

◆ Chapter 1

Comics: A Three-dimensional Art

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The comic is about to reach the one-hundred-year mark. Of course, the medium dates back much further than the previous century, but it was only in the 1930s that it took on its true dimensions. Thus, it is no longer possible to consider a comic solely in its immediacy, but instead one also must consider its context. As Jennifer Howell observes in *Popularizing Historical Taboos, Transmitting Post-memory*, each historical comic is the product of its time; it is both a tale of history and a historical object. Moreover, it encompasses three distinct chronological periods: the time of the related facts, the time of the creation of the comic itself, and finally the time of its reading. In other words, graphic literature which takes as its subject a certain occurrence from the past not only provides information about the historical event itself, but also about the society that remembers it—the same society from which the comic originated—and about the societies that read it, with specific prejudices within any of these groups. This multiplicity of contexts confers on the comic art a dimension beyond the two that exist on the page: time. That third dimension is as important, as complex, and as marvelous as the two others. Time is so much more than a date on a calendar, time is a form of thought.

It must be acknowledged that the historical comic does not represent history for two main reasons. The first is that, in its act of creation, a comic expresses only the artist's representation of a historical event, while the act of reading that comic presents other possible perceptions of that same event, the reader's representation being different from the creator's, and the former being as diverse and multiple as the readers who approach it. From this confrontation of representations, their coincidences and their oppositions, comes the meaning of the work. The second reason is that there is no stable historical reference with which to compare it. History as a discipline is constantly evolving and its approach to and reading of the facts of an event change according to the times and the societies from which the historian comes.

This approach to history applies to historical comics, of course, but also to all those disciplines working with the facts of society. The perception of the Spanish Civil War by historians and authors of comics is not the same in 1950, 1970, 2000 or 2020. The same goes for sociological or psychological topics such as relationships between men and women, relation to our own body, homophobia, etc. Each successive group claims to have the best point of view on history or society because they are the latest comers, but theirs is only one point of view among many, one which may well be subject to criticism or ridicule in the future. The consequences of this recognition are both inevitable and important when reintroducing the reader—and his subspecies, the analyst—into the process of analysis. No study will ever be relevant if we do not agree that all analysis must take into account the perceptions of the reader.

This position has major consequences: like a book, a film, a painting or a speech, a comic strip cannot be analyzed without recognizing the path of communication which runs from the author to the creation and from the creation to the reader. This confrontation between the author's and the reader's perceptions of historical facts or events may be consensual or conflictive, but whichever the case, it plays a major role in the pleasure of reading. While it may seem that this path linking author to reader by means of the artistic creation aligns with the referent-signifier-signified triptych proposed by many semiotics specialists, that linguistic triad nonetheless proves to be a trap for two main reasons. The first is that there is no definitive referent, no immutable historical reality with which to compare the comic. History, no less than fiction, depends on the society in which it is produced; it differs depending on the countries where it takes place and evolves over the years. The second reason is that there is no stable signifier, no bedrock consensus on what constitutes foregrounded history rather than background occurrences. What can be considered essential or paramount in one place at one time may be judged to be secondary or negligible in another place or another time. For example, while quite a number of works in the 1900s described the life and death of the poet Miguel Hernández, no Spanish comic dealt with a major figure of the Civil War period, Federico García Lorca, until the 2010s. Then came an avalanche of works: *La huella de Lorca* (2011), *La araña del olvido* (2015), *Lorca, un poeta en Nueva York* (2016), *Vida y muerte de Federico García Lorca* (2018) and *Residencia de Estudiantes* (2019). Similarly, Chilean comics long avoided representing the end of Allende and then, suddenly, several works were published on the subject, such as *¡Maldito Allende!* (2017) and *Los años de Allende* (2018). Is there some mighty celestial architect who decides that one aspect in history is to be neglected in one period of time only to be widely represented in another?

After the end of the dictatorship, Spanish comics about the Civil War experienced two significant surges in publications, the first one during the 1970s and

1980s, the second in 2000s and 2010s, while very few comics were published on the subject in the 1990s. These differing treatments of the same historical event are paralleled in other cultural products; for example, in dealing with the representation of the Civil War in Spanish language textbooks in France, Denis Rodrigues identifies three distinct periods: the first between the 1960s and the 1980s, with a strong pro-Republican political argument, the last in the 2000s with a more philosophical and anthropological analysis, and an in-between period, from 1987 to 2002, qualified as “programmed amnesia” (153–67).

