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Book Review: Espana Connection by Luis Gomez Arrojo

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Book Review: Espana Connection by Luis Gomez Arrojo

Abstract

Espana connection is a series of in-depth articles on organized crime in Spain written by Luis Gomez, a former editor of El Pais where he is presently an investigative reporter. On the best-seller list in Spain at one time, the book brings to light the growing criminal and drug culture in Spain by centering each chapter on a particular criminal activity, citing official police reports, using eyewitness testimony by field investigators as well as national and international statistics by Interpol, Europol, and the Spanish Guardia Civil, among other official bodies. Gomez then reminds readers about well-known-some might even say infamous-cases of police seizures and arrests which made the international headlines since the early 1990s. Overall, the book reads like an in-depth journalist's report which necessarily shields its sources and arbitrarily documents its statistics.

Disciplines

Creative Writing | Criminology | Law and Society | Spanish and Portuguese Language and Literature

Comments

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is a lot of theory implicit in his ethnographic craft. Her concluding comments on the merits of some postmodern criticisms I find balanced and revealing.

An author central to this work is Kuhn. I was lucky to attend one of his courses at Princeton and he made us read an article of his entitled "Metaphor in Science." Max Black's book on models and metaphors was a key reference. The lesson for me was that one could work on cultural metaphors and do cutting-edge social science. And the more one studies expressive culture, the more one tends to agree with Vico that "the first science to be learned should be mythology or the interpretations of fables." Brilliant instances of such projects harnessed to imagination and rigor, metaphor and cognition, could be found in the works of James Fernandez, Lakoff and Lakoff, Friedrich, Victor Turner, not to mention in Kenneth Burke or Gregory Bateson, all of whom are conspicuously absent from the bibliography.

Metaphor is not González Echevarría's forte. The book ends with nine methodological theses, the first one being "Certainties, conjectures and the limits of falsification." A typical paragraph reads:

What is implied by this analysis is that if T is constituted by a system of axioms, from the falsity of O cannot be deduced the falsity of T, but of one or various of the axioms that constitute T, and to avoid its refutation it might be sufficient to modify one or several of the hypotheses.

But something unexpected happens soon after her trying formula comparing Carnap and Nagel's axiomatic theories. "[A] theory is like an octopus," she declares to the surprise of the reader, and goes on to quote at length Moulines's zoological metaphor: "The head of the octopus is the nucleus; the sea's bottom, from which the nucleus is nourished, is the field of applications; and the tentacles represent the special laws..." For an an-trope-ologist like me, the epiphanic metaphor is the embodiment of the book. Definitely, each new step in social science, each one

of our concepts and descriptions and experiences, it all is deeply and inextricably enmeshed in the tentacles of the octopus of theory.

Joseba Zulaika
The University of Nevada, Reno

España connection
RBA Libros, 2005
By Luis Gómez Arrojo

España connection is a series of in-depth articles on organized crime in Spain written by Luis Gómez, a former editor of *El País* where he is presently an investigative reporter. On the best-seller list in Spain at one time, the book brings to light the growing criminal and drug culture in Spain by centering each chapter on a particular criminal activity, citing official police reports, using eyewitness testimony by field investigators as well as national and international statistics by Interpol, Europol, and the Spanish Guardia Civil, among other official bodies. Gómez then reminds readers about well-known—some might even say infamous—cases of police seizures and arrests which made the international headlines since the early 1990s. Overall, the book reads like an in-depth journalist's report which necessarily shields its sources and arbitrarily documents its statistics.

The Introduction presents the overall scope of the book and cites important information regarding growing criminal activity in Spain and the groups carrying it out. The next chapter, "Spanish connection," centers on Spain's role as a point of entry, transfer as well as destination for contraband and drugs. Gómez wishes to show that since the Transition and Constitution of 1978 contraband was never a serious criminal offense since it centered mostly on tobacco. Today, Spain is the point of importation, transfer and sale of cocaine, heroine and hashish because its lax contraband laws make it a more appealing location for criminal activity than even Gibraltar, long famous for its lenient penalties.

Gómez is at his best when he is able to show the cultural impact that these criminal activities and arrests have made on Spain. Consider the chapter, “Heroína, lazos de colores y una dedicatoria: Urfi Cetinkaya, *El Paralítico*,” which relates the pursuit and capture of *El Paralítico*, Urfi Cetinkaya, a paralytic Turkish drug dealer whose arrest warrant was signed by now-famous Judge Batasar Garzón. When *El Paralítico* was released he immediately began to distribute unique packets of heroine with colored bows and stamped with the phrases “Esto es bueno para la salud... Baltasar Garsón” or “Voy a envenenar España.”

“Las mil y una noches del hachís: Antón, El Nene, Ibrahim T.” also deals with the importation and sale of drugs, this time hashish from Morocco. The author points out that coastal towns were mistakenly identified by the government as among the poorest in Spain since earnings from the drug trade place them among the wealthiest. This is the case of Sanlúcar, officially the poorest town in Spain in 2000, whose most famous citizen was Antón, a local drug dealer who escaped capture for years. A highlight of this chapter is the author’s nighttime tag-along with the Guardia Civil noting the use of sophisticated observation equipment to monitor movements by high-speed crafts along the Straits. Operations against these powerboats usually include the participation of *El Pájaro*, a helicopter made famous in Arturo Pérez Reverte’s *La reina del sur*, which is used by the Guardia Civil to catch the culprits before they can dump their merchandise. In recent years, as Spanish authorities became armed with more sophisticated technology, their high-speed duals with the powerboat drivers became more spectacular and often made headlines in newspapers or television newscasts.

