

University of Massachusetts Amherst

From the Selected Works of Jacqueline L. Urla

2014

Review of Reclaiming Basque by Kathryn Woolard

Jacqueline Urla, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/jacqueline_urla/12/

distinguishing signifier from signified—to recognize fraud in a document he could not read.

References cited

- Allen, Catherine J.
2002[1988] *The Hold Life Has: Coca and Cultural Identity in an Andean Community*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre
1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rama, Ángel
1996 *The Lettered City*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Salomon, Frank
2004 *The Cord Keepers: Khipus and Cultural Life in a Peruvian Village*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Salomon, Frank, and George Urioste, eds. and trans.
1991 *The Huarochiri Manuscript: A Testament of Ancient and Colonial Andean Religion*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo
1998 Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 4(3):469–468.

Reclaiming Basque: Language, Nation, and Cultural Activism. *Jacqueline Urla*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2012. xiv + 275 pp.

KATHRYN A. WOOLARD

University of California

The Basque language revival movement has become almost impossible for outsiders (within Spain as well as internationally) to perceive except through a filter associating it with radical Basque nationalism and its armed incarnation, ETA (Basqueland and Freedom). As Jacqueline Urla recounts in the epilogue of this book, a Spanish cultural elite and the central Spanish state under socialist as well as conservative leadership have ever more insistently imposed this filter in recent decades.

In this superb ethnographic work of the heart and mind, Urla brings Basque language activism into new focus, analyzing it principally within Foucault's framework of governmentality, the management of the social and the self that arose with modernity. Although the concept of "governmentality" is often applied in sharp critiques of neoliberalism, Urla's goal is not to evaluate the various specific forms of language activism she examines as either good or bad. Rather, her sympathetic critique of the Basque language revival reveals the logics, modes of power, and conceptualizations of "language" in the modern landscape in which the revival moves. She shows that although language activism transforms linguistic habitus from doxa into a matter of conscious ideology, it at the same time naturalizes certain ways of understanding language, for example, as

a measurable object of planning. By denaturalizing rather than indicting or glorifying Basque language planning efforts, Urla hopes to contribute in the longer run to what she calls "linguistic democracy" (p. 206). Throughout, the book is a thoughtful analysis of the way that a revival movement, no matter how radical, draws on and disseminates a view of language as an object to be governed and as a social field of technical intervention. The Foucauldian analytic apparatus Urla draws on is explained clearly and worn lightly and is all the more effective for this.

As Urla points out, language revival has been marginalized not only in state politics but also in academic discussions of social movements. At best, there is often condescension toward language movements and stigma attached to them as "divisive" and "backward-looking" (p. 6). They are generally taken seriously only when language is a proxy for other forms of social inequality. This study, in contrast, takes language-revival activism out of its specialty niche and places it in wider conversations about modern forms of power and resistance, exploring its modernity. Urla treats language difference as an axis of social stratification in its own right, not just in service of other ends or reducible to other struggles. Shifts in linguistic practice are not simply indicators of social change; they are in themselves social changes, involving tensions, ruptures, and awkwardness as new subjectivities take shape.

Unusually broad, sustained popular and civic engagement makes Basque language activism distinctive in Europe. *Euskalgintza*, the subject of this book, is a Basque conceptualization of language making as a participatory, inclusive collective project that cuts across traditional older and transgressive younger generations; conservative and radical politics; first- and second-language speakers; and poetics and managerial prose. The idea of making and remaking language as a gateway to Basque identity regardless of ethnic background is widely established in the community, although this has been poorly understood by outside commentators and analysts who continue to characterize Basque nationalism as racist or xenophobic (p. 204).

Separate chapters address the way that language activists refigured Basque (mythologized by Unamuno and others as permanently uncivilized) as a modern language; the use of statistics and other measurement techniques not just to represent but also to create distinct visions of the Basque language and nation; youth rebellion against the standardized Basque they perceived as sanitized and their recuperation of vernacular forms in alternative media; and new managerial techniques of linguistic activism. The core of some of these chapters will be familiar to some readers from much-cited earlier publications. However, this is a coherently integrated new whole.

