Ibero Americana, Nordic Journal of Latin American Studies
Vol.XXVI: 1-2, 1996, pp. 9-31

VENEZUELAN ANTHROPOLOGY AT THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM

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Introduction

In this paper we seek to deal mainly with three aspects: First, to briefly discuss the institutionalisation of modern anthropology in Venezuela, its relation to the scientific approaches of the time, as well as to the social and economic aspects underpinning its consolidation[1], second, to discuss the amalgamation of contemporary anthropology in Venezuela during the seventies and eighties; and third, to provide a balance and perspectives of anthropology in Venezuela towards the end of the millennium[2]. We conclude by discussing the foundations of a nationally oriented anthropology whose members would be committed through common interests with the national reality.

The institutionalisation and subsequent consolidation of the social sciences in most Latin American countries are a point in case that shows our particular state of art. It is not until we denude national realities, influences, interests, and their linkages to research that the teachings of experience will shed light on where we are to go. Anthropology in Venezuela will illustrate our case.

I. INSTITUTIONALISATION OF MODERN ANTHROPOLOGY

Precedents

The beginnings of anthropological studies in Venezuela were established around the mid-1800s with the pioneer works of intellectuals of that time. This initial period of consolidation proceeded slowly, and lasted until about the 1950s. Mostly trained in the humanities, medical sciences and law, these early intellectuals reviewed, compiled, and systematised the chronicles and the historical information available. A common interest among them was the preservation of knowledge about the different Venezuelan Indian groups (Alvarado, 1945; Ernst, 1892; Febres Cordero, 1960; Marcano, 1971; Salas, 1919; Rojas, 1941). These predecessors made interpretative analyses of the ethnographic materials with ideas taken from

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doi:https://doi.org/10.16993/ibero.253

positivism and evolutionism, assuming the "Indians" as the object of their study (Vargas, 1976). Using the comparative method and historical reconstruction, they also focused on archaeological findings, physical anthropology, and Indian languages. Their legacy is an extensive and basically descriptive anthropology.

Some of these predecessors, however, actually explored the study areas such as the limits with Brazil and Colombia, making direct contact with indigenous groups (Jahn, 1927; Koch-Grunber, 1917-1923). These have provided us with copious and invaluable data about ethnic groups that are either extinct today or were not confronted by external pressures or contacts with the national society during the initiation of the modernization process circa 1930.

During this formative period, academic efforts to teach anthropology also began in Venezuela. In 1905, the physician E. Toro offered the first course in general anthropology at the School of Medicine, Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV). Though short-lived, the course trained many students in palaeontological and archaeological anthropology (Toro, 1906).

By the mid-1940s, the first attempts at institutionalisation were set in motion in Venezuela with the founding of Departments of Anthropology and the Grupo de Caracas[3]. In 1943, the Grupo de Caracas from the Sociedad Interamericana de Geografia was created. Concerned with the current Indian situation, it focused on the efforts of such noted scholars as López Ramírez (1945), Antolinez (1944) and Dupouy (1952). Shortly after, in 1944, Father Cesareo de Armellada opened the Department of Anthropology at the "Sociedad de Ciencias Naturales La Salle". And in 1947, Miguel Acosta Saignes, Venezuelan anthropologist trained in Mexico, founded an Anthropology Department as part of the Faculty of Humanities of the Universidad Central.

By the end of this formative period, we find that the efforts of historical reconstruction and cultural comparisons had produced basically descriptive anthropologies based upon non-systematized data collection and field methodology[4].

Anthropological research and conclusions of the period centered on the concept of cultural evolution in which cultures were thought of as passing through various stages of development toward later and more complex ones. It is within this context of thought that we find the first debates arising among national indigenous advocates.

Modern Anthropology: 1950 - 1970

It was not actually until 1953 that anthropology was officially instituted in Venezuela. The School of Sociology and Anthropology of the

Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV) was created under the directorship of George Hill, a rural sociologist invited from the University of Wisconsin who, originally, had been hired by the Instituto Técnico de Inmigración y Colonización in the previous decade (Torrealba, 1988). Concurrently, a growing interest by foreign universities in tribal and peasant studies developed and affected the research directions that Venezuelan Anthropology would take. Both systematic field work and teaching ensued, launching anthropology ahead as a field of study in the country, and as in most North American and European schools the disciplinary emphasis was ethnology, physical anthropology and archaeology.

