

Transcultural Spaces and Identities in Iberian Studies

Edited by

Mark Gant and Susana Rocha Relvas

Chapter One	11
Beginnings: the transatlantic space of the early modern period	
Chapter Two	27
The trilogy of the archetype: epiphany in the film of Vergílio Ferreira's novels	
Luis Carrilho	

Section Two: Iberian and Hispanic Representations

Chapter Three	42
Cross-cultural Lusophone and Hispanic spaces and identities: a postcolonial and decolonial reading of António Sardenha's <i>Hispanism</i>	
Susana Rocha Relvas	
Chapter Four	58
La representación histórica y cultural de los países ibéricos a través de las primeras revistas del hispanismo francés	
D. J. P. M.	

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Susana Rocha Relvas & Mark Gant	

Section One: Iberian Cinema: Origins and Perspectives

Chapter One.....	10
Rutas ibéricas: redibujar el mapa desde el cinematógrafo y su historia	
Begoña Soto-Vázquez	
Chapter Two	27
The trilogy of the archetype: epiphany in the film adaptations	
of Vergílio Ferreira's novels	
Luís Cardoso	

Section Two: Iberian and Hispanic Representations

Chapter Three	42
Cross-cultural Lusophone and Hispanic spaces and identities:	
a postcolonial and decolonial reading of António Sardinha's Hispanism	
Susana Rocha Relvas	
Chapter Four.....	54
La representación histórica y cultural de los países ibéricos a través	
de las primeras revistas del hispanismo francés	
Dario Varela	

Section Three: Gender, Feminism and Spatiality

Chapter Five	78
La renovación del canon literario español de la edad de plata:	
estrategias culturales para el rescate actual de las modernas	
Purificació Mascarell	

Chapter Six	96
Iberian geosophy in the work of Carolina Coronado from a didactic perspective Maria Encarnación Carrillo	
Chapter Seven.....	111
Emilia Pardo Bazán in Buenos Aires: spatial alienation and feminism on the other side of the Atlantic Natalia Corbellini & Silvia Carina Fernández	
Chapter Eight.....	125
A “citizen of nowhere”. Nancy J. Johnstone’s <i>Hotel in Spain</i> and <i>Hotel in Flight</i> Monica Varese	
Section Four: Iberian Contacts, Exchanges and Networks	
Chapter Nine.....	138
“Soy un escritor ibérico antes que europeo”. José Saramago: a Case of Iberian publishing success Margarida Rendeiro	
Chapter Ten	156
Popular editions of Spanish novels in early twentieth century Portugal João Luís Lisboa	
Chapter Eleven	172
Iberoamerican cultural programmes: 10 years of Iberescena Cristiane M. Oliveira	
Section Five: Nation, Community and Memory Culture	
Chapter Twelve	192
Cultura de la memoria en el contexto del franquismo. Construcciones del problema, estrategias de solución y acciones del movimiento memorialista Silke Hünecke	

Chapter Thirteen.....	213
<i>Sítio Distinto</i> and <i>Arte de Ser Português</i> : two performances about the concept of nation Antia Monteagudo	
Chapter Fourteen	236
Back to Sefarad? A comparative analysis of the 2015 Iberian citizenship laws for Sephardic Jews Davide Aliberti	
Section Six: Migrations, Identities, Social Mobilisation and Economies	
Chapter Fifteen	262
Decolonising identity and nation in a (post)migrant Europe: Luso-Africans (im)possible subjects Cindy Pinhal	
Chapter Sixteen	269
Border crossings ink in the gutter: comics and migration to Catalonia Sarah Harris	
Chapter Seventeen	284
The Rio Tinto strike of 1920: a key turning point in social mobilisation Nick Sharman	
Chapter Eighteen	294
Foreign direct investment after the great recession: opportunity or risk for Spain? Narita Makiko	
Contributors.....	313

comes to be deconstructed by these minority youths producing new modes of relating and existing that are not tied by citizenship, labour market and capitalism. Through the direct implication between the descendants as subjects of agency that turn away from the nation-state as a point of reference, they establish affective links that invest them ethically in interrogating, negotiating and resignifying the place of history, memory and multiple agencies in subject construction that can break the silence surrounding the myth of Europe as white Christian and produce alternative modes of envisioning the future which translate into concrete social change.

