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Cornejo Cabrera, Ezequiel



Born *in Mexico City, on April 10, 1913*

Died *in Mexico City, on September 2, 2002*

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Ezequiel Cornejo Cabrera, son of José Pilar Cornejo and Carmen Cabrera, was the youngest of seven brothers and sisters. He studied at the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria 1 “San Ildefonso” (National High School) of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (National Autonomous University of Mexico) (UNAM). He obtained a Master’s Degree in Spanish Letters and a Master’s Degree in Educational Sciences, at the Facultad de Filosofía y Letras (Faculty of Philosophy and Literature) (FFyL) (UNAM), in 1945. Subsequently, he obtained his doctorate in Spanish Letters at the FFyL (UNAM). He taught in various educational institutions: in basic education at the Secondary School 21, San Ángel, Mexico City, from 1940 to 1970; at the high

school level at the Centro de Estudios Científicos y Tecnológicos No. 5 “Benito Juárez” (Centre for Scientific and Technological Studies) (CECyT 5), commonly known as “Vocational 5”; and at a higher level in the Escuela Nacional de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales (National School of Political and Social Sciences) of the UNAM (in 1968 this School became the Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales [Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, FCPyS]), in which he taught the course of Social Anthropology and in the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales (Institute of Social Research) (IIS – UNAM) from 1954 to 1970.

He worked as a teacher, researcher, writer, and eloquent speaker, with a scientific production developed primarily at the IIS in which he worked under the direction of sociologists such as Lucio Mendieta y Núñez (1895–1988) and Pablo González Casanova (born in 1922).

His academic career was marked by interest in the study of original social groups that were in vulnerable situations due to the prejudices of the time. As part of his work as a sociologist and researcher for indigenous groups, he learned Nahuatl, so he was able to conduct firsthand interviews with peasants who were discriminated for not speaking Spanish. His scientific production began with the publication of the book *Estudio de Psicología Experimental en algunos grupos indígenas de México, UNAM, 1954*. In this work, Cornejo Cabrera proposed “to be a starting point or an axis of reference ... that shines light on the autochthonous groups of Mexico, so

slandered, both by those who demagogically praise them, and by those who ignorantly disrupt them” (Cornejo, 1953: 6). As part of the research that supports this book, Cornejo applied psychometric tests to girls, boys, and adolescents of indigenous origin in order to scientifically demonstrate that the differences in development trajectories between the rural and urban population were primarily due to sociocultural context rather than conditions attributable to organic or psychological deficiencies.

It was precisely this book that opened him the doors to the IIS-UNAM where he consolidated his line of research, which was distinguished for having a clear sociographic tradition, measuring and collecting quantitative data in groups of different ethnic origin. His subsequent publications maintained the interest in the study of native peoples and inhabitants of rural areas from a sociological-synthetic perspective (Cornejo, 1965).

As part of his work as a researcher, he carried out an extensive study that included 60 agricultural production communes, known in Mexico as “ejidos” (common land), of the State of Veracruz, Mexico. In order to describe the material and spiritual levels of life of the “ejidatarios” (communal land owners) and through the application of individual and group interviews, Cornejo Cabrera generated a large amount of descriptive data that supported the demographic analyses of the social life of the Mexican ejido zones during the 1960s of the twentieth century.

According to Colmenero (2003), at that time, there is a transition from orthodox sociological analysis towards trends in social analysis with quantitative research methodologies, with an emphasis on sampling and statistics to analyze aspects of stratification and social mobility. Cornejo Cabrera was one of the Mexican researchers with the most articles published in the *Revista de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales* (Journal of Political and Social Sciences) of the FCPyS at UNAM.

In most of his publications, Cornejo Cabrera sought to describe the diverse realities experienced by the inhabitants of rural Mexican areas. His texts included sociodemographic data that

give his readers the possibility of having a statistical description of the resources, spaces, and habits that very clearly marked the border between traditional rural life and lifestyles guided by modernist ideals of the time, primarily those who were encouraged by government efforts for universal access to basic education and health. As a constant in Cornejo Cabrera’s work, there is an effort to vindicate the figure of the ejidatarios as workers of the land or the sea whose health and development conditions were primarily linked to nutritional and cultural deficiencies associated with their rural condition, rather than to an innate or class disability.

It should be noted that in his studies he shows himself as a pioneer in explaining the “adolescent uprooting” that left communities without young people. Those who emigrated were particularly adolescents and young people who were interested in continuing their academic careers beyond basic education. It was clear that Professor Cornejo’s interest went beyond mere description, but was involved in the explanation of germinal social phenomena that would lead to distinctive demographic processes of the time and resulted from public policies after the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917). It is worth mentioning from what can be seen through his prolific scientific production that Cornejo Cabrera was a forerunner in the study of nonurban social groups in Mexico. This is achieved by the integration of psychometric and sociocultural traditions, in contrast to the rise of the psychoanalytic movement that monopolized the attention in the country since the decade of the 1950s of the twentieth century.

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