During the next 15 years, foreign scholars and Venezuelans trained abroad and in the School of Sociology conducted fieldwork in the country, and produced ethnographies with a strong emphasis on the concepts and theoretical approaches of the period, such as social organization, and the historical diffusion of materials and cultural traits. The general orientation was guided by the narrative styles of North American schools of thought, primarily, Boas' historical particularism and his emphasis on ethnographic fieldwork. To a lesser extent, research strategies borrowed from British functionalism and the structural-functionalism of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown are evident throughout the research conducted among Venezuelan ethnic groups.

Foreign anthropologists, supported by their financial and institutional backing, contributed decisively to the insertion of Venezuelan ethnic groups into the international literature. Consequently, those ethnic groups became new terrain for students of ethnographic studies -particularly for subsequent dissertations.

In the 1950s, for example, J. Wilbert[5], a Wenner Gren Foundation grantee, started fieldwork among the Warao of the Delta of the Orinoco River (1956). Zerries, an anthropologist from the Frobenius Institute of the University Goethe in Frankfurt, conducted fieldwork among the Yanomami of the Alto Orinoco (1954). Similarly, Leeds, with support of the Social Research Council, worked among the Yaruro of Apure State (1961).

Another aspect of interest was the creation of the "Venezuelan Indian Project" within the Latin American Center of the University of California in Los Angeles. Under the directorship of J. Wilbert, this project supported the dissertations of many students including Schewrin (1963), Watson (1967), Heinen (1972), and Olsen (1973), all of whom substantially contributed to the knowledge about different Venezuelan groups.

Other foreign universities also supported North American anthropologists in Venezuela. Chagnon (1966) with his studies among the Yanomami and Thomas (1973) among the Pemon were sent from Michigan

University; Dumont (1972) with his work among the Panare came from Pittsburgh University; Lizot from the Centre National de la Recherche Scientific, Paris, did his work among the Yanomami (1971, 1972, 1975); and Overing-Kaplan (1974; 1975), from Brandeis University conducted research among the Piaroa.

With the contributions of all these works we find a Venezuelan anthropology in which teaching and research were basically promoted by external impulses. Internally, however, an important fact occurred with the opening in 1960 of the Research Department of Anthropology at the Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas (IVIC). Under the leadership of the Venezuelan archaeologist Jose M. Cruxent, studies of Indian groups and archaeology produced the first national dissertations.

For example, M.M. Suárez (1968, 1971) produced a general ethnography of the Warao group choosing to focus on kinship terminology and marriage alliances to interpret the Warao social system; and N. Arvelo-Jiménez (1971) focused her work on the political process among the Yecuana. Both Venezuelan anthropologists -trained abroad at the University of Paris and Cornell, respectively- in addition to the research done in archaeology in the Andes by E. Wagner (1967) and A. Zucchi (1967) in the Venezuelan Plains, established the basis for research at the Anthropology Department at IVIC.

The 1950s and 1960s represented an expansive period in Venezuelan modern anthropology characterized by the gathering of direct information through ethnographic fieldwork and by the formal completion of graduate studies affecting many students. Within these lines of research and teaching we may differentiate a particular stream that influenced this and subsequent anthropologies in the country: its individualism and the independence of the researcher. The seed of non-collective research had already eroded the origins and basis of modern anthropology in Venezuela. The group efforts of the period were particularly aimed at individual recognition, academic promotions and financial backing.

At the international level, an increasing number of anthropologists were dissatisfied with pre World War II anti-evolutionism, particularism and functionalism and produced new analytical approaches aimed at explaining the origin of cultural differences and similarities. Stemming from the theoretical and methodological developments in neo-evolutionism, ecological anthropology and structuralism, Venezuelan anthropologists also engaged in these new styles of research. These alternatives, however, also reproduced an aspect of the ideological framework of the Boasian school and of the western science in general: the social and political neutrality between scientist and phenomena; which in traditional anthropology has

translated into anthropologists detached from the processes studied and "passivity" of the object of study (Torrealba, 1984).

II. CONTEMPORARY ANTHROPOLOGY: 1970-1990

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, anthropological research was already changing the tribal context of early anthropological works. The Indian situation had come to be defined as the "Indian problem" and, as a result, indigenist professionals -social workers, lawyers, anthropologists- started to analyze the problem within a political orientation[6]. This problem has become a highly delicate political issue today because of the Venezuelan government's interest in the strategic geopolitical value attributed to territories of Venezuelan Indian groups: first, with regard to the frontiers and second, to the natural resources which further stimulates transnational eagerness.