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CHAPTER SIXTEEN

BORDER CROSSINGS INK IN THE GUTTER: COMICS AND MIGRATION TO CATALONIA

SARAH HARRIS

Catalonia and its political situation

because I am in all cultures at the same time,
alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,
me zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.
*Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan
simultáneamente.*

Gloria Anzaldúa (1987: 377)

This chapter considers three recent Spanish comics as examples of interwoven narratives that spark broader questions about border identities and what comics add to this rich area of research. These three examples are from, and are about, Catalonia, which is an especially interesting region in which to explore border identities.¹ As an arguably stateless nation² and a hub of many types of migration, it offers an intricate tapestry with multiple layers of belonging and complexity, which these comics highlight through elements particular to their medium.

On the one hand, contemporary Catalonia is a centre, providing a centripetal force of attraction. It is home to one the largest and most

¹ At the time of writing this chapter, Catalonia is slowly recovering from weeks of ongoing protests following the conviction for sedition and harsh sentencing of several independence leaders. Meanwhile, the very recent growth of Spanish right-wing political party Vox seems related to its positions as both strongly anti-independence and anti-immigration.

² In the Spanish context, the term "nationalities" refers to territories whose inhabitants have a strong historically constituted identity. In practice, this has been most evident in Galicia, Catalonia, and the Basque Country.

powerful cities in Spain, which for better or worse is a venerable jewel of the tourist industry, an industry that in Spain has long added both money and diversity of culture. It comprises part of the “Catalan Countries”, a larger region of eastern Iberia where the Catalan language and its variants are prevalent. As a financial centre, Catalonia also attracts migration from within and beyond Spain, in numbers surpassing most other Spanish regions (Larramona, 30; OECD, 27).

On the other hand, Catalonia is on the geographical periphery of Spain, itself providing a border between its country, Andorra, and France. Its other side opens to the Mediterranean Sea, having historically offered one of the continent’s busiest ports. From an uneasy position on the edge of a peninsula between western Europe and northern Africa,³ native-born Catalan citizens report “permeable identities” and varying degrees of loyalties to Catalonia, to Spain, and to the European Union (Erickson, 117). Meanwhile, the many Catalan residents from elsewhere logically retain additional loyal ties to their places of origin. The resulting manifold layers of identity and identification come to light in subtle ways in these three comics.

Among the noteworthy Spanish comics that feature migration to the autonomous community are the fictional *Khalid* (2013) by Damián and Jordi Pastor, the autobiographical *Sansamba* (2014) by Isabel Franc and Susanna Martín, and the experimental and journalistic *Barcelona. Los vagabundos de la chatarra* (2015) by Jorge Carrión and Sagar Forniés. These comics use techniques particular to their medium to illustrate—literally and figuratively—complex and overlapping identities in the contested region of Catalonia, resulting in an overall sense of blurred boundaries.

Comics themselves have also long remained in between traditional academic disciplines of visual arts and narrative literature, therefore on the margins of mainstream academia. Perhaps this is one reason they manage to depict the in-betweenness of overlapping borders in innovative ways.⁴ In these three comics, and in part since Catalonia is a contested region, immigrants here are shown to be doubly, if not triply rooted, a depiction highlighted through innovative page designs, images that spill into the

³ A position, incidentally, that has repeatedly obsessed Spanish intellectuals in times of political transition.

⁴ *Sansamba*’s Martín comments in an interview “Si consigo romper alguna ‘frontera’ en unas pocas personas lectoras, eso va a significar un gran triunfo para mí. Una recompensa tras todo el esfuerzo que hay detrás de este libro. Eso le da sentido no solo a este cómic sino a mi profesión” (“Entrevista”, np).

gutters between panels, visual contrasts and parallels, visual metaphors for permeability, and the inclusion of real-world artefacts.

