MAPPING PRECARITY & RESISTANCE TO NEOLIBERALISM IN POST-2008 SPANISH COMICS

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ABSTRACT

Spanish peninsular literature and popular culture has increasingly focused on the 2008 global economic crisis as a primary focal point over the past decade, and the neoliberal economic and political policies that enabled it. This recession left a lasting mark, relegating citizens to precarity and alienation because of job insecurity and financial instability. Literary and cultural production have risen to critique neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis in Spain, and prior scholarship has engaged with this body of work extensively. Olga Bezhanova's work *Literature of Crisis: Spain's Engagement with Liquid Capital,* for example, analyzes the ways in which the eponymous body of literature critiques Spanish neoliberalism in the novel, essay, and poetry formats. More work is needed, however, in understanding the role that comics play in this social criticism, due to their unique ability to utilize cartooning to make difficult concepts more approachable to their reader. While work has been done in this field, a comprehensive and in-depth study of *comics* of the crisis is needed to advance the field further. This dissertation intervenes at this critical juncture. Engaging with scholars of neoliberalism and the economic crisis, most notably Wendy Brown and Guy Standing, as well as Scott McCloud's and Nick Sousanis' approaches to understanding comics, this dissertation analyzes the unique ways in which comics engage with the crisis. These comics are not only informed by the crisis and cycles of protest in Spain, but can also serve as a tool for the reader to map their own positionality within neoliberalism in Spain and, perhaps, visualize solutions to their alienation. Through comics, we can gain a more robust understanding of this crucial moment in contemporary Spanish history.

This dissertation is dedicated to my partner Spencer, and to my friends and family who have seen me through this process.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

The prominent comics studies scholar Scott McCloud tells us that: "Today, comics is one of the very few forms of mass communication in which individual voices still have a chance to be heard" (197). If we accept that comics can indeed augment individual voices, it must be said that comics can also be an important tool in apprehending major events and difficult cultural traumas. This dissertation seeks to reveal the role of comics in illuminating neoliberalism in Spain in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. This crisis had a crushing impact on Spain, as the fallout from neoliberal economic policy dramatically increased precarity across the country. In response, new configurations of popular protest such as the *mareas*, the PAH, and the 15M *indignados* movement took to the streets to demand political reform. Cultural production has played a key role in the examination and criticism of the crisis and neoliberalism in Spain, including literature (as described by Olga Bezhanova, Pablo Valdivia, and Bécquer Seguín), film (as described by Manuel de la Fuente, Carmen Moreno-Nuño, and Dean Allbritton), and theater (as described by Scott Boehm, Duncan Wheeler, and Matthew Feinberg). While the role of comics in this process has been examined by scholars such as Benjamin Fraser, Xavier Dapena, and Jorge Catalá-Carrasco, among others, more work is needed to illuminate how the critical powers of comic art manifest across the medium, which is where this dissertation intervenes. It expands upon how comics have been wielded to apprehend the crisis and the neoliberal politics that enabled it, seeking to understand what makes comics unique in this endeavor.

To achieve this, this dissertation's analysis engages with scholars of comics studies such as Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, and Nick Sousanis, as well as cognitive mapping (Frederic Jameson) and neoliberalism (Wendy Brown and Guy Standing) to perform a close reading of the comics considered throughout. This approach demonstrates that "the comics of

crisis” (named as such in the spirit of Olga Bezhanova’s 2017 book *Literature of Crisis: Spain’s Engagement with Liquid Capital*) develop clear critiques of neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis in Spain, representing a deep disillusionment with the hegemonic[1] neoliberal political and economic system. To do this, comic art wields multimodality, abstraction through cartooning, reader closure, and the fusion of multiple vantage points to enable a wide range of readers to cognitively map their own (precarious) positionality within the broader structures of neoliberal Spanish society. As Sousanis describes, comics “unflatten” prevailing perspectives on the world through bringing together many distinct points of view, providing new ways of seeing. This dissertation asserts that this “unflattening” is well in line with the spirit of the cycles of protest driven by the 2008 crisis that inform many of the comics analyzed here, especially the 15M *indignados* movement, which favored horizontal democratic organization and discourse. These elements of comic art, along with their inclusive and democratic nature, are what make comics unique from other forms of cultural production.

Thus, comic art can provide its readers with the tools needed to understand their own relationships to the prevailing neoliberal systems in Spain. This will be elaborated by means of an analysis of comics of distinct genres and perspectives, which reveals that bringing these perspectives together expands contemporary considerations of the 2008 crisis and serves as a tool in the cognitive mapping of situational relationships to hegemonic neoliberal norms in Spain. This study contributes to the fields of Spanish peninsular studies and comics studies by broadening the study of comics as they pertain to neoliberalism and the economic crisis in Spain

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[1] I understand “hegemony” in context with Antonio Gramsci who describes the concept in his *Prison Notebooks.* Specifically he notes that the functions of hegemony and direct domination by the state comprise “The ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of a population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group…” and also “The apparatus of state coercive power which ‘legally’ enforces discipline on those groups who do not ‘consent’ either actively or passively” (145).

and by detailing the critical power wielded by the medium of comics. This introduction to the present study will discuss the project's theoretical orientation, the historical context of neoliberalism and crisis in Spain, and how both these last broadly inform the project's research questions and analysis.

Theoretical Orientation: Neoliberalism, Alienation, & Cognitive Mapping

As discussed above, this dissertation is interested in the ways that comics of crisis are both influenced by and respond to the economic crisis in Spain, its neoliberal underpinnings, and the cycles of protest it has inspired. It is also interested in the ways these comics can serve as a tool for a reader to map their own positionality within the societal structures of Spain post-2008, as the effects of the crisis continue to be studied and better understood into the present day[2]. To understand this angle of analysis, this section engages with the theoretical base that informs this dissertation's discussion of these points, with special attention paid to neoliberalism, alienation, and the concept of cognitive mapping. Successive sections then engage with how comics theory intersects with these throughlines and detail the historical context that informs these comics.

Let us begin with the concept of neoliberalism, which connects all chapters of this dissertation. While neoliberalism is often narrowly understood as a set of policies that favors deregulation and reducing government spending in the name of the free market, neoliberalism is here considered a normative, hegemonic force. This position is informed by Wendy Brown, who describes neoliberalism as: "an order of normative reason that, when it becomes ascendant, takes shape as a governing rationality extending a specific formulation of economic values, practices, and metrics to every dimension of human life" (30). In other words, Brown argues that

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[2] This is not to say that these comics are strictly pedagogical in a top-down sense; rather, in enabling this cognitive mapping they serve as another discursive voice in apprehending the crisis, reflective of what Cristina Flesher-Fominaya identifies as the "deliberative democratic practices" of movements like the 15M (Flesher Fominaya 142).

neoliberalism is not simply a politics of deregulation and cutting government spending. Rather,

neoliberal capitalism has become so dominant globally that it projects these economic values

into every aspect of human existence. It is on this basis that this dissertation considers

neoliberalism a hegemonic force, and it is to this hegemony that the comics of crisis respond[3].

Specifically, these comics construct their critiques of neoliberalism through a focus on the

alienation inherent in precarious life. This project's understanding of precarity is informed by the

labor economist Guy Standing, who describes the emergence of a new socioeconomic class

known as the precariat. Defined among other things by its income insecurity and failure to (as

yet) identify as a class for itself, Standing describes the precariat as identifiable by a particular

structure of social income, "which imparts a vulnerability going well beyond what would be

conveyed by the money income received at a particular moment…" (12). He goes on to explain

that a key feature of the precariat is not the precise income earned by a precarious individual, but

rather " the lack of community support in times of need, lack of assured enterprise or state

benefits, and lack of private benefits to supplement money earnings" (12). Vulnerability is key;

Standing notes that the precariat is far more vulnerable than even those who make less money,

but who maintain structures of community support and/or state benefits (12). Alienation thus

emerges as the precarious individual lacks solidarity in their community. Understanding

alienation, therefore, is key to understanding comics of crisis' social commentary.

Karl Marx developed early considerations of alienation in his *Economic and Philosophic*

Manuscripts of 1844, where he argues that workers under capitalism are estranged not only from

the products of their labor, but also from one another and their own humanity. While Marx's

writings alone cannot adequately describe how alienation operates in contemporary neoliberal

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[3] Of course, how neoliberalism appears and operates in the Spanish context is unique to Spain, and the details of this will be discussed in more detail below.

society, his considerations serve as a useful point of departure. For Marx, estranged labor turns

humanity's species essence: "into a being alien to him, into a means to his individual existence…

In fact, the proposition that man's species-nature is estranged from him means that one man is

estranged from the other, as each of them is from man's essential nature…" (95). It is this

estrangement – not only from the products of labor, but also from one's fellow human beings –

that is especially highlighted in these comics. The intent is not to represent Marxism as a totality,

nor to reduce the conceptualization of community ties to labor, since the comics considered in

this project demonstrate varying depictions of community[4]. Since Marx writes from a 19th

century perspective, the key to understanding alienation as an operative force in contemporary

neoliberalism is the fact that the individual subject, has been alienated from their family and their

community. This relates closely to Standing's descriptions of the precariat's vulnerability due to

their lack of community support. Thus, to comprehend the impact of the destruction of labor and

community organizations to be replaced by the precarious, neoliberal workplace as a

"community" of alienated individuals exposed to new forms of vulnerability, it is necessary to

engage with contemporary scholars of neoliberalism to understand how alienation manifests in

the contemporary world.

Guy Standing's considerations prove useful in this endeavor. For Standing, alienation is

one of the four A's that the precariat experiences: "anger, anomie, anxiety, and alienation" (19).

Standing notes that anger arises from lost opportunities for advancement and deprivation, which

leads to anomie – "a feeling of passivity born of despair" (21). The precariat must also live with

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[4] It is important to note also that the contexts surrounding Marxism are different in contemporary Spain than in other parts of the world (such as the United States, for example). The Communist Party of Spain (*Partido Comunista de España,* hereafter PCE) was key to anti-Francoist resistance following the Spanish Civil War (Cowan 227), and the Communist Party remains a part of contemporary Spanish politics, albeit a small part. As of the time of writing (2023), the PCE forms a part of Spain's coalition government (*Boletín Oficial del Estado - Autoridades y Personal. Presidencia del Gobierno.*).

anxiety due to chronic insecurity, itself resulting from them being alienated. Alienation itself: "…arises from knowing that what one is doing is not for one's own purpose or for what one could respect or appreciate; it is simply done for others, at their behest" (21). In Spain, this alienation emerged from the flexibilization of the labor market, especially with the growth of the "shadow economy" in which precarious laborers made up 20% of Spain's GDP following the 2008 crash (56). This impact is important, as it is the alienation of the precariat to which comics of crisis pay special attention.

Critical theory bridges the theoretical underpinnings of neoliberalism and alienation in this dissertation's analysis, considering how comics serve as a constituent discursive voice in the cognitive mapping of the precariat individual's positionality within greater societal norms in post-2008 Spain. To understand this I draw from Frederic Jameson's description of cognitive mapping, which he describes as "a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system…" (92). Jameson develops this concept in context with the present postmodern (or late capitalist) era. He describes postmodernism as the result of a multinational phase of capitalism which seeks to invade and co-opt all aspects of existence that had previously not been commodified (78). This is reminiscent of Wendy Brown's description of how contemporary neoliberalism projects economic values on every aspect of human existence. In this postmodern world, Jameson describes that the individual often struggles to create a comprehensive cognitive map precisely because of late capitalism's focus on individualism and consumerism, which ultimately creates a sense of disorientation; the individual subject is not only alienated, therefore, they are essentially fragmented as well (63). Postmodernism, he says, has become a "cultural dominant," in which "aesthetic culture today has become integrated into commodity production generally" (56).

6

While not all cultural production is necessarily postmodern in nature, he says it all must navigate the postmodern cultural dominant in its creation.

Jameson expands at length upon the aspects to what he describes as the "cultural dominant" of postmodernism. Among these exists a sort of replacement of the deep with the superficial by means of, in part, the fragmentation of the individual subject mentioned above (58-62). This results in the rise of pastiche, and a move from *quality* to *quantity* in cultural production (64), along with a fragmentation of social life which becomes "reduced to a neutral and reified media speech" (65). Ultimately, in Jameson's view, the late capitalist world lacks a "great collective project" as well as an "older national language" (65). Thus, for Jameson this begs the question of the function of culture, in part because postmodernism has attempted to abolish the act of critical aesthetic distance, or the ability to perceive of oneself as positioned outside of the hegemonic "Being" of capital (92).

It is from this context that the concept of cognitive mapping emerges. Jameson calls for a new cultural model in response to postmodernism/late capitalism which "foregrounds the cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of political art and culture…" (89). This new political art needs to achieve new ways of representing multinational capitalism, "…in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle" (92)[5]. In light of this, Jameson states that cognitive maps "enable a situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structures as a whole" (90). In sum, cognitive mapping

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[5] This cognitive mapping is desveloped in context with ideology, citing Louis Althusser and Jacques Lacan. In particular, Jameson directly refers to the definition of ideology as a "representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser 693).

would allow the subject to counteract the alienation, disorientation and fragmentation of late capitalist society, and Jameson emphasizes that cultural texts have a role to play in this endeavor.

These considerations of cognitive mapping inform the broader thesis of this dissertation, namely, that the discursive voices of comics of crisis serve as a tool for a reader in cognitively mapping their own precarious relationships to the broader social norms of global neoliberalism, and how these norms manifest in Spain. However, Jameson's conceptions of cognitive mapping are not applied uncritically within this dissertation, as Jameson is not without criticism in the academy[6]. In particular, the issue of presenting Marxist theory as a totality (see: During 1987) and the issue of potential homogenizing discourses (see: Mukherjee 1990) are the most relevant critiques to this dissertation. While Jameson laments the existence of "discursive heterogeneity without a norm" (65), discursive heterogeneity is important to the cultural sphere in which this dissertation analyzes comics of crisis – the 2008 economic crisis and (crucially) the cycles of protest that emerged from it. Indeed, as the engagement with historical context below notes, one of the constituent factors of the 15M is its celebration of cultures of anyone, that is, the fusion of not just expert voices but of the voice of the common person as well in the movement's open, non-hierarchical structures (Moreno-Caballud 224). These movements are defined in part by

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[6] Postcolonial and decolonial studies are one important angle of critique of Jameson's analysis. For example, scholars argue that while Marxist criticism views postmodernism as ahistorical, "from its roots in architecture on, postmodernism has been embroiled in debates and dialogues with the past (see Hutcheon). This is where it overlaps significantly with the post-colonial…" (Hutcheon 152). Other scholars disagree with Jameson's assertion that postmodernism is a cultural dominant (During 32) and argue that "…the concept of postmodernity has been constructed in terms which more or less intentionally wipe out the possibility of post-colonial identity", while questioning Jameson's conception of postmodernity as a totality (33). Still others find issue with the "assimilationist and homogenizing moves" (Mukherjee 3) of both postmodern *and* post-colonial theories, arguing that postmodernists who "wrench the post-colonial and non-white texts of Euro-America out of their cultural context" are being "assimilative and hegemonic" (3), while "a post-colonial theory which creates a unitary post-colonial subject by erasing the differences between and within diverse post-colonial societies…" can be just as problematic as postmodernist theory that it seeks to critique (7). While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to contribute to this discussion, it must be acknowledged here.

their coalitional nature[7]. Since the cognitive mapping that these comics facilitate is placed

squarely in context with these cycles of protest and their discursive heterogeneity, this analysis

does not present Jameson's conceptions of postmodernism and cognitive mapping as a totality.

One must consider how collective projects may ensure diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice,

and thus this dissertation's analysis highlights the necessity of the many voices that are important

to these comics (and their cultural contexts).

For these reasons, this dissertation draws from Jameson's conceptions of cognitive

mapping to examine how these comics of crisis may enable a mapping of an individual's

positionality within and situational relationships to the greater social realities of neoliberalism

and crisis in Spain, while acknowledging the limitations inherent in Jameson's considerations.

Simultaneously, it acknowledges that while much of the analysis within considers class

configurations (especially the alienation of the precariat individual), it does so with the

acknowledgment that this angle is only one approach within the larger discursive diversity that is

necessary to fully appreciate the cultural impact of the comics of crisis. To this end, this

dissertation places its analysis in context with other scholarly conversations throughout the

analyses in each chapter. This theoretical framework was chosen due to its fit with the

throughlines of this dissertation, namely, the alienation inherent in precarious life post-2008.

Furthermore, this theoretical frame emerges from established scholarship that analyzes comic art

by means of critical theory, since scholars note that critical theory can highlight "the hegemonic

implications of specific cultural meanings found in modern media that reinforce the economic

status quo," (McAllister & Cruz 10). Moreover, comics have been shown to be suitable for

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[7] For example, queer and feminist groups such as the Transmaricobollo Assembly and Feminismos Sol were integral in combining queer activism and anti-austerity demands, despite facing heterosexist criticisms and pushback (Navarro 94-5).

critical theory analysis, with an established body of work analyzing comics' ideological

messages (10-1). Recent studies have even considered comics published after the 2008 crisis in

the light of the "cognitive and ideological function of art", inspired by Frederic Jameson and

others (Pereira-Zazo 61-86)[8]. To understand the specifics of how this theoretical frame operates

within comic art, let us now to engage with the history and theory of comics, as well as how

Spanish cultural production has responded to the 2008 economic crisis specifically.

The Theory and History of Comics

There are many competing definitions of the comic, which are often contradictory and

based on ahistorical accounts (Meskin 369-70). Indeed, it has been noted that "So great is the

diversity of what has been claimed as comics, or what is claimed today under diverse latitudes,

that it has become almost impossible to retain any definitive criteria that is universally held to be

true" (Groensteen, "The Impossible Definition" 126). A brief consideration of the many

possibilities does prove useful, however. Scott McCloud defines comics as "Juxtaposed pictorial

and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an

aesthetic response in the viewer" (9), which provides a useful starting point. Catherine Labio's

definition is more expansive and identifies multiple constituent elements of comic art, including

being mass-market products, varying in length from only a few panels to containing hundreds of

pages, having global reach, and including both the visual and literary where text is not privileged

over image (124). It has also been suggested that the central tenant to the comics medium is the

idea of iconic solidarity, that is, "interdependent images that, participating in a series, present the

double characteristic of being separated […] and which are plastically and semantically

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[8] Pereira-Zazo's article "Geografías distópicas en tres novelas gráficas pos-15M. Galvañ, Bustos y Colo" is considered in greater detail in the first chapter, as the author analyzes *Pulse enter para continuar* as I do in that chapter.

overdetermined by the fact of their coexistence *in praesentia"* (Groensteen, "The Impossible Definition" 128). Comics are also multimodal, in that they present a hybridity of form (Frey & Noys 255-6) and reach across generations in terms of their characters and narratives (Merino 570), which opens them to many forms of analysis.

In the spirit of the multitudinous considerations of the comic (and the diverse voices in the solidaristic cycles of protest from which many comics of crisis take inspiration), this dissertation engages with a constellation of theorists to understand how the medium operates. How comics are considered must go beyond how literature is considered, since the interplay between text and image in comics sets them apart from the classic "ideology of purity"[9] that has pervaded Western thinking in areas such as literary criticism (Groensteen, "Why Are Comics Still in Search of Cultural Legitimization?" 33-6). Scott McCloud's considerations in *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (1994) are a useful starting point, in particular his considerations of the combination of text and image, the transitions between panels, and artistic style. The multimodality of text and image is one key aspect that sets comics apart from other mediums. Though other mediums (such as film) do possess multimodality and hybridity of form, the unique power of comics' approach comes in part through abstraction and cartooning: "When we abstract an image through cartooning, we're not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details. By stripping down an image to its essential 'meaning,' an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't" (McCloud 30-1). Scholars beyond McCloud have highlighted this as well; for example, research has suggested that due to psychological mechanisms and the functioning of the human visual system, "Caricature, and not

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[9] Groensteen explains this ideology of purity as modernity preaching the deepening of each discipline's specificity, be that in literature, film, or other medium (34).

11

realism, is a mechanism for visual memory" (Medley 53). This supports McCloud's perspective on the power of abstraction through cartooning and its ability to convey complex information.

Abstraction through cartooning is not the only way in which comics can do this. Also important is the high degree of reader closure that comics require, due to the "gutter" (or transition) between panels. As McCloud explains, the concept of closure is key to understanding how comics convey information. In the act of closure, McCloud says, one observes the parts but perceives the whole, which is necessary as comics panels fracture the narrative: "But closure allows us to connect these moments, and mentally construct a continuous, unified reality. If visual iconography is the vocabulary of comics, closure is its grammar" (66-7). In sum, closure aids in understanding how readers interact with comics, and vice versa. Together closure, abstraction through cartooning, and comics' multimodality are effective in communicating information, which is key to understanding how the comics in this dissertation enable readers to situate themselves within the greater totality of their daily lives. Indeed, Alan Manning notes that McCloud's considerations of comic art are especially powerful, since a drawing or sketch can amplify new ideas by simplifying them and embodying concepts in a way that photos or film cannot (67-8). As McCloud notes, comics welcome any creator who has access to pen or pencil and paper (197), which makes the medium open to diverse viewpoints and narratives. Comic art offers the ability to be heard without compromise: "It offers *range* and *versatility* with all the potential imagery of *film* and *painting* plus the *intimacy* of the *written word"* (212-3, author's emphasis). He goes on to say that all that is needed is "the desire to be heard – the will to learn – and the ability to see (213). Thus, as McCloud understands it, the world of comics is based upon this vision, the coming together of creator and reader in partnership to create something new (205), making them a distinctly democratic medium.