Other reasons for the turn in traditional tribal anthropological works are the new and more elaborated visions that indigenous groups have of their own historical destiny, and their strong standing before researchers, governmental projects of assimilation and indigenous groups from another countries. Anthropologists, nonetheless, have been instrumental in the elaboration of the notions of "self-management" and "self-determination" which have arisen, too, from within the Indian groups (Arvelo-Jiménez, 1976a, 1976b) and from the identity movements organized by scholars associated with the School of Anthropology of the Universidad Central de Venezuela (Mosonyi, 1975). The 1970s closed with the first Ethnic Congress held in Venezuela by ethnic organizations (Mansutti, 1985).

During the seventies, an increasing interest in the urban situation gave new strength to urban anthropology in Venezuela (Suárez and Torrealba, 1983). The national reality and the need to diversify the realm of research paved the way towards non-traditional topics. These non-traditional topics found roots in an accelerated process of urbanization that Venezuela was experiencing, leaving behind its agrarian past. Although oil extraction began in the 1930s, it was not until after 1950 that the policy of industrialization based on import substitution started. The oil boom, the internal migration, the growth of shanty towns in the main cities, the state's investments in massive construction of large housing structures, and the accessibility of employment in the cities between 1950-1960 made Venezuela a predominantly urban country with one of the highest rates of urbanization in Latin America (Torrealba, 1987b).

Thus, Venezuelan's anthropology entered a new stage marked by the opening in 1974 of a master program at IVIC. During this period the research efforts aimed towards conducting research nationally at graduate

level. Studies on the effects of urbanization on the country side and the rural-urban migration circumscribed the original research on urban problems (DiPolo and Suárez, 1974; Margolies, 1979; Margolies and Suárez, 1978; Pollak-Eltz, 1979; Scorza, 1977; Suárez, 1976 and 1979; Suárez and Margolies, 1979; Suárez and Torrealba, 1979; Torrealba, 1979). Later, the same demographic dynamics of the country provided "international migration" as a topic of study (Sassen-Koob, 1979; Schloeter, Suárez and Torrealba, 1982; Torrealba, 1982, 1985; Van Roy, 1984). Ethnomedical and afro-Venezuelan research produced the first graduate thesis (Bermúdez, 1986; Guerra, 1984; Pérez Calcaño, 1977; Pérez Itriago, 1980). Similarly, ethnohistory, archaeology of rescue, national identity, and popular organizations became also the focus of anthropological research in the country (Clarac, J., 1976; Hurtado, 1981; Morales, 1979; Velázquez, 1986; Wagner, 1978, 1983).

During the eighties, a new generation of anthropologists, particularly those trained under Marxists/neo-Marxists perspectives, began questioning the anthropologist's position before national society, advocating for a science of compromise and greater active participation in the socio-cultural processes studied and in the national reality (Torrealba, 1984:230). These attempts did not crystallized mainly because they were individual efforts that lacked a collective audience and were detached from political practices that could have channeled their concerns. Therefore, they did not affect the social reality.

In the midst of the social changes occurring in Venezuela, in the international environment and in the social sciences in particular, old and new generations of anthropologists necessarily have started confronting the new realities with their own baggage of tools[7].

One way out of confronting such realities has been to ignore contemporary changes and continue the search for functions and the origins of similarities and/or differences among people by choosing categories of 'culture' and 'society'[8] as analytical starting points that treat supposedly "homogeneous" realities or cultural groups as wholes in order to prove, disprove or improve theoretical schemes. As we will appreciate further, the majority of anthropologists involved in teaching and research is heavily permeated by this position.

As an alternative to this, three broad lines of research or tendencies resulting from the upheavals that "traditional" schemes have posed to anthropologists while doing anthropological work this last decade are presented. In general terms we are referring to areas of research that embrace Indian groups; peasants and city-dwellers; and archaeology.

