Introduction

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Abstract

Spanish comics represent an exciting and diverse field, but with few exceptions they are unknown to most comics scholars outside of Spain. This is one important reason behind choosing the subject for not only one but two special issues of *European Comic Art*. Another reason is the opportunity to draw attention to the extensive comics research in Spanish, and a third is that a national comics focus such as this one contributes to two perspectives within comics research that are very much in vogue, namely transnational studies and memory studies. The six articles included in this issue contribute in different ways to one or all three of these concerns and, despite their necessarily limited number, represent a surprisingly broad spectrum of historical periods, genres and themes.

Keywords: children's comics, Galician comics, historical comics, new memory comics, social criticism, Spanish comics scholarship

This is the first of two special issues of *European Comic Art* dedicated to Spanish comics. Such a national focus may seem irrelevant, as all comics move beyond national borders and relate to comics from different places and countries in style, trends and traditions.¹ Moreover, the comics industry and comics audiences have been international or transnational phenomena for a considerable part of comics history, including those of Spain. In the case of Spanish comics, a common language unites the Spanish and Latin American comics and markets, but interactions with European (mostly Italian and Franco-Belgian) comics, US comics and, more recently, Asian comics and manga are also at work.

These features invite studies that move beyond the nation state and focus on comics and readers as part of 'multidirectional flows of peoples,

1 'Comic' is used here as a general term (including comic strips, series, books, and graphic novels).

ideas and goods' across national borders rather than as a phenomenon defined by its nationality.² Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, an explicit focus on transnational studies has shaped a wide range of research fields, including, to some extent, comics studies.³ A transnational focus 'questions the "naturalness" of political, geographical, and epistemological boundaries', but it does not render the national frame obsolete; it only draws attention to it as a construction.⁴ Comics are shaped by, and participate in the shaping of, the idea of the nation and the values and identities related to that idea. In this respect as well, the comics field seems to be on the move.⁵

Studying Spanish comics as part of transnational processes and of nation building are two good reasons for choosing a nation as a special issue theme. A third, more specific reason is that Spanish comics are only to a limited degree visible beyond Spanish borders and in English-language comics research. The explanations for the latter may be several, but at least one has to do with language, as comics research has traditionally been defined by publications in either English or French. With the two special issues on Spanish comics of *European Comic Art*, we hope that more non-Spanish reading comics scholars become familiar with the rich field of Spanish comics and Spanish comics research. The articles in this and the next special issue all draw on comics research in Spanish and make it clear that the field has become very lively in recent decades. The introduction to the next special issue will include a short overview of Spanish comics research and of research in English about Spanish comics.⁶

According to the historian Antonio Martín, Spanish comics history begins around the end of the nineteenth century primarily with illustrations and cartoons in newspapers, and it includes the same major

2 Shelley Fisher Fishkin, 'From the Editors', *Journal of Transnational American Studies* 1, no. 1 (2009), 1–4 (1).

3 An explicit example is Shane Denson, Christina Meyer and Daniel Stein, 'Introducing Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives', in *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics at the Crossroads*, ed. Shane Denson, Christina Meyer and Daniel Stein (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1–12.

4 Fishkin, 'From the Editors', 1.

5 Two explicit examples: Joel E. Vessels, *Drawing France: French Comics and the Republic* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2010) and Héctor Fernández L'Hoeste and Juan Poblete, eds, *Redrawing the Nation: National Identity in Latin/o American Comics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

6 Accordingly, the references to secondary literature in this introduction will be limited to a few works.

periods and themes as comics histories in other European countries.⁷ Nevertheless, this history was also shaped by particular Spanish phenomena, many of which are related to twentieth-century Spanish history. The Civil War (1936–1939) and the almost forty-year-long dictatorship (1939–1975) that followed set Spain apart in Western Europe.

This special issue begins with an article about a key period not only in twentieth-century Spanish history but also in the history of comics: the end of the Francoist dictatorship and the subsequent transition to democracy. This historical period is central to the understanding of Spanish comics history, as it saw the emergence of comics produced for adult audiences that were closely connected to the social, cultural and political protests of the time.

In his article, ‘Historicising the Emergence of Comics Art Scholarship in Spain, 1965–1975’, Antonio Lázaro-Reboll presents the emergence of Spanish comics criticism, which was, not surprisingly, closely related to the new comics development. Lázaro-Reboll analyses how cultural intermediaries – primarily publishing houses, magazines and comics critics – created the first generation of Spanish comics criticism and research. He shows how this process interacted with similar developments in France and Italy, and emphasises that the emergence of Spanish comics criticism was truly transnational. With his article, Lázaro-Reboll describes a crucial period in Spanish comics history that provided original theoretical arguments for its time and that has been largely unknown to most comics scholars outside of Spain. By opening this special issue, the article draws attention to the impact, both historically and presently, of increasing the exchange in scholarship across language barriers.