It is generally acknowledged by Spanish War memory specialists that the 1990s is a pivotal period between the idea of memory as reconciliation, as elaborated in the 1970s–80s, and that of memory as reclamation in the 2000s. Spanish comics follow the same pattern: in the first decade of democracy, they deplore wartime miseries, advocate for reconciliation, and avoid showing Franco’s side. Meanwhile, works after 2000 are far more controversial. Comics do not come exclusively from isolated individual initiatives, but rather they are both included in and participate in the elaboration and reproduction of dated social representations.¹

History Quicksands

“L’Histoire est une et l’on peut dire qu’il n’y a qu’une Histoire” (136) (History is one and we can say that there is only one history). Maurice Halwachs makes this declaration in his effort to distinguish between history and individual memories. This claim of history’s permanence and universality, however, has been widely questioned. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and Jocelyn Létourneau emphasize that in historical discourse “Le passé, bien que matière inerte et finie, semble continuellement se mouvoir, changer d’aspect, de figure, de sens” (17) (the past, although inert and finite matter, seems to continually move, change its aspect, its shape, its meaning). History itself, like fiction, has a trajectory and depends on the societies and the time periods which produce it.

This fluidity is due to the very nature of historical work. Paul Ricoeur points out that the only difference between a history book and a literary work is intentionality and that the rest is identical. Whether the narrative is described as a scientific text or a work of fiction, the plot must combine “seduction by the pleasant (and) persuasion by the probable” (Ricoeur 134). Ricoeur adds that moral aspects are not absent from historical work either: “Le travail de sélection et de combinaison [de l’historien] est nécessairement orienté par la recherche non de la vérité, mais du bien” (150) (the work of selection and combination [by the historian] is necessarily oriented by the search not for truth, but for good). Lastly, historical rendering includes an

element of mobilization and buy-in (of peers, of the public) from which, according to Bruno Latour in *Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*, no scientific work is exempt.

Another justification of History as a referent for fiction could be its power as a scientific product of an intellectual elite, without going so far as to claim its objectivity. However, we cannot consider that History alone shapes the collective perception of the past. Jewsiewicki and Létourneau point out that there is a dialectical relationship between the problematic of historians and the state of social discourse at a given moment: “Il n’y a pas détermination unilatérale de l’énonciation collective par le discours élitaire. L’élite intellectuelle définit, formalise et axiomatise les paramètres identitaires, mémoriels et conviviaux dans lesquels le collectif se reconnaît et par lesquels il se rassemble et se réconcilie” (19) (There is no unilateral determination of collective enunciation by the elite discourse. The intellectual elite defines, formalizes and axiomatizes identity, memory and the convivial parameters in which the collective recognizes itself and by which it gathers and reconciles). In other words, the historian is subject to the same constraints as fiction, he is not only subject to the influence of his peers or the intellectual spheres of which he avails himself, he is subject to other more popular and more diffuse influences. Historical discourse certainly must matter, but should it matter more than the fiction elaborated by the author of the comic?

One could argue that historical comics reflect the progression of a history which, over time and by dint of documentary research, approaches factual truth a little more. Yet, changes in perspective manifest alongside changes to the referent, and not necessarily in response to the latter. Recognizing this means also heeding François Godicheau’s warning against the mirage of “cumulative history,” the idea that the most recent history is necessarily the most successful and the most objective (74). Of course, new documents and new information appear, adding historical knowledge to the subject, making it possible to renew the analysis, but this in itself does not summarize the evolution of the historical perspective.

The Paul Preston of *The Spanish Holocaust* (2012) could process more material than the Preston of *The Spanish Civil War* (2006) thanks to the multiple testimonies reported to him, enriching and expanding the referent with new data points. Yet his outlook and those of his audience had also changed in those six years. The more recently published book aims to support the Historical Memory movement to reopen the graves where tens of thousands of Republican corpses were anonymously buried, and it responds to the “genocide by the left” claimed by revisionist writers and the Spanish Catholic Church.² Like the creator of fiction, the historian is accountable to his peers, to his publisher, to his audience. He can only come into contact with history through the

memory filters of the society of which he is a member. The historical outlook on the past, as well as the vocabulary for expressing it, are necessarily influenced by the demands of its time and its society.