Nick Sousanis expands upon these considerations in his work *Unflattening* (2015). In a world defined by what Sousanis refers to as one-dimensional thought and behavior due to the internalized limits to the ways in which we perceive the world, comic art offers an alternative. Much as McCloud considers comics a way of seeing, Sousanis identifies the opportunities for comic art to unflatten the ways in which readers understand the world: "Unflattening is a simultaneous engagement of multiple vantage points from which to engender new ways of seeing" (33). Whereas words have often been considered the primary tool of thought and images have been relegated to "spectacle and aesthetics" (54), in the medium of comics the two are allowed to exist in harmony, enriching one another to convey meaning (64). In this, he says, every aspect of the structure of this combination of image and word is important, including the size, shape, placement, and relationship of components, which together "produce a symphony" (65). Because of this combination of multiple perspectives, "Comics can hold the unflat ways in which thought unfolds" (66). As a result of comics' "multiplicity of approaches for constituting experience" (66), Sousanis argues that the form provides a way to perceive of one's own preconceived notions and move beyond them. Important is the space in between the multitudinous perspectives that comics bring together, "spaces for the unknown, openings for imagination to spill into" (163), which is reminiscent of McCloud's conceptualizations of closure (McCloud 63). Comics, in sum, unflatten perceptions of the world by providing new perspectives.

Scott McCloud's understandings of the constituent aspects of comic art and Nick Sousanis' considerations of unflattening perceptions of the world by engaging multiple vantage points fit well within the scope and context of this dissertation. As discussed previously, the fusion of many vantage points is important to any consideration of not only the crisis and the

resulting cycles of protest, but also the comic art that draws inspiration from them. This dissertation thus analyzes the ways in which comics of crisis serve as a tool towards a cognitive mapping of a reader's situational relationship within the larger structures of neoliberalism and crisis in Spain, informed by the horizontal democratic practices of mobilizations like the 15M. This is appropriate given comics' own approachable and democratic nature (McCloud 205-13) and their ability to unflatten (or complicate) a reader's viewpoints on the world by engaging with multiple vantage points simultaneously (Sousanis 33). Comics are thus well-positioned for a critical theory approach, given that critical theory can highlight hegemonic societal structures and present ideological critiques (McAllister & Cruz 10-1).

It is important to note that other approaches to comics are possible as well. In recent years, scholars have begun to consider comics empirically to trace how they convey meaning. One example of this is Visual Language Theory (VLT), which posits that the structure of sequential images is similar to the structure of verbal language (Cohn, "Visual Language Theory and the Scientific Study of Comics" 305-28). VLT and its sub-theory Visual Narrative Grammar (VNG) propose that: "This involves encoding into memory systemic mappings between form (sounds, graphics) and meaning to create 'lexical items' (words, images) which are then sequentially ordered using a grammatical system (syntax, narrative)" (Cohn, "In Defense of a 'Grammar' in the Visual Language of Comics" 2). In essence, empirical research suggests that multiple systems are involved in a reader garnering meaning from comics, which results in a visual language that is inherent to visual media like comics (Cohn, "The Architecture of Visual Narrative Comprehension" 1).

VLT's linguistic and cognitive science approach to understanding comics is not without critique and competing models; some scholars have suggested that the consideration of visual

language and grammar is problematic when removed from "natural language" and that there are approaches that do not require the assumption of grammar (Bateman y Wildfeuer, "Defining Units of Analysis for the Systematic Analysis of Comics"). Alternative models have been proposed, such as models of discourse pragmatics, which is argued to provide: "…a new foundation for reengaging with visual communicative artefacts in a manner compatible with the models developed for verbal linguistic artifacts, but without positing misleading analogies with linguistic syntax" (Bateman y Wildfeuer, "A Multimodal Discourse Theory of Visual Narrative" 181). While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to contribute to the discussion surrounding the linguistic structures and cognitive science of comic art, it is important to note this discussion here as it is an important line of research in the study of comics.

In sum, therefore, it is the theories of the comics medium presented by the likes of Thierry Groensteen, Scott McCloud, and Nick Sousanis that inform the thesis for the broader dissertation project. As comics provide a means for seeing the world from new perspectives and making complex, opaque topics approachable through their multitudinous ways of seeing, those considered in this dissertation serve as a tool for their readers in the forming of cognitive maps in the context of the 2008 economic crisis and the broader issues of neoliberalism. Much as Sousanis describes how comics allow readers to push past preconceived notions of understanding the world (or of unflattening their perspectives) (8-10), so too can comics of crisis allow readers' imaginations to see outside hegemonic norms of contemporary neoliberalism that inform viewpoints on the crisis and perceive of their own positionality within those norms. To elaborate upon how this operates within the context of the 2008 economic crisis in Spain, let us now consider the history of the medium on the Iberian Peninsula (and beyond).

Scholarship has shown that comics have a rich history both in Spain and globally. In general, scholars have argued that comics have roots in the 18th and 19th Century, with the likes of William Hogarth and Rodolphe Töpffer as prime examples (Fraser, *Visible Cities, Global Comics: Urban Images and Spatial Form* 20). Hogarth was a caricaturist and printmaker in the 18th century in London, often satirizing urban life in his work (20). Though it remains in debate whether Hogarth's engravings count as comics in the strictest sense, his work is often acknowledged as a precursor to modern comics (22). Töpffer worked in 19th-century Geneva, and is often considered to be a pioneer of modern comics (24). As Fraser describes, Töpffer can be said to have contributed to comics and comics studies, suggesting that if Hogarth's work can be considered an early form of comics, then "perhaps Töpffer's works deserve to be seen as 'graphic novels.' Kunzle uses the term 'graphic novel' intentionally to characterize the textimage combinations that the artist saw as a secondary" (25). Thus, comics have a long and varied history, well before the emergence of comics and comic books as they have come to be known in the present day.

Eventually the works pioneered by Töpffer would make their way to the Iberian Peninsula, but even before that graphic storytelling already existed in Iberia, as McKinney & Richter note. This came particularly in the form of proto-comics known as *aleluyas* in the 19th century which "consisted of a single-page of images, usually having 48 panels, each of which included a rhyming couplet or triplet" (5). Later, satirical comic strips would appear for adults in the late 19th century in such publications as *La Flaca* and *Madrid Cómico* (7), though McKinney & Richter observe that in the early decades of the twentieth century comics for adults declined due to "changes to the mechanics of printing… as well as continued urbanization and the capitalist development that came with it, and shifting attitudes (such as a move away from

didactic morality in favor of pure entertainiment)" (7). Comic books as they are known today would begin to appear in the 1930s, first taking the form of "funnies" (called "tebeos" in Spain), and then later evolving into other forms (Gil González 2-3). Some of the earliest of Spanish comic books would be overtly political. For example, *Flechas y Pelayos* served as a sort of propaganda machine for the far-right dictatorship of Francisco Franco in Spain (4). Because of repression and censorship practices under this dictatorship, many Spanish comics artists would flee repressive life under Franco to work in the comics industries in other countries, such as that in France (Fraser, "The Comics Landscape of Spain" 34). Another key example of an important comic in the Spanish landscape is *Mortadelo y Filemón,* which began its run in 1958 and has continued into the present day. Called "the most successful Spanish comic book series ever published" (Rey 453), it has inspired the creation of film over the years, such as the 2003 film *La gran Aventura de Mortadelo y Filemón* which presented critiques of the Franco dictatorship (461). This comic continues to provide social commentary into the present day, taking up such issues as climate change (Álvarez-Herrero 38-62).

It was not until the 1970s that comics in Spain would begin to appear in larger numbers for adult audiences, which included underground comics (McKinney & Richter 8). Scholars note that in Spain, these underground comics carried a transgressive reputation, especially under Franco. Many were fiercely censored by the regime, however on occasion comics would manage to escape censorship because their target audience was children. In these works, critiques of the authoritarian system were subtle, including such characters as "Don Pío, a good-natured clerk at the mercy of his cruel boss" or "Carpanta, who goes hungry and lives under a bridge in a Spain in which the authorities were vehement in their denials of the realities of poverty" (Merino 570), among others. As a result, Merino says, both children and adults could see a reflection of their

17

own bitterness towards the dictatorship reflected in these characters. Spanish comics, thus, have a rich history of subversive political critique. Ultimately, comics would emerge as a key medium for understanding and critiquing the brutality of the dictatorship, especially after Franco's death and into the transition to democracy, including Carlos Gimenez's *Paracuellos* (1976), "which famously represented the experiences of orphaned children living under the dictatorship and arguably demonstrated comics' capacity for denunciation as a way of working through Spain's dark past" (Fraser, "The Comics Landscape of Spain" 48). Fraser goes on to note that even after the end of Francoist censorship, the transgressive nature of comic art solidified comics as an integral part of counterculture movements in Spain (48).

However, scholars have noted that the comics industry in Spain struggled between the 1960s and the early 2000s as publishing houses dwindled, due in part to emergence of television (McKinney & Richter 9). Though artists during this time struggled especially to publish projects with long narratives, comics creators nevertheless persisted: "Important figures from the previous decade now shared a collaborative space with a newer generation, and both groups benefited from a growing understanding of comics artists as auteurs defined by their unique graphic style" (Fraser, "The Comics Landscape of Spain" 49). During this time frame we see the importance of such comics authors as Max, Miguelanxo Prado, and Carlos Giménez, as well as the emergence of the underground comics magazine *El Víbora* which broke ground as the first such underground publication sold in kiosks (49-50). Into the 1990s, Fraser notes the beginning of a "renewed intellectual commitment" to comic art (51), and new publishing houses would emerge in the early 2000s (53). Nevertheless, the comics industry in Spain still struggled between the late 1980s and 2000, with the graphic novel format being one way in which the industry shifted in response (McKinney & Richter 11-2). This shift came with an increase in

18

marketability, leading to a "second boom" of comics in Spain leading into the 21st century (12-4).

Comics artists in Spain during this time would take up serious issues such as the Civil War and gender inequality, which McKinney & Richter signify as being representative of the "new era of graphic novel production" (16). In the graphic novel, authors would seek to achieve a certain autonomy, "despite their traditionally precarious position insofar as their relationship with agencies and editors, often the owners of the rights to the work in question" (Gil González 3). Into the present day, comics have also become an important medium for exploring difficult topics in the Spanish landscape, including the historical memory of the dictatorship. Frances Capdevila I Gisbert (pen name Max) and Miguelanxo Prado are two notable examples of this, both of whom "best represent the transition from the comic, orientated toward children, to the more adult 'graphic novel'" (A. Merino 571)[10]. Indeed, many comics speak directly to this dictatorship, notably Rubén Uceda's *Atado y bien atado* (2018), a work that details the journey of Spain as it transitioned to democracy following the death of Francisco Franco. Scholars have noted that such comics that consider memory and postmemory both highlight and embrace the reality that: "those who are producing cultural works of historical memory did not live the national traumas themselves; their approach is characterized by the obligation to (re)construct

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[10] Importantly, I will not use the term *graphic novel* to refer to the comics considered in this dissertation. Though many may indeed be able to be considered as such, there is extensive debate surrounding the term. McKinney & Richter note that scholars and practitioners of comic art felt that the term graphic novel was "simply a way to side-step the historical stigma surrounding comics, or a marketing gimmick meant to repackage and sell comics to adult readers," (11). Indeed, scholars suggest that the use of the term *graphic novel* has "…been an attempt to rescue comics from their critical neglect, as well as to recognize the emergence of specifically adult comics and book-length works, particularly in the last 20 years" (Frey & Noys 255). Similarly, Labio insists that "The adoption of the label graphic novel to denote an entire genre (as opposed to a subset of comics reflects a sad narrowing of the field to a very small and unrepresentative canon" (124). Thus, for the sake of inclusivity, I will refer to all works throughout the dissertation as simply *comics,* except when citing other scholars who themselves explicitly use the term "graphic novel".

and (re)present them by means of an imaginative act mediated by previous narratives… "
(Tronsgard 268-9). Other comics take on more recent events, such as the 2008 economic crisis
and neoliberalism, which is the primary focus of this dissertation. Recent comics have even
begun to consider the COVID-19 pandemic, such as Max's *Manifiestamente anormal* (2020) and
Ana Jiménez Espinal's *Pandemiah* (2020).

It is also important to note that while this dissertation considers comics that critique the
2008 economic crisis and neoliberalism, Spanish comic art that is critical of capitalism is not a
new phenomenon. Indeed, graphic narratives critical of the capitalist system in Spain were alive
and well in the years preceding the crisis. One notable example is Miguel Brieva's *Dinero,* which
originally ran between 2001 and 2005 and was compiled into a single volume in 2008. *Dinero*
began as an underground comic, eventually becoming a fixture of Spanish counterculture (Torres
50). In this comic, Brieva has been noted to be able to make visible "las diversas contradicciones
generadas por el capitalismo y la sociedad de consumo que las sustenta" (52) / "the diverse
contradictions generated by capitalism and the society of consumption that sustain them" (52, my
translation). Torres notes that *Dinero* works to "producir una intervención política y social desde
el ámbito de la cultura" (62) / "produce a political and social intervention from the sphere of
culture" (62, my translation). Andrés Rabago García (pen name El Roto) is another such
important comics artist who, besides being a dedicated protest artist following the 2008
economic crisis was active well before. García was active as early as the 1970s under the original
pen name OPS, but under the pen name El Roto (which was first used in 1972) "his cartoons
became more overtly critical of the social situation in Spain, with the use of caustic humor and
direct attacks on capitalism" (Mourenza 83). Thus, the works explicitly critical of the 2008
economic crisis and of neoliberalism (what this dissertation chooses to call "comics of crisis")

have emerged from a rich history of critiques of capitalism in graphic narratives, and some of the authors considered here have been active in their criticisms for decades.

Neoliberalism, the 2008 Economic Crisis, and Cycles of Protest in Spain

To best understand critiques of the 2008 crisis and neoliberalism in Spanish comic art, it is now necessary to engage with the history of this crisis and of neoliberalism to fully situate the historical context of these works. Scholars note that neoliberalism globally finds its seeds in the theories of Friedrich A. von Hayek and Milton Friedman between the 1940s and the 1960s, before nations such as the United States, Britain, and others "worked to shift away from social collectivity and Keynesian government to radical individualism and macroeconomic strategies" in the 1970s and 1980s (Elliott & Harkins 4). The theory of neoliberalism generally has been noted to hold that "heightened market relations and privatization stipulate a minimalist state aimed at advocating efficiency and productivity" (Engel 215). In Spain, the arrival of neoliberal policies can be understood at least partially in context with the opening of the Spanish market in the waning years of the Franco regime after decades of autarky, as well as the transition to democracy following Franco's death in 1975. Many of these policies would come from outside Spain, as it sought to join the European Community in the 1980s and the European Union in the 1990s. As Laura Engel notes, "Spain's transition to a social democratic state and the democratization of institutions inherited from the Franco era were widely influenced by Spain's engagement with both European and global pressures" (218), which included the opening of the Spanish market to international competition in the 1960s. Neoliberal policies would continue to be implemented during Spain's transition to democracy. For instance, due to the economic plans

of the Moncloa Pacts of the 1970s[11], the Spanish state "carried out its project by suppressing

regulation of the financial world and worsening conditions in the labor market. At the same time,

as successive governments of the PSOE (1982-1996) decreed, industry was dismantled and large

public companies were privatized…" (Moreno-Caballud 54). Simultaneously, Spanish elites saw

integration into European "modernity" as crucial, which was a driving factor of Spain's

"neoliberal transformation"[12] (55).

Indeed, Europe in general was seen as a model for Spain to follow, and the victory of the

Partido Socialista Obrero Español (Spanish Socialist Workers' Party, hereafter PSOE) in the

1982 national elections saw a policy shift towards a search for efficiency in the government,

which Engel notes was a result of Spain looking to Europe as a model for economic growth:

"Ultimately, Spain's 1986 accession into the EC allowed for Spain to engage directly in vigorous

pursuit of policies aligned with European interests and provided Spain with a strong economic

boost that enabled it to reform public policy…" (219). These European interests carried

neoliberal elements within them, as the "euro system" itself has been called a laboratory of

neoliberalism (López-Castellano & García-Quero 169). López-Castellano & García-Quero argue

that the Maastricht Treaty that established the European Union imposed certain expectations on

constituent nations' economies, which included impositions of neoliberal culture on social policy

in the name of deficit reduction, in which "governments are applying severe austerity policies,

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[11] The Moncloa Pacts were a result of a meeting of Prime Minister Suárez and other party leaders in October 1977, in which an economic plan was announced to fight unemployment and inflation. Consisting of both economic and political agreements, the economic pacts have been referred to by scholars as "essentially an austerity plan that offered social reforms and more parliamentary control over the economy in exchange for wage restraint" (Desfor Edles 81-2).

[12] Importantly, Moreno-Caballud contrasts Spain's "neoliberal transformation" with the driving forces of neoliberalism in other countries: "In the Anglo-Saxon countries that had had a welfare state, the redistribution of wealth towards the rich that neoliberalism implies was accompanied by an ideology of disdain for the poor, stigmatized as supposed 'freeloaders' on the welfare system. Differently, the ideology that had enabled Spain's neoliberal transformation was that of integration into European 'modernity' (among other things because the Spanish welfare state was too weak to pretend that someone might 'take advantage' of it)" (54-5).

consisting of an increase of consumption taxes and a reduction of wages and of social aid, which are generating a vicious circle of negative growth and further austerity…" (176). As scholarship has shown, such neoliberal policies and austerity would come to Spain as it integrated with Europe.

Indeed, the conservative Partido Popular (People's Party, hereafter PP) governments of José María Aznar would engage in extensive economic liberalization in the 1990s, including a deregulation of the labor market, privatization efforts, and wage freezes (Magone 24). This was augmented following the 2000 elections when Aznar gained an absolute majority and subsequently increased his economic liberalization efforts (25). Scholars have noted that under Aznar's leadership, the PP came to embrace neoliberal economic policies both domestically and in regard to European integration (Llamazares 322); his governments were largely in favor of fiscal austerity in general, which included "policies aiming at market liberalization, deregulation, and a reduced participation of the public sector in the economy" (324). These included the proposed liberalization of telecommunications, gas, electricity, and transportation in the year 2000 (324). This was part of a larger move within the PP under Aznar's leadership, as it combined neoliberalism, Spanish nationalism, and a "transatlantic view" of integration with Europe (329).

Following these reforms, Spain's economy initially seemed to do well in the years leading up to the 2008 economic crisis. Immediately preceding the onset of the crisis, Spain had been considered one of Europe's strongest economies and in 2008 was in its fourteenth straight year of growth (Royo 121). In specific terms: "Unemployment fell from 20% in the mid-1990s to 7.95% in the first half of 2007 (the lowest level since 1978), as Spain became the second country in the EU (after Germany with a much larger economy) creating jobs (an average of 600,000 per year

over that decade)" (121). Royo goes on to note that in 2006 the Spanish economy "grew a spectacular 3.9%, and 3.8% in 2007" (121). This initial success was made possible in part due to the modernization of the Spanish economy following Spain's integration with the EU. However, Royo notes that this growth was fragile because it "was largely based on low-intensity economic sectors, which were not exposed to international competition" (128). Moreover, most jobs were in "low-productivity sectors" (128), including construction and tourism. Thus, the limitations to Spain's economy would quickly come to the forefront at the onset of the crisis.

Ultimately, the housing bubble burst in 2008, and during the following years, Spain spiraled into crisis. Hundreds of thousands of homes were either foreclosed upon or repossessed entirely (Cano Fuentes et al. 1198). Between 2006 and 2012, the poverty rate grew from 26.4% to 31.4% (Sales 217) and unemployment reached as high as 41% among young workers alone (Carballo-Cruz 310)[13]. The crisis was such that: "By the summer of 2013, Spain faced the worst economic recession in half a century" (Royo 129). 2009, according to Royo, was a particularly bad year: "GDP fell 3.7%, unemployment reached over four million people (eventually reaching over 27% in 2012, with more than 6 million people unemployed), and the public deficit reached a record 11.4% of GDP (up from 3.4% in 2008)" (129-30). While the economy would begin to recover in 2014 (See: Martí & Pérez 2016), the 2008 crash has been called the worst economic crisis in modern Spanish history until the arrival of COVID-19 (Royo 140). Research has suggested that this situation had a profound impact on mental health. One study showed that those affected by the crisis felt significantly lower satisfaction with their lives and perceived

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[13] Carballo-Cruz provides specific statistics for this: "The unemployment rate rose from 8.3% (1.834,000 unemployed), in late 2007, to 20.1% (4,632,000 unemployed). Unemployment increased mainly among younger workers (41% in the range of 16 to 25 years), particularly those with lower qualifications (between 25 and 45%, depending on education levels) and among foreigners (30%). Throughout 2010 there was a strong growth in long-term unemployment, which represents 42.5% of the total, particularly among workers between the ages of 45 and 64 years old" (310).

health across age, gender, and socioeconomic variables driven by personal and economic uncertainty, in line with previous studies that have observed that negative impacts of unemployment on health have been exacerbated by the 2008 crisis (Navarro-Carrillo et al. 3-12).