Borders and the double narrative

The introduction to *Border Theory* calls the border “the privileged locus of hope for a better world”, echoing Gloria Anzaldúa and other ground breaking theorists who have written optimistically of the borderlands as a place of possibility and transformation, an in-between space that allows for tolerance and ambiguity (Johnson and Michaelsen, 3). Anzaldúa and other “U.S. Third-World Feminists” offer a useful point of departure for an analysis of these comics because both offer a plural subjectivity that so often results from overlapping identities. In using this conception of the borderlands, in a medium with inherent gaps and in-betweenness, and in a location across many borders, comics about migration and Catalonia prove rich with opportunity.

The double narrative at the centre of each of these three comics supports its creators’ stated intentions by complicating the idea of a monolithic “single immigrant story”.⁵ For the purposes of this chapter, “double narrative” means that a single text includes two stories, each focused on a separate main character, and whose trajectories diverge and converge at particular moments. As compared to a more typical single narrative, double narratives begin to reflect the diversity of immigrant identity that is so multiple in a region such as Catalonia.

As a theme, doubles are also a frequent and effective trope in migration literature more broadly. States Miletic: “the theme of the doubles appears frequently in immigrants’ writing; [as] a fitting means of visualising the troubled and sometimes split identity of those who treat two different languages as their mother tongue” (2000, 235). Beyond the scope of the present chapter, it is nonetheless essential to remember that the politics of language are prickly in Catalonia, which has long been profoundly and proudly bilingual despite twentieth century dictatorial efforts to the contrary.⁶ This remains true though at the time of these comics’ publication about 23% of the Catalan capital’s residents were born outside of Spain, and another 24% moved there from another Spanish region (World Population

⁵ See Chimamanda Adichie’s TED Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story”.

⁶ Rosin writes: “Two specific periods of Spanish control demonstrate the resilience of the Catalan identity. Following the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) and during the Franco dictatorship (1939-1978), the Catalan language and culture was actively oppressed by the Spanish government. After each repressive period eventually passed, the Catalan identity rose in full force” (1).

Review, np.).⁷ Apart from bilingualism, the literary doubling technique is effective when it “articulates displacement, allowing [an author] to make use of the multiple aspects of that ‘double perspective’ experienced by so many migrant writers” (Bond, np.). As Carmen Sanjuán-Pastor summarizes:

Twenty-first-century Catalonia is a plurilingual, multiethnic society faced with the challenge of defining a national project based on cultural inclusiveness, linguistic unity and social justice at a time of acute economic crises, rising xenophobia in the political debate, and its own limited institutional power to grant administrative and political rights. (28)

Three relevant comics

Using various techniques specific to comics, all three of these books call attention to and/or blur physical and interpersonal borders. *Khalid* uses colouring and framing techniques to illustrate the simultaneous experiences of two Moroccan brothers who reach Barcelona separately, and who struggle to reconnect. This 2013 book is a collaboration between Damián Campanario (a writer and activist who has worked in the youth centres represented in the comic) and Jordi Pastor (a Catalan illustrator best known for his bold use of colours). In it, the older Rachid lives in Barcelona in a home for young immigrant men (MENAs),⁸ while the younger Khalid spends the majority of the book journeying from rural Morocco to Barcelona to reunite with his brother.

The book makes heavy use of two-page spreads to illustrate parallels and contrasts (2013, 18-19; 20-1; 22-3; 43-4, etc.), mostly between Rachid and Khalid, though sometimes between other character pairs. For instance, Merche is a tutor new to the youth immigration centre, and she tries to adapt to these new surroundings and circumstances while Rachid struggles to adapt to his life in Catalonia. The comic highlights this connection by drawing visual parallels between the tutor and her ward. They appear separately in panels with other characters, then once in identical positions in separate but side-by-side panels, and then finally in one larger panel together when they connect by learning a bit about each other (2013, 14-18). These design elements subtly draw a parallel between the experiences of the two newcomers.

