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Some Random Field Notes on a Gathering of Spanish Anthropologists

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SOME RANDOM FIELD NOTES ON A GATHERING OF SPANISH ANTHROPOLOGISTS

(G.W.S.)

Having spent six months there as a small child, on the eve of the Spanish Civil War, I was extremely grateful to be invited to return to Spain to give two talks at the Fourth Congress of Anthropology in Alicante: one, as the inaugural address ("Anthropology, yesterday and today: reflections on the 'crisis' and 'reinvention' of anthropology"); the other, to the section on the history of anthropology ("Malinowski's models: Maclay, Kubary, and Kurtz as ethnographic archetypes") [to forestall unnecessary correspondence, please note that neither of these is available for circulation at the present time]. Having lost my conversational Spanish in the half century since 1935, I must warn readers that it was only by virtue of the excellent translations provided by my hosts that I was able to deliver the talks in Spanish. By the same token, these brief notes--like the early field impressions of ethnographers--are based on a very limited knowledge of the language of the "natives," whose "customs and beliefs," I am embarrassed to say, were previously known to me only through a couple of articles I had read on Spanish anthropology (cf. Catedra 1977), and several very brief conversations with colleagues in the Chicago department. The justification for recording these notes is simply that many readers of HAN will be equally unfamiliar with recent Spanish anthropology, and may find them a useful addendum to Dr. Estevez' more historiographically oriented account.

As an organizing device for my paper to the Congress, I reviewed the history of American anthropology since the publication of Anthropology Today (Kroeber et al, 1953), using the contents of the Biennial and Annual Review of Anthropology, to make some observations about the extent to which the discipline had responded to the issues raised in the call for the Reinvention of Anthropology (Hymes, ed. 1972)--to the general point that the changes of the last decade and a half did not as yet seem to merit

description as "reinvention." Be that as it may, the thing that struck me most about Spanish anthropology, as displayed at Alicante, was the degree to which it could appropriately be described as a "reinvented," or, equally aptly, a "post-colonial" (albeit somewhat dependent) anthropology.

Of the fourteen symposia into which nearly 200 papers were distributed, a large proportion were devoted to topics with a current social relevance: urban anthropology, including ethnicity and nationalism (21); the anthropology of education (20); the anthropology of health (18); the anthropology of fishing (8); anthropology of women (6). With the exception of a few papers on indigenous America (under the heading "the anthropology of transition"--specified, in one of them, as the "transicion al Socialismo"), almost all of papers had "brought anthropology back home." That is to say, they dealt almost exclusively with communities within the Spanish state. On the other hand, there was little evidence of "studying up": within the Spanish state, the groups studied tend to be traditional national or regional minorities, often by people with close ties to the group. In this respect, Spanish anthropology seems less post-colonial or reinvented than following in a characteristic nineteenth century continental European tradition which focussed on the study of "internal others."

Consistent with the notion of a reinvented anthropology, the most immediately obvious thing about the Congress was its youth. Insofar as one could judge visually, the vast majority of those attending were people whose anthropological careers must have taken place in post-Franco, post-colonial Spain. An informant told me that the country's cadre of faculty and other doctorates is about 100; whereas there are about 1000 students, a third of whom must have been at Alicante, often clustered around their correspondingly young instructors. The contrast to the A. A. A., where students flit about the margins of the declining old boy network, or its rising post-feminist replacement, was quite striking--although it should be noted that the proportion of women at Alicante was quite as high.

From a theoretical and methodological point of view, postcolonial reinvention was perhaps rather less manifest. The major influences were those of the three dominant metropolitan anthropologies: American, British and French--a dependent condition which disturbed at least one speaker at the Alicante meetings. The relation between fieldwork and theory also seemed a lively issue: Spanish anthropology was seen as atheoretical, Boasian, still tied to the folklore tradition. Correspondingly, it was the subdisciplinary boundary with folklore whose definition seemed to be of greatest salience. The problem was to pass beyond folklore to theoretically significant anthropology. The difficulty was that there were no fathers to kill within the Spanish tradition ("No tenemos padres a matar"), and therefore no native ground for theoretical debate.

Given the recent signs of stringency in the Spanish political economy, one was inclined to wonder just how these rapidly expanding numbers of young anthropologists would find

research support and jobs ten years from now. But for the present historical moment, the effect was one of great optimism and liveliness--again (to this observer) in notable contrast to the A. A. A.

PAPERS PRESENTED TO THE SESSION ON THE HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY AT THE FOURTH CONGRESS OF ANTHROPOLOGY, ALICANTE, SPAIN, APRIL 1987

I. Theoretical and epistemological problems

David Alvargonzales (Oviedo)--"The cultural materialism of Marvin Harris: between science and philosophy"

Joan Bestard (Barcelona)--"Crested birds and men: regarding a text of Father Feijoo"

J. Bouza--"Criminal anthropology: between biology and law"

Francisco Castilla (Madrid)--"Methodology in the work of Julio Caro Baroja"

Josep Llobera (London)--"The orientalism of Gobineau as a form of cultural relativism"

Inma Querol (Barcelona)--"The beginnings of the institutionalization of anthropology"

P. Valenzuela--"Cultural law and causality"

II. Europe and Others: Ethnohistory

Christian Baque (Paris)--"The invention of the savage: the weight of the medieval heritage in the representation of the New World and the Indian at the beginning of the Conquest"

José Jiménez (La Laguna)--"The return to ethnohistorical sources: the war among the Canarian indigenes"

E. Llanges, A. Sella and M. Casielles--"The conception of the 'new man' in the 16th century: America and Europe"

J. Paniagua (Leon)--"Sources for the study of American anthropology: The Bulletins of the Institucion Libre de Enseñanza"

Luis Sánchez (Madrid)--"Spanish colonial administration and the ethnography of the Philipines (1874-98)"

G. W. Stocking (Chicago)--"Malinowski's models: Maclay, Kubary and Kurtz as ethnographic archetypes"