Scholarship has pointed out that although this crisis came as a shock, it should not have been a surprise (Royo 139). The nascent capitalist system made the initial economic growth tumultuous and fragile, and low taxes could not support the costs of public services (Banyuls & Recio 200-1). Specifically, Banyuls & Recio note that the background of economic developments in Spain before the crisis "promoted an economic development model focused on the volatile building industry, mobilized a reserve workforce in a very precarious social situation and weakened the country's tax base in a setting calling for higher spending" (206). Similarly, Vicenç Navarro considers the growth of financial capital and the deregulation of the banking sector as direct causes of the crisis, which fostered capitalism based on speculation. Navarro argues that this culture of deregulation caused a growth in the financial sector of the economy, which in turn caused growth in economic inequality, especially in the cost of living (28-9). For Royo, the "triple crisis" (the fiscal crisis, the loss of competitiveness, and the financial crises) in Spain had multiple causes. The fiscal crisis was driven by "the giant inflow of capital from the rest of Europe" (133) which resulted in rapid inflation, following which, "…the budget went into deep deficit, caused partly by depressed revenues and partly by emergency spending to limit human costs" (133). Spain also struggled with loss of competitiveness abroad (134-5), and ultimately the banking sector would fall into severe financial crises, with sovereign debt becoming an issue: "The crisis has largely been a problem of ever-growing private sector debt, compounded by reckless bank investments and loans, […] as well as aggravated by

competitiveness and current account imbalances" (137). This was made worse by poor policy decisions and excessive austerity measures imposed by the EU (139).

Corruption has also been shown to be a significant issue in relation to the economic crisis. For example, studies have shown that significant relationships exist between political corruption and the shadow economy (that is, underground/illicit economic activity), as well as Spain's increase in public debt in the autonomous communities during the time period immediately before and during the crisis (González-Fernández & González-Velasco 2014). Housing was another issue that faced corruption, where the growth in construction and urbanization "provided the essential economic incentives for those willing to take advantage of the structural problems of urban-planning control…" (Jiménez 263). The rise in housing development coincided with skyrocketing housing prices between 1997 and 2006, resulting in a stark increase in the difficulty in buying homes (264), a situation that was coupled with high levels of political corruption, including at the local level: "The incentives for corruption have been, hence, very substantial, to the extent that some of the leading characters in these [urban development] policies have not been content just to take advantage… but have also engaged in a wide variety of illegal behaviour" (268). Indeed, it has been shown that even at the municipality level, local politicians across political party lines enjoyed substantial financial powers but little pressure for accountability (Quesada et al. 618). Such corruption is by no means limited to the local level, however, as in 2018 the PP, along with several of its high ranking members, were found guilty of corruption at the conclusion of the so-called Gürtel Case, whereby the party itself was found to have profited from a bribery scheme regarding government contracts (Jones n.p.).

Irrespective of the precise causes of the crisis, the response to that crisis saw implementation of additional levels of neoliberal policy and austerity. For example, the PSOE

government under Zapatero would turn to austerity measures directed by the European

Commission in 2010, and the following PP government of Mariano Rajoy in 2011 would only

deepen austerity, introducing regressive and cultural taxes, and reform labor laws that hurt

workers all in the name of curtailing rising sovereign debt (de la Fuente 186). According to

Banyuls & Recio, the austerity measures undertaken by the socialist government in 2010 had at

their very nature a "neoliberal bent" (209), and included cuts in public spending, freezing

pensions, reforming the labor market, privatization of aspects of the public sector such as

lotteries and airports, and "modification of the Constitution (September 2011), including the

payment of public debt as the first priority of public budgets and constraining (in 2019) the

maximum public structural deficit to 0.4 per cent of GDP" (210). Rather than aid the crisis

situation, however, research has argued that these austerity measures in fact exacerbated the

crisis, pushing Spain (as well as Italy and Portugal, where similar measures were taken) deeper

into recession (Engler & Klein 89). Thus, while neoliberalism developed differently in the

Spanish context than in anglophone countries, for example (as described by Moreno-Caballud), it

has nonetheless been a point of contention in scholarship surrounding the crisis and the years

both preceding and following it.

  This crisis inspired extensive discussions among academics and activists in Spain (and

globally), and sparked a series of protest movements that critiqued the slashing of the social

safety net. These cycles of protest have been considered extensively in the academy, and

although this dissertation deals directly with them in the fourth chapter, it is important to engage

with the history of these movements here. Perhaps the most notable example of these cycles of

protest is the 15M *indignados* movement. On May 15th, 2011, thousands of *indignados* protested

in cities across the country, with Madrid being the epicenter. Descending on the Puerta del Sol,

protestors occupied the square until mid-June of that year, demanding accountability for those they saw as being the true cause of the crisis: corrupt politicians and bankers (Hughes 408). The impetus for the 15M demonstrations had come from street protests implemented by the citizen's group *Democracía Real Ya* ("Real Democracy Now") in multiple cities, following which activists decided to camp out in the Puerta del Sol (Revilla-Blanco & Molina Sánchez 209). This was suppressed by police, which "drew media attention and provoked indignation among a large section of the public. This produced more spontaneous calls for further action through social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, etc." (209). This ultimately led to the iconic 15M camp in the Puerta del Sol.

These demonstrations would blossom into a massive social movement, which was distinct from similar mobilizations in other countries such as the anti-austerity movement in the United Kingdom or the Occupy movement in the United States (and elsewhere). This is because the 15M's slogans were not simply about stopping the cuts to the social safety net but about seeking "real democracy" as well, highlighting that the crisis and austerity brought into focus a crisis of legitimacy for representative democracy: "They were presenting a central claim that the origin of the crisis was *political,* and not the result of abstract economic processes outside of anyone's control" (Flesher Fominaya, *Democracy Reloaded* 3). In addition, it was not just the size of the 15M *indignados* demonstrations that was surprising, but also the character of the movement as a whole, being one of the most notable examples of mobilization and organization through the internet and social networks (Morell 386). The 15-M mobilization "stands out for the strength of its mobilization, but also for its autonomous 'horizontal' forms of organizing" (Flesher Fominaya, *Democracy Reloaded* 10), which foster a collective 15-M identity "built primarily around movement political culture, that is, around a whole 15-M way of doing; and

shared master frames about the twin crises of austerity and democracy, rather than around a shared commitment to particular austerity issues" (13). Indeed, the 15M has been argued to demonstrate that there are ways of thinking that create momentum towards real change via horizontal democratic means (Valverde, *De la necropolítica neoliberal…* 90).

The 15M is not the only example of the cycles of protest in Spain. Other groups such as the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (the Platform for People Affected by Mortgages, hereafter the PAH) were also involved prior to the 15M, fighting for those affected by the mortgage and unemployment crises and galvanizing the Spanish people across generational and social/cultural divides (Morell 388-89). This group "se conformó en 2009 como un grupo de personas que creen que el marco legal actual está diseñado para garantizar que los bancos cobren las deudas, mientras que deja desprotegadas a las personas hipotecadas…" (Rivero Jiménez 280) / "was formed in 2009 as a group of people who believe that the current legal framework is designed to guarantee that banks collect debts, while leaving mortgaged people unprotected…" (Rivero Jiménez 280, my translation). The PAH would organize around the fact that Spanish law did not provide for mortgage payment relief for evicted families (Sabaté 198), as well as engaging in civil disobedience activities in response to evictions such as squatting (Berglund 854).

Las mareas ciudadanas ("citizens tides") were also an important series of movements during this time frame, especially in relation to the slashing of the social safety net by neoliberal policies and austerity. The *mareas* were a part of the cycle of protest that continued after the 15M, with multiple massive protests held between 2012 and 2014 that consisted of "activism for social rights and against the privatization of public services" (Revilla-Blanco & Molina-Sánchez 206-7). These "tides" would take on many different colors – green for education, white for

29

health, orange for social services, purple for equality, and red for unemployment, and "intentan, a través de la union de las personas trabajadoras y las personas usuarias, defender unos servicios públicos de calidad y protestar contra las diferentes recortes y políticas de austeridad impuestas desde el Goberino" (Rivero Jiménez 282) / "attempt, by means of the union of working people and users [of social services], to defend quality public services and protest against the different cuts and politics of austerity imposed by the Government" (Rivero Jiménez 282, my translation). The *mareas* have been noted for their horizontal forms of protest and discourse of optimism, and have been considered as a case study for their transmodality of metaphors; whereas *mareas* started as a "novel figurative expression for the people that marched for specific protests in education, health, civil rights, etc", it ended "as the name of some grassroot political parties, *Las Mareas,* that won local elections…" (Porto & Romano 341). The *mareas* metaphor would be adapted to many different modes to disseminate the movements' messages (342). Ultimately the *mareas* are cited as part of a series of movements that have the ability to bring together distinct voices and knowledge bases to effect change (Moreno-Caballud, "Combining the Abilities of all the Anyones…" 180-3).

Ultimately, these cycles of protest would find success in effecting political change, including the breakdown of the two-party system in Spain by means of the emergence of new political parties (Revilla-Blanco & Molina-Sánchez 207). For example, the new left-wing party Podemos ("We Can") would emerge from the 15M movement, which, according to Revilla-Blanco & Molina-Sánchez, "represents the most successful translation of ideological reconfiguration into electoral alternatives" (213). Indeed, scholars note that the 15M "reconfigured Spain's political landscape and inspired a process of democratic experimentation that continues today" (Flesher Fominaya 4), taking the form of not only Podemos but also "in the

municipal movements that in 2015 won elections to govern Spain's major cities…" (4). Other notable parties emerging in importance include *Ciudadanos* ("Citizens"), a center-right party that had previously been founded in 2005 but which experienced a revitalization in competition with Podemos (Revilla-Blanco & Molina-Sánchez 224). Revilla-Blanco & Molina-Sánchez argue that this political shift came from "changes in the social base of the electorate" (225), and conclude that not only can the breakdown of the two-party system in Spain be tied directly to these cycles of protest, but also that this breakdown demonstrates how fundamentally the cycles of protest have influenced politics in Spain (227).

These cycles of protest and the political changes they fostered come along with extensive cultural criticism from academics and activists, such as Guillem Martínez, Clara Valverde, Amador Fernández-Savater, and Ignacio Echevarría, which inform this dissertation's analyses. For example, one focus of discussion has been a critique of what has come to be called the hegemonic "Culture of Transition". This Culture of Transition (hereafter the CT) can be understood as a relationship between the state and culture in which culture is expected to not interfere with politics unless it aims to uphold the state (Martínez 15), and one in which the objective is a sort of cohesion in which every citizen accepts their assigned role and remains in that role (Fernández-Savater 38). Further, it seeks to mystify the Transition to democracy to create the image of a democracy of consensus (Delgado 18), as well as an assertation that Spain is a state that has left behind its troubled past in favor of looking to the future (Echevarría 19-48). The concept of the CT was formulated in part by Guillem Martínez, who notes that the CT "did not permit belligerent thinking, but rather, it demanded political cohesion over societal cohesion" (Martínez, *Culture of the Transition* n.p.). According to Martínez, however, the 15M demonstrations that rose in the wake of the crisis were an impetus for change, and afterwards

31

Martínez and a collective of other authors created the volume *CT o la cultura de la transición: Crítica a 35 años de cultura Española,* seeking to "normalize other visions of Spanish culture and liberate the notion of culture from its cohesive, palatable, and uncritical interaction with Spanish politics" (n.p.). These considerations of the CT will be especially important in the second and third chapters of this dissertation.

Another example of such critical cultural critique is the discussion of the potential necropolitical aspects of neoliberal policy in Spain. Clara Valverde, an activist in the 15M movement, healthcare professional, and writer on biopolitics and resistance, has argued that the state largely ignored the suffering of the Spanish people in the wake of the crisis, promoting the idea that neoliberal policies were the only option for managing Spain's sovereign debt crisis and shifting the blame onto those suffering under its yoke (Valverde, *No nos lo creemos…* 25). This shifting of blame, or "neoliberal guilt," as this dissertation refers to it, is the focus of some of the comics considered in this project, which seek to combat this characterization. Valverde argues that neoliberal policies and austerity measures amount to necropolitics, whereby instead of governing, the political elites "…hacen negocios con los recursos públicos a través de la mercantilización de los servicios de salud, de los recortes, de la medidas de austeridad y, en general, la privatización del Estado del bienestar" (Valverde, *De la necropolítica neoliberal a la empatía radical…* 12). / "…do business with public resources via the commercialization of health services, budget cuts, austerity measures and, in general, the privatization of the welfare state" (Valverde, *De la necropolítica neoliberal a la empatía radical…* 12, my translation). According to Valverde, this leads to a necropolitics by which human life is subject to calculations, allowing all non-profitable individuals (like the chronically ill, the homeless, the elderly, and so forth) to die and blaming them for their own suffering (14).

The answer to these necropolitics, Valverde claims, is radical empathy. In seeing the suffering in the eyes of excluded, the viewer can come to feel their own vulnerability, from which radical empathy emerges: "un sentimiento de entender, aceptar y sentir solidaridad con las emociones y vivencias del otro que rompe la barrera entre las personas. Y cuando el incluido también siente su propia vulnerabilidad, la empatía no es de una persona a la otra: es de todos y para todos" (88) / "a feeling of understanding, accepting, and feeling solidarity with the emotions and experiences of the other that breaks down the barrier between people. And when the included also feels their own vulnerability, empathy is not from one person from another, but from all people to all people" (88, my translation). This conception of the common space, of radical empathy, is important because it speaks to the solutions to neoliberal guilt and alienation that are envisioned in the comics analyzed in this dissertation. That is, these works depict a move from complete alienation and vulnerability towards community, solidarity, and direct action as a response to that alienation. This fits well within the framework of a reader's cognitive mapping of their situational relationships to neoliberal Spanish society. The individual must come to comprehend their own place within the larger systems of neoliberalism in order to both conceive of the causes of their alienation, and also conceive of the possibilities of relief in the form of solidarity and popular mobilization. As Valverde explains, if we do not understand our own positionalities, we internalize neoliberal guilt. Cultural texts allow a reader to see the fallacies of this neoliberal guilt.

The Response of Spanish Cultural Production to the Crisis

The response of popular culture in Spain to neoliberalism and the economic crisis (as well as to the associated cycles of protest) has been extensive and spans many mediums, including literature, film, theater, and comic art. Regarding literature, one need only think of the works of

Isaac Rosa, who has penned multiple novels that critique neoliberalism and the crisis, including *La mano invisible* (2011) and *La habitación oscura* (2013), or of Rafael Chirbes' *En la orilla* (2013) and Belén Gopegui's *El comité de la noche* (2014). Olga Bezhanova is one important scholar of the body of literature critiquing the crisis, and considers the novel, poetry, and essay formats in her iconic work *Literature of Crisis: Spain's Engagement with Liquid Capital* (2017). Bezhanova details the power that this literature holds, noting that: "Literature can serve as a conduit through which those who have no control over the world of high finance may travel toward reclaiming a measure of control over the flyaway financial economy" (xv). She notes that the bodies of literature that would emerge from this crisis are a testament to the fact that doubt has been sown as to the ability of the powers that be to handle economic matters (xviii).

There has been extensive scholarly work done on the body of work that is the literature of crisis, which highlights its diversity of narratives. For example, scholars have noted that Spanish crisis novels that emerged in the wake of the 2008 crash (such as Rafael Chirbes' 2013 novel *En la orilla)* work to present critiques of the present ecological crisis in conjunction with critiques of individualism and commercialization (Seguín 275, 286). While Seguín notes that many of such novels are either dystopian in nature or draw upon an aesthetic related to magical realism, other novels like *En la orilla* and Cristina Sánchez-Andrade's *Las Inviernas* (2014) fuse elements of these two viewpoints without fully becoming apocalyptic narratives: "They have instead embraced psychological realism… in order to present a picture of ecological shifts over time and provide political arguments in support of collective action" (276). For Seguín, these two novels provide a useful critique in the wake of society's "embrace of commercialism" even after the onset of the Great Recession, critiquing "the apocalyptic logic that has come to distinguish some

prominent approaches to addressing climate change in recent decades" (286) as well as suggesting potential collective responses to ongoing crises.

Other scholars seek to trouble the term "novel of crisis" and to expand the frames in which literature that considers the crisis is analyzed. For example, Pablo Valdivia argues that novelistic production specifically in the wake of the 2008 crisis has the opportunity to form cognitive maps[14] as a result of their multidimensional nature (Valdivia 23). Valdivia notes that the 2008 crisis has produced "a new individual disinherited of citizenship and protection" (33) and therefore "rather than facing crisis literature, we find ourselves before a new disinherited literature – in the same way that a new disinherited historical individual exists" (33). The cognitive maps that fiction helps build, therefore, open new territory where novels such as those considered in this disinherited literature offer proof that "the cultural, political and economic paradigm of our society has changed within an historical process, whose imbalances can only be corrected by considering the constellation of crisis stories that this new disinherited literature articulates…" (33). The operational nuclei Valdivia proposes to consider this new disinherited literature enable a visibilization of this disinherited subject following the 2008 crash (25)[15]

Theater is another important medium that presents critiques of the crisis and neoliberalism. Scott Boehm notes that *microteatro* ("micro-theater") emerged as a form of popular theater in the wake of the crisis and would become a popular mode of dissent against

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[14] It is worth noting that Valdivia does not draw upon Jameson to contextualize the term "cognitive mapping," but rather scholars of Cognitive Literary Studies (such as Zunshine), a highly decentralized field which is interested especially in human mental processes (Zunshine 1). As Zunshine describes, "Though 'vitally interested' in cognitive science, cognitive literary critics work not toward a consilience with science but toward a richer engagement with a variety of theoretical paradigms in literary and cultural studies… So while cognitive literary scholars draw on insights from cognitive science, they approach them critically and pragmatically, thinking through them on the terms of their own discipline" (2).

[15] Valdivia suggests five operational nuclei in which to consider this "disinherited literature", which include crisis novels in the rural world, crime fiction crisis novels, humorous crisis novels, dystopian crisis novels, and "Novels about the repercussions of the crisis" (Valdivia 25).

dominant political and cultural norms in Spain. In Boehm's analysis, *microteatro* and the creation of the Teatro del Barrio serve as counterspaces that both stage works aimed at inspiring desires for change and also "provide individuals affected and/or politicized by the crisis and the implementation of austerity with opportunities to encounter others who share a desire to 'be together' in the face of increasing precariousness" (Boehm "Popular Theatre as Space and Symbol…" 1090). Boehm goes on to explain that this form of popular theater would not only become a metaphor for democracy invoked by the left-wing Podemos ("We Can") party that emerged from the 15M movement, but also "played a critical role in shaping a more democratic structure of feeling" (1090) in opposition to the hegemonic politics of the neoliberal era. Musical theater, too, would play an interesting role in this endeavor as *microteatro* creators would also stage *micromusicales* ("micro-musicals")*. For example, the 2015 work *España ingobernable* was staged with the Teatro del Barrio company which, itself, had strong ties to the 15M movement (Wheeler 167).

The concept of spaces in theatrical production is an important one in scholarship that considers theater production in the wake of the crisis. Matthew Feinberg, for example, notes the importance of the 2011 and 2012 perofrmances of Zorrilla's *Don Juan Tenorio* in the Campo de Cebada. Formerly a "derelict space", the Campo de Cebada square became "a project of participatory urbanism " that highlighted principles of "inclusiveness, horizontality, collectivity and assembly driven modes of decision-making" (Feinberg 144). This gave the themes of Zorrilla's work new meanings for those enduring the crisis, as the organizers forged new spaces from collective experiences as opposed to the experience of the individual (146). Feinberg notes that the performing of *Don Juan Tenorio* in this reclaimed space transformed the work: "Standing in the physical remains of the economic crisis, bounded in by the graffitied walls, Don

36

Juan Tenorio and his struggle with a moral debt has a certain ironic resonance" (155). This brings into focus the power of collaborative work as a viable alternative to the individualism of contemporary capitalism (156).

Film, too, has had a place in the apprehension of the 2008 economic crisis in Spain. Documentary film is one example, with several notable films fiercely critiquing neoliberalism and the crisis. As prime examples we can take Icíar Bollaín's *En tierra extraña* (2014), which focuses on the life of Spanish immigrants in Scotland who have been forced to flee Spain for work, or Bill Brown and Sabine Gruffat's *Speculation Nation* (2014) which explores the housing crisis and subsequent popular mobilizations. Manuel de la Fuente, in his 2017 article on the documentary filmmakers Mercedes Álvarez and Pere Joan Ventura, demonstrates the importance of documentary film in commenting on "renewal policies" in times of crisis. He argues that they are "crucial examples for understanding a filmography that constantly confronts conservative forces by defending the autonomous voice of arts and culture" (186). Analyzing one film from each creator, he argues that in their collective protagonists "the anonymous victims of the financial crisis help the viewer understand the deep and long-lasting consequences, such as eviction and poverty, of a capitalist system that tries to hide the faces of such victims" (192), which in turn leads to appeal to mobilization.

Fiction film has also been important in consideration of the crisis and cycles of protest. Dean Allbritton has highlighted the importance of what he refers to as politics of pain and suffering in Spanish crisis cinema. He notes that the 2008 crisis highlighted the vulnerability of those citizens suffering in the wake of the crisis, and highlights how crisis films "finish the metaphor that is already at work and present in the signification of political vulnerability and in the embodied experience of being a physically vulnerable citizen" (Allbritton 102) by exposing

their protagonists to physical harm and death. For Allbritton, a fundamental characteristic of these films is their ability to "organize the individual experience of precarity and vulnerability into a communal one" (103). These communal practices (inspired by the 15M) have the potential to combat the vulnerability of the citizen[16] (112). Apocalypse film, too, has been implicated in critiques of the 2008 economic crisis. Carmen Moreno-Nuño provides a comprehensive study of the history and importance of apocalypse film in the Spanish context tracing apocalypse film in Spain over several decades. She notes that Spanish apocalypse film is the "result of an analogous dialectics between the national and the global that pushes Spanish cinema in new, unexplored directions" (212) through combining American Hollywood traditions and Spanish cinema traditions in a national lens. The 2008 crisis is one topic that Spanish apocalyptic film takes up, with films such as *Los últimos días* (2013) focusing on "the economic side of the crisis" (217) and the contemporary struggle to "conceive of a post-capitalist world order" (217). As Moreno-Nuño notes, Spanish cinema effectively conveys "the anxiety of a confined subject" (221), an anxiety that, as she describes, has only been exacerbated by the crisis. Given the breadth of mediums that have been important in the apprehension of the crisis, then, from film to literature, what is needed now is an engagement with how Spanish comics fit into this discussion.