Nothing New in the Alcázar, My General

Among the most commonly known events of the conflict, the siege of the Alcázar of Toledo is one of the most emblematic episodes for the Francoists and their heirs, which supposedly ends with the famous sentence “Nada nuevo en el Alcázar, mi General” (nothing new in the Alcázar, my General), addressed with splendor to Franco himself at the end of the siege by the commander of the fort, Colonel Moscardó.³ Ten or so comics were published on the subject between 1937 and 2012, expressing different perspectives from official Francoism and posterior extreme-right to communist inspiration.

Political views alone are not sufficient to justify these differences in the treatment of the Civil War in these comics. All of them used historical sources that the authors considered legitimate at the time of their production; in other words, their unquestionably divergent and contradictory descriptions are based on divergent and contradictory histories. Reading these comics as a sequence shows a process of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of the fictional description of the event based on the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of its historical referent according to the time period and societies. Their differences reflect the existence of successive histories of the Spanish Civil War, each proposing historical truths that are as definitive as they are contradictory.⁴

Comics prior to 1960 refer to the Franco dictatorship’s historiography of the *posguerra*, in which propaganda takes precedence over the facts. One example is “Alcazar” (1951), a short story by Octave Joly and Michel Jacq, published in the Belgian magazine *Spirou*. Its main narrative drive is the horrific blackmail perpetrated by the Republicans which will lead them to shoot Luis, the youngest son of Moscardó, an event which in Spanish history echoes the fate of Alfonso Pérez de Guzmán’s son during the siege of Tarifa by the Moors in the 13th century.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, Francoist and right-wing comics are based on a historiography of the conflict reconstructed at the instigation of Ricardo de la Cierva, in order to thwart Anglo-Saxon history books published outside of Spain, such as Hugh Thomas’s *The Spanish Civil War* (1961) and Herbert Southworth’s *El mito de la cruzada de Franco* (1963).⁵ This new history, which seeks to reconcile Franco’s ideology with a more sustained respect for the facts, even today remains the historiographical basis for right-wing essays

on the Civil War.⁶ The blackmail episode, definitely a hoax, disappears from these comics and the extreme right Fuerza Nueva comic⁷ *Setenta días en el infierno* (1978), by the brothers Carlos and Luis Fresno Crespo, only mentions the forced release from prison and summary execution of an older son of Moscardó, a proven fact but posterior and unrelated to the siege.⁸ In the same period, the pro-Republican comic *Eloy* (1979), by Antonio Hernández Palacios, bases its narrative on communist historiography. By showing that the siege of the Alcázar of Toledo is a demonstration of the inability of the Republic to provide a military response due to the inexperience and lack of discipline within the freshly armed militias, the comic helps to retrospectively justify the creation of a professionalized Republican army.

Other comics demonstrate yet another dimension, such as Tito's *La mémoire blessée* (1987), in France, or later, in Spain, "Con el moscardo tras la oreja" (2012), an episode of the *Nuevas Hazañas Bélicas*, by Hernán Migoya and Kim.⁹ Both comics mention the fact that the besieged would have captured a number of notoriously left-wing civilian hostages in Toledo and then executed them upon the arrival of Franco's African troops. Thus, rather than a symbol of the valor of Franco's army, the event becomes an example of the violence of the military uprising against civilians, an aspect of the war that progressively gains importance for historians after the turn of the century. Fiction and history have significantly evolved in somehow parallel routes.

What Side Was Your Family on During the Conflict?

The Spanish Civil War divided families, friends, neighbors. Francisco Franco and the poet Antonio Machado, like so many others, had a brother in the opposite camp (Ramón Franco, a Republican and freemason, died too quickly to manifest his opposition to his brother, and Manuel Machado was appointed academician because of his Francoist sympathies). The anarchist leader Buenaventura Durruti had two right-wing Falangist brothers, one of whom, Pedro, was shot during a *saca* in the Modelo prison in Madrid and the other, Marciano, was executed by his own camp for being *hedillista* (member of a Falangist faction opposed to Franco).¹⁰ All these were well-known individuals, but what occurred with others, with the average Spanish family?

I published my first academic paper about the Spanish Civil War, "La guerra de las palabras," in a Spanish history journal. The paper was well-received but peer reviewers were worried about one paragraph which stated that quite a significant part of the population supported the military uprising. This statement could not be made without factual evidence to support it, yet, should it have been written that quite a significant part of the population

supported the Republic, probably no objection would have been raised. This led to some additional research for another paper that I later published in a French journal, with somewhat surprising results.