Indian Groups

The real fact that the "subjects" of study were disappearing; that they were getting closer to us, progressively engulfed by the maladies of the national-social reality contributed to that the study of native people remained. Where we once constructed the borrowed perspective of an "Indigenous Anthropology" in which the object study referred to ethnically distinct groups, our perspective today has progressively moved towards a politically oriented anthropology for ethnic groups and social classes. The role of the anthropologist is not necessarily one of political activism but one that through scientific scholarship reveals the complexities of ethnic realities (Alés, 1995; Arvelo-Jiménez, 1984; Arvelo-Jiménez, Clarac and Lizarralde, 1986; Arvelo-Jiménez and Perozo, 1983; Biord, 1984; Chiappino, 1995; Clarac, G., 1982; García Gaviria, 1995b; Hill, 1995; Hill, González and Vidal, 1995; Holdham, 1995; Perera, 1995; Mansutti, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1995; Morales and Arvelo-Jiménez, 1981; Mosonyi, 1983; Perozo, 1986; Ponce, 1995; Seijas and Villalón, 1995; Silva, 1995; Urbina, 1979; Wilbert, J., 1987, Wilbert ans Simoneau, 1986, 1990; Wilbert, W. 1995).

Neither having researched abroad nor enjoyed the benefits that studying the "real non-western other" provides, Venezuelan anthropologists have being faced with the inextricable dilemma of inherently digesting view points derived from sources external to the Venezuelan reality and, hence, perhaps valid in another contexts. The Venezuelan anthropologist has come to a position of stagnation whereby the "old views" prove neither efficient nor sufficient to reconcile the discrepancy between the conclusions of science and socio-cultural realities.

Peasants and City Dwellers

Ethnological research conducted within the research genres of peasants and city dwellers (the former absorbing most of the new analytical inputs produced lately in anthropology), as well as "afro-Venezuelans", have also been affected. Research along these lines has illuminated hidden cracks in the old edifice of anthropological theory and method. Venezuelan anthropology endangered by its own natural weight discovered such weaknesses as the inappropriateness of methodological approaches; the inadequacy of research locales no longer self-contained and controllable; the dispersion of the "subjects" of study; the lack of coherent references by which to characterize a "society" or a "group"; and, finally, the sudden discovery of "new groups" or categories of people to look at. In response to these difficulties Venezuelan anthropologists have had to view as a "problem" the definition of the unit of analysis or of the social space by reconstructing or, at least, adjusting the anthropological work (Berlin 1986;

Clarac, J., 1995a, 1995c; Suárez and Bermúdez, 1988; Guerra, 1984; Torrealba, 1985; Vessuri, 1984).

Through these problems the Venezuelan anthropologist locates the boundaries of the space in which the "subjects" interplay, be it a work relation that aggregates a particular set of people (Pérez Itriago, 1987, 1993, 1994; Perozo, 1992, 1995; Perozo and Mande, 1991; Perozo and Moreno, 1993); a focal point of social cohesion such as a church or a ritual that congregates individuals (García Gaviria, 1995a, 1995b; Martin, 1983,1984.); a concept to interrelate theory and empirical data in a concrete situation (Carrillo and Suárez, 1986; Llambi, 1988; Pérez Itriago, 1990; Watson, 1980); in essence, seeking to represent and define social realities through a contemporary discourse in spite of a rapidly changing world.

Nothing new, we may say. However, two consequences of this trend have become apparent: the fragmentation of the topic of interest within anthropology and an interdisciplinary confluence.

In the first instance, there seems to be a fragmentation of research interest simultaneously linked to positions of theoretical eclecticism as Venezuelan anthropologists attempt to confront and resolve in their own ways the problems listed above. This eclecticism is an opening to a variety of influences employing whatever seems to work in practice and moderates the uncertainty experienced by anthropologists as unique models fail. In consequence the proposals or ideas of older dominant models are used eclectically as intellectual resources and produce an assortment of ideas that crosses theoretical boundaries.

It is in this way, for example, that functionalism, structuralism and Marxism as frameworks for research remain today, because as Marcus and Fischer suggest, they serve (1987:12), "as sources of concepts, methodological questions and procedures, but none authoritatively guides research programs on a large scale. They have become merely alternatives among many others that are used or discarded at will by researchers operating much more independently".

The need to represent social realities through a contemporary discourse bring us to the second aspect of relevance in this trend which markedly opens the boundaries of the field of anthropology itself making it easier for anthropologists to glean the cornucopias of other fields. Likewise, as other social sciences incorporate anthropology in their fields they begin "anthropologizing" their research spaces. Hence, sociology, demography, history, architecture, mass communication, among others, intermingle harmoniously enough with anthropology to produce highly scholarly interpretations of social realities (Briceño, 1983, 1985; Gasparini and Margolies, 1986; Pellegrino, 1984; Torrealba, 1987a). This interdisciplinary

confluence, using "the qualities" from different fields, far from being adopted only to fill in research gaps, is born by the need to make description and interpretation more sensitive to broader social, historical, and political phenomena.

