

Itxaro Borda: Melancholic Migrancy and the Writing of a National Lesbian Self

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Itxaro Borda euskal idazlearen literatura lana aztertzen du artikulu honek. Emigrazioaren gaia planteatzen du idazle horrek, bere lanaren formak tratatzerakoan, bai eta bere "gutxien kultura" globalizazioaren markoan kokatzerakoan. Sexualitatearen eta abertzaletasunaren arteko erlazioa globalizazio eta emigrazio markoaren barnean kontsideratzerakoan, artikulua, halaber, ukitu egiten ditu autorearen idazki lesbikoek euskal abertzaletasunarekiko jarrera malenkoniatsua egituratzen duten formak eta haren politika gorputzari buruz; modu horretara erbesteko beste emakume autore heterosexualek idazkietatik bereiz agertzen da. Artikuluan ondorioztatzen denez, Bordaren malenkonia kultura abertzale ofizialetik at den euskal ama nazional batengana zuzentzen da bereziki, eta horren ondorioz, Bordaren nortasunaren eta Euskal Herriaren bertso utopiko berriak idazteko gorputz eta toki emankorra bibratzen da.

Giltz-Hitzak: Globalizazioa. Emigrazioa. Literatura. Lesbianismoa. Abertzaletasuna.

Este artículo analiza el trabajo literario de la escritora vasca Itxaro Borda. Se plantea la cuestión de la (e)migración con el fin de tratar las formas en las que Borda sitúa su trabajo y a su "cultura minoritaria" dentro del marco de la globalización. Al reconsiderar la relación entre sexualidad y nacionalismo dentro de un marco de globalización y (e)migración, el artículo también trata de las formas en que sus escritos lésbicos articulan una postura de sujeto que es melancólica para con el nacionalismo vasco y su política del cuerpo, y de esta manera se distingue de los escritos exílicos de otras autoras heterosexuales. El artículo concluye que la melancolía de Borda se dirige específicamente hacia una madre nacional vasca, situada fuera de la cultura oficial nacionalista, que, a consecuencia de ello, se convierte en un cuerpo y lugar productivo para escribir nuevas versiones utópicas del "yo" de Borda y del País Vasco.

Palabras Clave: Globalización. Emigración. Literatura. Lesbianismo. Nacionalismo.

Cet article analyse le travail littéraire de l'écrivain basque Itxaro Borda. L'écrivain pose la question de l'émigration afin de traiter les structures dans lesquelles elle situe son travail et sa "culture minoritaire" dans le cadre de la globalisation. En reconsidérant rapport entre sexualité et nationalisme dans le cadre de la globalisation et de l'émigration, l'article traite également de la façon dont ses écrits de caractère lesbiens développent une attitude mélancolique à l'égard du nationalisme basque et de sa politique sur le corps, et se distinguent de cette manière des écrits depuis l'exil d'autres auteurs bétérosexuels. L'article déduit que la mélancolie de Borda s'adresse spécialement à une mère nationale basque, située en dehors de la culture officielle nationaliste qui, en conséquence, devient un corps et un lieu productif pour écrire de nouvelles versions utopiques de la personnalité de Borda et du Pays Basque.

Mots Clés: Globalisation. Emigration. Littérature. "Lesbianisme". Nationalisme.

I remember I met Itxaro Borda back in 1995 at Galeuzka, the annual meeting of national minority writers of Southwest Europe. They are writers who belong to the Basque, Galician, and Catalan nationalities, which spread over both the Spanish and French states as well as Andorra and other national diasporas located mainly in the Americas. That year Galeuzka took place in A Coruña, Galicia. What struck me most about Borda was her inclination to mingle with the Galicians, rather than “her own people,” that is, the Basques. She seemed to be at home among the Galicians rather than the Basques. But then, how can one feel at home among “strangers” when home is so precarious in the first place? I think I understood intuitively because even I no longer lived among my own people but in exile. I was one of the few, if not the only Basque speaker in Philadelphia, the city in which I lived at that time. It takes one migrant or exiled subject to know another. But unlike myself, Borda was temporarily out of the Basque Country. A few days later I returned to Philadelphia and she went back home to Maule, a city in the French Basque Country. However, the sense that she was a “migrant at home” stayed with me.

Nowadays there are countless volumes of literature on migrancy and exile, of which Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* has become the most canonical. But little has been written about “not being home at home” from the standpoint of global migrancy. That is, very little has been written about this new condition if one disregards the old psychoanalytic, existentialist, and Marxist clichés of “alienation and estrangement,” of which Kristeva's *Strangers to Ourselves* is one of the latest updates. For a moment at Galeuzka, I intuitively thought that there was something radical about Borda's migrancy, one in which you do not abandon home.

Here I intend to examine Borda's radical migrancy, as I intuitively perceived it from my own exilic encounter with her back in 1995. I want to argue that Borda's radical migrancy is “melancholic.” Following Freud's distinction between mourning and melancholia (244-46), I have coined the term “melancholic migrancy” in order to refer to a form of migrancy that has permanently lost its “original home,” but needs this loss in order to define its identity and desire. That is why “melancholic migrancy” needs to be at home: only at home can the loss be felt, desired, and identified. That is also why “melancholic migrancy” is so radical: home cannot be closer and yet farther. Home is where you are but you can only experience it as loss. After examining Borda's work I conclude that melancholic migrancy becomes politically utopian, for it defies nationalism's articulation of “home” while it produces an alternative “nation” that is situated both locally and globally through cultural hybridation. In this sense, melancholic migrancy defies nationalist discourses of essentialism, uniqueness, and inner-homogeneity while underscoring cultural hybridity in order to challenge the class and sex articulations that legitimize hegemonic nationalism. Thus, Borda's melancholic migrancy is crucial to understanding not only her own work and predicament but also the limits and

(1) I would like to thank Kenneth Kidd, Michael Ugarte, and Jaume Marti-Olivella for their insightful editorial work and the staff of the library of the Center for Basque Studies, at University of Nevada, Reno, and most especially Marcelino Ugalde, for their help in locating some of the works I discuss here.

contradictions of Basque nationalism. Borda's self, a "melancholic, migrant self," is crucial to understanding our own selves, Basque and global.

There are many ways to be melancholically migrant among one's own. Mingling with others is only a later development, an attempt to be materially consonant with one's own original condition. In Borda's case this original condition comes from a specific juncture. She is the most prolific creative writer of the French Basque Country; she stands out as the most prolific woman writer of Basque literature. Yet she remains utterly marginal to both the general public and most contemporary accounts of Basque literature.

Her opus is long. Back in the early eighties she edited the first anthology of Basque women writers *Hogoigarren mendeko emakumeak idazle* (1984, *Women Writers of the Twentieth Century*). She also wrote an original satire about the Basque Country, *Basilika* (1984, *Basilica*) as well as a more personal yet critical account, in the first person, about the same topic: *Udaran betaurreko beltzekin* (1987, *In Summer with Sunglasses*). After collaborating with Mark Legasse on a work about Ravel, *Infante zendu batendako pabana: Maurice Ravelen musika* (1986, *Pavana for a Dead Infant: The Music of Maurice Ravel*), she also published three detective novels: *Bakean utzi arte* (1994, *Till They Leave Us Alone*), *Amorezko pena baño* (1996, *Just Love Sickness*), and *Bizi ninzano munduan* (1996, *Till I Lived in the World*). Throughout the years, she has continued to write poetry, her most prolific genre. Besides her early *Nola bizitza badoan* (1984, *As Life Goes By*) and *Kokrodil bat daukat bihotzaren orde* (1985, *I Have a Crocodile As a Heart*), she is also written *Just Love* (1988), *Bestaldean* (1991, *Across the Border*), and *Orain* (1998, *Now*). Finally she is also the author of a biography: *Manex Erdozaintzi-Etxart* (1934-1984).