This second paper, called “Les mémoires historiques.” (Historic memoirs), dealt with the analysis of a survey performed in 2008 by the Spanish Center for Sociological Investigation (CIS) about contemporary perceptions of the 1936–39 Civil War. When asked which side their families took during the war, older respondents mentioned that more or less one third supported the Republic, one third the military uprising and the other third was indifferent. Public opinion was divided equally between the two camps, confirming that quite a significant part of the population supported the military uprising, apparently still a taboo for some present-day historians.

Younger respondents however had a different view of their families’ past. One third of their older relatives were still purportedly in favor of the Francoist side, but they considered that nearly two-thirds supported the Republic. These families were none other than those of the older respondents, but a large part of the group identified as “indifferent” by the older cohort was labeled as pro-Republican by the younger one. Present sympathy for democracy has modified respondents’ past memory.

In *La mémoire collective*, Maurice Halwachs emphasizes the social character of memory: to remember, we need others to hear, a testimony is not so much given as received. The notion of a social framework is inherent in the work of memory recall. As Paul Ricœur notes, “On ne se souvient qu’à la condition de se placer au point de vue d’un ou plusieurs groupes et de se replacer dans un ou plusieurs groupes de pensée” (148) (We remember only on condition that we take the point of view of one or more groups and that we place ourselves again in one or more groups of thought). Our memory does not belong solely to us, it is also that of our loved ones, those of the communities to which we are attached.

The Individual and the Collective

The creator of comics, the reader, and the analyst, all build representations that are simultaneously personal and dependent upon their society. The nature and extent of this dependence are widely debated between sociologists and psychologists. The differences on the real margins of choice of the individual, between cold calculator freed from any influence, “cultural idiot” prisoner of the social or moral order (using the ironic expression of Harold Garfinkel) or “mental handyman” (according to Jean-François Dortier) mark the differences between schools of thought.

Individual identity is a dual concept, between *ipseity*, the quality of being oneself, the essential element of individuality, and *sameness*, which reflects resemblance and belonging to the group. The relationship between the individual and society is necessarily complex: it concerns shared social situations and behaviors, the specific places of each individual, common and particular access to knowledge, and the role of imagination, as an intangible collective and individual heritage. It also shapes the perception that a society and each one of its members has of reality.

In his cohort theory, Karl Mannheim suggests that any individual is subject to two successive collective influences. The first one occurs when the individual's political vision consolidates, between the ages of 17 and 25, and is therefore strongly influenced by the political conditions of this period of their life. People tend to refer preferentially to their late adolescence or young adulthood to describe and justify their political positions and more generally their vision of the world. Mentioning the circumstances and events of their young adulthood, at the intersection of national history and personal history, underscores the importance of this period in the process of forming political consciousness and its lasting influence on opinions as a privileged referent. The sociologist thus considers that a generation is a social construction and not a biological datum.

The age group or cohort, i.e. the generational segment made homogeneous by a common socio-political environment, would therefore be an essential factor in our representations. Cohort analysis makes it possible to identify and distinguish "cohort effects," persistent and lasting generational differences which will be influenced only minimally by specific further events, from "period effects," which arise from events and changes over time that will affect all generations, and finally "life cycle effects," or changes due to aging.

Period effects are not only influenced by circumstances and events but also by their translation into dominant representations supported by those who get the best access to collective means of communication. We refer here to the cohort of people 40 to 60 years old who occupy dominant positions in politics, press, associations, etc. Bruno Latour refers to this group as *shepherds* in *Changer de société, refaire de la sociologie*, and notes that they maintain groups and concepts alive with their discourses and are influenced by their own cohort effects. For example, and to simplify as much as possible: in 2020, a person born in 1990 will deal with 2020 events and process them using the criteria of 2010 (his own cohort effect) within the context of dominant representations of 2020 (period effects), the latter being curated by the shepherds' 1990 cohort effect.

In this case, comic authors deal with historic events with their own preliminary categories, grids, filters, and systems of representation that depend not only on their identities as individual creators but also on their generation,

their own society, their homeland, and their time. This same framework applies to the analyst, who brings his own categories, grids, filters, and systems of representation, certainly different from the authors' and from their first readers. Researchers need to understand that we are part of our analysis as individuals (generation, time of analysis) but also as members of a community of research (contemporaneous peers).