⁷ Additional details from OECD: “The number of foreigners living in [Barcelona] has quintupled since 2000. While foreign residents accounted for 3.5% of Barcelona’s residents in 2000, they reached 18.1% in 2009” and overall they have increased in the ten years since (27).

⁸ *menores extranjeros no acompañados*, or foreign unaccompanied minors.

Khalid also travels briefly with a new friend who helps him learn the unwritten rules of the journey. This pair of young men is contrasted visually and narratively as the friend makes bad choices that prevent him from safely crossing the border (2013, 24-9; 35-6). The two boys connect immediately, appearing together in several panels, but in the moments when Khalid learns that the other boy plans to survive by stealing from tourists, and that he plans to spend the journey high on paint thinner, they are drawn as disconnected from each other. In this way, the comic foreshadows them taking separate paths, both literal and figurative, and it hints at the similar trouble Khalid’s counterpart—his brother—is causing across the Straits.

The friend’s body is drawn as fragmented when authorities discover and remove him from his hiding place, sealing his unfortunate fate. One detail panel shows only the disjointed fragment of a limp hand, and another shows eyes rolling back and drool coming from a gaping mouth. The final image of the boy is his visually dismembered wrist in handcuffs. Finally, the physical separation of the two would-be migrant children is highlighted in a large borderless panel, in which Khalid watches from the deck of a boat as it pulls away from the mainland, and we cannot distinguish any graphic details of what—or whom—he is leaving behind. Our perspective mirrors Khalid’s, and at this point the storyline will also leave both the anonymous boy and the Moroccan coast behind (2013, 49-51).

The most obvious and effective technique in creating this comic’s double narrative, though, is the two contrasting colours that represent Khalid’s story in yellow and Rachid’s story in blue. All of the early scenes of Khalid in Morocco are coloured solely in black, white, and bright yellow, while all of Rachid’s in Barcelona are in black, white, and soft blue. When Khalid’s boat reaches the Catalan coast, he remains yellow but the rest of the panel is blue, a contrast that continues as he navigates the city in search of Rashid (2013, 104; 115-121, etc.). The illustrator draws Khalid in blue for the first time when he discovers that his brother has run out of luck and been incarcerated, just prior to the potential and long-awaited meeting of the two brothers. The last symbol of Khalid’s hope, the photograph that represents his big brother’s supposed success and the goal of Khalid’s journey, remains yellow but it falls to the ground as his metaphorical dream bursts. In other words, all along the yellow has meant the hope of a new future through migration, and the blue has meant the disillusionment with this future’s impossibility. On the final page of the comic, the yellow photograph drifts aimlessly on the wind over the rooftops of the blue city.

Other clever design choices strengthen the messages about borders and permeability in this book. Some of *Khalid*’s detail panels give clues and foreshadow violence, for instance when a tail (similar to those used in

speech balloons) lets readers peek through the opaque barrier of a grocery bag. There we see that Rachid has stolen a can of paint thinner in order to sniff it to get high (2013, 105). Another detail panel again uses a tail to show where a knife is hidden in a man's backpack (2013, 37). When on the following page the same man rings the doorbell at the centre, asking for something to eat, we have been duly forewarned of the danger he represents (2013, 37-8). In revealing hidden objects, both examples show physical borders to be more porous than we might expect.