Although she collaborates with the magazine *Maiatz*, which publishes most French Basque creative writers, Borda still seems to be alone. She lives in a peculiar state of migrancy among her own people. At least, so I thought when I met her in Galicia. At that point even I had not read anything by this writer deemed "marginal and difficult." Nevertheless I vividly remember that she appeared to be aware of her melancholic and migrant condition and did not seem ready to make any effort to change. She seemed to be quite happy mingling with her Galician counterparts. She was at home.

In 1998, she published her latest poem collection, *Orain (Now)*. Borda opens this book by quoting precisely a Galician poet, Chus Pato: "Estranxeira na miña propia historia / na miña propia paisaxe / na miña propia lingua / eu tamén." (Stranger in my own history, my own landscape, my own language, I too).

Melancholic Migrancy, Radical Muteness

A beautiful film by Werner Herzog, *Where the Green Ants Dream*, best illustrates this melancholic migrancy I am attempting to sketch in order to read Borda's work. In the film, a mining company's project to expand over a desert area in central Australia encounters the resistance of the natives. The natives think the drilling is going to wake up the "green ants," the apocalyptic animal or totem of their

mythology. They believe that if awakened, their mythical animal could bring the world to an end. But what concerns us here, in this discussion of migrancy, is one of the secondary characters of the film, the individual the rest of the natives call "The Mute." At one point in the film, the natives travel to the capital to testify in front of the Supreme Court in their lawsuit against the mining company. At precisely the point at which one of the white witnesses is testifying about the holocaust brought to the natives by Western civilization, The Mute stands up and, ignoring court procedures, addresses the tribunal. Struck by this apparent inconsistency, the judge makes an inquiry as to his status. One of the court clerks explains that The Mute is the only survivor of another tribe that spoke a completely different language from the rest of the natives. Although he can talk, The Mute can no longer communicate with anybody. He is the last speaker of his native tongue. However, the camera does not focus on him again; the film follows the conflict between the mining company and the natives. As I watch the film now, I realize how radical The Mute's condition is and how unnoticeable that position remains for the rest of white people in the film. The Mute has to be displaced by language in order to be perceived in his radical migrancy: he has to speak and he has to be named by others. Only the other natives' homeliness hides The Mute's radical migrancy, for he still is at home but no longer home.

Here I will take the story of The Mute, his radical migrancy, as a point of departure for resituating my encounter with Itxaro Borda and her work. However, in order to understand the manifold articulations of "muteness," it is important first to recall that "language" is one of the most potent and overarching metaphors produced in the twentieth century through which we imagine and depict the human condition. We speak of body language, artificial languages, visual language, etc. and we also attempt to encrypt in language the chaotic functioning of complex systems such as the stock market, the weather, or the astrophysical universe.

As I read Itxaro Borda's work, through all the contemporary meanings of the word language and its absence (muteness), I am beginning to suspect that she might be a mute, a very vocal and eloquent mute, in more than one way, and in more than one language. Although I have already pointed out some of the circumstances that position Borda's work as migrant, let me now elaborate and combine them under the umbrella-concepts of language and muteness. Besides being the most prolific northern writer as well as the most published Basque woman, Borda is one of the few women writers to identify herself as a feminist and activist. She is the first anthologist of Basque women's literature, having edited *Hogoigarren mendeko emakumeak idazle* (1984, *Women Writers of the Twentieth Century*).² She is also the only openly lesbian writer in the Basque Country. However, no other Basque woman or lesbian writer has joined her active feminist politics.

(2) I decided to cite Borda's every work by its Basque title with an English translation in parenthesis in order to retain a Basque marker of a literature that otherwise might seem, by default, written in English. In short, I want the reader to remember literally that Borda's literature is written in Basque and is not Basque literature written in "global" English.

Furthermore, she is from the North of the Basque Country, which also constitutes the southern part of the French state. This region has become peripheral to the hegemony of the Southern Basque Country (north of Spain) and partly dependent on the latter's economic and cultural might—if not its blatant imperialism. Any northern writer knows that her or his reading public is in the South, and Borda is not an exception. But she continues to write in “Northern dialects.”

At the same time, she is one of the most visible northern writers in the South. She publishes most of her work with Susa, the southern publishing house that most runs counter to the literary mainstream. Susa is “well known” for publishing risky material (from sexuality to politics) that other presses would turn down. Only two of Borda's works have been published in the North, in the collection published by the collective gathered around the journal *Maiatz: Nola bizitza badoan* (1984, *As Life Goes By*) and *Just Love* (1988). In other words, even though we southerners know that there is a literary activity in the North around the journal *Maiatz*, we do not “care” to read what they publish. Yet, Borda reminds us of this neglect by actively appearing among the southerners as a northerner.

Finally, as most southern writers are able to seek financial help from the cultural institutions of the two Spanish regional governments where Basque is spoken, Navarre and the Autonomous Basque Community, Borda remains economically isolated and neglected. Although the French government spends huge sums of money in the cause of universalizing French culture, when it comes to promoting national difference, cultural difference within the “French nation,” it shows no interest whatsoever in anything French that does not comply to its fundamentalist cultural standards. In this respect Basque is not that far from Arabic literature written in France.

Borda seems to be aware of her mute condition, resulting from the above juncture, but she also appears determined to remain “mute.” In all respects, she gives the impression of speaking not to the Basque Country, and by extension to the world at large, but to an impossible public. The intersection of the identities that form her writing leaves almost no readers. Progressive, non-middle-class, lesbian, northern, Basques would form her ideal reader community. But how many people are there at this crossroad of identities? Naturally, one could argue that her writing could become universal beyond the specific circumstances and identities that comprise it. But she makes no concessions. She is not easily readable. She does not seem to be concerned with being understood by other readers who do not belong to her “non-existent tribe” or do not speak her “mute tongue.” She looks at home in her radical migrancy. However, if I referred to Borda as “vocal and eloquent,” it is because she is the most prolific writer both among the northerners and women writers. She seems to be convinced that she has a readership, or that at least she is creating one. She seems to imply that her writing is creating a body of texts, a body of language, that will continue to speak in her absence. Hers is a resolute act of communication that is as radical as her migrancy. In short, she is a very eloquent “mute.”

However, once her “muteness” is precisely located in the above terms, it no longer seems to be so unique. If anything, her melancholic migrancy represents a local,

radical version of the most essential and constitutive condition of identity in global culture within or in contact with the first world. Nowadays identity is defined by an almost existentialist loneliness that specialization, diversification, and mobility bring about in the late-capitalist world. Thus, the reason why I want to coin the concept of “melancholic migrancy” in order to talk about Borda’s work lies in my attempt to reread her work in the midst of global culture while finding its proper and precise place. Otherwise we risk the possibility of losing her work’s specificity and political aim; Borda’s is not the postcolonial condition predicated by Bhabha or the borderland situation presented by Gloria Anzaldúa.

Among the many existing accounts of migrancy, Ian Chamber’s provides a useful perspective on Borda’s work. He defines migrancy as an impossible location that has recourse to language in order to situate itself in the mist of late-capitalist globalization: “Migrancy... involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of homecoming —completing the story, domesticating the detour— becomes an impossibility” (5). But, in the case of Borda, we have the opposite form of migrancy: a radical migrancy in which the subject sets off in her voyage *without moving* from the point of departure, hence its melancholy. In a sense, Borda’s literature is very local: it is always circumscribed one way or another to her home region of the North Basque Country. Her characters always linger around the real author, as if they mirrored different aspects of her personality. Her writing, with only one honorable exception (*Allegro ma non troppo*, 1989), has never been translated nor into standard Basque, in the case of her northern-dialectal production, neither into any other language such as English, French, or Spanish.