Angelic Consensus

Perusing present-day academic bibliographies and studies on comics and the Spanish Civil War leads to some disturbing conclusions which would not arise from a similar perusal of right-wing bibliographies or Catholic series or albums. Works such as *Historia del Movimiento nacional* (1936–1938), *Setenta días en el infierno* (1978), *La guerra civil en España 1936–1939. La segunda república* (1987), or *Through the Mountains* (2005) do not appear in recent academic bibliographies, not because of deficiencies in format, pertinence, interest or quality, but more likely because these works strongly support anti-Republican views.

Historia del Movimiento Nacional by Mariano Vilaseca and various illustrators, with its nearly 200 pages of hate toward the Republican camp, begins by stating “El día 14 de abril de 1931, un grupo de malos españoles proclamó en nuestra Patria la República” (8–9) (On April 14 of 1931, a group of bad Spaniards proclaimed the Republic in our country). Yet, looking beyond its extreme ideology, the weekly documentary on the Spanish Civil War, considered by some to be a monumental work of historical and political comics comparable to Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, is a most interesting work to study. In a similar vein, *Setenta días en el infierno*, by brothers Carlos and Luis Fresno Crespo, was published during the Spanish Transition to recall right-wing values and Franco's heritage.

With pretenses of impartiality, *La guerra civil en España 1936–1939. La segunda república*, by Manuel Alonso García, also provides an overview of the Civil War with undoubtedly pro-Franco biases. According to the comic, the 1939 French concentration camps were characterized solely by the intellectual poverty of the Republican exiles. Furthermore, the comic was published as a part of a larger series, *Historia de España* (1991), which begins a chapter about Franco's dictatorship with a martial parade of . . . nurses (supposed to heal the country?). The comic was nevertheless re-published online in 2012–2013 by the Spanish moderate left-wing party Unión Progreso y Democracia, which curiously judged it as giving equilateral views on the conflict.¹¹

Other comic works are also worth mentioning. Released simultaneously in seven languages—English, Spanish, French, Dutch, Italian, German, and

Catalan—*Through the Mountains* (2005), by Paule Fostroy, Jean Gillissen and Étienne Gabriel, describes the life and exile during the Civil War of Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer, the founder of the Opus Dei. Within pro-Republican comics, the saga *De Profundis* (1996–1998), by Claude Carré and Jean-Marie Michaud, portrays the persistence of divisions among Republican factions within exile camps (with communists murdering anarchists with the complicity of the French Communist Party), and does not appear in French bibliographies. This is unlike another contemporaneous saga *Louis la Guigne* (1995–96), by Frank Giroud and Jean-Paul Dethorey, in which the episodes dealing with Spain denounce the mistreatment of exiles.

Two Spanish comic authors residing in France, Julio Ribera and Tito, also address the Spanish Civil War, though the former is far more cited than the latter, who adopts a more nuanced view on the conflict, denouncing both camps' violence toward civilians. Other authors of comics who present too obvious communist or anarchist point of views are also overlooked, as are satirical series such as the 2010 Hernán Migoya's *Nuevas Hazañas Bélicas* (2012) or the Pipo Loa work *Francisco Franco general ejemplar*.¹² The exclusions may occur because all these comics go against present angelic consensus on the war.

Academic essays focus repeatedly on certain authors, such as Carlos Giménez, Antonio Altarriba and Sento, because their discourses fit better with present mainstream representation of the Spanish Civil War. Most recent academic studies appear to concentrate on recent pro-Republican publications that serve to bear and relay this representation. In spite of their importance, less recent works with different views are mostly neglected. A review of academic studies does not give the impression of a comprehensive reflection on the War but rather of a little bubble of a consensus ideology.

This is obviously not about censorship, a word that academics would rightly reject. Neither is it an assumed choice as would be a selection of titles from an openly political perspective. Rather, we could speak of a selective relay of memory, favoring works more in line with a present shared representation of the Civil War. There is a collective responsibility: whether or not a work or an author appears in a bibliography, an academic paper or a book is not only due to the individual choice of the analyst. It is the result of a chain of events that facilitates or prevents its citation or study. It is memory in a single file, in a way. Experts naturally study and quote works from authors they like, which seem to have a useful purpose, and very often with which they find themselves in agreement. These same experts, as would be expected, bring their preferred works to the forefront, whereas a lack of critical attention isolates others and in the end, the less-cited contributions fade from view. The memory of memory also participates in representations.

