reprinted as “The birth of African-American culture” (Mintz and Price 1992). While Melville J. Herskovits, a student of Franz Boas, introduced Afro-American studies into cultural anthropology in the 1930s and 1940s, assuming the survival of African cultural elements among the contemporary descendants of the slave population, Mintz and Price emphasized their creativity and cultural adaptation to their new environments. In a way, they anticipated the concept of creolization.

In 1975, Johns Hopkins University launched a teaching programme on Caribbean anthropology, which was soon recognized as playing a leading role in the discipline (88–92). By this time, Price was enjoying a close relationship with Mintz, which later took an unfortunate turn. The elderly Mintz, another student of Franz Boas who challenged the classical ideas of studying indigenous societies, was a professor at Yale and had already established a reputation for himself for his focus on the Caribbean. He initially supported Price, but later distanced himself from him (123–124), and even seemed to have hindered his academic career in the course of the 1970s. Price comments on this in his autobiography, where, reading between the lines, he seems to allege that Mintz was motivated by envy. Indeed, Price appears to have gained more prestige than his mentor and to have done so very quickly. Repeatedly, however, he discovered that ominous phone calls

to various academic chairs had prevented him from getting tenure at a university (149). From then on, Price too kept his distance from Mintz. Later attempts at reconciliation failed. There is no definitive answer to the question of whether Price's assumptions are correct. In any case, increasingly, the rumours of Mintz blocking Price's career affected the mood at Johns Hopkins. Price compared himself to Ruth Landes (Coles 2003), who had met a similar fate (154–155).

Academic criticism was another challenge. Marvin Harris said that Price was a poet, not an anthropologist, and opposed his tenure at the University of Florida (160). In fact, Price and his wife did experiment with new narrative strategies as a way of expressing diverse ethnographic perspectives. This went along with a turning away from the classical anthropological monograph, the crisis in ethnographic representation and the growth of experimental ethnography as evidenced by the work of Clifford Geertz or George E. Marcus and Michael M.J. Fischer. In his autobiography, Price insinuates that he himself took an active part in this turn (139–140). The occasion was the publication of his work "Alabi's world" in 1990, which represented a kind of literary perspectivism and presented the views of different actors (Saamaka, missionaries, colonial administrators) using different fonts. Price states having been influenced by Latin American literature, but he does not name any important representative of the Writing Culture debate as a source of inspiration apart from his friend Renato Rosaldo.

The couple also participated in what Price calls the 1990 culture wars (162), that is, the dispute between the followers of scientism, who wanted to introduce the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences, and the postmodernists, who contrasted modernity, which they understood to be totalitarian, with many alternative perspectives and world views.

In 1985, the couple decided to leave academia, rumours and grief behind and start a freelance existence in Martinique (128). Many colleagues criticized this move and predicted the end of Price's anthropological career, but the couple managed to continue publishing and doing fieldwork in various places in the Caribbean. In the fishing village of Petite Anse, they expanded their circle of friends and received visits from colleagues and confidants from abroad.

In 1986, in the course of the civil war in Suriname, the Prices were expelled from the country. From then on, they could not come back but had to stay in neighbouring Guyana. But they remained politically active and

committed to the Saamaka. They describe themselves as ‘part-time activists’ (185–194).

Despite these setbacks, the Prices found their way to international recognition and success. Their joint website bears witness to numerous book and article publications, editorial activities, temporary employment, awards and, last but not least, exhibitions (<https://www.richandsally.net>). The Saamaka, and particularly the founding phase of their community, when escaped slaves won independence from the Dutch colonial power in the eighteenth century, were Richard Price’s life-long focus. Until recently, this foundation period was kept secret from young people and strangers because the commemoration of the dead and the remembrance of the violent past were believed by the elders to pose the risk of a resurgence of these past incidents. Price managed to overcome these obstacles of secrecy and was able to study the community’s foundation period. His 1983 book “First time: the historical vision of an Afro-American people” received the Clews Parsons Prize in 1984 and was reprinted in 2002. “Alabi’s world”, published in 1990, was also about this period and received three well-known awards: the Albert J. Beveridge Award in 1991, the Gordon K. Lewis Memorial Award in 1992, and the J.I. Staley Prize in 1993. In addition, Price has conducted countless other studies, which he mentions in the book under review. Eventually, Price did return to academia, teaching at William and Mary College in Williamsburg, Virginia, until his retirement in 2011.

Sally Price focused on textiles and the art of the women. She would deserve a biography of her own, given her academic achievements while at the same time raising two children and typing her husband’s Ph.D. thesis. She made a major contribution to the curating of Saamaka art exhibitions, and she and her husband promoted the combining of research and exhibition of traditional art objects, which was more common in the past.

In addition, the Prices revealed interesting blind spots. One example was the expulsion of Melville Herskovits and his wife from the Saamaka region, where they were doing research, in the late 1920s. The reason for this was the improper behaviour of the husband of Herskovits’ cook, who had come from the coastal region of Suriname and showed a marked lack of respect for the Saamaka. The Herskovits’ concealed this incident in their publications. Saamaka women, however, provided Sally Price with clear evidence of the expulsion, which is substantiated by a careful reading of the Herskovits’s book “Rebel destiny” (1934:102).

More important was certainly the discovery of the original manuscript of John Gabriel Stedman's "Narrative of a five years' expedition, against the revolted Negroes of Suriname in Guiana [...]" (1796) which Price found with the help of the historian Stuart B. Schwartz (110–117). The manuscript documented the Maroon Wars against the Dutch colonial power in Suriname. Price realized that the volume published in 1796 differed significantly from the original manuscript, which had obviously been censored because Stedman fell in love with a black woman and was critical of slavery. After a systematic examination of the author and his manuscript, in 1988 Price published the original of 1790, followed by a new edition in 2016 (Stedman 1988, 2016).

The Prices also revealed a political blind spot in the former Hamburg Museum für Völkerkunde, where, in 1991, they examined the Saamaka collection that had survived World War Two (212–213). The 86 pieces in this collection had originally been collected by the Herskovits. The Prices wrote an article for the catalogue "Afrika in Amerika" (Price and Price 1992), which was published on the occasion of the five hundredth anniversary of the so-called discovery of America. The Prices observed that a monumental photo wall in the museum that pictured famous black people from Michael Jackson to Pelé ignored two figures from the 1930s who had challenged the racism of Nazi Germany: Jesse Owens, the 1936 Olympic sprint champion, and Joe Louis, the 1938 winner over the German boxing star Max Schmeling, were both absent.

But Richard Price had some blind spots of his own. His tendency to surround himself with people of high standing might be understandable, but his impulse to take up arms – for example, when Richard Nixon was re-elected as American President in 1972, he remarked 'he must shoot something now' (87) – remains closed to many Europeans. In general, the book is aimed at those who are familiar enough with the USA not to have to look up countless abbreviations.

These criticisms do not change the fact that "Inside/outside" is an exciting and important book. It is full of revealing details from different continents, countries and cultures. It shows the simultaneity of divergent developments. It deals with ethnological currents in which the author himself was involved or which he followed as an observer. Over sixty years of lived anthropology have been processed in almost 250 pages, the gripping account of a remarkable career.

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