In other words, hers is a literature that is very much local. It has never moved from where her author lives. And yet, it is migrant, even radically migrant, in the sense that *The Mute* helps us understand. It is not she who has moved, but rather her place, her locus. She is migrant by default. She still speaks her own language. It is we, by moving nearby and beyond, who trigger this radical migrancy. It is the southerner reading her work, the critic across the Atlantic, the male reader who does not want to “deal” with a lesbian character, the nationalist who does not find in her work suitable models of femininity or motherhood, the women writers who do not rally around gender and sex issues, the French cultural institutions that deem her work “non-French,” etc. In short, it is the new cultural and historical development triggered by the southern nationalism of the Basque Autonomous Community, on the Spanish side, that puts her in a perpetual migrancy. Ironically enough, the rise of Basque nationalism on the Spanish side is part of globalization: only as nation-states fade into larger political formations such as the European Community, do new forms of regional or sub-state nationalisms such as the Basque emerge and expand around their territories.

Furthermore, this radical condition also sets her writing in motion; it defines and situates her writing. Borda writes first of all because she knows she is a mute and so she needs to speak up, to let the world know she is a mute. By the time Borda comes

into being as a writer she is already in a state of migrancy. In this case, loss predates locality, hence its melancholic nature. Chambers does not speak of this other local and immobile, yet radical, migrancy. However, works such as Borda's make us realize that this other melancholic migrancy is also a very clear condition of global culture. There is nothing archaic about Borda's condition. One could rewrite Chamber's paragraph by saying that:

Melancholic migrancy involves an immobility in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival change in the face of globalization. However, as language, histories, and identities are constantly subject to mutation, resulting from the geopolitical reorganization of global culture, melancholic migrancy calls for an impossible dwelling: always in the same position, the promise of homecoming —completing the story, domesticating the detour given by global culture— is lost.

Exilic Bodies, Migrant Selves

If I emphasized above the many uses and meanings of the word "language," it is because Borda's radical migrancy is not confined to her geopolitical and linguistic situation in the Basque Country. Her migrancy also traverses her body —her gender and sexuality— and turns it into a mute body as well, a homeless body of melancholia. If her work is compared with most other Basque women writers, it is clear that Borda's literature has a very different position vis-à-vis motherhood and thus Basque nationalism. As I have argued elsewhere ("Del exilio materno"), Basque nationalism only allows women to occupy the position of the natural, domestic, phallic mother. Most women writers, such as Arantxa Urretabizkaia, Laura Mintegi, Arantxa Iturbe, and Mariasun Landa live in the South and, thus, Basque nationalism's gender and sexual articulations determine their work. As a result, they adopt an exilic way of writing vis-à-vis Basque nationalist culture. In other words, all these southern writers define their work by negating the nationalist demand of domestic motherhood, and exiling themselves outside the nationalist imaginary. The exilic path taken by each author is different, but all of them write from a consciously embraced exilic position vis-à-vis nationalism's hegemonic culture.

Unlike Borda's work, the literature of all these women is not migrant but exilic. Arantxa Urretabizkaia's female characters are either abandoned by their lovers (*Zergatik Panpox*, 1985; *Why Darling?*) or must themselves abandon their lovers (*Saturno*, 1987; *Saturn*). These characters' heterosexual desire forces them to adopt a motherly position towards their male counterparts. As a result they have to exile their desire from themselves in order to survive. They remain in the Basque Country but their desire goes into exile: it cannot return to the Basque Country if the characters are to survive without becoming "nationalist, heterosexual, phallic mothers." *Saturno's* female protagonist, Maite, has no choice but to literally say "no" to her childish and self-destructive lover in need of motherly care. She literally steps out the narrative never to appear again. She remains in the Basque Country but her desire is literally exiled from the narrative and thus from Basque culture.

Mariasun Landa's characters always linger around the limit of adolescence, fully aware that once adolescence is trespassed they must deal with gender and sexuality as proscribed by nationalism. Her characters, usually children, clearly expose the adult world of the Basque Country, more than their own, but they always do so from the safe and exilic space of childhood. Childhood is the space in which desire and identity are not permitted to appear, to fully develop, beyond the prescribed ties of kinship. Only one character in Landa's production manages to circumvent the problem of exile and finds both identity and desire in migrancy. However, this character is not human but animal. It is the happy flea Errusika, the protagonist of the story that bears her name. She knows her true vocation and so becomes a ballerina. Since Errusika only has a family, not a homeland, she takes advantage of her migrant nature to travel towards Russia. On her way, she finds a new home in a Russian circus, and makes of this other migrant space her true and only home. This is probably the only character in women's literature that manages to avoid nationalist exile by embracing migrancy instead. However, she is a flea, not a human being. We, the readers, the nationalist readers, are exiled from this migrant happiness we can only envision as literary.

In the case of Arantxa Iturbe, the elaborate rewriting of gothic alternatives to marriage (adultery, crime, murder, criminal deception) shows that her female characters' desire is also elsewhere, beyond marriage and heterosexuality, in another land that is illegal or becomes criminal. Finally, in the work of Laura Mintegi, characters live in nations that resemble the Basque Country but cannot be pinned down. They live in Basque exile. Only in her latest novel (*Nerea eta biok*, 1992; *Nerea and I*) does the protagonist live in the Basque Country. However she ends up living vicariously, through her imprisoned son, a desire for a political and national self that Basque nationalism does not allow her to have beyond the domestic space to which she is ultimately confined.

In the case of Borda the opposite phenomenon takes place: nationalism and its *socium* become the space to which she wants to return. She wants to come home, but she cannot. Borda is not in exile, because she has never been in a nationalist Basque Country in the first place. She simply dreams of "returning" to a nationalist Basque Country in which she will be at home. Consider the opening stanza of her poem collection *Bestaldean* (1991, *Across the Border*):

We want the motherland on the wings of the south wind
 Doubting, suffering, jolting, or
 Strolling in the patios of Fresnes
 Without managerial gerontocrats
 Buying the newspaper with the cigarettes
 Walking the kids to school
 In the mist that makes beautiful the walls (15, my translation)³

(3) Fresnes is a suburb of Paris and the site of a jail where some Basque prisoners are confined. The word for "motherland" in Basque is gender neutral. I chose the feminine form.

Contrary to her southern counterparts, she expresses a mournful melancholia, a migrant longing, for the subject position against which the rest of the heterosexual women rebel: the national mother. She is a migrant daughter looking for a Basque nationalist mother she never had. At the beginning of the poem cited above, gerontocrats and children are set against each other, as if their mutual exclusion would open up the space for a subject who is both in power and capable of reproduction: the national mother. Note also that all references are to public spaces rather than domestic ones. But at the same time, as the poem opens up a potential space for such a nationalist mother, this space remains absent. The mother's place is negatively marked as non-existent; she is not mentioned. Hence the melancholic tone of the poem. Borda is not in exile, because she has never been at home in the first place. She has never been "home at home." At the same time she states her desire for a national space occupied and regulated by the absent mother: "We want the motherland." In this way also she is mute: her longing for the national mother cannot be understood by the rest of her heterosexual female writing peers—or male readers.

