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REVIEW

Joseba Gabilondo. *Nazioaren hondarrak: Euskal literatura garaikidearen historia postnazional baterako hastapenak*

(Bilbao: Euskal Herriko Unibertsitateko Argitalpen Zerbitzua, 2006).

322 pp. ISBN 84-8373-857-0

Iker González-Allende

In this book written in Basque, Joseba Gabilondo offers a panoramic view of Basque literature from 1898 until 2002, focusing primarily on contemporary narrative. The book consists of ten chapters that the author has previously published as articles in English, Basque and Spanish in the last fifteen years. The title, translated by the author on his web page (<http://www.joseba.net>) as *Remnants of the Nation: Prolegomena to a Postnational History of Contemporary Basque Literature*, calls attention to the main arguments that are developed in the book. As Gabilondo explains in the foreword, he uses the Basque word “hondarrak” – which means both “remnants” and “sand” – to convey the idea that the Basque country lives out of the remnants of the imperialist nation-state and, at the same time, to refer to the complexities and heterogeneity of Basque cultural reality.

Gabilondo relies on theorists such as Heidegger, Foucault, Althusser, Lacan, and Spivak, among others, to develop his vision of “postnationalism,” which differs from Habermasian “constitutional patriotism” or “neoliberalism.” For Gabilondo, postnationalism does not negate the existence of nationalisms, as neoliberalism does, but rather illustrates their diversifications and transformations in a globalized era. For this reason, he considers that the theorization of a postnational Basque country cannot be limited to a single state, or to one type of citizen.

Gabilondo thus criticizes the paradigm of “national literature” and proposes a new theoretical frame from which to renew Basque literary criticism. He defines postnational Basque literatures as those literatures written by Basques in all their different languages: Basque, Spanish, French, or even English (14). This is certainly an innovative position, one that departs from the usual alignment of language and national identity found in most national histories of literature (not just in the Basque country). Moreover, in his analysis Gabilondo also takes into account the multiple geopolitical places where Basque authors live and other important variables such as gender and class. Consequently, he widens the traditional understanding of Basque literature to incorporate authors as diverse as Pío Baroja, Robert Laxalt, Jorge Oteiza, or Mariasun Landa.

It is perhaps inevitable that in spite of Gabilondo’s well-articulated theoretical premise and his inclusive perspective, most of the book is devoted to authors who write in Basque. Gabilondo is certainly aware of this situation, and in the foreword he is careful to point out that the aim of his book is to explain how postnational literatures written in Basque illustrate the crisis of national projects. There is no doubt that the original theoretical readings included in this work do challenge certain entrenched notions of what a national literature and culture should or should not be.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that most of the book centers on literary production written in the "hegemonic" Basque country (the one located in Spain), with the exception of the chapter on Itxaro Borda, which discusses the reality of the French Basque country. In this regard, it might have been interesting to analyze works written by Basque authors exiled in America after the Spanish Civil War and the way the Basque nation is constructed from that specific (dis)location. On the other hand, Gabilondo should be commended for his attention to women writers, as well as to questions of gender and sexuality, for which he shows a remarkable critical sensibility.

The book is divided into two major parts and an introduction. In the introduction Gabilondo presents a concise overview of twentieth-century Basque literature and argues that the traditional model of "minority literatures" is no longer functional because currently all the literatures are postnational. In the first part, entitled "National Literature," the author examines Bernardo Atxaga's production, specifically his collection of poems *Etiopia* in one chapter, and his famous *Obabakoak* in three chapters, each of which studies the novel from a different perspective: the canon, (magical) realism, and modernism respectively. The main argument of this part is that until 1992 Euskaldun literature is an attempt to imagine the nation allegorically, and that Atxaga's novel represents to the fullest both this national intention and its decadence. In the second part, entitled "After the Nation," Gabilondo investigates the literary outcomes of the Basque postnational era, with the emergence of young and female writers who represent the complexities and multilayered dimensions of "Basqueness." In this section, the author dedicates five chapters to analyze respectively the connection between Basque literature and globalization, terrorism and memory in Atxaga and Saizarbitoria, desire and maternal exile in women's writing, utopian nationalism and the lesbian self in Itxaro Borda, and the crisis of Basque nationalism in Lourdes Oñederra.

Although all of the ten chapters have been published previously as articles, the undeniable cohesiveness of the whole book proves that the same theoretical issues have occupied Gabilondo for a long time. The fact that the book is written in Basque will inevitably limit the number of its readers outside the Basque country, but as Gabilondo's work is already recognized in the USA, it seems appropriate that this material is now available to a different reading public. Gabilondo clearly wanted to convey his Anglo-American theoretical and linguistic position to an audience mostly unfamiliar with this kind of cultural criticism. Indeed, in the foreword, he explains that he has written these articles "in the American way," using theoretical approaches such as poststructuralism, postmarxism, psychoanalysis, feminism, postcolonialism, cultural studies, and queer theory. He even proposes a new style of writing in Basque, what he calls "American Basque," a variety that he characterizes as one that follows the English syntax and expresses the accuracy and richness created by globalization (28).

In short, Gabilondo's work will be of great interest for those who wish to know more about contemporary Basque literature, and those who are open to question traditional approaches to the study of both dominant national and so-called "minority" literatures.