A Strange War

The European vision of Golden and Silver Age American comics tends to be rather contemptuous: the medium is considered mere entertainment with the exception of the WWII period when creators slavishly supported the U.S. war effort. It is generally accepted that U.S. comics avoided serious political topics until the underground movement of the late 1960s. However, an effort to expand the corpus of comics about the Spanish Civil War forced the writer of these pages to leaf through several thousand American comics from the 1930s to the 1960s, in search of histories related to the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939, and this led to a different conclusion. The screening, executed of necessity but with undeniable pleasure, showed comics dealing with the 1929 economic crisis or the 1930s Dust Bowl drought's dramatic consequences, unacceptable work conditions in factories, election frauds, fear of the growing influence of the extreme right, and nativist movements.¹³ From 1939 to 1941, a number of comics advocated in favor of an intervention in Europe when the U.S. government and moreover the U.S. public opinion, traumatized by the victims of WWI, were firmly opposed to sending troops. Is this not politics?

In the remaining years from 1942–1945, comics certainly supported the war effort but also described a very strange conflict, at least for modern European eyes: a war without Black Americans, without atomic bombs, where Allied fighting was shown according to one anecdotal model, the French Resistance.¹⁴ This goes even for the USSR, in spite of its millions of soldiers and victims. Temporal and geographical distances show us what the U.S. reader of the 1940s did not see or did not want to see.

Each era has its certitudes and considers with no little irony the prejudices of previous time periods. U.S. comic creators of the 1940s have based their fictions on a consensual and probably imperfect history that differs from the European version, the one dominant in their country and their time. It is easy for us to point out the biases because of the geographical and temporal distance. This certainly means that in turn, we do not see aspects in recent comics that other readers from coming times or distant areas will easily discover. Their approximation of history is probably as imperfect, but we do not see the imperfections because we share their views. The *zeitgeist*, the melody of time, never stops weighing over historians, comic creators, and analysts.¹⁵

Ontological Gerrymandering

The historical comic analyst must agree with Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman and the constructivist theory that the author does not know and transmit

historic reality, but rather a representation largely influenced by their time and society. This is likely easy to understand and accept. More difficult to accept is the idea that analysts must also admit that they themselves use referents and analytical criteria largely influenced by a time period and circumstances.

One sensitive point of the constructivist theoretical approach is that it prohibits in advance any comparison of former representations with an objective reality of which the analyst would be the depository, a mistake considered frequent in works that claim the constructivist theory and apply it in a way that can be described as hemiplegic (Lemieux, 169–87). Dorothy Pawluch and Steve Woolgar thus denounce the “ontological gerrymandering” which allows the researcher to attribute the representations of the subject of study to social constructions while claiming an anchoring in an objective knowledge of the historical facts (214–27).

New historical comics are undoubtedly necessary, to recall the past and provide new generations of readers with information and thought, but ongoing research limiting its scope to the newly published albums has its limits as well. The proximity of the comic creator and the references and criteria employed by the researcher can lead to a reinforcement of present time certainties and a diminishing of the critical distance essential to an analytical approach. The progressive disappearance of political differences between authors, and also between analysts, offers an ever-shrinking space for debate.

Looking for the roots of dictatorship, understanding why so many people consider it as a valuable or acceptable government does not occur through one well-intentioned and somehow boring shared conviction that democracy is the best system of government. Analyzing a recent graphic novel on feminism or about the gay pride movement could have less impact than looking for hints of male chauvinism or homophobia in earlier comics. Focusing on victims does not help to understand the motivations of executioners.

Jacques Rancière and Slavoj Žižek oppose politics—which for these authors are based on the clash of ideas and are now disappearing—and lately post-politics that manifest as a dictatorship of consensus. The current tendency to build up indisputable good-will consensus surrounding concepts such as democracy, human rights, environmental concern and gender equality, leads to two unintended but dangerous consequences. The first is to consider anybody that questions or criticizes that consensus as an extremist or a terrorist, and therefore deserving of (ironically) antidemocratic repression measures. The second one is to pave the way for counter-reactions spreading negationism and populist lies.

Another sensitive consequence of this form of political constructivism is its possible confusion with relativism: if no reality exists, if we rely only on representations, facts can be denied, and thus every opinion should be equally acceptable. This could be a reason to justify any discourse based on denial

and lies like the ones currently spread by a number of politicians, parties, and especially the right-wing media.