It is not a coincidence that she is the only writer to compile an anthology of Basque women's writings as a way to start her own literary work.⁴ Before she started to write her own self, she needed to know that a literary Basque Country existed in which her female self could find a place. Thus it is not a coincidence that her anthology is of women writers. She longs for a national community in which other women will welcome her. However, and ironically enough, she is the only woman writer to express concerns about "women's writing." Once again she is outside a home that she longs for but that does not exist; it has never existed except as loss.

The same year she published her anthology of Basque women writers, 1984, she also put out an allegorical satire of the Basque Country, entitled *Basilika* (*Basilica*). In this novel she narrates, in a humorous and critical tone, the story of a new fake miracle that takes place in a small village of the French Basque Country and uses Lourdes as its model. The fake miracle is staged with the cooperation of all the local authorities (religious, political, and scientific) as a means to create some economic prosperity in the region. At the end, the expansive economic impact of the miracle affects the entire Basque Country and helps to promote Basque culture. Interestingly enough, this novel positions Borda outside the Basque Country, as the critical instance that envisions, from the outside, the Basque Country as a self-contained, nationalist enterprise. In the true carnivalesque spirit of works such as Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, Borda envisions a way to use the religious and conservative culture of the Basque Country as the basis for a progressive and enterprising nation. Unlike previous and later allegorical accounts of the Basque Country (Andu Lertxundi's *Ajea du Urturik*, 1973; *Urturi is Hangover*, and Bernardo Atxaga's *Obabakoak*, 1989), Borda's allegorical account is not imbued with nationalist ideology. Her novel makes clear that nationalism is always a capitalist, economic enterprise for the advancement of a region and a particular social class. However, this outsider, migrant position

(4) She was also responsible for organizing the first meeting of Basque women writers in 1998, which most attended. There was no follow up or publications resulting from the meeting. The continuation and results of the meeting remain open.

adopted by Borda has the effect of creating a wholesome and encompassing representation of the nationalist Basque Country in a way that no other writer has attempted. Thus, the most migrant and carnivalesque account also becomes a foundational and nationalist literary representation of the Basque Country. This is probably the first time in the history of Basque literature that the Basque Country has been imagined and represented as a single nationalist community encompassing the North and the South.

Interestingly enough, the choice of a “fake miracle” to recreate an allegorical image of a nationalist Basque Country is not coincidental. In the narrative, the fake vision of the virgin is performed by a perverse adolescent following the instructions of her male lover, the new nationalist leader and congressman representing the French Basque Country in Paris. In its carnivalesque and abject details, the fake vision of the virgin also becomes the key allegorical performance of the Basque Country. As a result, the vision of a nationalist, reactionary, and religious *mother* is enacted in an impossible attempt to recreate and represent an absent, good mother who would bring the author of *Basilika* home. The novel implies that a good, nationalist mother could only be represented by the traditional, catholic Virgin, but at the same time, the narrative undermines the possibility of realizing such a “mother.” Thus the good mother is absent. As the story unravels, the girl and her male lover decide to immortalize the miracle by also faking her death. They pretend to bury her so that she can be sanctified later on. Therefore the novel “kills” the adolescent-mother religious bond for the sake of advancing a nationalist Basque Country. However, this fake death also brings the end of the real adolescent and her place in the nation. She flees to the South, changes her image, and returns in order to spend the rest of her life with her lover. At that point, her heterosexual bond with the male leader also becomes her only tie to the Basque Country. At the end of the novel her lover dies in a car accident. Although the Basque Country is “saved” with the consent of the authorities and even the blessing of the Pope, the adolescent cries mournfully, once again radically migrant in the Basque Country. She is instrumental in constructing, embodying, and representing the Basque Country, but at the same time she no longer has a place in it. As a result of faking her death and breaking her female bond with the impossible good mother, she no longer can live in the Basque Country. When her male lover dies, any connection with the Basque Country also dies with him. At the end, she kills herself on top of the coffin of her lover and moves onto “permanent migrancy” while the narrator avoids this sight as if it were too close for her:

Elorri [the female protagonist] exhaled: she lay down on top of Jon Kapagorri's [dead lover] coffin, with her intestines hanging outside her body, steaming. This touching story ended this way, since I, just like the others, shut my eyes in that difficult moment... (101, my translation)

Her next novel, *Udaran Betaurreko Beltzekin* (1987, *In Summer with Dark Sunglasses*), further emphasizes the radical migrancy already present in *Basilika*. Although the protagonist and narrator of the novel is no longer outside the Basque Country, the new relocation inside does not alter her migrancy: she remains as distant

from home as before. Furthermore, home is closer and thus farther, and so is her melancholic migrancy. The protagonist, Elena, tells her adventures as she hops aimlessly from summer town-festivities to concerts and from bars to motels. Her stories revolve around alcohol, anonymous sex, and friends. However, as she wanders through this nationalist and festive landscape, very much in the fashion of a flaneur/flaneuse, she longs for an absent male lover. At the end, she meets the object of her longing, Karl. But as she lies down in bed by his side, the novel does not narrate a happy ending but rather the narrator's realization that her desire is elsewhere and cannot be found within heterosexual love. At that point the narrator commits suicide and once again "removes" herself from the Basque Country. Home has moved elsewhere. Although the author keeps a distance from the character through a subtle irony, one can see how Elena's desire moves from the body of her male lover to the Basque nation and language. The religious and conservative components of *Basilika* reappear and negatively intimate the impossible object of Elena's desire: a non-heterosexual, non-male, national body.

She emptied the entire bottle of pills in her mouth. With no fear or hesitation. To carry out her decision. The next day, Karl would find Elena's hardened corpse, remembering the beautiful story of Romeo and Juliet. Excellent end. My soul is singing hymns... the innocent angels of a new celebration... For I will be forever the good girl that I am now... the golden chalice in the priest's hands. She opened the bible, on the pages of the Ecclesiastics, to die with honor in a Basque fashion... Yes. In these miserable countries, only the oppressors died of a natural death. The others, we, covered with shame and impotence, suffered death every minute... Elena lost consciousness. Whispering the new slogan "euskara [Basque language], ours, yours..." (100-1, my translation)

Only in her later novels does this lonesome, wandering female character find the object of her desire: women. But her new lesbian (and sometimes bisexual) desire allows her to once again displace her longing for the mother elsewhere. Her longing does not find its object in the actual bodies of her female lovers but in the "absent, national body" of the Basque Country. In her next two novels, *Bakean utzi arte* (1994, *Till They Leave Us in Peace*) and *Amorezko pena baño* (1996, *Just Love Sick*), the personal loneliness of the female character takes a professional turn: the protagonist is a rural private detective. This professionalization of the lonely lesbian subject is both a literary and historical relocation. On the one hand, Borda has found a literary genre in which the longing lesbian self locates a tradition that, although male in its genealogy, can be easily reappropriated for her own uses. As Sally R. Munt claims:

Can the mythically misogynistic monological male hard-boiled detective be transformed by a lesbian-feminist reading? Two archetypal traits lend the potential. First, he is a crusader, traditionally representing and reasserting with moral certitude the *status quo*, a redemptive figure, single-handedly stemming the tide of chaos... Aspects of feminism too were characterized by these same tendencies of evangelist salvation ("I was an

unhappy heterosexual until I found Women'), tempered, in the late 1980s, with a re-emphasis on discovery of 'self' and subjectivity. (120)