Other chapters such as “Escándalos a la italiana: Antonio Bardellino, Domenico Paviglianiti,” and “Turistas llegados del frío: Roman Frumson, Vladimir Goi, los hermanos Butorin, Serguei Pylev” recount the role of organized crime in Spain by Italian *mafiosos* or especially by the more-dangerous Russian mafia which has permeated Spain since the fall of the Soviet

Union. This is the same theme in the chapters “El ejército de la noche: Albanokosovares” and “Una epidemia que viene del este: Iván Dimitrov Dokatanov y Constantin Lucian Sirian.” Both chapters feature the rising tide of eastern European groups that are populated by well-trained ex-military or ex-police officers willing to ransack homes and business or steal luxury automobiles for resale in other countries, or even murder-for-hire schemes (193-95).

“Los Reyes Magos vienen de América: José Ramon Prado Bugallo, Sito Miñanco” highlights the role a U.S. Drug Enforcement operative played in Spain’s largest-ever seizure of cocaine and the arrest of José Ramon Prado Bugallo, alias Sito Miñanco, a wealthy and popular Galician who the police had been unable to catch in the 1980s when he began investing in community projects and bankrolling local businesses with proceeds from trafficking in contraband tobacco and, later, cocaine.

In the final chapter of España connection, “Epílogo: la Calle 340,” Gómez talks about the impact of money laundering along the famed Costa del Sol, known for the 340 highway that runs through it. According to the author, money laundering is carried out on such a massive scale that when the actor Sean Connery sold his estate in Marbella, he was the only person in his entire neighborhood whose home was registered in his own name. In other words, new luxurious homes built in Marbella and neighboring towns are often bankrolled by proceeds from “el blanqueo de dinero,” a crime carried out by nameless and faceless criminals who enjoy Spain’s relaxed banking and criminal laws.

Taken as a whole, *España connection* is a fascinating, sometimes suspenseful, collection of stories, and it also provides greater understanding about the fringes of immigrant populations and how their fight for a place in Spanish society often leads them to crime. Some readers may be offended by Gómez’s penchant for grouping these immigrant groups into virtual crime syndicates, but he does so only to tell the story. By no means is the text an opportunity for immigrant bashing or an alert against immigration in Spain. Instead, the author gives a glimpse into a new

cultural phenomenon that is gripping Spanish society, especially as newspapers and television reporting dedicate more and more of its time to anecdotal reporting of the type seen in gossip shows. Nowhere is this more evident than a surge in coverage in recent years on the mayorship of Marbella or the escalades of famous attorneys from the Costa del Sol, both of which are said to have ties to organized crime. Gómez's timing is right, too, as even *Newsweek* recently featured a story in its international edition called "Sun and Shady People: Is Spain's Costa del Sol the New Criminal Center of Europe?" (June 20, 2005). However, it must also be said that this is not an academic text; there is no index, no bibliography, no footnotes. And while Gómez is an experienced *El País* reporter and likely to be trustworthy, he does not fully cite his sources or the origins of some of his statistics. As troubling as that might be, the book nonetheless vastly improves our understanding of the drug trade and organized crime and their impact on Spanish society.

Chad M. Gasta
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The Spacious Word: Cartography, Literature, and Empire in Early Modern Spain
The University of Chicago Press, 2004
Por Ricardo Padrón

Ricardo Padrón explora a través de 287 páginas algunas de las obras más representativas de la literatura cartográfica, tanto discursiva como iconográfica, producida durante el siglo XVI por el imperio español, que paralelamente comenzaba a representar gráficamente a través de mapas el continente desconocido. Padrón asegura que la utilización de mapas sirvió al Imperio como herramienta para fortalecer su poder y autoridad como nación. La invención de América, según Padrón, se lleva a cabo en un momento en el que Europa intenta resituarse ante el mundo al mismo tiempo que se produce una revolución cartográfica. De la misma manera que algunos de los mapas trazados en el siglo

XVI, parte de la narrativa histórica creada en torno a esa época contribuye a la invención de América al trazar—como si de un mapa se tratara—las diversas regiones en las que acontecen los hechos narrados.

Padrón define la cartografía en el sentido más amplio de la palabra: como producto cultural que se halla en mapas y textos de dimensiones cartográficas. Para fortalecer su teoría se sirve del concepto de *metageografía* de Martin Lewis y Karin Wigen:

The set of spatial structures through which people order their knowledge of the World: the often unconscious frameworks that organize studies of history, sociology, anthropology, economics, political science, or even natural history. (26)

Cada una de las obras analizadas por Padrón traza su propia *metageografía* del Imperio, creando diferentes perspectivas de América, su gente y el encuentro entre los dos mundos.

En el primer capítulo "The Invention of America and the Invention of the Map" Padrón presenta la evolución del término "espacio" así como la evolución de la cartografía como ciencia a través de los siglos, con especial atención al periodo comprendido entre la Edad Media y el Renacimiento que culmina con el redescubrimiento de la *Geografía* de Ptolomeo. Paralelamente al auge de la cartografía, España tiene ante sí todo un continente que delinear cartográficamente por medio de las emergentes concepciones del espacio. La invención de América—por medio de mapas y escrituras cartográficas—en muchos casos viene a ser reflejo del viejo mundo:

This process of 'inventing America' can be understood as the process of 'remapping' the European imagination in ways that bring to light the connections between the early modern cartographic revolution, a larger process of cultural 'mapping,' and deep changes in Europe's conception of itself and its world. (20)

En el capítulo 2, "Tracking Space," Padrón lleva a cabo un breve y conciso análisis de la cartografía hispánica a través de formas