



**Samuel Amago.** *Basura: Cultures of Waste in Contemporary Spain*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2021. x + 239 pp. \$29.50, e-book, ISBN 978-0-8139-4593-4.

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Globally, the twentieth century transformed waste relationships. These changes caught the attention of historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnographers who scrutinize the stuff we scrap. First, World Wars I and II drove restricted public purchases and national recycling initiatives. In 1939, dictator Francisco Franco seized control in Spain with the support of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Post World War II, humans entered a new era: new, disposable, and convenient products drove higher rates of consumption and discard. Spain fully embraced this reality after the death of dictator Francisco Franco Bahamonde in 1975.

Samuel Amago confronts one of the central forces behind accumulation and abandonment: value. On the one hand, the capitalist urge to acquire more things symbolizes disposable income, wealth, and status. On the other hand, excessive accumulation mandates that we dispose of possessions to make room for new ones. Amago's *Basura: Cultures of Waste in Contemporary Spain* takes readers to a pivotal moment in modern Spanish history, the post-Franco period. Under Franco, the political regime "othered" and targeted undesirable humans. It also systematically killed and removed people from the body politic.

After his rule, Spaniards wished to trash the vestiges of dictatorship and rebuild and modernize Madrid and other urban centers. From the 1970s to the 1980s, Spain transitioned from a dictatorship to democracy and a neoliberal capitalist market. Simultaneously its institutions and people confronted rapid modernization, urbanization, and "the evolving social dynamics of trash making and the politics of disposal" (p. 4).

In six eclectic chapters that examine film, literature, architecture, politics, comics, and photography, Amago provides a "counter-narrative of contemporary Spanish culture" (p. vii). Through Pedro Almodóvar's films, chapter 1 discusses what waste meant in the last quarter of the twentieth century. While rebuilding, Spaniards sought to clean up the capital city and reclaim streets, plazas, and public spaces for the people. Madrileños forged a new civic identity dependent on cleanup. Almodóvar's 1988 film, *Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios* (*Woman on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*), captures the frenetic energy of an emerging political class and a nation obsessed with eradicating reminders of the past. In the film, the viewer can see dumpsters everywhere while the main character, Pepa, rejects temporal objects like an answering machine and sen-

timental souvenirs from a previous relationship. As the author notes, there is logic in the disposal—by throwing things away, a person can forge new social relations and curate her own space. Chapter 2 examines what happens when no one shows up to cart away the trash as happened during the Madrid Sanitation workers' strike. Modern capitalist systems of disposal depend on removal, and when "castoffs cease to disappear they make visible those systems and practices that have created them, calling attention to the logic of disappearance upon which global capitalism depends for its continued function" (p. 68). Chapter 3 critiques the unsustainability of this system via the work of photographers Jordi Bernadó and Oscar Carrasco. Both document the coexistence of decay and modernity in contemporary society and the creation of Junkspaces. Junkspaces embody neglected areas, which sometimes pop up overnight, where physical environments degrade, revealing "how architecture and physical spaces become objects of waste" (p. 95).

Part 2 shifts from "nonhuman materiality" to the "politics of memory and forgetting in post-dictatorship Spain" (p. 104). In chapter 4, the author contends that novelists act as literary archaeologists, uncovering forgotten events and bringing them into contemporary spaces and conversations. Novels can simultaneously recall and educate a generation of Spaniards who lack firsthand knowledge of those events. Chapter 5 turns from fiction to comics and the underlying waste economics. For example, democracy and neoliberalism transformed urban spaces while displacing and marginalizing the working and lower-middle classes. Finally, chapter 6 examines waste and selfhood in Rosa Montero's writing. This genre of waste fiction portrays characters as aware of their biological natures and the struggle to transcend the material body.

*Basura* reveals the human effort to erase political history and the cultural efforts to confront it. It could be used in the undergraduate or

graduate classroom with a range of course topics including modern European history, the environmental humanities, Iberian studies, film and literature, and waste studies. The book is written in an accessible format and students unfamiliar with Spain's recent history are provided the footing to engage the text and its core arguments.

This work connects with a growing international field on contemporary waste such as Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey's *Waste of a Nation*, which uses India to add caste, social class, and colonial legacies to complicate our understanding of materiality and modernization.[1] Another key study by Maite Zubiaurre confronts readers with waste's visibility in urban spaces and the meaning and self-reflection we can extract from it.[2] Adding to this corpus, *Basura* engages the core questions surrounding cultures of waste. What distinguishes it from other waste studies is the emphasis on erasure politics. From this vantage point, readers trace how politics and trash intertwine with the transition to democracy in modern Spain.

#### Notes

[1]. Assa Doron and Robin Jeffrey, *Waste of a Nation: Garbage and Growth in India* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[2]. Maite Zubiaurre, *Talking Trash: Cultural Uses of Waste* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2019).

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