In this last example and in other panels, the recurring image of the peephole at the main door of the immigrant centre highlights the theme of borders and divisions between public and private spaces, between protected and risky spaces, between self and other, between "us" and "them", as well as providing yet another distorted view of those on the outside. Through the peephole we often see the faces of two police officers (2013, 33, 52, 74, 92) but they are not the only characters who appear in a circular panel, itself a reproduction of the tiny lens. In this manner we also see the smiling face of another young and naïve new tutor (2013, 79), and the menacing face of the aforementioned man with the knife (2013, 37). This character, when denied entrance through the door, climbs an exterior gutter and comes through a window to accuse Rachid of theft and to threaten him (2013, 38-48). In another scene, the face of a neighbour, an angry mother, appears in the peephole when she comes to accuse the young men of corrupting her daughters (2013, 62). In each case, the peephole occupies the entirety of a circular panel, the panel itself reproducing the peephole through which we and the occupants of the centre can see outside.

As far as the storyline goes, the double narrative in this case is particularly interesting because Khalid departs for Barcelona based on a false story of his brother's success; he follows a photo in which Rachid feigns glamour on a stranger's motorcycle. Therefore, the encounter of the brothers is not impossible, but the fulfilment of Khalid's dream—based on a fiction and a lie—is. This book ends with predictable disillusionment, situating the two brothers' stories in a broader context: the youth centre closes because of budget cuts, just as Khalid's hopes of living a glamorous urban life with his brother are crushed. Because of Rachid's bad choices in the face of structural disadvantages, even the MENAs who have made every effort to comply with the goals of integration will now be unable to continue being supported towards citizenship or legal residency (2013, 123). This ending exposes a perennial dilemma for migration: one bad apple ruins the bunch—there will be fewer and worse opportunities for those who follow Rachid, including his little brother.

Fig. 16-1



One page offers an especially good example of the comic's use of colour and blurred boundaries, as well as a visual representation of how Rachid's behaviour affects Khalid (See Fig. 16-1; 2013, 44). This page contains four wide panels in landscape orientation, which alternate in colour and encompass the whole page. Here, the younger brother Khalid (in yellow as usual) hangs underneath the wheel well of a cargo vehicle, the exhaust from the vehicle surrounding him as he tries to continue hanging on, sweat covering his brow and a pained expression on his face. Meanwhile, Rachid (in blue as always) smokes hashish with a friend at a party in Barcelona. The smoke in Khalid's face, which had appeared to be exhaust from the vehicle, is actually from Rachid's joint. As Rachid blows smoke, it spills

from his blue panels into Khalid's yellow ones and gutter in between them. The lines that typically frame comics panels dissolve. These design choices hint at the ways in which Rachid's pleasure-seeking behaviour affects Khalid, causing him to suffer. The design also indicates that the borders are porous between the two stories, the two locations, and the two brothers.

Promotional materials for my second example, *Sansamba*, call its two main characters "opposites who meet and help each other despite differences in race, sex, and religion", and call this work, therefore, "a reflection on cultural and emotional borders" (2014, cover, translation mine). *Sansamba* opens in Marseme, a stretch of the Catalan coast north of Barcelona. In the autobiographical story the Catalan author (Isabel Franc) establishes Alicia, her own alter ego, as the protagonist. Franc, who sometimes publishes under the pseudonym of Lola Van Guardia, is the author of many works of literary fiction, essays, and plays, as well as one other autobiographical comic with Susanna Martín. Franc's writing is best known for its humorous style and focus on LGBTQ+ issues.

In *Sansamba*, when the young Senegalese Baala knocks at Alicia's door saying the Spanish word for "work", she hires him to do some yard maintenance. Throughout the rest of the comic, the image of an open door is repeated often (2014, 7; 8; 14; 19; 26; 38; 39; 40, etc.). It is this image that first connects Baala to Alicia, and it hints regularly at the porosity between self and other, even in Marseme where most residents have private homes and yards. Alicia gradually becomes close to Baala, sponsors his naturalization, and visits him in his home country of Senegal, where she sees the capital of Dakar and his tiny rural hometown of Sansamba. Therefore, the initial opening of Alicia's literal door also opens larger metaphorical doors that connect her to people previously unknown to her.