The Comics of Crisis

The matter of how Spanish comics of crisis respond to and are informed by the 2008 economic crisis, and neoliberalism more broadly, is where this dissertation intervenes. Important scholarly work has been done on this topic, including by the likes of Benjamin Fraser, who

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[16] As another example of this, Allbritton highlights the importance of the Campo de Cebada, as Feinberg does: "The communal practices of the Indignados movement – information sharing through open source and creative commons, "life hacks" that inform the public of loopholes and ways to maneuver harmful laws (however these are defined), and reorganization/transformation/occupation of public spaces like the Campo de Cebada in Madrid – may actually begin to neutralize some of the effects of political vulnerability and stem the physical vulnerability it engenders" (112)

considers (among other things) Miguel Brieva's comic *Lo qué me está pasando* as the fourth

chapter of this dissertation does, noting that Brieva's message: "is that in art, just as in social

discourse, the systemic nature of exploitation is often hidden under a patina of individualistic

ideology and by habitual patterns of consuming mass-marketed entertainment" (44). This fits

well with this dissertation's hypothesis that comics are an ideal medium to enable a reader to

contextualize their own experiences with neoliberalism and precarity and cognitively map their

positionality within neoliberal hegemonic norms. Important work has also been done by Xavier

Dapena, who argues that graphic narratives intervene in the political imagination in Spain and

engage in reciprocity with contemporary social movements such as the 15M and the PAH (vi-

vii). This dissertation builds on this scholarship, providing a comprehensive case study of how

Spanish comics engage with neoliberalism and enable cognitive mapping. This topic is in need

of addressing precisely because despite a significant uptick in scholarly literature considering the

medium, comics are still in search of legitimacy[17] (Groensteen, "Why Are Comics Still…" 3).

Thus, given the boom of comics production in Spain in recent years, the critical power of comics

deserves to be highlighted. This dissertation contributes to that effort.

The aim of this dissertation is to expand the scholarly literature surrounding how Spanish

comics engage with the 2008 economic crisis, as well as to unveil the unique nature of the

critical power of comics. It will cover a variety of types of comics in this endeavor, namely: 1)

Spanish dystopian comics, 2) Spanish noir comics, 3) Spanish political cartooning, and finally 4)

comics that are explicit commentaries on the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent cycles of

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[17] Groensteen identifies four primary reasons for this search for legitimacy: "1). It is a hybrid, the result of crossbreeding between text and image; 2) Its storytelling ambitions seem to remain on the level of a sub-literature; 3) It has connections to a common and inferior branch of visual art, that of caricature; 4) Even though they are now frequently intended for adults, comics propose nothing other than a return to childhood" (7). He goes on to explain that these four categories provide a base for all prejudices against comics and "inform and guide the opinions of the cultural referees who are invested with the power to judge artistic merit" (7-8).

protest. In this way, this project weaves a narrative of contemporary Spanish comics, beginning with dystopian imaginations of the ultimate neoliberal alienation of the individual, before analyzing depictions of the corruption of the crisis and to how the indignation of the precarious neoliberal individual can be used to push back against the despair and isolation of hegemonic neoliberalism. Thus, in the spirit of Nick Sousanis' considerations of the ability of comic art to bring together many distinct voices to forge new perspectives, this dissertation engages with many vantage points on the crisis in comic art. It will not, however, claim to be an exhaustive account of all comics to ever consider the 2008 economic crisis, as there are undoubtedly many more worth considering in future research endeavors. Instead, this dissertation aspires to build upon previous research.

This dissertation project achieves these research aims by engaging in a close reading of each of the primary texts considered throughout: three comics per chapter. In doing so, it remains grounded in the theoretical approach described above and uses this framework to draw broader conclusions about what each of these varieties of comics can reveal when read and considered together. In this way, this dissertation seeks to answer the following specific research questions. How have comics intervened on the matters of neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis in Spain? How do each of the genres/categories considered here approach the matter, and what new understanding about the critical power of comics can be gained from reading them together? Finally, what critical power do comics leverage in this context that other media cannot?

Answering these questions is important if we are to understand the critical cultural labor that comics have performed in Spain. The study of comics can open new ways of understanding the world in which we live and the ways in which history can be captured by artistic production. As comics can make opaque topics approachable through their many ways of seeing, and by

extension "unflatten" the limited ways in which a reader perceives the world by combining many vantage points at once (as described by Scott McCloud and Nick Sousanis, respectively), they can serve as a tool towards enabling a reader to cognitively map their situational relationships within contemporary, neoliberal Spain in the wake of the crisis. Key to this analysis is the many distinct voices and perspectives that these comics employ.

Over the course of the project, I identify many such "unflattening" vantage points in comic art that when read together create a larger narrative of a move from alienation to solidarity and community. The first chapter, for instance, reveals the ways in which dystopian comics of crisis enable cognitive mapping by extrapolating the anxieties of the alienated neoliberal subject to their most extreme possibilities. It is in the confronting of these anxieties that a reader can map their situational relationships to prevailing neoliberal norms in Spain. Albert Monteys' *¡Unvierso!,* as an example, depicts characters who are directly victimized by dystopian caricatures of corporate greed, either alienated from their loved ones due to poor working conditions (sent back in time to the big bang with no easy way to return) or injured in a workplace accident (caught inside the time machine) and subsequently pushed aside once they no longer inhabit an exploitable, normative body. Approaching this narrative from a fusion of critical theory and comics theory reveals that this comic wields dystopian extrapolation as a unique vantage point to provide new ways of conceiving of how the precarious individual is alienated by corporate greed. This lays the groundwork for a reader to conceive of their own precarious relationships to contemporary neoliberal structures in Spain. Importantly, the depictions of precariat alienation within this comic intersects with depictions of oppression based on race and disability as well, demonstrating the importance of the multiple vantage points in unflattening a reader's perceptions of the world and their position within it.

41

Noir comics, meanwhile, enable a reader's cognitive mapping in a different manner, developing a critique of the crisis and neoliberalism in Spain by linking them with corruption and the lingering legacy of Francoism. Victor Santos' *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* is a paradigmatic of how noir comics provide new ways of seeing and understanding the crisis and its causes. Using elements of noir, including dark themes and grim realism, the comic highlights what Cristina Flesher Fominaya asserts was the 15M's position that the crisis was inherently political in nature, and that "austerity policies weren't inevitable, but rather the result of collusion between financial and political elites" (*Democracy Reloaded,* 3). It does this through the depiction of a corrupt politician with connections to the old Francoist dictatorship – César Gallardo – who rises to prominence and wealth by using his contacts in the criminal underworld to manipulate speculative real estate practices. Importantly, though César falls from political grace, he is never charged with a crime, detailing the difficulty in seeking justice for this corruption. This distinct viewpoint enables a reader to not only cognitively map their anxieties in the abstract but also their precarious positionality within contemporary Spain as a direct result of corruption and political machinations. This is because César embodies and represents those political and economic elites that many scholars and activists (such as Clara Valverde) identify as among the culprits of the crisis. *Intachable* (along with other noir comics) dispels the myth that austerity and crisis were inevitable.

Political cartoons add another distinctive vantage point to this discussion, which further unflattens prevailing perspectives on the crisis and neoliberalism by leveraging satirical humor to challenge the master narratives of neoliberalism in Spain. An instructive example of this is Manel Fontdevila's *No os indigneís tanto,* an informative piece that details the history of the crisis and its political and economic ramifications. Fontdevila directly cites Stéphane Hessel's

¡Indignaos!, a treatise on the importance of indignation as source of peaceful revolution against oppressive systems to construct his narrative, bringing the power of indignation to the forefront of the narrative. In doing so, Fontdevila highlights the critical power of indignation by engaging with the conversations that occurred within the 15M mobilization. Fontdevila combines multiple viewpoints within the work to trouble (or unflatten) conceptions of not only the crisis but also mobilizations in response to it. Much as the 15M demanded both relief from austerity and also "real democracy now" (Flesher Fominaya, *Democracy Reloaded* 3), Fontdevila challenges the notion that the civil disobedience of the 15M is disrespectful to the "spirit of the transition" for indignantly demanding change, when such mobilizations are key to peaceful, democratic revolution. In this way Fontdevila's work (and other political cartoons) enable a reader to cognitively map their relationships to the prevailing structures of the Spanish state post-2008, demonstrating that there are viable alternatives to precarious existence.

The possibilities for cognitive mapping inherent in the leveraging of indignation are fully realized in the comics that consider the crisis and cycles of protest, analyzed in the fourth chapter. Celebrating the voice of the Anyone (described by Moreno-Caballud), these highlight the transformative joy to be found in solidarity movements like the 15M and the PAH, and present this joy as a solution and viable alternative to the alienation and precarity in neoliberal, austerity capitalism. Whereas previous comics presented few (if any) alternatives to these problems, these works provide their readers the opportunity to cognitively map their positionality within the social and political structures in Spain by providing examples from existing movements (or fictional ones that cite them). For example, Miguel Brieva's *Lo que me está pasando* has been cited as a hallmark of the artist's commitment to the 15M (Fraser 2018). Brieva develops a narrative of community building to demand change, depicting a young man

who lives in precarity making the journey from complete alienation and vulnerability to the joy and strength in solidarity. This protagonist, Víctor, is relentlessly pursued by hallucinatory manifestations of his depression and alienation, and must choose to trust in his solidarity network in order to find relief. This comic (and the others in the chapter) facilitates a reader's situational mapping by unflattening perspectives of the crisis and its subsequent cycles of protest, presenting them as *the* alternative to precarious alienation. In tracing the protagonist's journey from complete alienation to a transformation through the inherent joy in coming together in solidarity, the reader can begin to conceive of their own alienated positionality.

In this, a larger narrative emerges upon reading and analyzing the twelve comics considered throughout this dissertation together. The dystopian comics considered at the top of the project depict the anxieties caused by the crisis and neoliberalism in the abstract, after which an examination of noir comics places these anxieties in context by providing the reader a place to lay blame: the corrupt political and financial elites within Spain. Political cartoons then demonstrate the potential for mobilization inherent in the indignation that such corruption has inspired, before the dissertation closes on depictions of how this indignation has been and can continue to be mobilized to effect real change. Thus, individually these chapters reveal the ways that each of these comic types has the potential to be a useful tool in a reader's mapping of their own positionality within and relationships to prevailing social and political structures in Spain, but when read together reveal a progression from neoliberal anxieties in the abstract to a concrete solution to those anxieties. In the spirit of the horizontally democratic cycles of protest by which many of these comics are directly inspired, comics of crisis bring together a vast variety of perspectives to unflatten preconceived notions of this moment in Spanish history, a task for which the uniquely inclusive and democratic medium of comics are well-situated.

Conclusions

Let us conclude this introduction with clarifications of the scope of the present study, before engaging in a structural outline of the dissertation. First, as previously stated, this dissertation should not be construed as an exhaustive survey of all Spanish comics that consider the 2008 economic crisis and/or neoliberalism. Rather, this project represents a selection of such comics and endeavors to use them as a case study of the critical power comics possess. It will also not claim that comics are better at enabling cognitive mapping than other media. Instead, it highlights what makes comics unique in this endeavor. Future research could include an analysis of these works' fan communities, to empirically identify the extent to which the reader base took advantage of the opportunities for cognitive mapping identified in this project. There are also limitations to the methodology of this study. Many other approaches to these texts are possible and would be fruitful sites of future research, such as an analysis of these comics in context with VLT or another linguistic/cognitive science model. However, the use of the theoretical framework described above was specifically chosen to answer the questions posed in this dissertation within a cultural studies and critical theory lens. Despite these limitations of scope, the findings of this dissertation are generalizable and will prove useful to the field. As comics continue to seek legitimacy, the understanding of their critical power is paramount.

This will be developed over the course of four chapters that consider different aspects of the comics medium and the way they respond to this moment in Spanish history. The first chapter, "The Alienation of the Neoliberal Subject as Social Nightmare in Spanish Dystopian Comics", opens the dissertation with a consideration of the dystopian imaginations of what may come to pass under the current neoliberal model. This chapter considers three texts: David Rubín's *Cuadernos de tormentas* (2018)*,* Albert Monteys' *¡Universo!* (2018), and Ana Galvañ's

Pulse enter para continuar (2017). Taken together, these comics focus on the inherent alienation of the precariat under neoliberalism. By extrapolating neoliberal politics and economics to their most extreme and dystopian possibilities, these authors provide their readers with an idea of the danger of such policies, laying bare how the precariat is oppressed by hegemonic neoliberalism. These works capture the anxieties of contemporary neoliberal existence, and through confronting these anxieties a reader can begin to understand their own alienation and begin to conceive of their positionality within neoliberal Spanish society. This is an excellent point of departure, as the following chapters move away from these anxieties and towards solutions to them.

The works considered in the second chapter center on depictions of the crisis itself, analyzing the issue of corruption in Spain and the alienation it engenders for the precariat. This chapter, titled "The Legacy of Authoritarianism in Spain and its Connection to Neoliberalism & the Economic Crisis in Contemporary Noir Comics", seeks to explore how noir can aid in an understanding of the political and economic situation in Spain following the Transition and, later, the economic crisis. It considers three comics: Santiago García's & Luis Bustos' *¡García!* (2015), Víctor Santos' *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* (2020), and Álvaro Ortiz's *Cenizas* (2012). When read together, these comics demonstrate a disillusionment with the neoliberal status quo following the transition to democracy, and link contemporary neoliberalism with the authoritarian legacy of Francisco Franco. By demonstrating the corruption of the political and economic elites as well as the precarity this corruption causes, they challenge the dominant narrative of contemporary Spanish society by laying bare how deeply the common citizen has been affected by the crisis. Futhermore, they provide the alienated individual under neoliberalism a place to lay at least partial blame for their suffering: corrupt politicians and bankers. In this

consideration we see the first move towards not just cognitively mapping one's positionality within neoliberal Spanish society, but also understanding some causes of one's alienation.

As discussed above, such corruption depicted within the second chapter has inspired significant amounts of indignation in Spain, and the third chapter seeks to unveil how comics have handled that indignation. In this it considers Spanish political cartoons and how they approach the 2008 economic crisis. This chapter, "Indignation as Source of Democratic Revolution in Contemporary Spanish Political Cartoons," analyzes three such texts: Manel Fontdevila's *No os indignéis tanto* (2013), Aleix Saló's *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* (2011), and El Roto's *Viñetas para una crisis* (2011). These comics seek to mobilize dissent via the stoking of indignation. This chapter demonstrates that these political cartoons speak to their readers' indignation by providing them with the means to apprehend that emotion to cognitively map their own relationships to neoliberalism and associated resistance movements. Affect (as emotion) thus allows the construction of a counter-narrative; by understanding how emotion is utilized by these political cartoons, a reader can better relate to their own emotions related to the crisis and how they may thus be able to better conceptualize their relationship to hegemonic neoliberalism.

The fourth chapter, "Joy and Precariat Awakening in Spanish Comics of Crisis" considers how the indignation described in the third chapter has been effectively mobilized. Specifically, it analyzes potential stirrings of class consciousness for the precariat class in three comics: Miguel Brieva's *Lo qué me está pasando* (2015)*,* Isaac Rosa & Cristina Bueno's *Aquí vivió: Historia de un desahucio* (2016)*,* and Isaac Rosa & Mikko's *Tu futuro empieza aquí* (2017)*.* This chapter demonstrates how these comics celebrate the transformative joy of collective resistance and community building in the face of alienation and precarity, citing real movements such as the

47

15M and the PAH to do so. The dissertation ends here to examine the culture and ideology of these cycles of protest, and also because these comics depict the solution to the anxieties presented in the dystopias at the open of the dissertation. In specific terms, these comics show what can be done when indignation is effectively mobilized. Significantly, these works present the crisis as not only a product of systemic problems, but also as something that can be overcome through the strength of solidarity and the joy in coming together. In this way the dissertation completes the journey from the ultimate alienation of the neoliberal subject towards a cognitive mapping, as well as the apprehending of solutions to that very alienation.

In sum, comics of crisis perform an important role in enabling of a reader to understand their own positionality and experiences with neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis. Emerging in context with other mediums of Spanish cultural production that have engaged with this crisis, these comics form an important tool of social criticism that can enable new understandings of this historical moment, as well as shed light onto the mechanisms of resistance and activism that persist to this day. By means of both comics' inclusive and democratic nature and the unique elements of comic art (described at length by Scott McCloud), these comics can unflatten (as Nick Sousanis describes) the ways in which readers perceive the world, and in specific terms, the way they perceive the prevailing social and political structures in contemporary Spain that shape their daily lives. Through these comics, this dissertation will trace the multidimensional experience of the neoliberal subject in Spain and its multidimensional responses to the 2008 crisis. Understanding how this operates is crucial, as the critical power of cultural production will remain an important topic as more recent crises continue to unfold.

Chapter 1 – The Alienation of the Neoliberal Subject as Social Nightmare in Spanish Dystopian Comics

There exist few genres that wield critical power better than dystopian fiction, and at the intersection of dystopia and comic art there are many possibilities for social commentary. It is in this spirit that this chapter considers Spanish dystopian comics and how they respond to (and unflatten considerations of) neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis. This dissertation chooses to begin here because a turn to dystopia can provide insight into the imagination of potential future (or alternative) worlds that respond to contemporary neoliberalism, and how this can begin to facilitate the creation of cognitive maps. To this end, this dissertation opens with an analysis of the extant anxieties and alienation present in neoliberal Spanish society, and how dystopia can help us understand them. Significant work has been done on dystopian fiction in Spain, and on how it has been affected by neoliberalism and the 2008 crisis specifically. Diana Palardy's book *The Dystopian Imagination in Contemporary Spanish Literature and Film* (2018) is one example. In it, she describes how a notable spike in dystopian fiction has been observed since the 2008 crash and that Spanish writers effectively create their own dystopian imagination in line with traumas and experiences of Spanish society (14, 32). What is needed now is to expand this important work on the Spanish dystopian imagination to a consideration of comic art. It is here that this chapter intervenes, engaging in a close reading of three dystopian comics of crisis: David Rubín's *Cuaderno de tormentas* (2018), Ana Galvañ's *Pulse enter para continuar* (2017), and Albert Monteys' *¡Universo!* (2018).

Analyzing these comics will demonstrate that their dystopian visions are informed by contemporary neoliberalism in Spain, and thus they provide opportunities for their readers to map their positionality within and situational relationships to contemporary neoliberalism (and with the 2008 economic crisis). Seeing their struggles extrapolated in dystopian fashion, readers

can apprehend their place among the economic and cultural forces that shape such neoliberal dystopias. This chapter explores what the combination of dystopia and the multifaceted nature of the comics medium wields in its critique that is unique, and what the Spanish dystopian imagination (as Palardy describes it) can tell us about the impact of neoliberalism on the public consciousness. To achieve this, this chapter will be grounded in comics theory, neoliberalism, and alienation as will the rest of this dissertation. However, this chapter expands on this by engaging here with scholars of utopian and dystopian studies such as Diana Palardy, as well as Lyman Tower Sargent and Tom Moylan, to understand how these dystopian comics operate. What will become clear is that by focusing on the alienation of the precariat under neoliberalism and the hierarchical power structures that enable it, these comics present a vision of the future in which the dynamics of contemporary neoliberal Spanish society have been allowed to continue unchecked. As a result, the suffering of the most precarious of neoliberal subjects is augmented and extrapolated to its most extreme possibilities. Thus, if utopia is a form of social dreaming, as Lyman Tower Sargent suggests, then the neoliberal dystopias presented in these comics are a social nightmare, one in which the alienation of the neoliberal subject is absolute. These comics capture and articulate the fears and anxieties of what may come to pass in a hypothetical dystopian future, should the present neoliberal dystopian reality fail to be addressed. In this they respond to the "never-ending nightmare" of neoliberalism's assault on democracy (Dardot & Laval, 2019). This serves as an excellent point of departure for the rest of this dissertation, establishing these dystopian anxieties present in contemporary neoliberal society as one important discursive voice in comic art, before the project moves on to a consideration of how comics of crisis envision a solution to these anxieties.

Introduction

Let us begin with an engagement with the theory of dystopia to better situate the analysis

of these comics in context with contemporary neoliberalism. Dystopia is related to the concept of

utopia, which Lyman Tower Sargent discusses at length. For Sargent, utopianism is a type of

social dreaming, specifically, those dreams that have to do with the ways in which groups of

people envision a radically different society than that in which they live (1). A utopia, Sargent

says, is defined by its nonexistence combined with a location in time or space. That is, a utopia

can be considered a *no-place*, and Sargent highlights that utopian fiction describes either a good

no-place (a *eutopia*, or a positive utopia) or a bad no-place (a *dystopia* or *anti-utopia*) (4-9).

As for dystopia specifically, Sargent defines it as "a non-existent society described in

considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a

contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader

lived" (9). For Tom Moylan, dystopia and dystopian fiction sit along the spectrum between a true

eutopia (a good *no-place*) and its polar opposite, a place of abject misery (x). In this middle

ground, where texts may lean toward utopian or anti-utopian visions of the future, dystopia has a

certain power:

> Dystopia's foremost truth lies in its ability to reflect upon the causes of social and
>
> ecological evil as systemic. Its very textual machinery invites the creation of alternative
>
> worlds in which the historical space time of the author can be re-presented in a way that
>
> foregrounds the articulation of its economic, political, and cultural dimensions (xii).

