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Obituary

**Carmelo Lisón-Tolosana** (1929-2020) was a major figure in European social anthropology, having played a central role in Spain and across Europe as a promoter of our discipline. He was part of a generation of Spaniards who was too young to fight in the Civil War but not too young to feel its direct effects. Having originally trained at a seminary and then graduated in History in Zaragoza, he found his vocation in the social sciences largely inspired by the work of José Ortega y Gasset. Fascinated by the new developments that were taking place in the sixties in British social anthropology, Carmelo registered at the University College London to do a PhD. He found out, however, that his plan to study Spanish society was not welcomed there. As a result, together with the Portuguese scholar José Cutileiro, he moved to Oxford, where J.G. Peristiany was cultivating a group of brilliant young Mediterraneanists at St. Antony’s College. At Oxford, however, both Cutileiro and Lisón-Tolosana found greater support and encouragement in John K. Campbell, then a young post-doctoral researcher at the college, than in any of the older members of the Institute of Social Anthropology, who shared with their London colleagues a deep primitivist prejudice against anthropological research in Europe.

Carmelo’s thesis—later published as *Belmonte de los Caballeros: a sociological study of a Spanish town* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966)—is one of the major works of European ethnography of the post-War period and remains fascinating reading today. The book deals with the small town in Aragón where Carmelo was raised, addressing very particularly the way in which the major upheaval of the Civil War marked differently the worldview and sense of self-identity of successive generations. Due to their close collaboration, the book brings together brilliantly, on the one hand, Carmelo’s inspiration in Ortega’s phenomenological sociology and, on the other hand, Campbell’s inspiration in Parsonian social theory (and his excellent English).

When he returned to Spain, Carmelo took from Oxford more than a life-long love for ethnographic research and social anthropology. He also took his wife Julia, who was a close companion and dedicated collaborator for the rest of their long lives. In the mid-1960s, Franco’s regime was experimenting with a measure of modernization and liberalization. This meant that Carmelo ultimately managed to find a place at the prestigious Universidad Complutense de Madrid. In order to do that, however, he was obliged to write a second doctoral thesis, this time in Spanish. At the Complutense, he
founded and directed first the Department of Sociology and then the Department of Anthropology. In the course of the decades that followed, he published a number of books on Galicia, where he carried out fieldwork in the 1970s, mostly researching themes associated to family patterns and to magic. His latter work was deeply influenced by Lévi-Straussian structuralism and manifests his growing fascination with the transcendental side of human experience.

One of Carmelo’s greatest achievements was the role he played as a promoter of Iberian and European anthropology. Every year—with the financial support of a wealthy childhood friend—he organized a small conference. These restricted and intense meetings brought together a carefully chosen group of participants and normally took place in a distant and attractive venue or at the sumptuous setting of the Casa Velazquez in Madrid. Having been a student of his lifelong friend John Campbell, I was invited to many of these. There, I was given the occasion to meet some of the more important figures of European anthropology and I befriended Spanish and French colleagues with whom I have, since then, collaborated for a number of decades. All of us who were blessed with his discreet but decisive hospitality will fondly remember the intellectual intensity of these occasions. After retirement from the University, Carmelo’s intellectual base was the Royal Academy of Moral and Political Sciences in Madrid, where again he fostered actively anthropological debate. He was an Honorary Member of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

Carmelo was a believer in European anthropology and worked actively at promoting it. With his disappearance, we witness the passing of a generation of social thinkers who fought for the institution of the social sciences in the universities of southern Europe, and who created schools that are today alive, active, and share their ecumenical outlook.

João de Pina-Cabral