Following several critics, and recalling Judith Butler's theorization on sexuality and performance, I would suggest that the lesbian private detective is not a break or deviance from the traditional male canon. Rather the opposite, the lesbian private eye makes retrospectively clear that the lonesome male detective, in all its shades of *noir*, was simply performing masculinity. The detective genre is about performing lonesome and melancholic masculinity. Whether men or women can perform this type of masculinity is a historical development contingent upon women's struggle for equality rather than their performative abilities. In this sense, Borda's characters become "the redemptive figures, single-handedly stemming the tide of *nationalist* chaos." On the other hand, as nationalism has finally taken an institutional and political shape at least in the Southern Basque Country, any subject that wants to wander throughout the nationalist landscape needs to take a specific public shape as well. In this respect too, Borda's lesbian detectives follow the other main tradition Munt points out as constitutive of the detective genre:

Second, the detective hero is an outlaw, and here the parallel with lesbianism is clear. He is alone, isolated, on the edge, an observer, not a participator. This motif of lesbian identity has been imposed and internalized ever since *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), occasionally transformed by an inversion which endows lesbians with a superior vantage point from which to analyze the vagaries of institutionalized heterosexuality. So, the detective hero exhibits a paradox: he is at once a representative of society and a critique of it. (120)

The profession of private eye gives Borda's characters a public and private identity that allows them to pursue their search for the nationalist mother —mother-land and mother-tongue— from the edge, without participating in national reality. In this search, the lesbian detective becomes both the nationalist crusader and the critic of nationalism. She is the denouncer of the motherly loss as well as its melancholic restorer.

From this double relocation within the nationalist Basque Country, Borda's two detective novels show the same structure of longing. The detective novels begin by presenting the new case assigned to the detective while also describing her longing for an absent female lover. At the end of the novel, once the case is solved, the absent lover comes back and gives closure not only to the detective's quest for truth —the assigned case— but also to her quest for identity and desire. Moreover, the order of events is not coincidental. The detective's longing for the absent lover can only be fulfilled once the assigned case is solved. In other words, the detective's desire can only be solved once truth is restored. As I will discuss later on, the assigned cases are not simply circumstantial problems concerning private clients. As the detective investigates, both cases gradually unravel a national dimension. They are threads of a larger national tapestry. The solution to both cases requires disentangling a national, political problem. In *Bakean utzi arte* (1994, *Till They Leave Us in Peace*), the case concerns the plans of an energy company to build a gas pipeline that will cross

the entire region of Soule and change its geographic and economic landscape. In *Amorezko pena baño* (1996, *Just Love Sick*), a simple case of a car accident and consequent amnesia reveals the plans of an American military base in Navarre to expand its field of action at the expense of the local population's safety. Thus, only when national truth is explained and solved can the detective's personal desire be fulfilled. Although the detective's desire is symbolically sanctioned by the return of a lesbian body (the lover) at the end of the novel, ultimately it is directed towards unraveling the truth of another body: the national body. Only when the detective's desire to grasp, unravel, and represent the truth of the national body is solved, can she proceed to accept a lesbian body as a sanction of her national desire.

In *Amorezko pena baño* (1996, *Just Love Sick*), as she returns from the region of Navarre in which the American military base is located (Bardeak/Las Bardenas), the detective closes her interior monologue by abandoning herself in the arms of her lover, Zelda:

The dry smell of the Bardeak hardened me; I was a hiker, without possessions, without a house; the verb was courageous within me and the word echoed the impossible confession of the mediocre poet... Since I was able to cure Uritz's amnesia [assigned case], I realized that it was time to cure my own. The sharp, intrepid finger pointed to the direction and the task ahead. I was ready to spend all my nights with the same lover.

Erribera [area of south Navarre] was in my heart, begging for light and reassurance. The desert that I located in my mind would save me now. Only the geographers paid by the oppressor states calculated the rationally measured distances. The heart and matter of closeness and intimacy lied in the distance.

I was in the arms of Zelda. (203-4, my translation).

In her evocation of migrancy ("without a house") she captures its nature: as she internalizes the national landscape ("Erribera in my heart / the desert in my mind") and its problems ("oppressor states"), closeness and intimacy ("the heart and matter of closeness and intimacy") are not located in her lover's body but in the landscape that remains far away ("lied in the distance"). In other words, as she is about to embrace her lover, intimacy and closeness move away onto the national body she cannot embrace. She can only internalize the nation as loss in her mind and then proceed to embrace it in the lesbian body that stands for it.

Interestingly enough, the detective's desire and quest for the national body are always encoded as feminine. Her arrival to a new town or village is always sanctioned by the encounter with another woman whom she seduces or befriends. Moreover, most of the resources and knowledge the detective has or acquires in order to solve the problem derive from literature and history as told by female voices of authority. In other words, the national body is geographically, historically, and epistemologically encoded as female. The nation itself becomes an extended female body that the detective desires but never obtains in its incommensurability. In *Amorezko pena baño* (1996, *Just Love Sick*), a queen from the old kingdom of Navarre

(recreated as a literary character by the Basque romantic writer Villoslada) makes a magic appearance at the site where the detective is working. The queen then produces a magic beverage so that the detective can drink it and travel back in time and eventually gain insight into the case she is working on:

I was staring at the lady:

—Who are you?

—Lie down in bed [in a medieval sounding Basque] —asked the lady tenderly, and I got up from the ground.

Instead of arms, I had black and white wings; I realized I had the head of a bird. I was flying across nights, across centuries....

I did not know how long lasted the moment I turned into a bat. Nevertheless, when I woke up, the lady was sitting down on my bed by my side, silently, like a mother next to the feverish child, with a sad and pained look. She cleared her throat by coffin twice. Although she was about to talk, I repeated my question:

—Who are you?

—I am Zuriñe. The forgotten queen of Navarre.

—Zuriñe? But I thought you were just the invention of a romantic writer from Biana, Villoslada!

— - I have become the queen without a land. I gave you a beverage to drink and you saw the past. Raise your head! ... Those words were ours. I came to you to uplift my sorrows

The cries and laughs of the children of Argia school [Basque speaking school] were on my mind.... the wars carried out by the kings of Navarre in the name of greatness, the oppression we suffer nowadays, our situation of little hope towards a peace in which we can live with dignity and justice, and the case of Uritz. I stared at the rosy sky, admiring the sublime flight of the morning stork. I grabbed Zuriñe's elbow:

—And poor Uritz's encounter on the road to Argedas [her case]?

—I have given you strength to solve the case —she whispered and disappeared from my side. (110-12, my translation)

Every woman, every female voice becomes the marker of the extended national body the detective is trying to grasp, comprehend, and solve. Thus her desire is directed towards the national body as the latter disseminates itself over and through every woman encountered by the detective: every new place, clue, and case brings another woman and vice versa. As the detective of *Amorezko pena baño* (1996, *Just Love Sick*) states, she lives “in a big zapping of relationships” that take her “from town to town” (131). Ultimately her “zapping” or disseminating desire is directed to the impossible national mother she desires but cannot have. Desire moves restlessly through the national body so that it finally is never home. An intense lyricism rather than suspense

characterizes these novels. That is why this endless desire towards a disseminating, national body only stops when each individual case is solved. At that point the female lover comes back. She stops the detective's endless desire for the national body and stands for it. She locates and contains this national desire in her own body.

In her last book of poems, *Orain* (1998, *Now*), Borda writes about the actual loss of her biological mother. As Aurelia Arkotxa summarizes in her preface: "With the death of her mother, the poet's journey takes a new step: the wound is immense but the death have to be left with the death, 'Dust to dust.' The poet following the path of the Native-American medicine man, finds her way to cure" (14, my translation). Thus, Borda continues to migrate, to join other mutes who populate the mournful, globalized world of migrant melancholia.