The critical power of dystopia in modern texts targets many social problems throughout the 20th

(and later 21st) century, including the hegemonic systems of capitalism and related

disillusionment. It is this critical power in context with the framework of this dissertation that

makes dystopian comics an ideal site of critique of neoliberalism post-2008. Indeed, Bill Bradan argues that life under neoliberalism is already a dystopia: "…not one with zombies, societal collapse, or plagues, but rather, one without enough real jobs (gigs, underemployment, and part-time do not count) capable of providing these basic socioeconomic securities" (2). He argues that dehumanization, exploitation, and inequity are key parts of this estrangement, as desperation and few employment options become a key part of daily life, which has a normalizing effect upon the neoliberal subject in contemporary society (3-4). Similarly, Clara Valverde notes that one of the many functions of neoliberalism is to instill in its subjects feelings of doubt, guilt, lies, and fear (13). Thus, since dystopian fiction is so equipped to capture the systemic nature of societal injustice, its utility in this analysis of how Spanish comics enable a cognitive mapping becomes clear.

It is surrounding the issue of cognitive mapping in Spanish dystopian comics that this chapter intervenes. As Jameson describes cognitive mapping as "a pedagogical political culture which seeks to endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (92), this chapter demonstrates that this is what occurs in these dystopian comics. Not only can a reader contextualize their own experiences with alienation under neoliberalism through these narratives and the anxieties they represent, but also perhaps apprehend their own positionality and relationship to the cultural forces that have enabled that alienation. As Diana Palardy has indicated, a distinct Spanish dystopian imagination exists in Spain post-2008, in which authors and directors "draw not only from well-known dystopias of the past and present, but also from a shared mental construct of dystopia that can be found in the landscapes of contemporary Spanish society" (32). What now must be elaborated upon is what sets dystopian

comics apart in particular. Understanding how dystopia operates in the comics format will enable new ways of understanding contemporary criticisms of neoliberalism.

To elucidate this, this chapter analyzes three dystopian comics of crisis in context with this theoretical approach: *Cuaderno de tormentas* (2018) by David Rubín, *Pulse enter para continuar* (2017), and *¡Universo!* (2018) by Albert Monteys. These works were chosen because of the parallels they present to contemporary neoliberalism (and its dystopian possibilities). Through a close reading of each text and a synthesis of what can be learned upon reading them together, this chapter demonstrates that these comics present a dystopian vision of the future in which neoliberal policies have been extrapolated to their most extreme possibilities, in which the precariat is completely estranged from their fellow human beings. These comics not only highlight the alienation of the lower classes, but also expose the elites at the very top that enable it through problematic structures of power and exploitation. Because the relationship of these comics' protagonists with the global systems in which they live is one of alienation, precarity, and submission, these comics empower their reader to position themselves in context with contemporary neoliberalism which represents similar societal pressures. Importantly, these comics provide no clear alternative to this ultimate alienation, which forges a distinctly admonitory narrative. It is in this dystopian way of seeing that readers can begin to unflatten their perceptions of neoliberalism and crisis, and cognitively map their own positionality and estrangement in postmodern, neoliberal society. Importantly, these dystopias do not present the Spanish neoliberal context as explicitly as other comics considered in this dissertation do. Rather, they present a more generalized, abstract depiction that speaks to the universal, international forces of neoliberalism. To demonstrate this, let us now engage in a close reading of each of the comics and demonstrate how this cognitive mapping functions in practice.

Cuaderno de tormentas

Let us begin with David Rubín's *Cuaderno de tormentas* (2018). This comic is unique amongst the three considered here; instead of picturing a possible dystopian future, it depicts a dystopian alternate reality that is a dark reflection of both contemporary neoliberalism, and of what contemporary neoliberalism may become should it be left unchecked. It tells the story of a struggling author who is tempted into selling his soul to the demonic city of Ciudad Espanto for a story to tell, and it is in this unnamed narrator's journey that the comic demonstrates the alienating force of neoliberalism acting upon its subject. Though this analysis will not claim that this is the only way to read and interpret this text, it will demonstrate that the city itself is a dystopian extrapolation of contemporary neoliberalism in Spain (and abroad). It is in the protagonist being forced to navigate the neoliberal hellscape presented in this comic that the reader can begin to map their own neoliberal lives and their relationship to the societal norms that drive their daily lives.

David Rubín is a Spanish comic artist and animator who has been active since as early as 2005 with the publication of the graphic novel *El circo del desaliento* ("Astiberri - El circo del desaliento - David Rubín"). He is credited with a significant number of works since then, predominantly comics and albums, and his body of work has gained popular and scholarly attention in recent years. Elena Galán Fajardo and José Carlos Rueda Laffond, for example, consider several contemporary Spanish comics and their approach to postmemory and the Spanish Civil War, one of which was *Nuestra Guerra Civil* (2006), a collaborative work to which Rubín contributed. Commissioned for the 70th anniversary of the Spanish Civil War, the work advocates for the preservation of historical memory around the conflict and following dictatorship (67). In addition, Luis Unceta Gómez uses Rubín's body of work as a case study for

54

his consideration of the modern comic superhero as essentially related to the hero of classic antiquity. He concludes that graphic narratives such as Rubín's modern take on the classic hero of Hercules in *El héroe* (2016) allow some of the most original retellings of classical archetypes, largely because of the comics medium fighting for legitimacy over the years (14). Unceta Gómez goes on to note that "we also find an example of the inversion of hierarchies, according to which the hypertext, the archetypical superhero, becomes the hypotext in this revision of the classical hero myth" (14), demonstrating the complex nature of Rubín's graphic narratives.

Another notable work is Rubín's collaborations with Marcos Prior on *Gran Hotel Abismo* (2016), which Xavier Dapena notes depicts a direct response to and identification with the 15M in the dystopian world it develops ("*Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution…*"66). Indeed, in Dapena's interview with Rubín, the artist notes that: "No te damos respuestas en ese libro. Planteamos preguntas para que tú mismo te las generes en la cabeza y te cuestiones cuál es tu papel de cara a la Sociedad" (336) / "We don't give you answers in that book. We pose questions so that you yourself can generate them in your head and so you can question what your role is in society" (336, my translation). Further, when posed the question of whether all comics are political, Rubín responds in the affirmative and notes that although many people think comics are a lesser art meant for entertainment purposes, comics allow a "flexibilidad que en otras cosas no tiene" (337) / "flexibility that in other things is not there" (337, my translation). Thus, comics are beginning to carry more and more discourses in their narratives all the time. This fits well with McCloud's theories of understanding comics and Sousanis' view of comics as being able to open up new ways of seeing by fusing multiple viewpoints. It also fits well within this dissertation's hypothesis of the potential for cognitive mapping in comics of crisis, in particular regarding the questioning of a reader's own role in society.

In sum, David Rubín has a history of playing with genres and archetypes to construct original storytelling, and this is visible as well in *Cuaderno de tormentas*. In this work Rubín gives a new spin to the narrative of a protagonist facing temptation in a Faustian sense, which enables the cognitive mapping that is the focus of this project. The demonic city Ciudad Espanto serves as a parallel for Hell in this narrative, and rather than depict an adventurer or someone from a capitalist upper class being forced to face their own sins, the comic instead follows a denizen of the lower classes. He, and others like him, are lured to Ciudad Espanto with promises of glory and riches (i.e., an escape from their precarious existence), only to be met with more extreme forms of alienation. These denizens are then blamed for their falling victim to a cycle they never could have resisted in the first place. This calls to mind Clara Valverde's considerations of neoliberal guilt, whereby hegemonic neoliberalism politicizes and blames those in poverty for their own situation (Valverde Gefaell, *De la necropolítica neoliberal a la empatía radical…* 14). Thus, *Cuaderno de tormentas* depicts a sort of neoliberal, capitalist hell[18].

In specific terms, *Cuaderno de tormentas* centers on an unnamed, struggling artist who is tempted by a demonic figure into visiting the hellish city of Ciudad Espanto ("Terror City"), where he is promised that he can find all the stories he could ever hope to tell. The identity of this demonic figure is never fully revealed; however, it is implied to be a manifestation of Ciudad Espanto's own sinister personality, luring new victims into its maw. This struggling artist feels obliged to take this offer in order to break his writers' block, which reminds us of how Jameson describes all cultural production being obliged to navigate the hegemonic norms of contemporary postmodern society driven by consumerism and mass media (57), for which Ciudad Espanto is a

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[18] Though the elements of religious overtones in this comic are not the primary focus of this chapter, it is worth noting that such a depiction is darkly appropriate considering Spain's history with the extreme authoritarianism of the Franco dictatorship that so heavily cited the "glories" of the old Spanish Empire and its devout Catholicism.

dystopian representation. As stated above, what makes *Cuaderno de tormentas* original is that it is an iconic inversion of the classic depiction of the underworld, in which it is the precariat that suffers instead of hedonistic elites. What the protagonist finds in Ciudad Espanto is a sentient, dark, and twisted city full of denizens who, like himself, had been lured there to their doom, metamorphized into creatures barely recognizable as human and exploited in disturbing ways. Both the city and the demonic figure that represents it equate to a dystopian extrapolation of the forces of neoliberalism, seeking to keep the precarious soul in their alienated position for the benefits of the elites. Through this unnamed protagonist's journey, the comic demonstrates the alienation inherent in contemporary neoliberal society through a dystopian depiction of that alienation taken to the extreme. In this, a reader can see their own struggles with neoliberalism and crisis in the fantastical nightmare of this struggling artist, as well as trace their own experiences and positionality within the larger cultural systems of contemporary neoliberalism.

These themes of alienation and precarity are developed in no small part by Rubín's artistic style. Line work is dark and bold. Color is varied, with deep, rich shades punctuated by flashes of bright color and intensely dark shadows. Rubín often favors abstract shapes, though he includes detailed shading, line work, and synaesthetics to add depth. Panel use is variable, as are the transitions[19] between them. Many panels take up the entirety of a two-page spread, with inset panels adding detail by providing a wandering eye over a scene or focusing on some aspect of the characters themselves. These panels fuse text and image[20] in interesting ways. Interdependent

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[19] To gain a snapshot of Rubín's use of panel transitions, I considered the first 25 pages of *Cuaderno de tormentas*. These pages contain 40 panels and 39 panel transitions. The most common transition was the subject-to-subject transition at 19 total, followed by scene-to-scene transitions at 9 total. Also present were 6 action-to-action transitions, 3 moment-to-moment transitions, and 2 aspect-to-aspect transitions.
[20] To gain a snapshot of Rubín's combinations of text and image, the same 25 pages were considered. These pages contained 40 panels. Of these, 21 had no words at all. 15 displayed interdependent combinations of text and image. Also present were 2 parallel combinations of text and image and 2 picture-specific combinations.

combinations are the most common, precisely because the storytelling depends upon a relatively large amount of text and highly detailed imagery working together in concert to create meaning. The result is a work that places form on equal footing as content. The extensive use of text and the rich artwork create meaning in tandem with one another.

What's more, the subject matter the artwork depicts makes extensive use of body horror and visceral terror to impact the reader. Ronald López Cruz defines body horror as being "characterized by the manipulation and warping of the normal state of bodily form and function", which is especially adept at evoking terror and revulsion through the violation of one's own sacred biology: "The central hypothesis is that body horror finds strength in the way it goes against what is considered normal anatomy and function in biological species (not limited to human): that it is indeed biological horror" (161-2). It is in this way that Rubín illustrates the alienation inherent in Ciudad Espanto. The city's victims are literally estranged from their humanity, both from their human essence and their physical human forms. While there are many avenues for analysis of this artistic strategy, in this analysis the twisting and transformation of the precarious denizens parallels the ways in which the modern neoliberal dystopia (as Bill Bradan describes it) consumes its human subjects, alienating them from themselves and from one another to exploit them as expendable resources.

A close reading of this text demonstrates the critical power of the dystopian extrapolation of contemporary neoliberalism in Spain (and globally) that is Ciudad Espanto[21]. The protagonist's journey through the city serves an admonitory function for the reader, as he rapidly becomes disillusioned with what was promised to be the cure to his artistic stagnation. As previously mentioned, in the first few pages we are presented with a nameless, struggling artist

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[21] Please note that due to the lack of page numbers this comic, specific page numbers cannot be provided for each vignette.

desperate for inspiration. As he struggles at his drawing board, he is visited by a demonic-looking spirit, painted in a brilliant red that contrasts with the monochrome, greyscale world around them. This use of color underscores the tempting nature of the offer to visit the dark universe of Ciudad Espanto, a place where he will supposedly find the answer to his artistic frustrations. The narrator accepts this offer, and brings with him his *cuaderno de tormentas* ("notebook of torments") to transcribe what he sees there. However, though he does not yet realize it, the city manipulates every step of his journey. In the end, Ciudad Espanto will never allow him to leave. Functionally, Ciudad Espanto is a place that subjectifies and commodifies the suffering of its inhabitants for its own profit, twisting them until they are almost unrecognizable as human. This alienates them both from their own humanity and also from one another. Not only have they had their human form taken from them by the manipulations of Ciudad Espanto, but also the city actively undermines any attempt at solidarity against its sinister will.

This can be seen as early as the first scenes following the author's journey to Ciudad Espanto. In appearance, the city is vastly different than that of the "real world" the narrator leaves behind, as though to signal to the reader the sheer sensory overload experienced by the protagonist. The sky is a dark, blood red, and the world is painted in vibrant colors that contrast sharply with the greyscale illustration of the narrator's home office seen in the opening pages of the comic. Much of what the narrator witnesses is an example of body horror, that is, violations of "what is considered normal anatomy and function…" (Cruz 161-2) which gets progressively more disturbing as the comic progresses. As he enters the city, for example, the narrator observes that everything that once made the city's newest visitors human is being left behind, a foreshadowing of the city's power to twist and manipulate its citizens. In another early scene, the narrator encounters the spirits of dead fisherman, fishing in a vast river of human blood. They

have been grotesquely transformed into slug-like creatures that retrieve human remains from the river and transform them into musical instruments that betray their former owners' darkest secrets. Here we see a double metamorphosis – not only have the fisherman themselves have been estranged from their former human selves, they also now actively participate in the manipulation of human remains into inhuman tools that perpetuate the betrayal of the human spirit. It is never revealed if these fishermen have done anything to deserve their fate, who they were before their arrival in the city, nor why there are human remains in this river in the first place. What is clear is that these people are made complicit in the city's oppression, much as Bill Bradan describes how the most precarious members of neoliberal society cannot help but be complicit in their own oppression (12-14). Though we do not know if these individuals belonged to the precariat before they arrived in the city, the later evidence of the city's own cruel, anthropomorphic will that constantly seeks new prey implies that they, too, may have been lured here as the protagonist was.

The early pages of the comic are filled with scenes like this, and it is through these visceral moments of body horror that the narrator begins to suspect that Ciudad Espanto is not what it was advertised to be. The turning point in the narrative for him, however, occurs when he is invited to a party thrown by the wealthy elite of the city, and it is here that we see David Rubín's use of body horror on full display. All manner of people and creatures are in attendance. The butlers appear to be half humanoid, half skeletal serpent. A demon-faced man with red eyes leers at a young woman who possesses tentacles for legs. The host, it is revealed, has made his fortune by being paid to erase the memories of Ciudad Espanto's victims from before their arrival. Trapped in the city as the narrator will himself be, these memories augment their torment at being unable to escape. What brought these individuals to the city is never explained; the

60

reader has only the protagonist's journey to draw upon. Importantly, this is the first time the narrative depicts an influential bourgeois class that is complicit in the exploitation of their fellow citizens. It is also never made clear if this upper class relies upon the alienated, metamorphized lower classes to make the city run, however, the dichotomy between the excesses of the upper crust at this party and the grim reality of those who live in the city's bowels is blatant.

In a dystopian reading, this is exploitation and alienation at work, profiting from the suffering of one's fellow subjects. This is important because Rubín is not only displaying the misery of the precariat to drive the narrative, but also the corruption in the upper classes that enables the exploitation of the precariat. Note, however, that not even this bourgeois class is exempt from the city's manipulations. They, too, have been twisted and metamorphized beyond recognition, alienated from their own humanity as well. Thus, in this scene there are multiple opportunities for cognitive mapping. The manipulation of the precarious classes of society by the upper crust is extrapolated here in dystopian fashion, which parallels the precariat experience under neoliberalism in contemporary Spain (and beyond) quite accurately; contemporary neoliberal society functions in much a similar way, with the precariat class manipulated by financial and political elites. Seeing this repressive relationship between society and subject in dystopian fashion, a precariat reader may begin to understand their own relationships to the hegemonic norms of contemporary neoliberalism.

This bourgeois party serves as a turning point in the narrative because the theme of alienation becomes ever more pronounced from then on. At this party, the narrator meets a young, unnamed woman with whom he quickly forms a deep connection. This woman alters his journey completely, and is ultimately the person who opens his eyes to the true, sinister motives of Ciudad Espanto. Through her he will discover that he, himself has begun to be twisted by the

city's dark will, complicit in the exploitation of others. The narrator and the unnamed woman fall quickly for each other, and so desperate is he to hold on to this one vestige of companionship that he buys her an amulet that is meant to bind her to him forever. In this he commits the sin of jealousy, in keeping with Ciudad Espanto's parallel of a neoliberal and quasi-religious vision of hell. The scene in which this occurs is also artistically interesting for several reasons. The protagonist is no longer drawn as a man simultaneously fascinated and horrified by his surroundings. Rather, he seems to be transfixed upon this new woman in his life, wearing a deliriously happy expression on his face despite the terrors around him. Yet their happiness is undercut by the narrator's own complicity in furthering the exploitation of a fellow precarious citizen, having bought her a gift whose explicit purpose is to connect them forever (without her consent to such a binding). The city has begun to alter him, though he does not know it; already, he has fallen victim to his darker urges, manipulated by the alienating force of the city's will. It will soon be revealed that this dark will and the demonic figure who lured him here are, in fact, one and the same.

Though these two are deeply smitten with one another, their companionship does not last. Upon their visit to the *Salón del Reflejo Futuro* (the "Room of Future Reflection") she leaves him, having seen some terrible future in one of the funhouse-style mirrors there. As she departs, tears rolling down her face, the mirror into which the narrator had been looking shatters, as if representing his prior illusions on his journey through Ciudad Espanto. Artistically speaking, this event has a noticeable effect on the narrator. Early in the story, the narrator's face had betrayed a certain sense of wonder and fascination with the fantastical sights of Ciudad Espanto, augmented by his infatuation with the nameless young woman he meets at the party. Now, however, the horrors of the city and the alienation and betrayal he has experienced take their toll on him. He

becomes haggard, unshaven, and disheveled. There are dark circles under his eyes, and his face

is spattered with blood, though whether the blood is his or someone else's is unclear. As the text

will later reveal, this was all part of the city's plan; Ciudad Espanto fosters no solidarity against

its whims (much like the alienating, neoliberal normative pressures that it represents). Reeling

from the loss of his companion, the narrator spirals into a search for escape through alcohol

binging. It is at this point that he begins to realize the truth: he is trapped in this city. Upon this

revelation, the narrator's transformation is profound, being a representation of his complete

estrangement. Lured to Ciudad Espanto with promises of inspiration and prosperity, he has

merely become yet another one of its victims.

Ultimately, the narrator takes refuge in the last place he can: the *Gabinete del Suicidio*

(the "Office of Suicide"). As its name suggests, this is an establishment which specializes in

aiding the most desperate of Ciudad Espanto's victims in dying by suicide. This again calls upon

the author's use of religious imagery in the developing of this dystopia, as suicide is considered

by the Catholic church to be a sin; yet in this case, official institutions are enabling their

metamorphized denizens to succumb to it, presumably once their use has been expended. The

representation of such a bureau is a dark parallel to the 2008 economic crisis and its impact on

the people of Spain. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the neoliberal economic

crisis hit Spain especially hard, and the austerity measures that emerged as a result had a

profound impact on the mental health of the country's citizens. As more and more people found

themselves unemployed[22], people would be evicted from their homes and yet still pursued by

predatory mortgages. Spanish law at the time did not provide for debt relief for evicted families

following repossession, something for which the PAH organized vigorously (Sabaté 198). In this

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[22] Unemployment rates, as previously discussed, reached levels as high as 41% among young workers (Carballo-Cruz 310), with the poverty rate reaching 31.4% in 2012 (Sales 217).

environment, suicide rates rose at an alarming rate. If a causal association between the crisis and mental health can be established, "the financial crisis may account for around 21 suicides per month in Spain or around 680 suicides since the crisis so far (up to the end of 2010)" (Lopez Bernal et al. 734). More recent studies have found some support for this idea, with one in particular finding a positive correlation between suicides in Spain and the 2008 crisis, though their data only identifies this between 2011-2014 and they offer the caveat that more extensive study of ongoing data collection is necessary (Alvarez-Galvez et al. 6-7). Thus, the depiction of a government office whose services specialize in helping the most desperate citizens of the city end their lives to find relief from their torment is darkly appropriate to this vision of a neoliberal hell. It is also deeply reminiscent of Valverde's argument for the necropolitical aspects of neoliberalism and austerity in Spain.

