

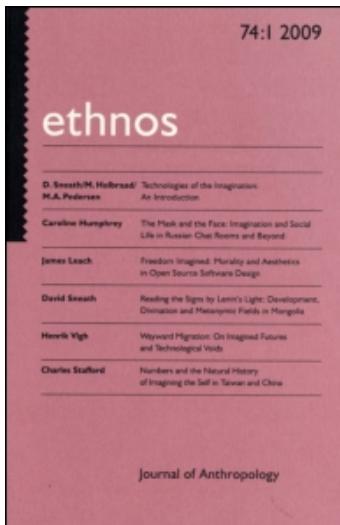
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La memoria amenazada. Relatos de vida e historia sociocultural de Puebla de Don Fadrique

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Book Reviews

Arturo Alvarez Roldán, Noelia Martínez Casanova, & Sandra Martínez Rossi.

2008. *La memoria amenazada. Relatos de vida e historia sociocultural de Puebla de Don Fadrique*. Granada: Ayuntamiento de Puebla de D. Fadrique. 649 pp.

During the twentieth century, Spain lived through enormous changes, in values, attitudes, and material conditions. The generation born approximately during the 1920s and 1930s lived through the most dramatic years, including the civil war (1936–1939), the hunger years of the 1940s, the mechanization of agriculture and the massive emigration to the cities and abroad of the 1960s, and the clear improvement of food and living conditions in general during the 1970s. Finally, in the 1980s and 1990s, the population reached a living standard comparable to the rest of Europe. This generation is now growing old. Its memories should be preserved.

'Threatened Memory' is an appropriate title for a collection of life stories of people of this generation. Testimonies from members of middle and upper classes are plentiful, but testimonies from workers and farmers are scarce, among other things because few people of poor background in this generation had more than a few months of schooling.

It is therefore a fortunate idea to publish a collection of such testimonies.

At the initiative of a development group and financed by the town hall of Puebla de Don Fadrique (province of Granada), a team of three anthropologists from the University of Granada interviewed villagers born between 1913 and 1940. The last story in the book comes from a son of the woman who tells the first story.

The book contains 38 edited life stories. There is also an introduction and some conclusions with a minimum of analysis. The book is not very interesting for theoretically inclined anthropologists and probably not intended for them. It will probably sell well in the village and its surroundings, but I would hope it also reaches the attention of younger Spaniards from the whole country, since it is usually difficult for them to imagine how their grandparents lived when young.

Here are stories about the first radio in the village, the first TV, the first tractor, the first bathroom. There are descriptions of how the women made clothes, how everyone made their own shoes from esparto grass, how one slept on the ground, how almost everyone started working around the age of six or seven, of customs around courting and weddings.

There are anecdotes about the strict 'respect' for parents and the even stricter distance upheld between women and men. One is struck by how military service was often enjoyed by the young men, since it was usually their only opportunity to travel; the exceptions are the ones who had to serve during the hunger years when food was extremely scarce even for soldiers and also the ones whose families needed their labor in order not to starve. The patron-client relationships are ubiquitous and accepted as natural. Few people got to know more than one or two of their grandparents, since they were usually already gone when the grandchild was born. Almost everyone has lost one or more siblings, and one or more children, some in the civil war, most to diseases that could be easily cured today.

Some of the most common comments concern how 'we did not know any better then' and 'that was all there was then' and 'that was how life was then', 'there was nothing'. 'Then' (*entonces*) is constantly contrasted to 'now' (*ahora*), without any further specifications of dates.

The book is thus a valuable testimony of a recent historic period that already seems very far away and with a class perspective that makes it practically unique. (Unfortunately most of the stories are by men, 28, as opposed to only 10 by women.) It is nicely presented with wonderful portrait photographs. It is a book of ethnography, without theoretical ambitions, but I would definitely recommend it for an anthropologist preparing to do fieldwork in Spain.

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Tanya Richardson. 2008. *Kaleidoscopic Odessa: History and Place in Contemporary Ukraine*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. xi+280 pp.

It is widely acknowledged that Odessa, the 'pearl of the Black Sea' (so goes a popular song) is a unique city with a 'special something'. That special something often is described in local parlance as Odessa's *kolorit*, 'a term that can be glossed as colour, character, or exotic quality' (p. 15). There exists a part-historical, part-literary 'Odessan myth' or 'Odessa text' that posits the city as distinctive, as more cosmopolitan and perhaps more self-reflexive than other cities of the former Russian Empire and the former Soviet Union. As an anthropologist specializing in Ukraine, I have visited Odessa numerous times. But, until reading Tanya Richardson's fascinating and insightful book, I did not 'get' Odessa. Thanks to Richardson, now, I think, I do.