Nobody can deny that events occurred, wars destroyed cities, people died. Between 1936 and 1939 there was a war in Spain. Violence against civilians resulted in nearly as many victims as the military battles. According to the latest data, about 130,000 civilians were killed by Franco's side during and after the conflict and 50,000 died at the hands of pro-Republican forces, the latter mostly in the first years of the Civil War (Espinosa Maestre, 77–78). The dispute between anarchists and communists was a major issue that undermined the Republican camp. These are indisputable facts.

However, the ways of representing these facts in historical comics (as well as in more traditional history texts) substantially differ from one time period to the next and from one country to another. While this is not the space to thoroughly discuss these issues, one can note that many comics about the Spanish Civil War are uncomfortable with the extent of violence perpetrated against civilians, especially the violence by the pro-Republican side, and that very few works evoke the fractures within the Republican camp.¹⁶

This is certainly a reason the comparison of comics from different countries and different time periods on the same historical topic is so necessary. The third dimension of the comic—Time—makes it a magnificent object of study not only for comic analysts, but also for researchers coming from other disciplines within the Humanities. For historians, historical comics may bring little additional information on the events they describe but offer significant contributions to the study of how societies retrospectively perceive these events, at a given time or place. The same can be true for sociologists and psychologists regarding aspects such as death, violence, gender, religion, and family, to name a few. Those who specialize in the study of the comic genre do not (or not often) come from these disciplines, but they are in a position to pave the way and demonstrate the value of the comic as an indispensable source for historical, sociological, and psychological research.

Notes

1. The theoretical bases of this article are extensively developed in the essay *La fonction de la bande dessinée* (2018), also available in Spain as *La función del cómic*.
2. See for instance César Vidal's *Paracuellos*. *Katyn*.
3. To cut short all speculations, Hergé named his character in *Tintin* General Alcazar a little before the historical events here and it would be wrong to see it as a political allusion.

4. The description of these successive accounts of the war may be found in Paul Preston's "La historiografía de la guerra civil española: de Franco a la democracia," as well as in J. Andrés Blanco Rodríguez's "La historiografía de la guerra civil española."
5. Ricardo de la Cierva, historian and teacher at the University of Alcalá de Henarés and the Complutense University of Madrid, was Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Information and Tourism in the 1960s.
6. The very existence of the bombing of the city of Guernica was not admitted by Franco's history before 1969. Two years earlier the British historian Brian Crozier firmly demonstrated in his book *Franco a Biographical History* that no bombing had occurred in Guernica.
7. Fuerza Nueva is an extreme right-wing political party created in 1966 by Blas Piñar Lopez. Blas Piñar himself had a family interest in the event, his father having been one of the defenders of the Alcázar.
8. Francoist historical views continue to find an audience, as proven by the fact that the comic was translated and published in 2006 by Clovis, a French right-wing Catholic publisher, as *Le siège de l'Alcazar*.
9. The title is a joke referring to "tener la mosca detrás de la oreja" (to have the fly behind the ear), equivalent to the idiom "to smell a rat."
10. The *saca*, practiced by both camps, consists of taking a prisoner out of his cell to summarily shoot him.
11. UPyD Web page, no longer available. Matly (*Bande* 221).
12. Pen name of Guille Martínez-Vela and Carlos Escuin. For this comic overview, see Michel Matly's article "Francisco Franco, general ejemplar. Un lavado de imagen definitivo," *Tebeosfera*, 2016.
13. In favor of immigration restrictions against the waves of workers and families from abroad, for economic, religious or racial reasons. Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, Catholic and non-white were the principal targets.
14. This is not exactly true. In one comic, a Black marine is depicted in the sea, beside his sunken ship. He clings to piece of flotsam from the wreck and sings a gospel song to cheer up his comrades, like a good minstrel caricature.
15. *Zetgeist*, "spirit of the age," an invisible agent or force dominating the characteristics of a given epoch in world history, is a concept generally associated with Georg W. F. Hegel, contrasting with Hegel's use of *Volksgeist* "national spirit" and *Weltgeist* "world-spirit."
16. Only in the 2010s and in the satirical *Nuevas Hazañas Bélicas*, by Hernán Migoya, do the two major slaughters of civilians during the Spanish Civil War appear, in Paracuellos (around 2000 people killed by the pro-Republican partisans) and in Badajoz (between 3000 and 4000 victims killed by Franco's partisans).

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