Fittingly, it is here that the protagonist learns the extent to which he has been manipulated. As he enters the *Gabinete del Suicidio*, he sees the woman with whom he fell in love and who had previously left him. She reveals to him then that the city itself manipulates each of its inhabitants, and it had been laying a trap for him since the beginning. Furthermore, she reveals that she was part of the city's plan to ensnare and murder him. In return, the city would let her leave, but she fell in love with the protagonist and couldn't follow through. Now, she warns him that there is no story to tell in Ciudad Espanto. There is only misery: "Rellenas de polvo y muerte tu cuaderno, nadie va a recordar lo que en él escribes. La gente acude a Espanto para olvidar, nada puede ser recopilado o registrado… No puedes salirte con la tuya, la ciudad no permitirá que compartas los secretos que atesora en su vientre" (Rubín). / "Your notebook is full of dust and death, nobody will remember what you write in it. People come to Espanto to forget,

nothing can be compiled or registered… You can't leave here with what you have, the city will not permit you to share the secrets that it hoards in its belly" (Rubín, my translation). She then urges him to leave this notebook behind and flee for his life. In that moment, the city punishes her for her betrayal. Two spiked tentacles appear and decapitate her as the narrator flees. This scene represents the ultimate manifestation of the theme of alienation in this comic. The dark, manipulative consciousness of Ciudad Espanto serves as a direct allegory to contemporary neoliberalism which has been personified in a way that enables the reader to identify with the protagonists' alienation and manipulation. Imagining the alienating effects of neoliberalism as a hellish, anthropomorphic city has a profound effect on the narrative, establishing opportunities to situate one's own relationships to hegemonic neoliberalism by witnessing dystopian extrapolations of those relationships play out.

Ultimately, the protagonist is unable to escape Ciudad Espanto. At the end of the comic, we see him collapsed, bloody, and weeping. In this moment, the demonic figure that had tempted him into coming appears again, taunting him for his hubris:

¿Quién atenderá a lo que has visto y vivido? ¿A quién le va a importar?

¿De qué te ha servido sumergirte en la selva de desdichas que es Ciudad Espanto? Éste es el castigo a tu soberbia, la pena por volcar tu pasión en ficciones de papel. Espanto te condena al olvido, a habitar por siempre dentro de tus tripas, a ti, que soñabas con ser único y especial sin serlo (Rubín).

Who will attend to what you have seen and lived? Who will care? What did submerging yourself in the jungle of miseries that is Ciudad Espanto do for you? This is the punishment for your pride, the punishment for putting your passion into paper fictions.

Espanto condemns you to oblivion, to live forever in its gut, you, who dreamed of being

unique and special without being so (Rubín, my translation).

The comic ends here, with the alienation of the protagonist having become absolute. The very

city itself has been successful in trapping another victim, and then laying blame on him for his

suffering, much as Valverde expands upon the neoliberal guilt inherent in contemporary society.

The textual evidence for this lies in the quotation above; this, the dark spirit says, is the

punishment for the narrator's own pride: eternal alienation and damnation in the bowels of

Ciudad Espanto. Of course, this blaming of the narrator (an allegory for neoliberal guilt) ignores

the fact that it was the city that lured him to his eternal damnation in the first place. This ending

solidifies the opportunities for cognitive mapping developed throughout the narrative, allowing

the reader to identify with this protagonist and in so doing begin to comprehend their own

relationships to the alienating forces of neoliberalism that seek to make them complicit in their

exploitation and blame them for their own suffering (as Bradan and Valverde describe,

respectively).

This ending also raises a host of questions about what Rubín could be communicating

about his own experience working as a publishing author, and there are many possible avenues

of analysis to answer these questions. In this reading, the protagonist feels that he has no choice

but to sell his soul to capital in order to make a living doing what he loves. In arriving in the

neoliberal hell that is Ciudad Espanto, Rubín's narrative draws parallels to the alienation

experienced by the neoliberal subject in Spain, especially in the wake of the crisis. This comic

effectively creates a social nightmare, one which presents an admonitory narrative. Though it is

not a depiction of the future, it is a sort of alternate reality that represents an extreme

extrapolation of the alienating effects and anxieties of neoliberalism in modern society, a vision

of what could be if the effects are not held in check. While the comic never explicitly mentions the crisis or Spain specifically, reading the work through a lens of alienation reveals the neoliberal nightmare that the comic develops.

This nightmare personifies the hegemonic forces in contemporary neoliberal society and depicts them as a scheming, manipulative, unseen force. This is augmented by quasi-religious elements within the story as well as the body horror seen throughout the comic; the denizens of Ciudad Espanto, and indeed the narrator himself, are brutally warped by this neoliberal alterity, twisted into beings barely recognizable as their formal human selves. This is in many ways indicative of Rubín's other comic art, which does not always use body horror but does make extensive use of extreme contrasts and dramatic juxtapositions of characters and environments that are so key to the body horror we see in this comic. The characters of *Cuaderno de tormentas* are reduced to levels of precarity that reflect the desperate situation Guy Standing describes in his considerations of the precariat class. In this they are estranged not only from one another, but also from themselves, from their very humanity. The narrator's experience stands as a reminder that there is no escape once one sells their soul to capital.

To conclude, therefore, it is in David Rubín's metaphor for the artist struggling to find inspiration that parallels can be drawn to the alienation inherent in the intersection of neoliberalism, alienation, and crisis. Rubín's depiction of the pressures placed upon the artist, his use of body horror and depiction of religious sins, and his depictions of extreme alienation within Ciudad Espanto speak to the mark that contemporary neoliberal society has left on this narrative, as well as construct an admonitory social nightmare. Indeed, *Cuaderno de tormentas* presents no other alternative to selling one's soul to find better stories to tell. Thus, though this comic is not as explicitly critical of neoliberal capitalism in the ways that the following two works to be

considered here are, what I highlight in the Spanish dystopian imagination of *Cuaderno de tormentas* is an admonitory narrative, depicting a dystopian extrapolation of the trajectory of current neoliberal norms. The luring of the narrator to Ciudad Espanto enables the reader to identify with this character, and in this identification begin to map their own relationships to the hegemonic pressures of contemporary neoliberalism that Ciudad Espanto represents. After all, who might not be tempted by the possibility of enough success and money to escape their day-to-day precarity and alienation? Indeed, as Bradan reminds us, the precariat cannot help but be complicit in their own oppression (12).

Pulse enter para continuar

This consideration of the alienation of the neoliberal subject connects well to the next work to be considered in this chapter – Ana Galvañ's *Pulse enter para continuar.* This comic presents a direct and didactic criticism of contemporary neoliberal capitalism, with the author's own description on the cover of the comic demonstrating her critique: "Para entender la malicia de las grandes corporaciones en escenas pequeñas y cotidianas, reales pero surrealistas. Para comprender por qué debería caer el sistema" (Galvañ) / "To understand the malice of large corporations in small and everyday scenes, real but surreal. To comprehend why the system should fall" (Galvañ, my translation). Thus, this analysis will demonstrate that this comic seeks to enable its reader to visualize their estrangement under neoliberalism by depicting a dystopian future that routinely plays with the dividing lines between the real and the virtual. In this way, Galvañ's work depicts a manipulation of the subject into complacency and/or complicity in their own oppression. This is accomplished by demonstrating the alienation of the neoliberal subject as a hegemonic force, instituting its system of values and normative practices in every aspect of life. In Galvañ's comic this alienation is taken to the extreme, where everyday life seems almost

indistinguishable from the virtual. Through this the reader can see how the individuals living in this neoliberal dystopia are kept unaware of what is real and what is a manipulation of the truth. In seeing this problematic relationship between the characters and the unseen forces that manipulate them, the opportunities for the readers' own mapping of their position in contemporary neoliberal society are developed, as the comic's dystopian extrapolations provide new means of seeing and understanding these situational relationships.

Ana Galvañ is a Spanish comic artist and illustrator from Murcia, where she lives and works. Originally working in advertising, she now focuses full time on her artistic endeavors and has collaborated with such publications as *El pais, The Guardian, The Washington Post,* and many more. Her comic art has also been published in many outlets, among them Apa Apa, Vertigo DC, and Fantagraphics, and in 2020 she was nominated for an Ignatz Award[23] (Galvañ, *About / contact - Ana Galvañ*). Her work is also garnering attention in the academy. For example, one study considers Galvañ's *Pulse enter para continuar* alongside two other dystopian works in an analysis of the social-space contained within the narrative, arguing for the cognitive function of art and the critical power of science fiction (Pereira-Zazo 61-86). This fits well with this chapter's considerations of the work here, as Pereira-Zazo also references Frederic Jameson's conceptions of cognitive mapping to understand the cognitive functions of art (and science fiction, utopia, and dystopia especially), highlighting the importance of the connection between science, social engineering, and utopianism in fictional narratives like *Pulse enter para continuar* (82).

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[23] The Ignatz Award is "the festival prize of the Small Press Expo, that since 1997 has recognized outstanding achievement in comics and cartooning. The Ignatz recognizes exceptional work that challenges popular notions of what comics can achieve, both as an art form and as a means of personal expression" (*About the Ignatz Awards | Small Press Expo*).

Simiarly, Xavier Dapena notes that Galvañ's use of science fiction often conveys personal stories and emotions as well as readings of systemic oppression to drive her narratives (*"Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution"* 147). In terms of *Pulse enter para continuar* specifically, Dapena observes that the comic explores themes of repression and dehumanization (148), which this chapter's analysis also notes. Indeed, Dapena observes that the world described in the comic wields science fiction to capture the anxieties of dehumanized characters, in which: "los gestos y la vida cotidiana se vuelve el escenario de multiplicidad de luchas en las formas políticas básicas. Estas historias como genealogías de temporalidades discontinuas que plantea Galvañ no dejan espacio para la vida, para el trabajo reproductivo" (149) / "gestures and daily life become the scene of multiple struggles in basic political forms. These stories as genealogies of discontinuous temporalities that Galvañ proposes leave no room for life, for reproductive work" (149, my translation). The vignettes that make up the comic, he notes, explore the multidimensionality of identity (149), and the conflict between human life and capital within the comic exposes "nuevas formas de explotación de los cuerpos despojados de sus identidad y del amparo del protegerse" (157-8) / "new forms of exploitation of bodies stripped of their identities and of the refuge of protecting themselves" (157-8, my translation). This aligns well with this chapter's analysis of the comic's depiction of the extreme alienation of the neoliberal subject as a device for enabling cognitive mapping.

What's more, in a field that seems dominated by male comics authors, *Pulse enter para continuar* has been recognized as a significant work by a woman comic artist, according to Montserrat Terrones. For Terrones, the current era is an important one for women in comics. They have been key content creators since the 1960s counterculture and feminist movements, highlighting such important issues as sexuality and mistreatment by the comics industry. In

70

addition, women artists have also served important roles as comics editors in Spain, positions

which had historically gone to men, which went a long way towards expanding the reach of

women's voices within the medium and within the field in general (3). In context with these

considerations, Terrones offers a series of works by women comic creators that contain a high

cultural value and whose script, art, and political/social commentary are of high quality. Ana

Galvañ's *Pulse enter para continuar* is one such work, due to its ability to explore "los límites

del lenguaje del comic en lo que tiene de arte visual" (6) / "the limits of the language of the

comic in the visual art it possesses" (6, my translation)[24]. Indeed, Terrones argues that Galvañ is

a prime example of women comics artists that are creating an important feminist dialogue within

the medium. In many ways, the writing and success of *Pulse enter para continuar* itself is an act

of resistance against an industry formed within a neoliberal system that normalizes lack of

representation of women's voices within the medium. This discourse is important, as *Pulse enter*

para continuar certainly represents a subversive narrative in its highlighting of the alienation of

the neoliberal subject, especially through the depiction of contemporary neoliberal society as

hegemonic. The "reality" established in the comic serves as a sort of allegory for contemporary

society, one obsessed with technology and consumerism and an alienation of the everyday

citizen.

      Galvañ's artistic style throughout the comic is deeply involved in developing this

discourse. The art is highly abstract. Though people, animals, buildings, etc. are all recognizable,

they often take on bizarre forms. At times these forms are highly geometric, while at other times

they are made of fluid, intersecting lines. Indeed, line work itself is highly variable, at times

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[24] Another such work that Terrones mentions that is equivalent to Galvañ's comic in this respect is *Gran bola de helado* by Conxita Herrero, a collection of 17 short vignettes. Another notable artist is Ana Jiménez Espinal (pen name Mercronimah), who published *Pandemiah,* a comic that depicts the author's own experiences during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

heavy and dark, and at others extremely light. The use of color is the most notable factor in Galvañ's art style in this comic, which is highly saturated and intense. Scott McCloud describes in detail how color can provoke emotions from the reader (192), and this comic is a prime example of this. Transitions between panels[25], like much of the artwork, are highly variable, which speaks to the experimental form of the work. Text is scarce throughout the comic, with most panels[26] containing no words at all. Where text is present, it works together with the art to produce meaning. In sum, this work seems to privilege experimental form above all. The highly variable and intense artwork is the prime motivator in the storytelling, as the reader is encouraged to use visual clues to piece together the story as it progresses (a demonstration of comics' extensive use of closure, as described by Scott McCloud). This aesthetic choice heightens the alien feeling injected into depictions everyday life throughout the work. The result is a sense of dissonance that clues in the reader to the fact that what appears to be the real world may, in fact, be a manipulation of the truth.

Let us now demonstrate how this artistic strategy enables a reader to cognitively map their own experiences in contemporary neoliberal society by engaging with this dystopian future. In the first few pages, as someone presses an enter key, a woman appears from a storm of pixels, as if she is rendering on a virtual scene (3-6). The process from key press to full rendering takes four pages, made up of full-page panel arrangements. This extensive use of space for the character's appearance establishes the bizarre setting immediately for the reader. Each time a

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[25] To gain a snapshot of Galvañ's use of panel transitions, the 25 pages between pp. 5-29 were considered. These pages contain 81 panels overall and 80 panel transitions. Most transitions were subject-to-subject transitions at 36 total, followed by action-to-action transitions at 22 total and moment-to-moment transitions at 14 total. Also present were 4 non-sequitur transitions, 2 scene-to-scene transitions, and 2 aspect-to-aspect transitions.

[26] To gain a snapshot of Galvañ's combinations of text and image, the same 25 pages between pp. 5-29 were considered. Most panels, at 68 total, had no text at all. 11 panels displayed interdependent combinations of text and image, and 2 displayed a picture-specific combination of text and image.

new protagonist is introduced throughout the comic they appear in this way, suggesting that day to day life in this world is at least partly virtual. The comic makes clear that this world is manipulated by forces that cannot be seen by the characters, and is made up of vignettes showing multiple protagonists being manipulated in various ways, each of them highlighting the alienation and precarity of the subjects they depict. These vignettes together form a narrative that depicts the relationship of the average citizen to larger societal norms as one of oppression, manipulation, and submission, which enables the mapping of the reader's positionality to the larger neoliberal systems in contemporary society that this comic represents.

In one vignette, for example, we meet Julián, who materializes onto the virtual scene as the woman at the opening of the comic had done. He is a trapeze artist, and has just joined the Chipperfield Circus. He quickly develops an attraction for another of the circus' performers, Scandal, who is known as *La Muñeca Humana* ("The Human Doll"). Everyone informs Julián that he must avoid Scandal at all costs; she is considered untrustworthy, and her act is in danger of being cancelled due to lack of audience. Despite this, Julián is deeply attracted to her. What is revealed to the reader, however, is that Scandal is not what she seems – under her gigantic, doll-like mask she is in reality a monster that devours the romantic partners that she lures into her grasp. Inset panels reveal that the previous trapeze artist was devoured in this way, but the reader never discovers if Julián himself is also consumed (17-33).

This vignette is important because it clearly demonstrates the alienation and manipulation of precarious lives in this strange world. In the first place, we have the trope of the circus, in which the "grotesque," othered body (as described by Bakhtin, Kafai, and Fricker & Malouin) is forced to make itself a spectacle for those that oppress and ostracize them. Even in this world in which the real and the virtual seem almost indistinguishable, those who do not fit within the ideal

neoliberal body are relegated to the margins[27]. The artistic styling of this vignette supports this. The color contrasts become more dynamic, and Galvañ favors larger establishing shots with framed images overlaid with text. Occasionally, smaller inset panels that offer enhanced detail of certain events or conversations appear within the larger image. Rather than create tension through a limitation of the view of the reader, Galvañ's artistic strategy engages in worldbuilding and immersion by demonstrating the massive extent of this futuristic virtual world and its essential, intricate involvement in people's day to day lives. This blurring of the lines between virtual and real continues and develops throughout the comic, keeping the reader guessing about what is real and what is not. Alienation is key here; not only are these characters alienated from their own humanity by being forced to put their "grotesque" bodies on display to justify their existence in society, but they are also alienated from one another in a very explicit way. Although these performers could potentially find solidarity in this circus as outcasts, the internalization of society's view of them have made it so that even here they are suspicious and distrustful of one another; after all, one of their own ranks is ostracized and, ultimately, implied to be responsible for the disappearance of a compatriot. Through this depiction we can see potential avenues for cognitive mapping, since the commodification of human bodies and labor is one that is rampant in contemporary neoliberal society, and through identifying with this narrative a reader can begin to comprehend their own precarious relationships with the dominant cultural norms.

One of the strongest criticisms of the comic appears in a later vignette, which deals directly with the mistreatment of the precarious worker. This scene depicts a new, unnamed protagonist who is taking part in a degrading job interview. Upon arrival, she is forced to crawl

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[27] Xavier Dapena also highlights the importance of this vignette, describing how it depicts the objectification of women's bodies, since Scandal always wears a mask that conceals her face, as well as the fact that she has been cast aside once her body (and her circus act) are no longer profitable (*"Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution…"* 152-3)

through a pet door to reach her interviewers, and once the interview begins, strange events begin to happen. She hears disembodied voices, and the interviewer begins acting strangely, pushing buttons under the table, and reading strange things aloud. When the woman finally confronts her interviewer, a group of people enter the room and applaud her for "passing the test". She is told to return the next day, and is escorted back to the pet door through which she entered and is forced to crawl her way out to the street again (35-48). The artwork makes a dramatic shift for this vignette. Whereas previously Galvañ favored large establishing shots, this vignette contains far more panels per page whose transitions are frequently moment-to-moment, giving the story a quicker pace and enabling the reader to focus intensely on the unnamed woman's reactions throughout the experience, which plays a part in the cognitive mapping that can take place here. This woman's positionality within the societal structures in which she lives is one of submission and humiliation, which parallels the neoliberal dystopia described by Bill Bradan.

Prior scholarship has also detailed the importance of this vignette, which encapsulates Galvañ's criticisms of hierarchical power relations (Dapena, *"Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution"* 153) as Galvañ imposes "ese sentido cíclico que inhibe todo desarrollo de personaje al mismo tiempo que acrecienta la situación precarizada y la desigualdad" (154) / "that cyclical sense that inhibits all character development at the same time as it increases the precarious situation and inequality" (154, my translation). Indeed, this vignette demonstrates all the hallmarks of the alienation of the precarious individual under neoliberalism. The protagonist is degraded and mentally manipulated by the employer with which she is interviewing. They toy with her and then celebrate her "success" in passing a test for which she didn't know she was sitting. She is forced to literally crawl on hands and knees before them to even be considered for the job, an act that Dapena describes forces the protagonist into an act of submission (153). Note

that she never protests; she even thanks her interviewers for congratulating her, suggesting that at least in some ways this kind of treatment is normalized/expected. That is, normative forces are acting upon this precarious individual. It is a direct parallel to the flexibilization of the labor market described by Guy Standing and the mistreatment of labor in general under neoliberalism. Depicted here is the problematic relationship between the individual relegated to the precariat and the corporate entities which alienate them and keep them in their downtrodden position. There is an extreme power imbalance here, and those who possess that power make no effort to disguise that fact. The work the comic does is to visually show this power imbalance to its reader. This fact facilitates cognitive mapping through an extreme extrapolation of the processes of contemporary neoliberalism, revealing their extreme human costs to a reader who may not yet be aware of their own positionality within these problematic, hierarchical structures of power. This cognitive mapping is made more effective by this comic's making of this character's exploitation clearly visible in dystopian fashion, unflattening notions of worker exploitation.

These themes appear in a different way in a later vignette, which features a new protagonist reflecting upon a strange place to which his parents sent him as a young man. The young man's story takes the overarching themes of the manipulation of the "real" and the alienating of the precarious individual to new extremes. He recalls donning a uniform, stepping through a liquid crystal door, and emerging into a giant room full of others just like him. He remembers also that he and the other participants were subjected to increasingly bizarre tests and activities. They were placed into stasis, joining their minds while their data, thoughts, and emotions were monitored and recorded by officials wearing what appear to be hazmat suits. He leaves this place with no knowledge of what happened to him, and laments that he never again sees the people he met there. As the vignette closes, a laser blast fires through a portal,

76

destroying the facility and all evidence of its existence (51-64). The artwork here is distinct, using substantially more text than normal and varying its use of panels widely. On one page an illustration may take up the entirety of that page with inset comics adding detail (56) while others are entirely made up of multiple small panels arranged geometrically around the page (60). Color is intensely varied, which gives the vignette a kaleidoscopic effect. This varying of panel arrangement and use of color creates an intentionally chaotic and disorienting reading experience. In many ways, it directly mirrors the experience of the characters on the page, who are undergoing bizarre experiments, completely unaware of what is occurring to them. This mirroring of the characters' experience provides an opportunity for cognitive mapping.

Here we see alienation, manipulation, and precarity clearly illustrated. This young individual seems to be a participant in some sort of camp or institute, but it quickly devolves into abduction-style experimentation upon its subjects. Individuals no longer appear to even have names in the traditional sense, but rather are identified only by a series of numbers and letters or symbols. The protagonist's love interest, for example, is identified only as $630\sum$. The ignorance to what is happening to them demonstrates how completely these characters have been manipulated. This is not a place of recreation or relaxation but is rather a site of harvest. They are invaded in all the most fundamental ways possible, probing them and analyzing them each moment of each day, and their thoughts are constantly monitored. They experience dehumanization, internalized powerlessness, and alienation throughout this scene. What's more, this lack of information as to what is truly happening to these subjects becomes a recurring theme throughout the comic[28].