In *Kaleidoscopic Odessa*, Richardson takes readers on multiple and intersecting journeys through the city, allowing us to explore it as a true heterotopia, or 'a space of overcomplexity' in which 'different spaces and times are juxtaposed' (p. 172). Richardson employs a broad yet deft ethnographic approach to examine different sites and practices through which this condition of heterotopia is produced, including high school history classes (Ch. 2), the life story narratives ('living history') of elderly Odessan residents (Ch. 3), the captivating area of the city known as Moldovanka (Ch. 4), the sensory- and history-based walking tours of members of the city's My Odessa Club (Ch. 5) and efforts to re-inscribe particular histories (Jewish, Ukrainian) into the Odessa text through museums and 'alternative' walking tours (Ch. 6). This vibrant and

varied material illustrates vividly the 'co-presence of different historicities and temporalities in particular institutions, groups, lives, and urban landscapes' (210), and fully supports Richardson's creative description of her project as a kaleidoscopic ethnography. It is precisely this complex inter-tangling and overlapping of multiple nostalgias that accounts for Odessa's special something, its *kolorit*.

Yet, Richardson convincingly argues, 'while the Odessan experience is seen by locals and non-locals alike as unique, that uniqueness is in a way exemplary of something that is quite typical for Ukraine' (p. 6). This is because, when we consider Ukraine as a multi-ethnic borderland characterized by ethno-religiously heterogeneous cities and towns, the strong sense of place that characterizes Odessa becomes less exceptional, and more typical for Ukraine as a whole. I find this a helpful intervention that takes discussions of place, history, memory, and narrative beyond the oft-encountered discourse of Odessan exceptionalism. This has not only theoretical implications but political ones as well, since Odessa, with its mostly Russian-speaking, multi-ethnic population and its history of colonization by the Ottoman and Russian Empires (among others), is usually positioned as somehow 'not really (in) Ukraine'. Richardson upsets this easy view on multiple levels. In what she describes as her 'spatial ethnography', the author eloquently shows how multiple and shifting histories coexist in the spaces of Odessa; in, for example, the city's famous courtyards, Isaac Babel's classic literary portrayals of Odessa, and the life stories of the city's long-time inhabitants. Richardson also provides ample evidence of how Odessans draw upon multiple

historical time periods (Soviet, pre-revolutionary) to craft their sense of the city and their own place within it; she further juxtaposes these different accounts 'to demonstrate how different narratives reveal and conceal particular peoples, relationships, and spaces' (p. 204). Odessans' variable engagements with narrating histories, arguably, can be considered 'typically Ukrainian' and, in fact, typical for any borderland.

I was most intrigued by Chapters 4 and 5, in which Richardson, diverse groups of residents of Odessa, and, indeed, the book's lucky readers, 'walk the city' to experience and examine the 'idea of Odessa' through 'techniques of sensing, reading, and narrating the urban landscape' (pp. 35–6). Chapter 4 explores the many places of Moldovanka, a section of Odessa commonly characterized as 'more Odessan than Odessa itself' (p. 116). Richardson ably 'brings together certain stories through which place is narrated ... with cultural practices of nostalgia to uncover how Moldovanka is constituted as a "special" place productive of Odessanness' (p. 108). In Chapter 5, we follow the My Odessa Club, a group led by historian and professional tour guide Valery Netrebsky. The club takes weekly excursions through their city to 'sense Odessa' while Netrebsky introduces and describes to them 'places in the city they would not normally visit because they are out of the way, invisible, dilapidated, or appear uninteresting' (p. 148). Netrebsky 'maps history' in ways that are multi-layered and historically 'deep'; even so, his tours, which at times engender sharp disputes over the historical narrative(s), also illustrate the 'slippery nature of the past' (p. 157).

This beautifully written book is a real treasure, a pearl one might say, with

plenty of its own '*kolorit*'. It will be of interest to a scholarly readership (including undergraduate students) and lay readers alike.

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Kristen E Cheney. 2007. *Pillars of the Nation. Child Citizens and Ugandan National Development*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. 299 pp.

Pillars of the nation is strongly informed by the authors' sense of social justice in its analysis and critique of children's social and political status in Uganda, as well as children and childhood studies' present position in anthropology.