Comics for adults and comics scholarship were new phenomena in the 1970s, but comics for children had a rich history in Spain with their so-called golden age in the 1950s. In her article, ‘Dissenting Voices? Controlling Children’s Comics under Franco’, Rhiannon McGlade offers an overview of the interaction between comics publishers, censorship authorities and children’s comics during this golden age. She draws attention to the comics themselves and to the ways in which the regime tried to control the comics’ content and thereby to force a specific idea about Spain onto the children. McGlade introduces the development of this relationship in the first part of the twentieth century, but the analytical emphasis of her article is on 1950s humorous children’s comics.

7 Antonio Martín, *Historia del comic español: 1875–1939* [The history of Spanish comics: 1875–1939] (Madrid: Editorial Gustavo Gili, 1978).

McGlade's focus is primarily national, but she also argues that transnational processes were in play in the form of inspiration from foreign children's comics. Efforts to control children's literature were present in other European countries and the United States in this period, but the possibilities of control and punishment during a dictatorship set the Spanish comics market apart.

It is clear from McGlade's analysis that the big publishing houses practised self-censorship to a considerable degree. This was not the case, however, with the fanzines that emerged from the 1970s. They were publications outside of the mainstream that took part in the increasing protests and pressures against the dictatorship. The many new fanzines were provocative and loud and represented a radical rupture with the children's comics universe not only in publication practices, but also in style and theme. Retrospectively, they stand out as the most visible characteristic of 1970s comics.⁸ In the second special issue, some of these fanzines will be discussed.

One of the two comics discussed in Iain MacInnes's article, "For He Bestirred Himself to Protect the Land from the Moors": Depicting the Medieval Reconquista in Modern Spanish Graphic Novels', was published during the 1970s but was not part of the fanzine movement. It belonged to the genre of historical comics that were considerably less loud than the fanzines and that did not break with children's comics in the same way as they did.

A stereotyped version of the Spanish Middle Ages had been a key component in the Francoist efforts to shape a specific Spanish identity and had been a recurrent subject in children's adventure comics during the dictatorship. Against this background, it is interesting to see this component in MacInnes's comparison between the 1970s comic and a comic from 2016: the two offer complex and very similar narratives about the Spanish Middle Ages, despite the fact that they belong to two quite different time periods in Spanish comics history.⁹ In this

8 A few examples of academic books about this period are Antonio Altarriba, *Los tebeos de la Transición: Las historieta española en los setenta* [Comics of the Transition: Spanish comics in the 1970s] (Cuenca: Fundación Antonio Pérez, 2008); Pablo Dopico, *El cómic underground español, 1970–1980* [The Spanish underground comics, 1970–1980] (Madrid: Ediciones Cátedra, 2005); Francesca Lladó, *Los Cómic de la Transición: El boom del cómic adulto 1975–1984* [Comics of the Transition: The boom of adult comics 1975–1984] (Barcelona: Ediciones Glénat, 2001); Francisco Segado Boj, *Un país de chiste: El humor gráfico durante la Transición* [A country of jokes: Graphic humor during the Transition] (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 2012).

9 José Antonio Ortega Anguiano, *El Capitán Trueno: El gran héroe del tebeo* [Captain Thunder: The great hero] (Palma de Mallorca: Dolmen Editorial, 2012); Vicent Sanchis,

way, MacInnes's study shows that there are also important features of continuity within the comics field that may easily be overlooked. One feature that stands out with regard to the historical comics of this kind is the considerable influence of the Franco-Belgian comics tradition. This feature may explain the difference from the general trends in Spanish comics from the 1970s to the 2000s, and it draws attention to the importance of looking beyond national borders by taking on a transnational focus.

A key component of the 1960s and 1970s social and political protests in Spain was the question about the nation's historical regions and cultures, namely those of Catalonia, the Basque Country and Galicia. These regions had been heavily repressed during the dictatorship, and the comics scene – especially in the Catalan capital, Barcelona – was part of the radical political and cultural environment of the time.¹⁰ There were not equally strong or visible comics scenes in the Basque Country and Galicia, but there was nonetheless some comics activity.

In his article, 'From Pioneer of Comics to Cultural Myth: Castelao in Galician Graphic Biography', David Miranda-Barreiro begins with a short introduction to Galician comics history at the beginning of the twentieth century. The protagonist of Miranda-Barreiro's analysis is Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao, one of the founders of Galician nationalism, who was also a cartoonist who published cartoons and caricatures in newspapers and pamphlets. Miranda-Barreiro's focus is on how Castelao has been represented over time in a series of comics biographies from the 1970s to the 2000s. Within a national and transnational context, the Castelao comics biographies tap into two different trends. As part of the 1970s and 1980s, they participated in the general questioning of a united Spanish identity by strengthening the focus on regional cultures and history. In the early 2000s, the biographies became part of another broader, both national and international, trend that was focused on historical and/or personal memory.

An international interest in comics and memory gained speed from 2000, and in Spain it acquired a particular focus on memories of the Civil War and the dictatorship. The new memory comics and

Tebeos mutilados: La censura franquista contra Editorial Bruguera [Mutilated comics: Francoist Censorship Against Editorial Bruguera] (Barcelona: Ediciones B, 2010).