Every chapter of this mature work brings the perspective of nearly thirty years of ethnography to bear on these various facets of language activism, interweaving

observations from Urla's first fieldwork in 1982–83 with her research in the 1990s and reports on events as recent as 2010. Across this time, there have been several sociopolitical realignments of the Basque language: from radical politicization in the 1960s and 1970s to incorporation under political autonomy into a governmental rather than popular domain of action; through a return to a depoliticized, affectively motivated frame for language renewal in the 1990s; to strategic adoption of entrepreneurial management techniques toward the turn of the millennium. Across this same time, vernacular speakers' early reaction against the standardized variety, *Batua*, as "monstrous" and "artificial" in the 1970s and 1980s has given way to broad acceptance (perhaps partly attributable to the "normalization" of *Batua* through incorporation in schooling). Urla describes an emergent conceptualization and appreciation of a non-hierarchical relation of complementarity between standard and vernaculars in more recent years.

Chapter 6, which has much to say to a broad audience concerned with neoliberal techniques of governance, addresses important shifts in discourses of language activism in the 1990s. Some evoke traditional culture, some appropriate entrepreneurial marketing methods, and some bring the two together. Accounting-culture techniques of "total quality management" (TQM) were adopted and adapted by activists to further the effort to extend Basque to new domains and new levels of use. Drawing on her own interviews with the innovators, Urla argues that this is best seen as self-aware, strategic appropriation of entrepreneurial methods by language activists, rather than as either ideological imposition or migration of expertise culture across spheres under neoliberalism. In her view, such techniques are neither exploitative nor progressive in themselves but, rather, represent the creative, deliberate response of activists to particular challenges. Nonetheless, such techniques are neither neutral nor inconsequential in their effects because they are deliberately designed to induce shifts in subjectivity.

This book has a strong argument, coherence, engaging accessibility, and a particularly welcome sensibility. Urla's authorial stance is at once critical and empathetic. I found especially moving the epilogue, where Urla recounts her own shock at recent unprecedented treatments by the Spanish state of Basque language activism as criminal activity, on the theory that all Basque cultural organizations function as ideological subsidiaries of ETA. Yet, drawing on solid ethnographic grounding, Urla succeeds in giving a judicious, complex view of the struggles of a minority movement without falling into hagiography on the one hand, or standard critiques of alleged retrograde provincialism or violent ethnic propensities on the other.

Working in Catalonia, another autonomous community subject to Spain's continued "possessive investment in monolingualism" as the preferred order of things

(p. 224), I well recognize both the political and analytical forms of marginalization that Urla describes. No doubt many researchers of other minority language movements will also recognize similar conditions and, thus, appreciate the acuteness of this analysis. However, this is more than a study of a minority language problem; it is an exploration of a significant social movement that has both persisted and been transformed over several decades. As such it has much to offer a broad audience of anthropologists, sociologists, and historians interested in social transformations of popular and political action in late modernity.

Culinary Capital. *Peter Naccarato and Kathleen LeBesco.* Oxford: Berg, 2012. 145 pp.

JANE FAJANS

Cornell University

The phenomenon of *culinary capital* has been around for millennia although the term is relatively recent. People and cultures have long determined what is desirable to eat either for status or for health, and have conferred social capital on those who conform to such norms. The term *capital* refers to a social relation or substance that confers value within a system of exchange and interaction. Much of what confers social status within the culinary domain derives its value from relative scarcity. Scarce goods, like spices or specialty items, became desirable because they were hard to acquire, but scarcity also led to inflated prices, so such foods became expensive and, thus, the possession of the wealthy. What the rich ate was long held in awe by those who had little or no access to it. As people move up the social ladder, they often eat "higher on the hog" than they did before. Foods are a mark of social status, but social status also reciprocally plays a role in what people define as desirable.

Naccarato and LeBesco base their book on the idea that status and power are associated with diet, especially in the contemporary United States. Their basic premise is that relatively well-off and educated people have absorbed the ideals for a "healthy" diet, which in the United States means one relatively low in fats and sugars, composed of ingredients that are fresh and preferably provided from organic or reputable sources. Such elite foodways become defined by cultural mediators like Michael Pollan. Second, the authors also recognize alternate pathways to culinary capital such as the elevation of omnivorousness and openness to experimentation across wide-ranging choices. The authors see these practices as aspects of a process of democratizing foodways and food choices, although they modify these evaluations by recognizing that "such a breadth of choices is itself a marker of class status ... and both models are available only to those with the economic resources