Archaeology

During the 1950s, the decisive input of Cruxent and Rouse regarding systematic excavations and the importance of conceptual tools, respectively, oriented the first generation of Venezuelan archaeologists graduating from the School of Sociology and Anthropology of the Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV). Since then, two main groups of archaeologists, representing the two larger anthropological institutions in Venezuela, have overseen the major regional research projects within the country.

One of them, the Anthropology Department of the Instituto Venezolano de Investigaciones Científicas (IVIC), has researched the geographical areas of the West Plains and the Middle Orinoco River (Zucchi, 1967; Zucchi and Tarble, 1982, 1984), as well as the Andes region and northern Maracaibo Lake (L. Arvelo and Wagner, 1984; Wagner, 1967, 1973, 1978; Wagner and Tarble, 1975). Following the initial training of Cruxent and Rouse, this group has mostly focused on the reconstruction of a spatial and temporal framework of reference and stylistic differentiation of the materials collected, enhancing with an ecological perspective, the schemes previously proposed by the teachers. In general terms, these archaeologists might be characterized as heterogeneous users of practical models proposed basically from beyond Venezuelan borders and, equally so, as obtaining and adjusting pertinent information for the specific approaches used.

The other group of archaeologists is associated with the Universidad Central de Venezuela (UCV) and has mostly researched the areas of the Orinoco River and western Venezuela. In 1974, Sanoja and Vargas published *Antiguas formaciones y modos de producción venezolanos* (1978) establishing a qualitative breakthrough from the traditional mode of conducting archaeological research in the country. Based on the serial methodology for ordering data to derive regional chronologies, these archaeologists focus on the people that had produced the objects under study; from a historical and Marxist framework, they intent to reconstruct the modes of production of the family and social organization of the group to which the objects belonged. This group participates in the trend currently known as "Latin American Social Archaeologists" (L.Arvelo, 1988; INAH 1976).

Both institutions have produced a prolific collection of monographs and publications, as well as a new generation of archaeologists that have already begun to contest those two institutional frameworks and propose new perspectives in the field (L. Arvelo, 1987; Tarble, 1982, 1985). Although still at a nurturing stage, this tendency might soon truly produce appealing results. For example, the proposal of opening archaeological research to public interest and to private and/or governmental agencies shakes public opinion from time to time (Sujo, 1975). Similarly, the call for a new archaeological approach is an example of a more comprehensive position (Sujo 1994; Tarble, 1987).

In academia, this young generation of archaeologists is confronting a new challenge in the country. Having been trained by two distinct and basically exclusive ways of focusing on cultural materials - from styles to modes of producing them- these archaeologists are faced with a vacuum within the gulf that extreme research positions have taken. On the one hand, there is lack of information from which to infer due to the inherent limitations of the practical models used. On the other, there is too much room for speculation in interpretation due to the grand theoretical spaces created for discussions, and equally so, there continues to be lack of information.

The tendency, then, leans towards the rescue of field work focusing on methods of data collection, treatment of variables, and systematic to approach not only the "sites" under study but the geographical area in a more comprehensive way. By engulfing more "space", archaeologists expect to generate a greater flow of information/data with which to support interpretations.

As general conclusion it may be possible to argue that contemporary anthropology in Venezuela has been marked by at least three distinctive features: (i) The continued indiscriminate use of the orientations inherited from modern anthropology; (ii) the reaction to this use with an amalgamation of approaches with the end result of research and teachings mixed with various perspectives; and (iii), the pervasive individualism used as a strategy for professional survival. Within this scenario, the results might be shattering. The strength of the reaction seems to weaken before the depletion of answers from the models and the lack of training in collective wondering and searching. Attempts to link anthropologists with anthropologies exhaust their limits. At a few years away from the end of the millennium this seems to be the state of art of Anthropology in Venezuela. We wonder where we can go.

III. BALANCE AND PERSPECTIVES

Our next discussion focuses on three interrelated factors affecting Anthropology in Venezuela: (i) from the outside (oil, debt and research funds); (ii) from the inside (anthropology as an institutional field); and (iii) from within (the anthropologists themselves).