- 10 See e.g. Dopico, *El cómic underground español, 1970–1980*; Marina Hertrampf, 'Katalanischer Comic und movida barcelonesa: La noche de siempre von Montesol und Ramón de España', *Zeitschrift für Katalanistik / Revista d'Estudis Catalans* 25 (2012), 153–170; and Rhiannon McGlade, *Catalan Cartoons: A Cultural and Political History* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016).

the accompanying research was part of a broader movement in Spain concerned with historical memory.¹¹ Now, more than fifteen years after this process began in earnest, memory continues to be a central theme in many comics and in comics research, but the focus has shifted.

The specific focus on historical and social memory gave way to a stronger focus on personal memory, which is discussed in the article by Benjamin Fraser, 'Paco Roca's Graphic Novel *La Casa* (2015) as Architectural Elegy'. Through a close reading of the graphic novel, Fraser shows how architecture represents grief in sophisticated ways and dimensions. The analysis, as well as the comic, zooms in on the personal to such a degree that any potentially specific national (or transnational) references are left out. In this way, analysis and comic differ from the earlier focus on Spanish historical memory and represent a general human or existential theme that is very much in vogue in both European and US comics. At the same time, it points back to some of the most popular comics of the 1990s, creating continuity within Spanish comics history.¹²

It is not uncommon that historical studies characterise the present as more complex or diverse than historical periods further back in time. This seems to be the case also with regard to comics. Whether this is because the comics field actually *is* more diverse today, or because it is easier to simplify or generalise from a historical distance, is a question beyond the scope of this introduction. Still, diversity seems to have been a distinct characteristic of Spanish comics since the 2000s. The very limited number of articles described above involve several comics from 2000 to 2017 that are all Spanish but that represent very different genres and styles: a historical comic about the Spanish Reconquista, Galician comics biographies and a graphic novel about personal grief. With the last article, another important dimension is added, namely that of comics as social criticism.

In 'Social Criticism through Humour in the Digital Age: Multimodal Extension in the Works of Aleix Saló', Javier Muñoz-Basols and Marina

11 See e.g. Ana Merino and Brittany Tullis, 'The Sequential Art of Memory: The Testimonial Struggle of Comics in Spain', *Hispanic Issues On Line* 11 (2012), 211–225, <http://hdl.handle.net/11299/184372>; Anne Magnussen, 'The New Spanish Memory Comics: The Example of *Cuerda de presas*', *European Comic Art* 7, no. 1 (2014), 56–84.

12 See e.g. Pedro Pérez del Solar, *Imágenes del desencanto: Nueva historieta española 1980–1986* [Images of disenchantment: New Spanish comics 1980–1986] (Madrid: La Casa de la Riqueza, 2013), who discusses part of this history. The edited book by Viviane Alary, *Historietas, comics y tebeos españoles* [Spanish comics] (Le Mirail: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2002), includes several studies about comics during the 1980s and 1990s. See also Anne Magnussen, 'Spanish Comics and Politics', in *Comics & Politik*, ed. Stephan Packard (Berlin: Ch. A. Bachmann Verlag, 2014), 157–178.

Massaguer Comes analyse how the comics artist Saló uses different media in his critical, humorous and informational comments about the economic crisis in Spain from 2008 and onwards. The analysis draws attention to the regional, national and transnational dimensions of Saló's work, which are due not least of all to the various media involved. In this sense, it is very much a comic of its time, but, as the authors argue, Saló draws on a long tradition of Spanish comics artists and cartoonists, going back to the first emergence in the 1970s of magazines and fanzines for an adult audience and their political and social activism. Its combination of comics history or tradition and new, transnational media makes the article an apt ending to this first special collection of Spanish comics articles.

Albeit digressively, this introduction mentions more or less all major periods in Spanish comics history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: Castelao as a representative of some of the century's first newspaper and pamphlet cartoonists; the golden age of Spanish children's comics during the Francoist dictatorship; the emerging political and cultural consciousness and changes in the 1960s that engendered both comics for adults and the first Spanish comics scholarship; the political transition of the 1970s and its social and political activism; and the diversity of the comics field since the 2000s – including historical comics and biographies, intimate themes such as personal grief, and social activism. One period that is missing is the 1980s and 1990s, although it is not a deliberate omission. This was the period of the democratic stabilisation and European integration of Spanish society, and in comics history it combined several generations of comics artists, including the first and (by then) mature generation of comics artists from the 1970s and a young and very active new generation. The international influences were many, from the Franco-Belgian *ligne claire* to the continuing inspiration from underground comics.

In different ways and to different degrees, all the articles show how their objects of analysis can be understood when taking into account regional, national and transnational processes. This will also be the case with the articles included in the second special issue (vol. 11, no. 2), where other comics, generations and trends will be discussed and will contribute to a more general picture of Spanish comics, albeit one that is far from complete. The introduction to the next issue of *European Comic Art* will include an overview of the most recent research on Spanish comics.