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Joseba Gabilondo. Introduction to A Postnational History of Contemporary Basque Literature (1978-2000): Remnants of the Nation. Tamesis, 2019.

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Abstract

Review of Joseba Gabilondo. *Introduction to A Postnational History of Contemporary Basque Literature (1978-2000): Remnants of the Nation*. Tamesis, 2019. xii +338 pp.

Keywords

Basque literature, postnational, Bernardo Atxaga, Kirmen Uribe

Joseba Gabilondo. *Introduction to A Postnational History of Contemporary Basque Literature (1978-2000): Remnants of the Nation*. Tamesis, 2019. xii +338 pp.

This monograph is the English translation of *Nazioaren hondarrak* (*Remnants of the Nation*) which was published in 2006 in Basque as an innovative review of Basque literature from the perspective of poststructuralist theory, advancing the notion of postnationalism. The author, Joseba Gabilondo, has published several works related to the subject: the 2013 *New York-Martutene: Euskal Postnazionalismoaren utopiaz eta globalizazio neoliberalen krisiak* ('New York-Martutene: The Utopia of Basque Post-Nationalism and the Crises of Neoliberal Globalization') and *Before Babel: A History of Basque Literatures* (2016). Thus, these three titles encompass a formal and historical trilogy of Basque literature since the Middle Ages and center their review on literature published up to 1975 (*Before Babel*), between 1975 and 2000 (*Remnants*), and in the 21st century (*New York-Martuten*).

A particular virtue of *Remnants* is the advancement of postnationalism as a critical theory, "meant to capture the historical and geopolitical complexity of the Basque Country" (18) and presented in the first section of the book, in contrast to the accepted notion of Jürgen Habermas's *The Postnational Constellation*, which Gabilondo argues is still nationalistic in nature because it does not account for "national languages" as the framework and ultimate horizon or context of this literature. The argument also describes "minority" (ix) literatures, such as Basque literature, as "post-imperialist-nation-state literature" (x). This critical analysis depicts the literary struggles that Basque letters encounter on their way to recognition, especially during the period following the death of Spanish dictator Francisco Franco in 1975 until the 2000s. The book is organized in three distinct parts, each paying attention to the postnational concepts underlying Basque literature and offering a survey of it from 1898 to 2000.

The first part, "Postnational Theory and History," defines what constitutes a postnational theory for Western literature. It is especially useful to understand how he applies this perspective to the analysis of minority and majority literatures. The author concludes that "twentieth-century Basque literature is an attempt to write a national allegory that represents and imagines the nation (in Benedict Anderson's sense)" (x) and recognizes the difficulties in creating an institutional corpus and canon, for the latter rests at the intersection of three domains: political, cultural and economic issues (86).

The second part of the book focuses on the idea of "Writing the Nation" based on Bernardo Atxaga's work (his 1978 *Ethiopia* and 1988 *Obabakoak*). He considers the impact of *Obabakoak* on Basque literature to be similar to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or *Midnight's Children*, as it portrays a realistic-magic

rendition of the Basque Country. At the same time, the section addresses a significant gap in the historical and cultural changes that occurred between these two works for the non-Basque reader, because of the lack of full translations and attends to the impingement experienced by Artxaga's literary success as a globally recognized author.

The third part points to a new literary reality under globalization and neoliberalism, beginning in 1992. This part also includes women's literature, from Itxaro Borda and Aingeru Epaltza to Lourdes Oñederra and Joxean Sagastizabal, recognizing the significance of the alternative that these writer's identities offered in a literary field dominated by men. To this review, Gabilondo adds works published in the 1990s by Atxaga and Ramon Saizarbitoria, especially *Martutene* and its influence on Basque letters.

The book concludes with an "Epilogue" to summarize the trajectory of Basque literatures from 2001 to 2017 in the context of political and institutional developments brought about by global capitalism and framed by the Spanish and French states. This perspective includes the intersectionality of politics, terrorism, social and sexual identities, and national expression. It begins with the work of Kirmen Uribe, highlighted as a new turn in literary identity: what the author calls "the autofictional effect," which brings a more affective and self-aware perspective to the representation of the national self (299). Other developments in the new millennium include an oral tradition (*bertsolaritza*), multigenerational approaches to writing (several authors labeled by Jon Alonso as The Pack), women's writing and alternative female perspectives, and the development of the "generalization of the conflict as a background" (representing the so-called Conflict between ETA and the Spanish government). The Epilogue ends with a question about the impact of the renowned *Homeland*, by Fernando Aramburu, published in 2016 in Spanish, "we still do not have enough distance to analyze fully" (302).

The corpus of literary criticism related to the Basque tradition is extremely modest. Gabilondo's compilation and translations are essential to understand Basque literature and its postnational context. His well-researched monographs are crucial references to any serious study of minority literatures in general and Basque letters in particular, and *Remnants of a Nation* is indeed a significant contribution.

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