Franc calls comics the perfect medium to tell this story so that it can be accessible to those who cannot read, especially the undereducated Senegalese women she met on her travels ("Entrevista", np.).⁹ Comics also offer much more than that—their power does not lie simply in being accessible to undereducated readers, but rather in heightening the humanity of their characters through giving them human faces, implicating readers in the reassembly of their stories, and eliciting especially strong emotional responses (Simpson 2018, np).

⁹ In the original: "[Él] me invita a visitar su pueblo, Sansamba, un lugar perdido en la Casamance senegalesa que ni siquiera aparece en Google Maps. Allí descubrí una nueva familia. Me gustaría explicarles nuestra historia, pero la mayoría, sobre todo las mujeres, no saben leer. De ahí viene la decisión [de publicar en forma de novela gráfica]" ("Entrevista", np.).

Like in *Khalid*, several techniques designate and blur boundaries in *Sansamba*. Martín's drawings orient readers within this double narrative with multiple journeys and locations through establishing frames (2014, 1; 8; 13; 26; 34; 50, etc.). These frames also begin to show the contrasting environments that lead to different experiences in Senegal and in Catalonia.¹⁰ As a visual symbol for human relations across emotional borders, *Sansamba* offers the recurring image of two physically contrasting faces in proximity and gazing at each other (2014, cover; 29; 39; 47). These panels appear primarily in moments of vulnerability and connection. For instance, when a kind stranger helps Baala navigate the train station, or when Baala regains Ali's trust by paying back a loan from her, the two characters stare into each other's eyes.

The storyline highlights and contrasts several of Alicia and Baala's simultaneous experiences as well. While Ali reads about politics and environmental disaster in the newspaper, Baala experiences these same disasters in person (2014, 18; 21; 23). While she suffers the cancer attacking her body, he suffers from lack of resources for survival (2014, 19). Though the specifics of their situations differ, there is also affinity in their simultaneous suffering across their physical distance (2014, 21).

Other than a dark background to distinguish the sections where Baala narrates in the first person, the narrative voice slips almost imperceptibly between the two main characters, highlighting again the permeability of very different lived experiences. *Sansamba* also establishes a parallel between Baala's difficulty in journeying from Sansamba to Marseme (2014, 19-31), and Alicia's difficulty in obtaining his papers (2014, 50-61) to stay there, calling both of the experiences "journeys". Stylistic choices emphasize the excessive paperwork (or *papeleo*) and excessive steps towards legal migratory status. For instance, forms for paperwork break free of their panels and flood the gutters in between them (2014, 55-56). Again, as in *Khalid*, the papers that break free of the panel borders subtly suggest the porosity of divisions that might separate these "impossible friends" (2014, 3).

The overwhelming administrative process also hints at a system overrun with applicants in spite of the nation's economic disaster. While much of Spain had been fighting to recover from the financial crisis since 2008, Catalonia remained relatively economically sound. Curiously, this regional financial strength contributed both to rising calls for Catalan independence

¹⁰ The book has a downloadable didactic guide, which explains its intention to "go beyond comics" to explore human relations, explain the "immigration problem" in Spain, and propose reflection and debate about this and other contemporary injustices (Norma 2014, np.).

and also to an increase in foreign residents, both of which reinforced the idea of Catalonia as in-between Spain and not-Spain. Fifty percent of all foreign-born migrants to Spain settled in Catalonia between 2007-2012 (Rodríguez García et al, np).

During this period, rising international migration to Catalonia defied demographic trends in most of the country, as elsewhere the lack of available jobs contributed to falling immigration rates, even producing a brief period of negative net migration in which more people left than entered Spain (Larramona, 213). In addition to the didactic guide mentioned in the footnote below, *Sansamba* also doubles down on its real-world significance by intercalating a hefty percentage of “collage-style” artefacts and maps including forms, flyers, and a passport (2014, 27; 35; 36; 40; 42; 70-71; 72; 79). Nearly a full third of the book is comprised of two long intercalated notebooks / sketchbooks, one for the trip to Dakar and the other for the trip to Sansamba (2014, 79-121). Overall, this optimistic comic resides in the in-between space permissible in comics and other borderlands. In between autobiography and travel journal, in between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and in between prejudice and openness, the work offers hope for human connection and growth.

