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Richard Price. 2008. *Travels with Tooy: History, Memory, and the African American Imagination*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. xiv + 452 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-226-68059-0, ISBN-10: 0-226-68059-2.

Catherine Reinhardt
 Department of Languages
 Chapman University
 reinhardtzacair@hotmail.com

Travels with Tooy is an exceptional ethnographic study of Saramaka maroon cosmology, healing practices and contemporary negotiations of life in a former French colony. The work is groundbreaking in terms of both content and form. The archival wealth resulting from Richard Price's long-standing friendship with Tooy Alexander, one of the best-known Saramaka curers, beginning in 2000 combined with 35 years of experience with the Saramaka people of French Guiana and Suriname is an anthropological treasure trove. The text, consisting principally of conversations between Price and Tooy is further complemented and expanded with extensive notes and a coda of esoteric language. Beyond the impressive primary source material, what is even more exceptional about *Travels with Tooy* is Price's unique ability to adopt the Saramaka world view in his writing style. Price communicates not only information about Saramakas but also a way of being Saramakan through the very textuality of his writing. Coming from a literary and cultural studies background myself, I will primarily focus on Price's unique writing style.

The book is divided into something one might equate to journal entries headed by a title and generally also by a date or a date span. Oftentimes the dates are realistic and represent an actual date either from a past century or from the present day. Other times the dates are a series of zeros when the journal entry pertains to the Saramaka gods, in particular the sea gods. The dates are a key element helping the reader navigate from century to century as Price's and Tooy's stories of the Saramakas intermingle and gradually unfold. The book begins at the beginning, in a sense, recounting the search for a Saramaka healer to cure a Martinican businessman and gamecock breeder which brings together Price and Tooy and begins their friendship and collaboration. However, as Price already explains on the second page, this situation is far from simple and plunges all the characters in the story, along with the reader, in the heart of a fantastic adventure:

What a tangle! How to reconcile personal and professional ethics while trying to bridge the various worlds we inhabit. How to suspend certain kinds of disbelief while holding on to others, never forgetting

the inextricable links that bind modernity to magic in our present world. We are plunged into the middle of a very Caribbean imbroglío, with tentacles stretching from Haiti to Trinidad—and now to the descendants of escaped slaves in the tropical forest of Suriname, whose fame as conjurers radiates all the way to Martinique and beyond. On balance, it seems like too good a story—and too good a way of tying together the strands of our own lives—not to see how it will play out. I take the bait and promise Roland to make some phone calls and find an appropriate specialist (pp. 2-3).

These few sentences foreshadow what will follow in the next 300 hundred pages. “Imbroglío” perfectly qualifies the narrative that strives to reflect the historical, social and geo-political reality of the Caribbean, both past and present. Throughout the story, the author’s writing shadows Tooy as he continuously bridges various worlds “between centuries, continents, the visible and invisible, and the worlds of the living and the dead” (p. xi). It is the relationship between these different worlds that nourishes his Dúnguláli-Óbia rites (the power that protects against Death). The fact that he can directly trace his ancestry to escaped slaves is perhaps the focal point that connects the tentacles reaching throughout the Caribbean basin, but also all the way to Africa several centuries back. Perhaps the most important key to reading *Travels with Tooy* is the necessity of suspending certain kinds of belief while remembering the inextricable links binding our contemporary modern world to magic. While North American and European readers may approach this book from a perspective to some extent diametrically opposed to that of Tooy, Price invites us to put aside these beliefs for a moment and enjoy the novelty of looking at the world through a completely new lens. In the end, Price suggests, we will find that the magic that is so part and parcel of Tooy’s world also permeates our own world, if we only let ourselves look at it through Tooy’s eyes.