It is somehow ironic that the study of more than half of the world's population (persons under 18 years) is still considered peripheral in some perceptions and corners of anthropology. Paradoxically it is perhaps precisely so, because children and young people's contributions and participation in political and economic life are under-documented. Kristen Cheney's book is a welcome contribution to the growing anthropology of children and childhood in the relatively unexplored field of children's political life and the political use of children and childhood in nation building.

The focus of the book is how emergent ideas of nationhood and childhood are informing and mutually constituting each other (p. 2) Cheney describes the various ways that childhood has been conceptualized in Uganda as an especially promising space for reimagining the nation after decades of civil war.

Children are taught in school to be a new kind of national citizens; Ugandans rather than Baganda, Acholi, Iteso, Banyankole etc.; members of tribes. In pointing out how childhood and children are being co-opted as discursive objects in relation to the nation Cheney makes the observation that one of the reasons why children are regarded as especially precious to the nation building project is their assumed lack of social memory regarding ethnic and religious division. (Drawing on the idea that fostering a climate of national tolerance for difference may help children avoid ethnic conflict in the future.)

However, by asking children in school to write essays about 'a time when you really felt like a Ugandan' and 'a time when you really felt like a member of your tribe' (p. 104) Cheney is able to draw a much more nuanced picture of the ways children perceive the complex dynamics and connections between ethnicity and nationality.

Inspired by the 'children as agents paradigm' – Cheney focuses on how Ugandan children respond to adult and political notions of childhood; how they construct and operationalize their own identities not only as objects, but also as subjects. (In this strain of thought it would be interesting to take a step further and ask children whether *they* see ethnicity as a problematic hindrance to peaceful co-existence in the future or to ask more openly what they regard as conducive and problematic for peaceful development. The usual assumptions about ethnicity as problematic are taken for granted).

Cheney laments that policy makers have not or are too slow at acknowledging that children are active in the construction of their own lives and have

political opinions. Cheney points to empirical examples such as children's letters in the national newspapers, their selection of specific newspaper covers for exercise books, and politically informed schoolyard games. Cheney draws our attention to the paradox that children want to participate in nation building and are expected to do so in specific and limited ways, but at the same time they are not recognized as (politically) competent. However, the question of whether policy makers *are* aware of the political life among children – as a potential and threat – remains unasked.

One chapter in the book is about children in Northern Uganda who were abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and who participated in the armed conflict. Cheney discusses the problems of viewing 'child soldiers' as simultaneously victims and perpetrators. In relation to this specific group of children Cheney finds the theoretical focus on children's agency problematic: 'These divergent notions of childhood and children's agency obscure the amelioration of the situation for northern Ugandan Children, though; LRA children are not conscripted into armed conflict in the stereo-typical child-soldier scenario; they are literally kidnapped and sacrificed' (p. 169). However, further into the chapter Cheney exemplifies how a universalistic model of childhood that idealizes children as innocent and harmless (as the one UNICEF adopts) is a somewhat unrealistic stance in this situation (p. 209).

In other chapters of the book Cheney discusses eloquently and exemplifies richly the interpellation of children's rights discourses in everyday life as well

as children's agency in navigating adverse circumstances. I find Cheney's reflections regarding the paternalism that prevails in children's rights sensitization workshops especially illuminating: 'rather than freeing children, normative discourses of childhood based on international rights were often used to constrain children by suggesting how they should be, what they should have and how they should behave' (p. 67).

Various aspects of the right to education and the Universal Primary Education Programme are described and discussed. Cheney points to the important double-bind that children are caught in: 'while they are told that schooling is essential to their own future and that of the country, the challenges of quality and access keep them back from reaching those goals' (p. 76). Furthermore the belief and hope in education is poised for disappointment when the new educated generations will be looking for employment to sustain the kinds of lifestyles they have been taught to believe in as good and right.

The book is based on fieldwork from August 2000 to December 2001 and is centered around observations and conversations in two primary schools in Kampala. One month was spent with the NGO World Vision in Gulu. Five life history interviews with children greatly contextualize and enrich the narrative of the book. Cheney also visited the homes of these children and had extended conversations with their parents and/or grand parents. Cheney describes the challenges of working in steep generational hierarchies where children are told to stay out of the living room when parents and the visitor are discussing. I am wondering why Cheney

did not consider living with a family to be able to do participant observations in homes where interaction between children and adults is part of everyday life. This type of old-fashioned fieldwork may not always be possible, but I still

find it ideal to be able to understand the complexities of interaction.

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