From the Outside: Oil, Debt and Research Funds

Although it sounds rhetorical and common place to relate national societies to macro-aspects that control world economies and affect national realities, nonetheless we insist. Venezuela, as another newly developed country, has been characterized by two main elements: a single commodity economy (oil) and a large foreign debt. As a result, this has come to play on the direction of scientific research in Venezuela.

It is unfortunately true that knowledge through scientific research generated in Venezuela is still not highly regarded (Vessuri, 1986; Ruiz, 1991). The amount of national resources expended on research and development during our 30 years of democracy is very far from the recommendations of UNESCO: 2 per cent of the gross national product (J. Urbina, 1992).

The difficulties imposed by the payment of foreign loans has added to the pressures to reduce national expenditures. Public output priorities such as those related to services, housing, education, and health, rank high in relation to scientific research on the national priority scale. These budgetary restrictions for science affect the training of personnel, equipment acquisitions and the publication of books and journals. Similarly, access to technology and information networks, graduate training, and visits by foreign scholars are also affected[9] (Tarble, 1987). As elsewhere, social sciences in Venezuela occupy a distant second to the "hard" sciences. And within the former, anthropology is usually one of the last fields to receive financial resources. Further, there is a poor tradition of acknowledgment and status attributed to anthropological research (Vessuri, 1995), in spite of its most noted sub-field, i.e., archaeology. For the past 30 years anthropology emerged from the economic prosperity the country was experiencing. Now, with limited resources available, the outlook for Venezuelan anthropology is extremely bleak and as a productive field may barely survive.

From the Inside: Anthropology as an Institutional Field

Contributing to this state of affairs there is also an internal complexity: the lack of an unifying body and collective sense of what could be called a "national anthropology". Three factors may be closely linked to

this. Firstly, the traditional dependence on foreign modes of thought contributed to the training of professionals with minimum interest in national realities; consequently producing massive non-critical scholars with respect to anthropology and national issues. Although achievements have been made with the neo-evolutionists, neo-Marxists, and historical structural approaches, nonetheless, the result has been the compartmentalization of research and apparent specialization within schools and institutes that neither share common interests nor establish contacts with one another. Secondly, identification with the ideology of political parties further complicates this fragmentation within institutions, particularly, at individual levels. Thirdly, a national anthropology is even more difficult to develop because: (a) the unresponsiveness of the market to the skills of anthropologists, leading to the underemployment or even non-employment of these professionals; (b) a minimum exchange of information among training centers (i.e., IVIC and UCV) and those dealing with anthropological research in Caracas and the countryside (Universidad de Los Andes, La Universidad del Zulia, Fundación La Salle, Museo de Ciencias Naturales)[10], and (c) the unrestricted "production" of anthropology students who have a poor idea of what to expect as professional anthropologists in Venezuela.

From Within: The Anthropologists

Another factor of this lack of unity and a "national anthropology" is the anthropologist him/herself. The public image of anthropologists as "bone searchers" and students of primitive and exotic societies is still largely with us. In response to this stigma, we devote valuable inner energy fighting this just to create a modicum of respectability before other members of the social and "hard" sciences.

Several other factors mitigate anthropologists' future survival in research and teaching. Firstly, as a consequence of our dependence on foreign standards, scientific acknowledgment is still measured through publications in international journals. Secondly, there are few accessible and accredited national periodicals in which anthropologists can publish. Because teaching runs hand in hand with the handicaps inherited from ill-trained anthropologists, we keep reproducing ad infinitum the malaise of the past, one of them the individualism. Mediocrity further devalues the image of anthropologists and their possible contribution to society, thereby siphoning off scarce resources for those who really believe in the profession.

IV. Concluding Remarks

As devastating as our discussion may sound, we believe there is one way to overcome past maladies and improve the present outlook of

anthropology in the country: with a *national anthropology* whose members are committed through common interest with the country's reality.

As mentioned above, a common concern in this anthropology should be its orientation towards social issues played out in the nation. On the one hand, multiple national realities, not necessarily those traditionally chosen as topics of research, should be a focus of attention. On the other, the conventional way of choosing which "data" to study and analyze today creates conflict between the methods used and what could be new or somewhat different themes of concern. Accordingly, the move towards an 'oriented anthropology' whose "object of study" is defined by those multiple realities instead of being imposed by models of the field itself, becomes a strategy for research. Furthermore, the opening of anthropology to other disciplines is a necessary consequence of this strategy.