It is truly an ethnological and discursive feat to take the reader on this textual journey. The feel of the book is oral rather than written, as the history, memory and imagination of the Saramakas’ past and present comes to life through conversational exchanges between Tooy (either normal or possessed by various gods) and Price. The conversations follow Tooy’s stream of consciousness rather than a systematic, organized and predictable storyline. Interweaving an increasing number of narrative strands from one journal entry to the next, the author jumps between centuries as far back as the ninth century, between the Americas and Africa, and between the world of the living and that of the gods as they communicate through the living. Throughout these non-linear conversational meanderings, Tooy tells the history of his people and of his own personal ancestry, his biography as a Saramaka *óbiaman* (healer and

spiritual practitioner) living in Cayenne, French Guiana, and his personal struggles to adapt to modern life in a French overseas *département* while continuing to cure people from all walks of life thanks to his extensive knowledge of Saramaka cosmology and his profound experience as a healer. While participating in or witnessing these religious rites, Price at times imparts a certain direction to the storyline as he asks Tooy questions and also complements Tooy's story with his own vast knowledge and experience of the Saramaka maroons.

In conclusion, Price's purposeful "non-Western" account of Saramakan history, memory and imagination through the vibrancy of dialog unfettered by academic epistemologies, brilliantly confronts non-Saramakan readers with a new world view. The book is not "about" Saramaka maroons, nor does it try to label or explain different aspects of their life. Instead, it allows the Saramakan way of life to transpire throughout pages and pages of stories, rituals, questions, memories, laughter, suffering, hallucinations, death, rebirth, and much more. The result is an ethnographic study that forces the reader out of his/her traditional analytic grid to directly experience Saramakan culture as far as that can be possible through a written text. Many North American or European—and especially academic—readers may be frustrated by the non-conventional approach to ethnographic study. He/she may feel relieved when reading the last chapter "Reflections from the Verandah" which provides the historical facts and theoretical analysis we take for granted and come to expect in our own non-Saramakan world view. However, I would like to point out that trying to retrospectively understand *Travels with Tooy* through the interpretive lens of the last chapter is perhaps missing the real message imparted by Tooy and Price throughout the preceding 300 pages. In Price's own words:

... that final chapter could easily have been left out of the book. For its contents are ... consonant with the theoretical and methodological ("analytic") message (about Afro-American creolization, cultural creativity, and so forth) that I have been rehearsing for more than four decades. For me at least, it is the rest of the book that is new and exciting: tracing the development of a special friendship between an anthropologist from the United States and a Saramaka immigrant in a Cayenne shantytown; the ways that understandings (and misunderstandings!) about magic/causality operate transnationally in the Caribbean; the discovery in Guyane of the force of French (neo)colonialism and the creative adaptations made by the territory's multiethnic residents, legal and illegal; the continuing role of the African heritage in the lives of Tooy and his friends; the remarkable and ongoing creativity of Saramakas in remaking their social and spiritual lives in new transnational contexts; and much else (Price 2009:219).

Price's ground-breaking work is essential reading for any ethnographic, anthropological, sociological, literary, historical or cultural study that aims to represent another culture. Price has entered uncharted terrain that will bear fruit for the years to come.

Reference

Price, Richard. 2009. "Further Travels." *Small Axe* 29 (June):218-228.

Rebecca J. Scott. 2008. *Degrees of Freedom. Louisiana and Cuba After Emancipation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 365 pp. (Paperback). ISBN 0-674-02759-0.

Richard Blackett
 Department of History
 Vanderbilt University
 Richard.J.Blackett@vanderbilt.edu

The best thing one can say about Louisiana politics during Reconstruction is that it is Byzantine. Years ago, while I was trying to piece together the activities of a couple of African Americans who had gone to Louisiana in the early years of Reconstruction, I was forced on a number of occasions to throw up my hands in despair of ever understanding the twist and turns of state politics with its competing governors, unpredictable relations between sympathetic whites and freedmen and, for that matter, the ways gradations of color informed relations among African Americans. After all, I am from the Caribbean and know a thing or two about the effects of color on political and social relations. But even that did not prepare me for Louisiana.

Rebecca Scott has come to the rescue; or at least I think I now know more about the strange ways of Louisiana politics at the end of the 19th century. Part of the reason for this new appreciation lies in her commanding comparative analysis of developments of Louisiana and Cuba, two major former sugar-producing slave economies, in the years after the American Civil War and the Cuban Ten Years' War and the shorter War of Independence. This is comparative history at its best, but one that in the end shows how the struggles in both locations became intertwined at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries with the intervention of the United States in Cuba. In order to make the study