Thus it is important to note that this dynamic of desire for the national mother is inextricably connected to lesbian sexuality. If the detective is a migrant subject looking for the nationalist mother she never had, it is precisely because her lesbian self is not threatened by the prospect of becoming one, unlike her heterosexual counterparts from the South. Indeed precisely because the detective cannot become the reproductive, heterosexual nationalist mother articulated and enforced by Basque nationalism, she desires it. She becomes the migrant subject looking for a motherland and -tongue. As I will discuss later on, Borda's linguistic choices also respond to the same migrant desire for the absent mother, one that is both mother-land and -tongue. Each word, each sentence, each dialectal choice, becomes a way to disseminate desire and represent the lack of a mother-tongue.

Finally, it is paramount to emphasize that, as Borda endlessly writes a "lesbian desire for the mother," this desire cannot be reduced to a personal or individual dimension —more precisely, to the familial psychodrama prescribed by psychoanalysis. Perhaps retrospectively one can trace the individual aspects of Borda's desire to her particular family psychodrama. However, her actual desire, as written and represented in her novels, is inextricably national, political, and geographic. It is not simply the desire for the biological mother of childhood, as psychoanalysis would have it, but rather for a more radical mother: a political, linguistic, and geographic mother. In this respect, although lesbian critical readings of psychoanalysis such as the ones effected by Teresa de Lauretis are useful in order to explain the libidinal mechanisms of desire, at the same time, these readings end up being very reductive.⁵ They reduce desire to an apolitical and ahistorical family psychodrama that is only present in middle-class, bourgeois families. In this respect,

(5) Teresa De Lauretis offers a similar explanation of the motherly loss and lesbian desire via Freud: I am arguing that the disavowal of castration is a force that propels the drive away from the originally lost object (the mother) and towards the object/signs that both acknowledge and deny a second, more consequential, narcissistic loss (the subject's own libidinally lost body-image), thus keeping at bay the lack of being that threatens the ego. This "displacement of value" (SE 23: 277) or transfer of affect onto the fetish allows the subject to reinvest libidinally in the female body, in other women, through its fantasmatic or intrapsychic image, of which the fetish is a metonymic sign." (265)

the analysis of Borda's work and desire reaffirms some of the criticisms raised by Third-World feminists of first-world, middle-class feminism.

Geopolitics

Borda's characters are never threatened and confined by the domestic space traditionally assigned to motherhood by Basque nationalism. It is not a coincidence that her first novels take place in carnivalesque spaces —town festivities, a Lourdes-like town— or that her later novels move to spaces of crime. These are public spaces in which domesticity is marginal. Furthermore, the literary convention of the lonely private-eye character allows her protagonists to travel throughout the Basque Country and map it while remaining in a permanent state of migrancy.

The detective's permanent migrancy also allows the author to literarily "re-produce" the Basque Country. Unlike most Basque literature written on either side of the French-Spanish border, Borda's narratives always cross this border and move on both sides so that they create a single space, precisely the one that constitutes the geography of the nationalist Basque Country. This crossing is a permanent feature in all her novels. Furthermore, crossing also affects the innermost part of the detective's own self: her desire. Usually the lover who appears at both the beginning and end of the novel comes from the opposite side in which the case takes place. When the case happens in Navarre, the lover is from Soule and vice-versa. In other words, the case and the lover overlap geographically so that the relationship between knowledge and desire is articulated across both states in a nationalist fashion.⁶

When I referred to crossing as a way to create a single national space, I meant it in a radical sense, too. Usually southern literature has never integrated the North in its attempts to represent the Basque Country. In its imperialism, the South has reduced the Basque Country to its Spanish side. The act of relegating the North to the nationalist geopolitical unconscious is actively pursued by the South because in this way the North becomes the South's other. The South usually invokes the North as the past —a past marked by the language of love and epic. In other words, the North is reduced to a literary site: not its present literature and culture but its oral tradition of the past, which in the form of ballads tells epic and romance stories. By relegating the North to the status of Other, the South becomes the only present and actual site of Basque nationalism. Furthermore, Spanish areas in which Basque has receded over the last 100 years and thus no longer is spoken by a sizable portion of the population are also relegated to oblivion by southern nationalism.

Borda, very conscious of this double oblivion effected by southern nationalism, organizes an alternative space that runs across the North and the Spanish-speaking South so that the central territory of Basque nationalism is moved to the background. By establishing a connection between both relegated areas while actively crossing the

(6) Furthermore, more regional differences are recorded in order to create a permanent sense of crossing. When the detective travels to Soule to solve a case, she will come from another province and so the fact that she is not Souletin will be inscribed as a meaningful identity in her novel: she is a "manexa" (*Bakean utzi arte* 120).

state border that separates them, Borda creates a marginal space that is *constitutively* marginal to Basque nationalism. Yet, only a nationalist writer would think of connecting both marginal spaces. In this way she maps and represents a space that is *constitutively more nationalist* than the one traditionally represented by southern nationalism. One could argue that the nationalist space of southern literature is Basque but ultimately remains Spanish, whereas Borda's is neither French nor Spanish but both and so it only exists in the Basque nationalist imaginary.

Furthermore, by limiting the area of action of her novels to sites, institutions, discourses, and people who naturally speak Basque (ikastolas or Basque-speaking schools, literature, political activists, music etc.) she also redefines this nationalist space as inherently limited by Basque language. In other words, Basque is the cognitive and historical limit of this Basque nationalist space that she represents in its marginality. In the case of *Bakean utzi arte* (1994, *Till They Leave Us Alone*), the popular ballad "Goizean goizik" becomes a clue to the case (114). In the same novel she renders a Basque poem by Gabriel Aresti originally written in standard into Souletin (109). In other words, she is the first writer to fully imagine an allegory of the Basque Country and then map it in all its historical and linguistic contradictions through the literary convention of the private detective. As a result Borda is actively creating a Basque Country that has never previously existed as literary representation.

As a result of this attempt to "recreate" a nationalist, geographical body, Borda assembles realities that are otherwise separated by hegemonic Basque nationalism. So much so that she depicts the active encounter of geographic, cultural, and linguistic realities that southern nationalism keeps separate in order to legitimize its own centrality. In *Bakean utzi arte* (1994, *Till They Leave Us Alone*), for example, Borda has three characters from three marginal dialects speak to each other in a way that only nineteenth-century dialectal collections once did. As a result, the marginal dialects of both the South and the North address each other bypassing the central dialect (Gipuzkoan) of Basque nationalism. The encounter between these three dialects does not happen in hegemonic nationalist land and so the effect is not one of recentring Basque nationalism but rather of decentering its hegemony.

Several contemporary cultural theorists (García Canclini and Bhabha) have called this process of culturally reorganizing objects and texts deriving from different geopolitical realities "hybridation." In the case of Borda, this hybridation of spaces and dialects has a disseminative effect. The Basque Country is no longer anywhere: each place and dialect disseminates the appearance of the mother-land and -tongue. As the standardization and centralization of Basque language and culture in the South have pushed some cultural and dialectal traditions to the periphery, the latter have returned to their local traditions in order to claim their regional differences as a form of resistance to standardization and centralization. At the same time, as each peripheral tradition has attempted to unify its own local resources, this unification has also created a second wave of standardized forms. Yet, this second wave of peripheral standardization has also become subject to further local resistance and further peripheral standardization, in a potentially endless cycle of standardization and peripheral resistance. For example, nowadays there is a "standard" Biscayan

dialect, which just few years ago did not exist. At the same time, people who speak other Biscayan local varieties feel now discriminated by “standard” Biscayan —just the same way Biscayans originally did. Now, for example, the speakers of the Biscayan variety of the Deba valley feel discriminated by the standardization of Biscayan, which is based on the variety from Markina, etc. In other words, standardization has created a peripheral rebellion which no longer is standardized but can no longer “genuinely” become local either for resistance requires unification and thus ultimately standardization.

