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Abstract

Review of Tatjana Gajić. *Paradoxes of Stasis: Literature, Politics, and Thought in Francoist Spain*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2019. 219 pp.

Keywords

Spain, Francisco Franco, Miguel Espinosa, José Luis Arrese, Dionisio Ridruejo, falangismo Jesús Fueyo Álvarez

Tatjana Gajić. *Paradoxes of Stasis: Literature, Politics, and Thought in Francoist Spain*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2019. 219 pp.

Tatjana Gajić's *Paradoxes of Stasis: Literature, Politics, and Thought in Francoist Spain* sheds light on the political contradictions and inconsistencies that plagued the Francoist regime. Through a reading of the ancient Greek concept of stasis—a complex concept that allows for a wide range of interpretations in Gajić's approach, including civil strife, contrary opinions, unrest, immobility, movement, and paradox—*Paradoxes of Stasis* argues that to better understand the political dynamics of the Francoist regime and its almost forty-year hold on power we must confront the nagging tension between the two mutually-reinforcing forces that governed its existence: first, the regime's anxiety over its impermanence (or movement); and second, the regime's capacity to ensure its survival and continuity (or immobility). As Gajić proposes, “the tension between immobility and movement inscribed in stasis allows us to capture the internal dynamic of the Francoist regime while problematizing the idea of a lineal progress from dictatorship to democracy” (11). The fundamental paradox that defined the Francoist regime was given clear form in its compulsion to advance legal, political, and socioeconomic policies that, rather than projecting strength and stability as was hoped, called into question its very legitimacy and governance strategy.

After succinctly defining the concept of stasis in the Introduction, Chapter 1 explores the fundamental gap Gajić perceives between the legality and legitimacy of the Franco regime in its engagement with various notions of change and immobility. This chapter, with its focus on lesser-known (yet important) political figures such as José Luis Arrese and Jesús Fueyo Álvarez, does an effective job of revealing in what sense ideals of legality and legitimacy drove the regime's obsession with ensuring its continuity. Chapter 2 examines Dionisio Ridruejo's political trajectory from totalitarianism to liberalism and showcases how his works can illuminate the profound sense of disillusionment with Francoism that affected a number of Spanish intellectuals after the Spanish Civil War. While this chapter provides an insightful reading of Ridruejo's disaffection with the Francoist regime through interpretations of stasis and *anabasis* in his work, it could have been strengthened not only with a more detailed contextualization of his political ambitions prior to the 1950s, but also with a deeper sense of the impact of his writings between 1950 and 1975. Thanks in large part to his early *falangismo* ('falangism') and his later turn toward liberalism, Ridruejo remained a fringe figure in Spanish intellectual circles who was often maligned or simply ignored by Francoists and liberals alike. Who was reading Ridruejo's literature and political writings? What influence did his so-called conversion to liberalism really exert on intellectuals in Francoist Spain? How did his changing political views contribute to larger social critiques of Francoism? Lastly, it would have been helpful to readers

unfamiliar with Ridruejo if Gajić had entered into a broader critical discussion on key biographical works dealing with Ridruejo's life and politics not included in the bibliography, including Ridruejo's *Casi unas memorias* ('Almost Rememberances'), as well as Jordi Gracia's *La vida rescatada de Dionisio Ridruejo* ('The Recovered Life of Dionisio Ridruejo') and Manuel Penella's *Dionisio Ridruejo: biografía* ('Dionisio Ridruejo: A Biography').

In Chapter 3, Gajić undertakes a close reading of Miguel Espinosa's *Escuela de Mandarines* ('School of Mandarins') of 1974. For Gajić, Espinosa's novel "stands out as the most probing literary examination of the nature of the Francoist regime" (19). Gajić's reading of Espinosa's novel is convincing for the most part, and her analysis of Espinosa's formulations of protest as a type of radical "being in the world"—and "being in common" with others—is intriguing and points toward those crucial questions of dissidence, individuality, and community that fundamentally defined (and problematized) Spain's democratic transition. An engagement with Carmen Escudero Martínez's important *La literatura analítica de Miguel Espinosa (Una aproximación a Escuela de mandarines)* ('Miguel Espinosa's Analytical Literature (A Critical Reading of School of Mandarins)') and José Ignacio Moraza's *Miguel Espinosa: poder, marginalidad y lenguaje* ('Miguel Espinosa: power, marginality, and language'), which are not included in the bibliography, would have enriched the chapter with a sharper critical perspective on the complex and heterogenous character of Espinosa's fiction and its political implications. In Chapter 4, Gajić should be commended for tackling María Zambrano, whose life and work still remain understudied. This chapter, however, requires a more extensive consideration of Zambrano's thought. It is not only the shortest chapter, but the core concept of stasis that is developed in earlier chapters in relation to Francoism recedes as Gajić attempts an ambitious reading that seeks to connect such challenging concepts as God, nothingness, and exile in Zambrano's work. The chapter does outline a compelling framework to undertake this task that accommodates Nietzsche's ideas on God and the figure of Antigone, yet it does not quite succeed in fully realizing it.

The short, three-page Afterword that brings *Paradoxes of Stasis* to a close offers a hasty review of the ground covered. The Afterword could have been expanded to draw together Gajić's original ideas on stasis and highlight the ways in which these ideas contribute to new directions in the field. Indeed, it would have been very beneficial to the development of the book's core arguments if Gajić had offered a clearer roadmap in the Introduction and/or Afterword for how *Paradoxes of Stasis* critically engages and dialogues with current debates on Spanish politics, philosophy, and literature of the Francoist period and democratic transition. With this in mind, the bibliography could have been significantly expanded to incorporate a number of more recent—and essential—works on the political and cultural logic of Francoism and its aftermath, including Anderson, Encarnación,

Faber, Graham, Hopkin, Krasikov, Lowe, Messenger, Míguez Macho, Morcillo, Preston, Scarlett, Treglown, and Valencia-García, among others. *Paradoxes of Stasis* is a suggestive book on the Francoist regime and will be of interest primarily to readers well acquainted with the topic.

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