Venezuelan anthropologists must become aware of the limits of our conceptual tools as learning systems; of what other social sciences have to offer, of our blindness to national realities, and of the evident absence of relevant socio-anthropological themes in our country. Awareness promises a fertile terrain for distinctive oriented anthropologies.

There is a "national reality" that is not stagnant. In the intellectual scenario presented above, institutional and professional forces could interplay decisively and directly challenge the current intellectual trend. Venezuelan anthropologists cannot be sightless to the national context. The unique context of the Venezuelan world suggests an anthropology different from that which we have been trained to perceive. It is not that we no longer devote interest to traditional anthropological topics, but that there is an urgent necessity for disciplinary transformation. The country is experiencing a critical historical period of political corruption, discontent with the democratic system, inflation, international drug trafficking, violence and delinquency, and even imported guerrillas. Anthropologists in Venezuela must recognize these major social issues, among others. By the end of the millennium, Anthropology, should be closing the enormous gap between *the self* and *the other*. And that is true here and probably everywhere. Anthropology should stop looking for "that other" somewhere else; it has to recognize it as being right beside.

We need to believe transformation is feasible. The first steps have already been taken. Efforts are being made to: (i) reevaluate research orientations, which stems from self-criticism, the fragmentation of research and the confrontation with new problems affecting method and theory; and (ii) take an interdisciplinary approach in order to understand the complexity of socio cultural processes within the Venezuelan national realities, felt by some anthropologists as a need. These, then, may lead to an Anthropology

in which commitment reduces our debt with the "objects of study", stimulates the compromise between social sciences and politics, and consequently, allows for new ways to negotiate financial resources. The dynamics of the interplay of these relationships, i.e., between science, society and politics, should therefore provide the new theoretical issues for a nationwide oriented anthropology in Venezuela.

A National Anthropology then should be oriented, shared and connected to *the other*; a science capable of feelings and demonstrative of opinions. It should be sensitive, accommodating and effective to mankind. Where do we go from here? As of today, the answer to this question may perhaps be summarized as follows: we should continue to pursue our dreams, with the burden of reality that we have, with renewed strength derived from the day to day struggle to survive and with the knowledge and support of our profession.

Notes:

1 For an elaborate discussion of these aspects also see Vargas (1976) and Margolies and Suárez (1978), Arvelo and Biord (1987), Torrealba (1984) and Ruiz (1991). Since 1972, E. Wagner has compiled and published in *Antropológica* the "Bibliografia Antropológica Reciente sobre Venezuela". It already reached in1991 its 17th chapter.

2 Besides the required readings, this section is mainly based on interviews of professional anthropologists working or not within the field. The general topic of discussion was guided by the area of specialization and the specific context in which the professional was involved. We would like to thank Maruja Llovera for editing this paper and our various colleges for their stimulating discussions.

3 Although of brief trajectory, by 1918 there were already attempts of organization when the group of the "Sociedad Venezolana de Americanistas y Estudios Libres" and its subsequent journal *De Re Indica* appeared (Margolies and Suárez, 1978:696).

4 Of importance to this period was the collection of data compiled by missionaries, i.e., by Barral (1960); García, (1971); Armellada, (1964, 1972); Moreno, (1945).

5 By 1956, J. Wilbert helped to organize the "Instituto Caribe de Antropología y Sociología" of the Sociedad de Ciencias Naturales La Salle. *Antropológica,* the only specialized and still functioning journal in the country, appeared (Torrealba 1984:221).

6 There are 28 Indian groups identified in Venezuela today, for a total of 315.815 individuals- 1,5% of the total population. Six of them share international frontiers (Mansutti, 1988).

7 For an interesting discussion of these points refer to Vessuri 1984

8 As broad, undefined and inappropriate as they may result.

9 The introduction and subsequent development of electronic mail might offer a new way of communicating

10 Besides the annual meeting of the Venezuelan Association for the Advancement of Science (AsoVAC) which opened in the 1950s a chapter for anthropological works, there is hardly any national event that gahters anthropologists from the different fields. The tittle of Clarac's paper (1995b) presented in one of those few special events is more than suggestive of this point: "Dificultades de la construcción de la Antropología en Venezuela" (Difficulties in Building Anthropology in Venezuela).

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