This process of dissemination and hybridation is innovatively captured in Borda’s work because ultimately hybridation implies disseminating desire for the mother-tongue: a home language that does exclude by law any speaker regardless of his or her dialect. Ultimately, hybridity creates permanent migrancy, linguistic and cultural.

Class and the Economy of Hybridation

Hybridation, as explained above, does not stop at the borders of Basque nationalism’s geography, culture, and language. Because Borda’s writing is not hegemonic but at the same time remains nationalist, the process of hybridation in her work starts within the borders of the Basque Country but expands outwards into global culture. Hers is probably one of the most inclusive bodies of literature as far as hybridation is concerned. Her novels include endless references to global culture, detective stories, road films, reggae, rock, etc. Also, archaic, rural, and camp forms of Basque culture are incorporated into her work in innovative ways. The almost obliged visit paid by the detective to the shepherds of the area in each novel is part of this hybridation of non-modern elements of Basque culture. Such moments pay tribute, a hybridated tribute, to the foundational narrative of the Basque novel: costume literature (*obiturazko literatura, costumbrismo*) and more specifically Txomin Agirre’s *Garoa* (*Fern*). Furthermore both Spanish and French are spoken in her work. In *Bakean utzi arte* (1994, *Till They Leave Us Alone*), one can read the following “Basquized” French and Spanish dialogues:

Dressed with the T-shirt of the rock group Negu gorriak:

—Ke no jode, ke no! [in Spanish in the original but transcribed with Basque ortography: “fuck no, no way!”]

—Te digo ke si. Ai ikastolas i gaueskolas aki. [in Spanish in the original but transcribed with Basque ortography: “I am telling you. There are Basque-speaking schools and night schools here!”]

—Es una pelmada en realidad. [in Spanish in the original “after all, a bummer”]

—Nothing happening here. It’s very underdeveloped... Me gusta Xiberoa pues. [in Spanish in the original but transcribed with Basque ortography: “I love Xiberoa, then.” The first sentence is in Biscayan Basque, not standard Basque] (92-3)

...

—Have you seen this man in his workplace these days?

—No ja le pa vü. Me ier kalkixox bizar le paze. [in French in the original but transcribed with Basque orthography: “No, I have not seen him. But yesterday something strange happened to him”]

—Kua? [in French in the original but transcribed with Basque orthography: “what?”] (96, my translation)

In other words, because Borda's version of nationalism is not centered and hegemonic but migrant and marginal, it allows for the incorporation and hybridation of global culture in a way that official nationalist Basque culture does not. If Borda longs for an absent national mother, this melancholic migrancy generates a dissemination that opens up Basque culture to global culture. In this sense Borda's work underscores the fact that the relationship between gender, sex, and nationalism is central to the understanding of Basque culture.⁷ As I discuss elsewhere, hegemonic Basque nationalism is centered on an absent masculinity that stands for the former's non-sovereign but hegemonic position. Basque nationalist hegemony is masculine but absent in most cultural representations. This absent masculinity erases cultural difference through violence and relegitimizes itself as the only possible subject of Basque culture (“Uncanny Identity”). Daniel Calparsoro's *Salto al vacío* (1995, *Jump in the Void*) is the newest and most paradigmatic filmic representation of this absent yet hegemonic, nationalist masculinity. Because Basque nationalism erases difference, it cannot tolerate hybridation. At this crossroad one can begin to understand the political importance of Borda's work.

The fact that the publishing house Susa puts out Borda's work can be understood as a result of the relationship between hegemonic nationalist culture and hybridation. Susa has published most of the Basque literary production that in one way or another subverts in carnivalesque ways official, nationalist, Basque culture. As Jackie Urla's research proves, cultural hybridation and political contestation go hand by hand in the Basque Country. Interestingly enough, this hybrid, contestatory culture is the one most aware of globalization as well as most playful about the political and utopian potential of hybridation. However, in most cases hybridation is short-circuited in order to uphold nationalist masculinity, as in the example of Xabier Montoya's work, especially his *Emakume biboteduna* (1992, *A Woman with a Mustache*).⁸ In the case of Borda, dissemination characterizes her entire work.

In this sense Borda's work raises questions about the important relationship between nationalism and hybridation. Borda's high levels of hybridation underscore the intolerance hegemonic nationalisms exhibit towards hybridity. In official, nationalist Basque culture borders—cultural, linguistic, and geographic—must be respected as clear demarcations that expunge ambiguity. Borda's work instead helps us to understand that the presence of Spanish, French, and English (global) language

(7) Atxaga's work for example is fragmentary not hybrid. It responds to the old tenets of modernism. He cannot tolerate hybridation although his younger production (*Etiopia*) did.

(8) Although most of his previous work was published with Susa this specific volume was published with the most mainstream press: Elkar. It was met with praise throughout the nationalist spectrum.

and culture is an important component of Basque nationalist culture. Their presence must be hybridated in celebratory ways, for their denial brings nationalism to cultural and political paranoia or suicide (in the form of conservative and policing purism). Borda's work emphasizes the necessity of accepting the migrant nature of any nationalist cultural enterprise in late capitalism. She stresses the fact that nowadays only those elements of Basque culture that can afford hybridation can reveal their global dimension; only the dissemination of Basque culture into Spanish, French, and English proves that indeed Basque culture is part of global culture, not the other way around. On the other hand, one can conclude that only the interests of a social class, which needs to keep hold of the nationalist hegemony in the Basque Country, require the denial of hybridation and the affirmation of purity. In this respect hybridation has the economic and political potential for reinventing Basque culture beyond hegemonic southern nationalism.

Finally, but most importantly, Borda's work reminds us that hybridation reveals the migrant nature of Basque culture. Once migrancy is accepted, Basque nationalism is decentered and no position can claim the "home position." Just as Borda is a French-Basque writer, southerners are clearly marked by their Spanish location: they are Spanish-Basques. As a result, other Basques living in the diaspora, most of them American-Basques, become just as central as anybody else to the new hybrid, migrant location of Basque culture. To refer to William Douglas's formulation of "hyphenated Basque identities," Borda's work and its hybridation reminds us that all Basques are hyphenated. There is no "non-hyphenated, original" Basque position. Any purist tendencies within Basque nationalism stress the hegemony of southern Basque nationalism. Southern Basque nationalism is in need of the mirroring, negative image of Spanish nationalism, and as a result tends to promote purism and non-hybridated identity forms (non-Spanish, purely Basque). No other form of Basque nationalism is caught in this problem. Although all Basques are marked by the longing for a Basque national body (linguistic, cultural, geographic, etc.) the hybridation of Basque culture and its global dissemination point to a different reality. All of us are hyphenated and so the non-hyphenated national body—motherland and mothertongue— does not exist but as desired body: the absent body of the mother.

However, and unlike most American versions of hybridation (García Canclini, Bhabha, and Anzaldúa), the one proposed by Borda is nationalist and so allows for a specific location: the Basque Country. In other words, Borda does not belatedly infiltrate some new form of global consumerism and commodification under the rubric of "migrancy" or "globalization." Her hybridation is clearly situated as both global *and* Basque.