While during some historical periods Iberia has famously—perhaps simplistically—signified the convergence (*convivencia*) of many cultures, today clashes around cultural differences abound.¹¹ Recent increases in vocal ultranationalism and anti-immigrant political positions belie real-world surveys that still reveal Spanish attitudes towards immigrants to be more tolerant than in other European countries (Sánchez, np).

Meanwhile, tensions between Catalonia and the rest of Spain are nothing new: the modern iteration of the Catalan separatist movement dates back to the founding of the Catalan State party in 1922. In the past few years, though, these longstanding tensions have become pronounced once again. The executive branch of Catalonia’s government was deposed after a nonbinding (and officially prohibited) 2017 regional referendum on its independence. Marred by voter suppression and a brutal crackdown on protesters, this referendum resulted in an 81% victory for separatists (albeit most eligible voters did not participate), and Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy subsequently imposed direct rule on the region.

The other nonfiction comic, *Barcelona. Los vagabundos de la chatarra*, takes a more overtly political stance on related current events. It chronicles

¹¹ “Convivència is a key term of popular discourse in Catalonia. It derives from Spanish historian Ramón Menéndez Pidal’s characterization of the contemporaneous presence of and competition between variant forms of early Romance languages in the Iberian Peninsula” (Erickson 123).

one year (2012) in Barcelona’s history through the illegal trade of scrap metal, mostly by groups of undocumented immigrants. This comic uses this irregular market system—which Carrión and Sagar call their main character—to show the dark underbelly of the Catalan capital, and to focus on a group of people as invisible as they are omnipresent. This investigation lends itself to a direct consideration of the *okupa* and independentist movements, as well as explicit commentary on the abuses of power by large corporations and government.

Here the double narrative is less relevant than in the other two comics. In *Barcelona*, the two main characters are Carrión and Sagar themselves, and through most of the comic they investigate their story together.¹² In addition to their self-representation and demonstration of their bona fide journalistic techniques, further emphasis on the real-world significance of this comic comes from its reproductions of artefacts of modern technologies. The comic replicates through illustration, for instance, a complete website and a series of tweets (2015, 89; 73), a direct message sent through a website (2015, 21), newspaper clippings (2015, 48), advertisements (2015, 36), graffiti (2015, 37), and photos (2015, 64). All of these highlight the relevance of the story in the real world and make the comic book feel like a scrapbook.

The reproduction of reporters’ notebooks use the recurring subtitle “*esta historia es antigua*” to show this is a longstanding issue, yet one that is still evolving (2015, 22; 36; 73-4). These notebooks also include scraps of paper with “handwritten” notes on some of their pages, making readers feel as if they have a peek at the book’s own creation. When holding the book, we are also holding a clipboard with its photos and annotated typewritten pages, all of which a real and enduring struggle. Further, as mentioned, the story of the scrap trade is framed and contextualized through including scenes of the authors conducting and discussing their research, thereby making its impact stronger and more relevant (2015, 23).

Stylistically, and unlike the other two comics, it is important to mention that the creators here use full colour to brighten up what they call very dark depressing topics: the economic crisis and resultant increase in homelessness (Norma 2015, np.). With scholarly rigor unsurprising of a literature professor, Carrión also offers detailed references and a downloadable didactic guide. Again, this comic is meant to offer lessons and real-world information.

As has been mentioned in the cases of both of the other comics, *Barcelona. Los vagabundos de la chatarra* also employs many visual

¹² The presence of two creators distinguishes the work from other examples of journalistic comics from auteurs such as Guy Delisle, Joe Sacco, etc.

metaphors for permeability, here with repeated images of doors, ports, peepholes, and camera lenses. The story starts and ends at the city's commercial port (2015, 11; 93), and the doors between condoned and condemned spaces are a nearly constant image, both as the authors try to gain access to the story they will narrate, and as migrants are pushed out from the abandoned warehouses they have occupied and made into homes (2015, 16; 19; 21).

