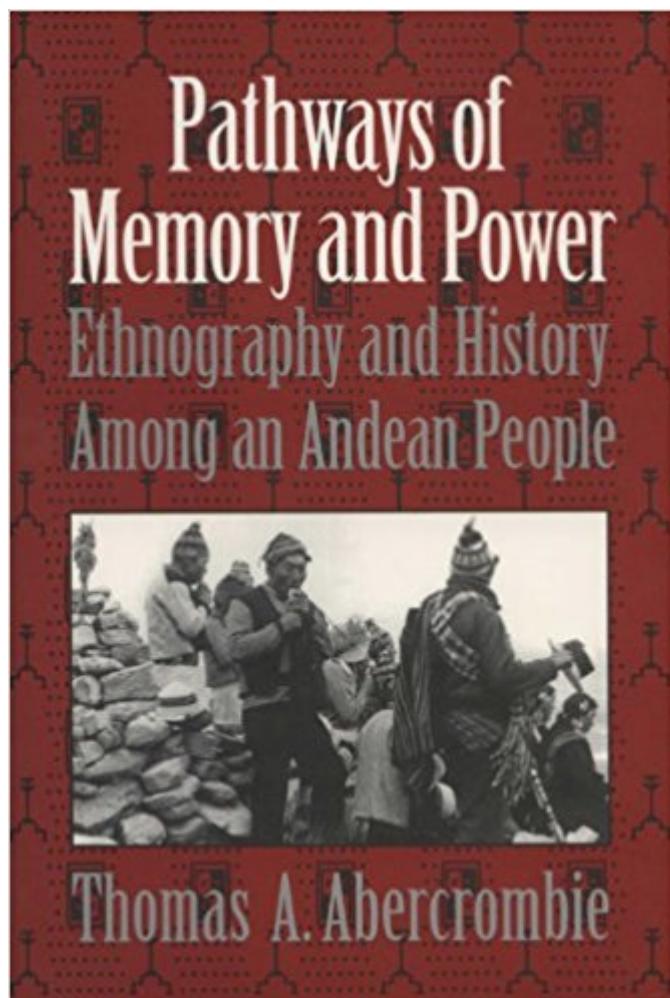


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Pathways Of Memory And Power: Ethnography And History Among An Andean People



Synopsis

Pathways of Memory and Power crosses the disciplinary boundary where anthropology and history meet, exploring the cultural frontier of the colonial and postcolonial Andes. Thomas A. Abercrombie uses his fieldwork in the Aymara community of Santa Barbara de Culta, Bolivia, as a starting point for his ambitious examination of the relations between European forms of historical consciousness and indigenous Andean ways of understanding the past. Writing in an inviting first-person narrative style, Abercrombie confronts the ethics of fieldwork by comparing ethnographic experience to the power-laden contexts that produce historical sources. Making clear the early and deep intermingling of practices and world views among Spaniards and Andeans, Christians and non-Christians, Abercrombie critiques both the romanticist tendency to regard Andean culture as still separate from and resistant to European influences, and the melodramatic view that all indigenous practices have been obliterated by colonial and national elites. He challenges prejudices that, from colonial days to the present, have seen Andean historical knowledge only in mythic narratives or narratives of personal experience. Bringing an ethnographer's approach to historiography, he shows how complex Andean rituals that hybridize European and indigenous traditions—such as libation dedications and llama sacrifices held on saints' day festivals—are in fact potent evidence of social memory in the community.

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Customer Reviews

Two important elements of social "habit memory" processes strike me in Pathways of Memory and Power. The first is the apparent ease with which the colonial power asserted its program for "social

amnesia" through a physical restructuring of social space (rectilinear, functional living spatial constructions) and time (the marking of Church calendrical and daily time, basically obliterating indigenous conceptions of time). The second is the reinterpretation of public and private to suit a colonial "moral code" based on the ritual performances of excessive drinking and bloodletting. These systematic, institutionalized policies effectively dismantled the Indians' social habit-memories-replacing them with new ones modeled on Castilian life. The long-standing issue of religious syncretism is (thankfully) questioned, through an understanding of how the indigenous people create distinctions between the "more Christian" and "more Andean" aspects of their deities and religions. The quipu system of knotting preserves a physical remembering which was transformed, but not destroyed, by Christianity. As Abercrombie states, "the techniques may have remained the same, but the content, the memories, were changing" (p. 260). The "Imagenes de bulto," which were introduced by colonial priests, replaced the indigenous idols with Catholic saints, and initiated a long process of revisionist iconography for the Indians from one source to another. The llama, as an animal that closely (to the Indians) resembled humans in their social interactions, acted as a replacement for the human sacrificial victim; this helped ease the sacrificial rituals into a more acceptable Christian realm of possibilities.

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