During the 20th century, Spain lived through enormous changes, in values, attitudes, material conditions. The generation born approximately during the 1920s and 1930s lived through the most dramatic years, including the civil war (1936-39), the hunger years of the 1940s, the mechanization of agriculture and massive emigration to the cities and abroad of the 1960s, the clear improvement of food and living conditions in general during the 1970s. And 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 gone to school beyond a few months.

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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