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[28] Though I focus here on the alienation involved in the harvesting of data from these characters as well as the lack of information of what is happening to them, prior scholarship has pointed out the critical importance of the star-crossed romance between the protagonist and $630\sum$, which also highlights the issue of alienation. This is both

These themes are developed further in one of the closing vignettes of the comic. In this scene the reader is introduced to Laura, whose story is the longest of all the comic's vignettes. Laura is living her life normally, until one day the apparition of a young child begins to appear to her, saying the same two words repeatedly: "Shinda Kodomo." He appears everywhere, including on her computer monitor at work and at her bedside. Paranoid, she is stopped cold walking on the street one day as she passes a technology store on the street whose window advertisement offers "Shinda Kodomo" among its other services. Shaken, she asks the store clerk about it who invites her to a secret base of operations underneath the storefront. The store clerk reveals that the visions of Shinda Kodomo are the result of a terrorist organization known as Z°, who is planting these images as a virus in people's brains to drive them to suicide (a sort of parallel to *Cuaderno de tormentas,* in which suicide also appears as a plot point). Laura leaves the store in disbelief, but is accosted by a strange woman on the street who she suspects is part of Z°. This woman urges her to open her eyes and to "remember," though remember what she does not say. To escape, Laura tases her and calls the store. She is told to enter the code they have discovered to stop the virus into her computer. She rushes to do so, but the child materializes on her computer screen in the process. Finally, she discovers a box on a nearby shelf labeled with those same two words spoken by the child apparition – Shinda Kodomo. Reaching inside, she finds a photo of what seems to be herself holding the hand of that same little boy who has been appearing to her. The vignette ends here, leaving the discovery unexplained (68-91).

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because of the disturbing harvesting of data from the individuals in this camp, and also because "De nuevo la serie de elementos comúnes de tipo temático como narrativo sirven a la autora murciana para plantear la sistémica alienación de las mujeres en una sociedad absolutamente tecnificada en la que la identidad se diluye en el que no hay espacio ni tan siquiera el gesto de amor" (Dapena, *"Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution"* 155) / "Once again the series of common thematic elements as narrative serve the Murcian author in laying out the systemic alienation of women in an absolutely technical society in which identity is diluted and in which there is no space even for the gesture of love" (155, my translation).

The artwork in this vignette makes full use of all the artistic strategies employed by Galvañ throughout the comic up to this point, alternating between full-page establishing shots and the use of many small vignettes. This very effectively controls the pace of the story, enabling the reader to share in Laura's emotional state, especially in her urgency as the vignette nears its climax. The cognitive mapping enabled in this vignette, and the artistic style it employs, lies especially in the narrative of an individual slowly coming to realize that they have been lied to/manipulated by higher forces that they cannot identify, much as the precaritized mind (Standing 18) may yet come to realize the manipulations they face in the flexibilization of the labor market and beyond. Indeed, it has been observed that in this vignette "Galvañ cuestiona el estatuto de la memoria, de los recuerdos y los relaciona con técnicas biopolítica de control poblacional" (Dapena, *"Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution"* 157) / "Galvañ questions the statute of memory, of recollections, and relates them to biopolitical techniques of population control" (157, my translation). Essentially, Galvañ uses dystopian extremes to make visible to her reader the machinations of hegemonic neoliberalism and the ways in which they manipulate the individual, allowing the reader to better understand their own relationship with these machinations.

Indeed, this section presents its reader a powerful example of alienation and manipulation. Laura's own (virtual) reality is being warped by unknown forces, making her unsure of who or what she can trust. This child seems to have been important to her somehow, but the memory of him has been erased for reasons that are never explained. It is important that not even the reader knows the truth of what is happening in this scene. The narrative makes clear that we should question everything. The lack of information is, indeed, part of the narrative's point here. Everything is manipulated by powers that Laura – and the reader, by extension – can

79

neither see nor understand. It is an ultimate representation of the manipulation and alienation of the precarious individual. As Guy Standing notes, electronics increasingly permeate our lives, effecting the way we think: "It is doing so in ways that are consistent with the idea of the precariat. The precariat is defined by short-termism, which could evolve into a mass incapacity to think long term, induced by the low probability of personal progress or building a career" (18). Indeed, in light of Standing's considerations here, it is not difficult to visualize our contemporary neoliberal society in the extreme, dystopian depiction shown in Laura's vignette.

Individually, each of *Pulse enter para continuar*'s vignettes develops the social nightmare of a reality in which the individual is isolated, monetized, and abused. Thus, when taken as a whole, *Pulse enter para continuar* portrays a world in which the current, 21st century neoliberal hegemony has been extrapolated to its most extreme, dystopian possibilities. Here, the real world is virtually indistinguishable from the virtual world, which itself is manipulated by unseen, unknown forces. It can be concluded, therefore, that the neoliberal dystopian nightmare depicted in this comic is a warning for the contemporary reader, especially considering that the virtual world is an integral part of contemporary neoliberalism. The reader is not an impassive observer of this neoliberal nightmare. Galvañ herself invites the reader to enter this narrative ("Pulse enter para continuar…" / "Press enter to continue…") and see for themselves what might come to pass should the current neoliberal system be permitted to continue its present course. *Pulse enter para continuar,* therefore, is an explicitly didactic comic. Its stated purpose is to expose the reason that the contemporary neoliberal dystopia (as described by Bill Bradan) must fall, lest it complete its repression of society utterly. Though of course this virtual world depicted in this comic is nothing the reader would have experienced, its overall themes of being manipulated by ruthless employers or being gaslighted by higher forces is something many could indeed relate to,

providing an opportunity for readers to see themselves in these struggles and develop a map of their positionality against these forces.

¡Universo!

This brings us to the final text to be considered in this chapter: Albert Monteys' *¡Universo!* (2018). The comic is made up of several science fiction vignettes, and what unifies each of these stories is their shared setting within a neoliberal dystopia in the distant future, where large corporations control every aspect of day-to-day life. This includes precarious life and labor, both of which are major themes throughout the work. It constructs a social nightmare that reveals the inequities of contemporary neoliberal society via a dystopian caricature of corporate greed. The comic provides a means for the readers to identify their experiences through the caricatures of corporate greed in the comic and, ultimately, to map their place within the systems of contemporary neoliberalism that these caricatures represent. In sum, these depictions enable the reader to comprehend the complex issues of neoliberalism and by extension better understand their own struggles.

Albert Monteys hails from Barcelona and is the former director of the popular satirical magazine *El Jueves.* He started his work on the anthology comic *¡Universo!* after leaving the magazine. He would go on to other projects as well, including founding the digital magazine *Orgullo y Satisfacción* alongside other key Spanish comics artists such as Manel Fontdevila (Gascón-Vera 128). Other notable works by Albert Monteys include *Humor a todo tren* (2000), *Solid State* (2017), *El show de Albert Monteys* (2018), and *Leyendas del recreo* (2020), among many others. His work has also been previously considered in the academy. One notable article that considers the construction of "masculine" and "feminine" in comics and cartoon strips, for example, notes that Monteys' work *Ser un hombre: cómo y por qué* (2013) deserves mention as

an example of a comic by a male comedian that can be read from a feminist perspective (Acevedo 29-52). His work, thus, has previously been observed to take up political and social commentary, and as this study will demonstrate, *¡Universo!* fits well with this consideration. Specifically, *¡Universo!* imagines a social nightmare in which corporate greed has been extrapolated to its most dystopian possibilities, where human life has been reduced to nothing more than another resource to be exploited.

The art style of the comic is key in the development of its narrative. Albert Monteys is true to Scott McCloud's conceptualization of abstraction through cartooning and multimodality of text and image. His artistic style utilizes bright colors, exaggerated and often comical caricatures of human appearance and emotional states, and a clever utilization of varied panel arrangement to control pace of the story. The result is a vision of the future that recalls Jetsons-style technological utopianism[29], though a close reading demonstrates that the universe of this comic is more dystopian in nature. In this, Monteys draws fantastic depictions of daily and domestic life which fuse the familiar with the bizarre. A man may have all the typical comforts of a present-day home in one panel but express his undying love for the marital robot he has purchased and fly to work in his personal green bubble in the next. His line work is dramatic, with items being outlined in a thick dark line that, when combined with detailed shading effects, adds a compelling level of depth, dimension, texture, lighting, and perspective. Transitions between panels[30] are mostly focused on subject-to-subject transitions, which is due to the heavy emphasis on dialogue between characters throughout the story. Most of these panels favor an

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[29] See: Yegen (2018)
[30] To gain a snapshot of Monteys' use of panel-to-panel transitions, pp. 5-24 were considered. These pages contained 61 panels, and 60 panel transitions. The most common transition was subject-to-subject at 36 total, followed by moment-to-moment transitions at 10 total. Also present were 7 action-to-action transitions, 5 scene-to-scene transitions, and 2 aspect-to-aspeect transitions.

interdependent combination of text and image[31], where the two together form meaning where either alone could not. The result is a dynamic work of art that controls the pace and attention of the reader with extreme effectiveness. This is true of the main character Tommy's narrative in particular, whose mistreatment by the dystopian caricature that is the mega-corporation for which he works is interlaced with almost every other major plot point in the comic. It is the depiction of precarious workers like Tommy that enable a cognitive mapping on the part of the reader, who may have yet to map their own relationships to their corporate masters in the neoliberal dystopia in which they are living. In this way the comic works to unflatten preconceived notions of contemporary neoliberalism and corporate greed.

¡Universo! is set in the 56th century, and is filled with bright colors and fantastic technology. Earth appears to have been transformed into a futuristic utopia, though the narrative quickly reveals its more dystopian nature. Many of the comic's vignettes focus on the employees of the corporate tech giant Wortham Industries and the manipulation and alienation they experience due to corporate greed. The president and CEO of Wortham Industries, Mr. Wortham, is barely human. All that remains of his physical body is his severed head, kept alive in a fluid-filled glass sphere, which is variably attached to different robotic or holographic bodies. This is a common trope in futuristic dystopian narratives, in which the super wealthy can cheat death in a way the precariat cannot[32]. The perturbingly humorous way in which he is drawn adds a cartoonish villainy, and the comic demonstrates his corruption by detailing the suffering of those

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[31] To gain a snapshot of Monteys' combinations of text and image, the 61 panels in pp. 5-24 were again considered. The most common combination was the interdependent at 33 total, followed by word-specific combinations at 15 total. Also present were 2 picture-specific combinations and 1 montage. 10 panels had no images at all, only text.
[32] See for example the Netflix series *Altered Carbon* based on Richard K. Morgan's novel of the same name (Morgan 2003) and the scholarly analyses it has inspired; Kobus and Muniowski edit the collection of essays *Sex, Death and Resurrection in Altered Carbon: Essays on the Netflix Series,* in which they highlight, among other things, how the show "can be seen as a show advocating for transhumanism as well as a satire aimed at its basic assumptions, especially stark anthropocentrism and the discontention between the body and the mind/soul" (Kobus & Muniowski 2).

who work for him. This analysis considers two of those people: Tommy and Cristina. Although these two characters never interact within the series, their arcs are united by Wortham's efforts to achieve time travel, which has dire consequences for both characters.

One of the most important characters of this comic is Tommy, who becomes part of the CEO Mr. Wortham's plan to achieve time travel. Wortham wants to send Tommy back to the Big Bang, so that he can trademark every atom in existence with Wortham's name. Tommy's story is told in multiple vignettes which do not appear chronologically in the volume, but when taken together develop a very explicit critique of corporate greed and the alienation it fosters. In one early vignette we are given a glimpse into Tommy's home life, before receiving his assignment. The scene demonstrates a mixture of the familiar and the bizarre. He has a mirror, a sink, and an electric razor, all of which are signals of quotidian life that are immediately recognizable by the reader. At the same time, however, Monteys introduces futuristic fantasy into the artwork. Outside Tommy's apartment there are flying cars. Unfamiliar devices line Tommy's shelves. He expresses love for his marital robot Andrew (10-1). This combination tells the reader that this world is not the one that they know, and this is often used as a vessel for criticism via caricature, which itself enables the reader to cognitively map their own positionalities with contemporary neoliberalism and better understand the ways in which it injects itself into every aspect of daily life (as Wendy Brown describes).

As an example, let us consider Andrew, Tommy's robot spouse, who inspires questions about how relationships function in this far future. In another vignette, we learn that relationships between humans have become taboo, since marital robots are now the norm. An argument exists for Tommy's identity as a queer man, for his choosing to give Andrew a masculine-coded identity, which raises the question of how relationships and intimacy are viewed in this dystopian

future where queer-coded relationships are acceptable only so long as they are not human-human relationships. In this future Earth where alienation is the unifying factor, anything, including human to human love and intimacy, that threatens the accumulation of wealth and consumerism must be avoided. Relationships between two humans have become taboo, alienating people from one another and commodifying love and sex.

In a later vignette, the reader sees Tommy at a briefing ahead of his time travel assignment, delivered by the CEO of Wortham Industries, Mr. Wortham himself. Wortham is the caricature of corporate greed. He has extended his own life long past the normal human lifespan by preserving his severed head in a glass sphere, which is attached to robot or holographic bodies as his needs demand. In this briefing, Mr. Wortham reveals his plan to use 23% of all of Earth's resources to build a time machine and execute the one jump back to the Big Bang. He then makes an offhand joke of the extreme cost which is extremely telling: "Exacto, ¡hacerlo una segunda vez dejaría el planeta al borde del colapso! No soy un loco, ¡soy un hombre de negocios!" (13, author's emphasis). / "Exactly, doing it a second time would leave the planet on the edge of collapse! I'm not crazy, I'm a businessman!" (13, author's emphasis, my translation). Wortham makes light of the human and environmental cost of his grab for power and money, itself a caricature of corporate greed. This caricatural depiction makes it easy for a reader to identify with Tommy; while present-day superrich CEOs cannot extend their lives indefinitely, the excesses of the super wealthy while the precariat suffers is indeed something that a contemporary reader could glean from this exaggerated representation.

Following this scene, Tommy's story is then told in intervals. We learn that upon completing his task for Mr. Wortham, he now must wait many billions of years, preserved in his space/time suit, until he arrives back at the moment of his departure. His centuries-long wait

85

reveals his bitterness and disgust at having been literally alienated from those he loves for millennia in the name of corporate greed. When he gets home, it is revealed that rather than trademarking every atom in existence with Wortham's trademark, he instead inscribes "Mr. Wortham es un mierda" (35) / "Mr. Wortham is a piece of shit" (35, my translation), an act of rebellion for which he is fired. Precarity and alienation, thus, are central to Tommy's story arc. The primary example of course, is Mr. Wortham. Wortham is the ultimate representation – or caricature - of corporate greed. Not only does his bid for control appropriate nearly a quarter of the world's resources, but the human cost is also apparent in the treatment of his workers, most notably Tommy and – as will be discussed next – Cristina. The fact that he can pursue this course of action with impunity demonstrates the sheer amount of power given to the interests of capital in this dystopian futurity.

Another character who exemplifies the neoliberal dystopia in this comic and the alienation of the precariat is Cristina, who is also an exploited laborer on the time travel project. Cristina is permanently disabled in a workplace accident when somebody turns on the time machine with her inside. She survives, much to Mr. Wortham's displeasure: "Hmph, es todo más fácil cuando mueren" / "Hmph, it's all so much easier when they die" (156). Here also we see the extreme costs of corporate greed and the search for power, especially in context with precarious labor. As a result of this injury, Cristina's mind becomes temporally disconnected from the moment in time in which her physical body exists. As she explains to her husband Jacques, "Sufro un desplazamiento temporal, todo lo que veo, oigo y siento sucederá dentro de un minuto y treinta y siete segundos. Es como si viviera en el futuro…" (162) / "I suffer from a temporal displacement, everything I see, hear, and feel will happen within a minute and thirty-seven seconds. It is as if I lived in the future" (162, my translation). Over time, Cristina's injury

becomes progressively worse, and her consciousness becomes ever further distant from her physical body. The only solution offered by Wortham Industries is a time capsule that will help; however, it is prohibitively expensive, and the company will not pay for it. As a result, Cristina must use her ability to experience the future to raise money for her own treatment, acting as a fortune teller-for-hire. Even this does not save her from the alienation she experiences. While the capsule will treat her displacement, she will by necessity be completely separated from the rest of the world, literally alienated as she is locked inside the chamber.

At the forefront of this character arc are the alienation and exploitation of the precariat, as this story is essentially an unfortunate case of worker's compensation. Despite causing the injury in the first place, Wortham Industries demands that Cristina pay for the only recourse available. It is a clear example of the exploitation of the precarious laborer, who is essentially cast aside once they are no longer useful, once they inhabit an Othered body that is of no further use to the corporate overlords. This raises important questions about the intersection of ability/disability and neoliberalism, and how this dystopian social nightmare views that intersection. Scholars note that despite being left out of many scholarly considerations of science fiction, disability is in fact central to "the formation an ongoing grown of the genre" (Allan & Cheyne 390). Indeed, as Allen & Cheyne note, "Science fiction is a particularly potent site wherein models of disability are made evident" (390), be that implicitly or explicitly. *¡Universo!* reflects this, and foregrounds the issue of disability by demonstrating how Cristina is immediately pushed aside the moment she no longer inhabits a normative body, one that can no longer be exploited as an expendable labor source (which is also important in Ana Galvañ's *Pulse enter para continuar*). Cristina's oppression can thus be seen not only from a standpoint of alienation of the precariat, but in an interdisciplinary way as well at the intersection of gender, disability, and class configuration.

When these vignettes are taken together, therefore, it is obvious that *¡Universo!* is a didactic comic that through dystopian caricature criticizes the structures in contemporary neoliberal society that permit corporate greed to consume human life and labor in the name of endless growth. Dystopia here portrays a vision of the future in which the unchecked greed of the superrich has created a true social nightmare in which humanity is nothing more than another resource to be exploited. Through these dystopian extrapolations, this comic enables its readers to cognitively map their own relationship to neoliberalism and corporate greed by allowing them to identify these didactic themes in the fantastical depictions of alienation and precarity, in particular in relation to Tonmy and Cristina's narratives. This is because the relationships that Tommy and Cristina possess to the dystopian extrapolation of neoliberalism seen in this comic is itself one of alienation and exploitation. While certainly none of its readers has ever been sent through time to the Big Bang or been temporally disconnected from their bodies, the theme of manipulative work superiors and abusive work compensation programs would certainly be familiar to many. In this way comics like this one can abstract complex topics to make them more approachable, unflattening prevailing notions through combining diverse viewpoints.

Conclusions

Individually, each of the comics considered here leverages dystopia in its own unique way to develop a critique of contemporary neoliberalism's hegemony and make the complex topics of neoliberalism and crisis approachable to their reader base. *Cuaderno de tormentas* depicts a struggling author manipulated into selling their soul to find a (marketable) story to tell, using body horror to display the grotesque consequences of this manipulation and subsequent alienation. *Pulse enter para continuar* envisions a world in which neoliberal alienation and manipulation is so pervasive that the line between the real and the unreal is blurred, eliminating

personal autonomy and solidarity. *¡Universo!* envisions a future in which neoliberal capitalism has gone to such extremes that the super wealthy can extend their lives indefinitely and attempt to trademark every atom in existence. In reading these works together, a greater trend emerges in their critique of neoliberalism: a focus on the alienation of the precarious individual in postmodern, neoliberal society. Each of these comics highlights both the suffering and precarity amongst the exploited classes, and the deep corruption and problematic, hierarchical structures of power that enable it. This brings the discussion back to the primary research question of this chapter: How do dystopian comics *specifically* enable such a cognitive mapping? As the introduction to this dissertation has demonstrated, abstraction through cartooning, multimodality, closure, and the combining of multiple vantage points are key components of this process. These work in conjunction with the theme of alienation (depicted in dystopian fashion) to make these complex topics approachable to their reader; dystopia here presents contemporary issues of neoliberal society in the abstract, enabling the reader to understand the relationships the characters possess to their dystopian realities and, in turn, begin to form cognitive maps of their own lived relationships to broader hegemonic norms in contemporary neoliberal society.

Thus, understanding alienation is a key aspect in understanding the experience of the precariat, and this analysis demonstrates that Spanish dystopian comics are useful tools in this endeavor. It is through this highlighting of alienation that these dystopian comics enable a cognitive mapping of neoliberalism more generally, especially post-2008. Each of the protagonists experiences types of alienation and exploitation that would be immediately identifiable by the reader, who may then be able to draw connections to their own experiences. It is through this dystopian vision that the precariat can come to better understand their own real-life struggles represented in fantastical fashion in these comics, offering an opportunity to map

their own relationships with the structures of power in contemporary neoliberal society and situate themselves within broader global contexts. The implications of this are multifaceted. In the first place, this analysis fills a certain gap in the literature. As Groensteen tells us, comics have long been in search of legitimacy in general, but it's also important to understand how comics fit in to the discussion of literature of crisis. Per Scott McCloud, comics have a unique combination of artistic elements, discussed extensively above and throughout this dissertation. Artistic production – of which comics are a significant part - can provide us a window into public consciousness, especially in the wake of traumatic events like the 2008 economic crisis. Ongoing research can help us better understand the unique abilities of comics in the realm of social commentary.