Fig.16-2



While the author and illustrator represent themselves as almost one-dimensional, the cast of characters they interview is more multi-dimensional, as highlighted through interesting design choices (See Fig. 16-2; 2015, 28-9). On this two-page spread, and just having received some hard statistics about local precarity and homelessness, readers learn the story of Vasile, a scrap metal trader with a shopping cart, who will only talk if his interviewers also buy an old stove from him. As Vasile tells the story of his arrival and previous experiences in Spain, detail panels focus on his menacing features, an exaggerated shadowy face, tattoos of monsters on his hands. As his story becomes clearer, though, the detail panels focus instead

on better lit fast food items, and the journalist's notebook where this story is being preserved. A focal point for the layout of the whole spread, and a recurring image, recreated with two connected speech bubbles, is the red can of soda, a symbol of the global economy of scrap metal that this comic explores.

Other characters' stories flood the pages too, with details emerging and surrounding the interviewers as they take faithful notes (2015, 42; 49; 84). At several points, this visual complexity becomes almost cubist, showing multiple and simultaneous angles and details of one character. In other interviews, as the two reporters begin to learn their background stories, the panels zoom in on the faces of the interviewees, underlining the openness with which these complex characters offer their stories to the author and illustrator (2015, 50; 71). Also, in contrast to this openness, are the faces on the political posters that plaster the walls of the neighbourhood, and those of the demolition men who come to clear out the warehouses (2015, 54-5; 87). In both cases, masks (literal or figurative) hide the character's features, and they say nothing, reveal nothing.

This comic employs a number of other compelling techniques, such as highlighting the theme of journey through its inclusion of many maps, one of which appears digital like a page from Google Maps (2015, 66). There porters constantly travel the city on bikes and on foot, journeys that underline the idea that scrap metal travels the world, and most importantly, that migrants live unsettled and nomadic lives too (2015, 92-3). Its use of the ironic symbol of the shopping cart—on the end-papers and cover, as well as throughout the comic—is powerful as well. This object that invokes consumer society (in that it promotes buying more than one can carry), here is repurposed and necessary for the survival of those whose lives are nomadic, who carry weight of others' detritus with them. Here, ironically, it becomes a symbol of poverty and homelessness. Finally, this self-referential comic notes its own power as journalism, when several of those interviewed reject cameras (e.g. 2015, 33), but allow a sketchbook. These scenes suggest that, in addition to the techniques described throughout this chapter, comics can offer less aggressive, but still impactful, access to understanding real-world problems.

Conclusion

By way of a quick summary, given the many layers of borders they depict, these three books add to a conversation on comics and borders. Since Catalonia is a contested region, with a prevailing sense of identity in between the rest of Spain and the rest of Europe, immigrants in the region

are doubly, if not triply rooted. Baala, Khalid, and Rashid are economic refugees from different areas of Africa, and they bring with them the historical complexities of a web of relations between their home countries, Catalonia, Spain, and Europe, as well as the global north. The cast of characters in *Barcelona* represent an even more complex tapestry of stories and border identities.

Meanwhile, these works also serve as good examples of the power of comics that put a human face on a complex political issue, eliciting strong emotional responses in the readers who must fill in the inherent gaps to reassemble their stories. Through this and their paratextual supports (didactic guides, interviews, websites, etc.), the three comics have clear intentions of being relevant in the real world. The comics medium offers these stories particular opportunities to illustrate complex identities through page design, double narratives that emphasise permeability, and the replicas of real-world artefacts. This multi-layered nuance begins to undo the “dangers of a single story” while still providing a unified and coherent narrative, so that readers can also hear some of “*todas las voces que [nos] hablan simultáneamente*”.

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