Pleasure and Melancholia

I forgot to add that the vision of *The Mute* in Herzog's film made me melancholic, universally mournful, in a way that I only understood later when reading Freud's essay on mourning and melancholia. It is not a coincidence that a very similar and profound sense of melancholia pervades Borda's work. A lyrical and

vital contemplation of the Basque Country, always wrapped in melancholia, defines her work. Precisely this very same Basque Country that pushes her into migrancy makes her melancholic. It is a radical and political melancholia, an outmost migrancy, which only a mute can experience to its full extent. This melancholia is central to the understanding of Basque literature, for as Freud lucidly pointed out, melancholia hints at the loss of identity and desire. We feel melancholia because all the mutes share one language, the language of loss. But unlike Freud, Borda and all the "radical, migrant mutes" announce a different type of loss, a different type of melancholia: one that is productive of identity and desire. Borda proposes a different type of loss. The migrant who does not stand in a position of power cannot lose it. Thus in the case of migrancy, melancholia becomes a way to gain a position of power by simulating loss. Borda proposes a different model from Freud's: what if we first have to lose an object, pretend that we lost it, in order to desire and find it? What if loss precedes the lost object? What if loss is a way to find desire and identity? What if loss is a political strategy to gain power?

In the case of hegemonic, Basque nationalism, negating difference through violence is the main way to produce culture (from terrorism to cinema). As I elaborate elsewhere, this violent dynamic is generated by the mirroring effect that Spanish and (southern) Basque nationalisms have on each other. Only by negating itself can (southern) Basque nationalism become desirable to Spanish nationalism (Uribe's *Los días contados*, 1994; *Numbered Days*) and only by negating Spanish nationalism can (southern) Basque nationalism regain an identity (Atxaga's *Obabakoak*). In this respect, Borda is the voice, the reminder, of a lost Basque Country, the one negated by hegemonic Basque and Spanish nationalisms. Borda's work is a detective-like search for all the traces of Basque culture that hegemonic nationalism negates and relegates to the periphery through violence. In this sense, melancholia is always on the verge of utopia, and so Borda's work is also a "memory" of everything that the Basque Country might regain, recuperate, and, as a consequence, become. In this sense, The Mute is the most important person to listen to, and so is Borda herself.

It is clearly the case that southern hegemonic nationalism represents the second moment in history in which nationalism has been able to form a political and social Basque body (The Autonomous Basque Community of Spain). The first time was the short interval at the end of the second Spanish republic. Thus, and practically speaking, the democratic period following the death of the dictator Franco is the first time Basque nationalism has organized itself as a geopolitical reality. In order to consolidate this founding nationalist community for the first time in history, other areas of Basque culture have been pushed to the periphery. The confusion around the term "Basque Country" is a good example of this displacement. "Basque Country" refers to all regions in which Basque culture is present. But at the same time, "Basque Country" stands for its nationalist, political realization: the Autonomous Basque Community of the Spanish state. Thus while the "Basque Country" has come into existence for the first time, some of its regions have also been lost. Here I use the term "lost" because they have never participated in the political formation of the Basque Country but, at the same time, remain a part of

it. In this sense, loss precedes and makes possible gain. Certain parts of the Basque Country have never been politically incorporated into the (Spanish Autonomous) "Basque Country" and so have been lost before the "Basque Country" has been formed. For example, when southerners go to Soule to attend a cultural event such as a pastoral, they experience the pastoral as a lost Basque cultural object or event. However, this lost object has never belonged to the political Basque Country in the first place. In this sense, loss comes first and makes us melancholic. But melancholia can also become actively political and utopian in the sense that makes us want to create, expand, and produce a future and utopian Basque Country that will include all forms of loss. In this sense, loss becomes productive, provocative, mobilizing. Melancholia thus becomes a form of politics, and as I will discuss below, also a productive form of identity and desire.

At this point it is worth rereading Freud's formulation of melancholia in order to fully understand its political potential for nationalist formations. Freud formulates melancholia by stating that the loss of a person or object of affection creates a libidinal loss. The libidinal feeling for this loss then is redirected inwards towards oneself and so becomes a loss within oneself, a loss of one's own self (or ego). At the end, one's own self becomes both the subject responsible for the loss as well as the lost object:

An object-choice, an attachment of the libido to a particular person, had at one time existed; then, owing to a real slight or disappointment coming from this loved person, the object-relationship was shattered. The result was not the one of a withdrawal of the libido from this object and a displacement of it on to a new one... The object-cathexis proved to have little power of resistance and was brought to an end. But the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an *identification* of the ego with the abandoned object. Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego, and the latter could henceforth be judged by a special agency, as though it were an object, the forsaken object. In this way an object-loss was transformed into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification. (248-49)

Afterwards, Freud explains the pleasure derived from loss as manifesting in a regression to a narcissistic phase, in which self-punishment becomes the main form of pleasure since the ego is both the subject responsible for the loss as well as the lost object: "The self-tormenting in melancholia, which is without doubt enjoyable, signifies... a satisfaction of trends of sadism and hate, which relate to an [lost] object, and which have been turned around upon the subject's own self in the ways we have been discussing" (251). However, if the logic of loss I sketched above is incorporated to the Freudian analysis, one might begin to understand the intricate and productive logic of melancholia actualized by Borda's texts. Her work proposes the following logic: What if I do not have a (national) ego or self, if I am migrant? What if I simulate loss in order to gain an ego or self? What if loss precedes the formation of

the self and its identity? Or more generally, what if I simulated a loss, I desired loss, in order to then acquire an identity? In other words, Borda's novels generate the loss of a mother who never existed in the first place in order to then create desire for this lost mother. The result is that Borda's novels create a desiring subject with a very specific identity.

Freud makes identity precede desire, but Borda reverses this order as a way to gain identity. What in Freud is an act of "self-tormenting" becomes in Borda's work a desire for identity, even the very formation of identity. Borda's logic then does not derive its pleasure from "sadism and hate" but rather the other way around, from a process of separation, differentiation, and production in which her national, lesbian self comes slowly to the fore. The process of desiring the loss of the national mother separates her from that loss while at the same time gives her an identity: her desiring, lesbian, national self. In this way, Borda's wandering through the national landscape and language becomes a strategy for finding and articulating her lesbian, national self. Each place and word become a signifier of the loss of the national mother and thus also a signifier of Borda's desiring, national, lesbian self.

At the same time, as I have discussed above, the serial process of dissemination (always another word, another place, another woman) does not end within the confines of national culture. Through hybridation, dissemination opens up Borda's self to global culture, thus making it a globally located, Basque, national, lesbian self. Borda's heterosexual, Basque counterparts define themselves by either negating global culture (hegemonic masculinity) or exiling themselves outside national culture (heterosexual women's writing). However dissemination is not endless in Borda's work. Her novels do not end with a universal melancholia that threatens to dissolve her national, lesbian self into global culture and capitalism. The female lover that returns at the end of her novels stops this dissemination, this universal melancholia. At the end of the novel, Borda's characters find a place in the Basque Country, a place in the world: the migrant but national space oscillating between the lover and the lost mother. This is the melancholic, migrant space Borda occupies.

I want to conclude by revisiting Herzog's film once again. The filmic narrative does not give us a chance to follow *The Mute*. He disappears in the middle of the film, never to come back. If for a moment we were to imagine his story, if he were to write down his story, he still would remain *The Mute*. But at the same time, he could write the story of a loss that every other Mute could understand, only if the right linguist were to decipher his language. In the same way, Borda's texts remain difficult; they might even require the help of a linguist or critic—perhaps even another mute such as myself. Even I am not sure I understand her language yet. But at the same time, mutes are telling one of the most universal stories of global culture. They, or we, speak the same language, the language of loss. In the case of Borda I hope that her silent language will find other mutes in the Basque Country. I hope she turns the Basque Country into a mute culture. For mute culture is politically, socially, and economically more utopian than contemporary hegemonic nationalist Basque culture. Or so I think, the other mute from the USA.

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