In conclusion, these comics utilize their unique multimodalities and artistic styles to make the alienation of the neoliberal subject easily understandable to their readers, effectively enabling a cognitive mapping that permits a reader to use these dystopian caricatures of contemporary neoliberalism to better situate themselves within the world in which they live. This is because the relationship that these characters possess to their larger realities is one of alienation and precarity, of being made complicit in their own repression (albeit in dystopian fashion), which parallels the realities of contemporary neoliberal society (described by Guy Standing, Clara Valverde, and Bill Bradan especially). Thus, if utopia is a form of social dreaming (as Lymen Tower Sargent describes), then dystopia can be argued to be a form of social nightmare, one that serves an admonitory function. It can both reflect contemporary society as well as extrapolate the consequences of contemporary trends in society. David Rubín, Albert Monteys, and Ana Galvañ specifically imagine such a nightmare, one in which humanity has been completely alienated and marked as expendable in the name of the free market. This has important implications for the rest

of this dissertation project. In this chapter, we have demonstrated how dystopian comics depict the extant anxieties and alienation of neoliberal Spanish society, and also how they can be used to facilitate cognitive mapping. What is needed now is an examination of how comics envision ways in which this alienation can be resolved. This question will be explored over the next three chapters. The second chapter will begin to examine how comics engage explicitly with corruption in Spain and its connection to the economic crisis, before exploring how contemporary comics visualize responses and appropriate interventions to these last in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 – The Legacy of Authoritarianism in Spain and its Connection to Neoliberalism & the Economic Crisis in Contemporary Noir Comics

As the first chapter of this dissertation discussed how Spanish dystopian comics depict extant anxieties of precarious life in contemporary neoliberalism (and the subsequent need for cognitive maps), this chapter will continue this discussion by analyzing how comics depict some of the root causes of those anxieties. Specifically, it will do so in those comics that invoke the noir mode. Scholars have long identified noir as a mode suited to social commentary, and in this spirit, this chapter analyzes how Spanish noir comics consider neoliberalism in Spain as well as the 2008 economic crisis, and what sets them apart from other comics (and other noir media such as film). Noir has been extensively studied in Spanish literary circles, and despite its delayed development due to Francoist censorship, it has been shown that noir – and in particular the noir novel (the *novela negra*) – has been used as a powerful tool of social criticism in the wake of Franco's dictatorship (Colmeiro 15-29). What is needed now is an analysis of how noir comics in Spain enable their reader to situate themselves within the larger structures of contemporary Spanish society. To do this, this chapter engages with three noir comics: *¡García!* (2015) by Santiago García and Luis Bustos, *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* (2020) by Víctor Santos, and *Cenizas* (2012) by Álvaro Ortiz. This analysis will seek to unveil how the intersection of noir and the comics medium approaches the crisis and enables the cognitive mapping that is the focus of this dissertation through providing new perspectives and vantage points. These works invoke elements of noir to link contemporary economic and political woes in Spain directly with the legacy of the Franco dictatorship to drive their critique and provide opportunities for cognitive mapping.

Specifically, this chapter will seek to answer the following research questions: How do noir comics enable their readers to situate themselves and their own experiences within neoliberalism post-2008, what sets them apart from other noir media, and what do they bring to the discussion that other media cannot? To answer these questions, this chapter continues to rely on the theories of Frederic Jameson (on cognitive mapping), Scott McCloud, Thiery Groensteen, and Nick Sousanis (on understanding comics), Wendy Brown (on neoliberalism), and Guy Standing (on alienation and precarity) that inform this dissertation's throughlines. However, it will also engage with theorists of noir, in particular in the Spanish context (such as José Colmeiro) in order to situate noir's unique critical power. In this way, this chapter demonstrates that the unique multimodality, closure, and democratic nature of the comics medium, along with the ability to "unflatten" perspectives of the world through a combination of distinct viewpoints, work in tandem with the noir genre to enable readers to map their relationship to post-Transition and post-2008 Spanish society by linking present, lived precarious experiences with Spain's long-term struggles with authoritarianism and corruption. Not only do these comics speak directly to the extensive political corruption of the elites in Spain, but also to the suffering it engenders for those in the precariat. Reading these works together reveals the significance of the issue of corruption regarding the economic crisis in Spain, as well as its connection to legacy of authoritarianism that remains present in Spain today. This contributes to the field of comics studies as well as studies of noir fiction, especially regarding social commentary post-Transition to democracy.

More than this, however, this chapter continues the discussion begun in Chapter 1. Where that chapter laid bare the extant anxieties of contemporary neoliberal Spanish society, this chapter begins to move towards an explicit depiction of the crisis and the corruption that

engendered it, providing the reader with a place to lay blame for their suffering: corrupt politicians and bankers. This analysis will begin with a brief engagement with theories of noir (and how it connects to the throughlines of this dissertation) and its manifestations in the context of Spanish cultural production, followed by a close reading of each comic. The chapter will then close with a synthesis of what is revealed upon considering these comics together.

Introduction

Defining noir for the purposes of this chapter is challenging, as the term can carry many meanings and span many media. The aesthetics of noir can be understood as including "constant opposition of light and shadow, its oblique camera angles, and its disruptive compositional balance of frames and scenes, the way characters are placed in awkward and unconventional positions within a particular shot…" (Conard 1). While Conard here writes specifically in relation to film noir, these themes are traceable also in noir comic art. Realism is also an iconic feature of noir: "The tone and mood of film noir are apropos of how things really are, a sense of reality, not distorted but *conveyed* by expressionist techniques and convoluted plotlines" (Holt 25). The dark realism inherent in noir has also been suggested to contain "pedagogical moral value," (Skoble 41), that is, Skoble argues that film noir in particular demonstrates "practical reason and ethical decision making, in settings that affirm moral realism and explicitly reject nihilism" (47)[33]. Such elements make noir a useful mode for social commentary. Indeed, the intersection of noir and comic art is ideally suited to present social commentary , unflattening preconceived notions of the crisis and enabling cognitive mapping. To fully understand this

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[33] It is important to note that Skoble is speaking on American film noir in particular in this context, though I will argue below that his points are nonetheless relevant to my consideration of Spanish noir comics in this chapter.

process, we must also understand how noir has previously been understood in the Spanish context, and how this informs this chapter's understanding of Spanish noir comics.

Previous scholarship has dealt extensively with noir fiction in Spain and its use as a vehicle for social commentary. For example, many of the same aspects and characteristics of noir discussed above are observable in Spanish noir media as well, including the contrast between light and shadow, multiple narrators/voice overs, and a dark, morally ambivalent tone (Rodríguez 140-1). However, the evolution of noir in Spain is unlike that in the United States or France, for example, due in part to the censorship of the Franco dictatorship (141-2). Nevertheless, new themes would be introduced in Spanish film noir, including organized crime (Medina de la Viña 15), which connects well to the considerations of the noir comics in this chapter which also take up that theme. These factors open such works to an analysis of the social commentaries they provide via elements of noir in their narratives, among which include an exposition of the corruption in the social system of Spain (Rodríguez 153).

Indeed, prior scholarship has identified the recent resurgence of neo-noir film in Spain in response to the corruption and alienation of neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis, which is itself "a morbid cinematic symptom of a cultural crisis provoked by neoliberal catastrophe" (Boehm, "Cinema of Dissensus…" 41). This reemergence coincides with an "explosion of dissensus" following the crisis and its associated austerity measures, and Boehm argues that while Spanish horror film from the early 2000s: "staged encounters with a traumatic real that threatened to destroy, or at least disrupt, the smooth functioning of the symbolic order established during the 'Transition' that followed Franco's death," (42), the shift in focus from horror to thrillers and neo-noir after 2010 "portends a preoccupation with the breakdown of that very symbolic order and the absence of symbolic authorities who can guarantee social welfare"

95

(42).Thus, Spanish film noir offers critiques of neoliberal Spanish society, which Boehm notes is appropriate considering noir's history of (re)emergence in times of crisis (58).

Noir is important in other mediums in Spain as well, such as the noir novel (the *novela negra*). Though as previously noted Spain did not have the same surge in hard-boiled police narratives in the 1940s and 1950s that would inspire noir media in other countries, the turn to noir in the literary field would eventually come in the waning years of the Franco regime and well into the transition to democracy[34] where the *novela negra* would be used as a tool of social criticism. Rather than celebrating a return to normalcy, as the traditional police novel often does, "la novela negra pone en tela de juicio la racionalidad del orden social, la justicia del sistema legal y la ética de la policía, y ofrece una crítica moralista de las deficiencias del orden capitalista" (Colmeiro 18). / "the *novela negra* questions the rationality of the social order, the injustice of the legal system and police ethics, and offers a moralist critique of the deficiencies of the capitalist order" (Colmeiro 18, my translation). Thus, the *novela negra* emerged as a tool to explore social inequities in contemporary Spain. Mari Paz Balibrea notes, for example, that these novels would play an important role during the transition to democracy, where their investigatory style and structure enable them to serve not only as a form of resistance, but also as a rejection of the politics of forgetting that came along with the Transition. In sum, noir is wielded in a way

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[34] To be clear, this is not to say that there were no police/noir narratives before this point. As José Colmeiro notes: "La estrecha relación entre la novela policiaca y la ciudad moderna ha sido constante desde sus comienzos del siglo XIX. Ambas han ido creciendo y desarrollándose en paralelo, al compás del establecimiento y desarrollo de los propios organismos encargados de mantener el orden social establecido, por ello mismo llamados 'fuerzas del orden', que conforman en términos de Althusser el aparato represivo del Estado" (Colmeiro 16). / "The extensive relationship between the police novel and the modern city has been constant since its beginnings in the 19th Century. Both have continued growing and developing in parallel with the establishment and development of the same organizations responsible for maintaining the established social order, themselves called "forces of order" which in Althusser's terms make up the repressive apparatus of the State" (Colmeiro 16, my translation). By extension, Colmeiro notes that the *novela policíaca* did exist in the fifties and sixties despite fierce censorship of the government, and some of these authors (such as Francisco García Pavón) would use the medium to covertly criticize the repression of the Francoist police and the regime at large (20).

that takes advantage of a public looking to navigate a society driven by disillusionment (Paz Balibrea 117). This is precisely what we can observe in the noir comics considered in this chapter, as they draw parallels between the legacy of Francoist repression and the economic crisis that would come in 2008.

What is needed now, therefore, is an engagement with how noir can be wielded as a means of social commentary of neoliberalism and the 2008 crisis in the comics medium. Given noir's propensity for social commentary born of disillusionment (as Paz Balibrea notes), understanding how this operates in the graphic narratives of comic art is important because it will allow us to trace the ongoing evolution of noir's ability to confront repressive politics and corruption. Prior scholarship has specifically established the ability of noir film and literature to critique both the politics of forgetting of the Transition and of contemporary neoliberalism as well, and so how the intersection of comic art and noir enables a reader to situate themselves against the broader realities of contemporary, neoliberal Spain is especially deserving of study. This is where this chapter intervenes with its consideration of *¡García!* (2015) by Santiago García and Luis Bustos, *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* (2020) by Víctor Santos, and *Cenizas* (2012) by Álvaro Ortiz. While this chapter will not claim to be a comprehensive survey of all noir comics in Spain, nor that these works are necessarily representative of *all* noir comics post-2008, it will assert that they nonetheless prove useful in a consideration of how the intersection of noir and comics develops social commentary of neoliberalism and the crisis.

Specifically, this chapter will demonstrate that the linkage between the memory of Spain's authoritarian past and the present neoliberal system post-Transition in these three noir comics is a useful vehicle of cognitive mapping, due to their providing new perspectives on the economic crisis. Their didactic narratives allow a reader to begin to map their own positionality

within the larger context of hegemonic social norms in contemporary Spain. In part, they enable a reader to not only contextualize their own struggles with alienation and precarity, but also conceive of some of the root causes of these struggles. While certainly corruption was not the only cause of the crisis, these comics focus their critical powers on exposing corruption leading up to the crisis. In this way, these comics enable this mapping by providing the reader a place to lay (at least partial) blame for their misery: the financial and political elites.

¡García!

Let us begin with *¡García!* by Santiago García and Luis Bustos (with a special collaboration with Manel Fontdevila). This comic depicts the eponymous Spanish secret agent who formerly served the dictatorship of Francisco Franco and finds himself thrust into modern-day Spanish politics after being cryogenically frozen for decades. Considering *¡García!* first in this analysis is intentional, as the narrative of *¡García!* deals directly with the impact of the problematic legacy of Francoism on present-day, neoliberal Spain (and the Culture of Transition or CT[35] that enabled it). The comic depicts Franco's legacy as inherently inseparable from the contemporary Spanish state. Noir is key in this development, as the comic wields the dark realism that theorists such as Conard have demonstrated is key to understanding the genre. It is upon seeing this on the page that the readers can conceptualize of themselves as victims of the corruption that the comic makes visible and comprehensible. This is supported not only by prior scholarship on this work (and its authors), but also in the fact that *¡García!* has succeeded in reaching wide audiences. As of the time of writing (2023), the work is being adapted for television ("HBO Max pone fecha de estreno a "¡García!", la adaptación del cómic de culto") which demonstrates its reach in promulgating its message.

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[35] See for example: Martínez (2012), Echeverría (2012), and Delgado (2014), discussed in the introduction to this dissertation.

¡*García!* is a collaborative work by Santiago García and Luis Bustos, and includes

flashback interludes drawn by Manel Fontdevila. Each of these authors has had a noteworthy

career. Luis Bustos hails from Madrid and has worked as an illustrator and cartoonist since 1996.

Besides ¡*García!,* he has several credits across comic strips and graphic novels including

Endurance (2009), *Versus* (2014), *Puerta de luz* (2017), and *POP* (2019) among many others

(Bustos). Apart from ¡*García!,* his other works have acquired scholarly attention as well, in

particular his dystopian comic *Puerta de luz* which is considered a prime example of the use of

art for its cognitive and ideological functions, alongside Ana Galvañ (discussed above) and Jesús

Colomina Orgaz (Pereira-Zazo 61-86). Notably, Pereira-Zazo observes that while Ana Galvañ's

Pulse enter para continuar does little to provide hope for a better future, the works of Bustos &

Jesús Colomina Orgaz: "sí contienen finales que pueden ser calificados de ambiguos y abiertos.

Ahora bien, a este lector el carácter formulario del final de *Puerta de luz* le impide otorgarle en

beneplácito utópico – el esfuerzo tiene que ser más sustancial" (83) / "do contain endings that

can be qualified as ambiguous and open. Now, for this reader, the formal character of the end of

Puerta de luz prevents him from giving it utopian approval – the effort has to be more

substantial" (83, my translation). In any case, this situating of Bustos' work in post-15M cultural

contexts as Pereira-Zazo does sets the artist up well for a consideration of his noir works in this

context of cognitive mapping in neoliberal Spain.

Santiago García Fernández also hails from Madrid and possesses a degree in journalism.

He helped found the magazines *U* and *Volumen,* was a significant contributor to *ABC,* and has

worked with many other notable cartoonists (*Santiago García Fernández…*). Apart from

¡*García!* he has also written such comics as *La cólera* (with Javier Olivares), *El vecino* (with

Pepo Pérez), and *Cómics sensacionales*, among others (García). He has also been noted to be a

dedicated protest artist; Xavier Dapena highlights, for example, his collaboration with Pepo

Pérez on the short comic *Spanish Revolution* published directly to García's website. Along with

the follow-up short comic *Barcelona (Spanish Revolution #2),* Dapena notes that this work

responded directly to the events of the 15M and: "…en *Spanish Revolution* las experiencias de

Sol, plaza principal de Madrid, del personaje protagonista se solapan con las 'batallitas' relatadas

por el padre de uno de los personajes sobre la Resistencia antifranquista a finales de los setenta

también en Madrid" (58) / "…in *Spanish Revolution* the experiences of Sol, Madrid's main

square, of the main character overlap with the 'small battles' related by one of the character's

father about the anti-Franco resistance at the end of the seventies also in Madrid" (58, my

translation). This is significant because it connects well to this chapter's consideration of

¡García! as I also highlight the connections between contemporary struggles (i.e. relating to the

2008 economic crisis) and the specter of Francoism as a driving factor of the comic's critical

power[36].

    ¡García! itself has also been the subject of research in the academy, which highlights

many critical aspects of the narrative. López Martín for example observes, as I do here, that the

comic takes up the issues of the CT and the persistent legacy of Francoism by means of the

superhero genre and elements of dystopia (236-8). Highlighting the ways in which the comic

seeks to capture extant anxieties of post-2008 Spain, López Martín notes that: "The unscrupulous

corruption in *¡García!*'s not-so-alien Spain is motivated by greed and preservation of power, but

first and foremost, it is understood in terms of its Francoist heritage…" (247). He goes on to

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[36] What's more, in Dapena's interview with Santiago García the artist affirms, as did David Rubín in his interview, that all comics have the power to be political commentaries. However, as he notes, this is merely an extension of the fact that every action we take can be political: "Por un lado, 'todos los cómics son políticos' que es tanto como decir que todo acto que hacemos es politico… Otra cosa es que quizás lo que queremos decir ahí es que todo comic es susceptible de hacer una lectura o tener una influencia política" (177) / "On one hand, 'all comics are political' is the same as saying that every action we take is political… Anotehr thing is that perhaps what we want to say then is that all comics are susceptible to reading or having a political influence" (177, my translation).

point out that the work " points this historical reality out as a systemic problem from which other evils afflicting society emanate" (247).

López Martín then concludes these astute observations by arguing that not only is the eponymous Francoist super-agent effectively exhumed from the memory of Francoism (as symbolized by the Valle de los Caidos monument, as will be discussed below), the comic also essentially presents "a condition of possibility to initiate a moral reparation, an exercise of memory toward the articulation of a more honest and democratic recounting of history" (254). This chapter will build upon this scholarship by highlighting the use of noir elements in the comic specifically to drive its critique, as well as placing the work in context with other noir works to demonstrate the link not only between Francoism and the current state apparatus, but also between Francoism and the present neoliberal hegemony in Spain. In this way the comic enables its readers to begin to map their own positionalities in relationship with this hegemony.

¡García! is the story of the eponymous secret agent, who previously served the regime of Francisco Franco in the 1950s. García served the regime faithfully, believing himself to be a righteous crime fighter working for the greater good. One day, however, he disappears without a trace when his sidekick Jaimito betrays him. He is captured and cryogenically frozen, placed in suspended animation. The comic picks up in the present day, and recounts García's sudden reappearance after being in stasis for decades, amidst the greater economic and political forces at play in contemporary Spain. A new, left-wing party (whose leader resembles Pablo Iglesias Turrión, one of the founders of the left-wing Podemos party that emerged out of the indignation of the 15M) has gained prominence and stands a chance at winning national elections. To prevent this, the Partido Popular (PP) and the Partido Social Obrero Español (PSOE) form a coalition government with a unified candidate. However, the government's candidate in the comic has

been kidnapped and the country finds itself in a fierce debate over terrorism and the still-present

mark of Francoism on the modern, post-Transition political machine.

García's story unfolds amidst this political turmoil. The narrative shifts perspectives

between García himself and the young journalist Antonia. While García awakens from stasis in a

laboratory deep beneath the Valle de los Caídos[37] monument to an attack force of masked

soldiers apparently attempting to kill him, Antonia gets caught in the crossfire after receiving an

anonymous tip about García's existence and reemergence. It is revealed that Antonia's father Don

Jaime - an old Francoist himself and the elder version of the young Jaimito - manipulates García

into believing the upstart left-wing candidate is a communist agent who orchestrated the

kidnapping of the unity government's candidate. He orders García to abduct him, and then

betrays García to the Spanish authorities, attempting to frame him for the government candidate's

kidnapping as well, whose corpse is later discovered in a landfill. Antonia, meanwhile, attempts

to put these details together as García flees the government forces. While this chapter only

considers the first volume of the comic, over the course of three volumes Antonia and García

form an unlikely partnership and delve deep into the corruption of contemporary Spanish

politics. That this all begins beneath the Valle de los Caídos monument is significant because the

monument was built as a Civil War memorial and as a burial site by the Franco regime following

the Spanish Civil War. The monument was also Franco's site of burial until his exhumation in

2019, following much public debate and extensive legal battles (Booker). Thus, the monument

serves as a symbol of that dictatorship, and its presence in this comic is an ominous one.

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[37] The Valle de los Caídos ("Valley of the Fallen") is a monument that was constructed on the orders of Francisco
Franco in memory of those killed in the Spanish Civil War. It was also Franco's place of burial before he was
exhumed and moved to a family mausoleum in the Mingorrubio-El Pardo municipal cemetery outside Madrid.

This story is developed with a highly realistic art style which reflects the dark realism of noir fiction. The illustrations are entirely black and white which, as Scott McCloud notes, is ideal for communicating a didactic message to the reader. When coupled with the heavy line work and stark contrasts between light and shadow, the result is a dark and suspenseful atmosphere which complements the story of corruption and intrigue that runs throughout the comic. This is combined with a highly variable use of panels. Panel shape and arrangement shifts depending on the needs of the story at the time, and so the reader's eye is guided across the page by the panel design in a deliberate way. For example, a panel may take up the majority of one page with several insert panels within it, or a page may be dominated by square and rectangular panels on one half and circular panels on another that depict actions happening in parallel in another location or perspective. Transitions between panels[38] are predominantly made up of subject-to-subject and action-to-action transitions. The result is a heavy focus on character dialogue and the minutiae of hand, body, and facial movements with occasional aspect-to-aspect transitions providing a wandering eye across a scene. Regarding how text and image are combined within these panels[39], the interdependent combination is the most common type, whereby text and image work together in tandem to create meaning in the narrative. However, picture-specific combinations and panels with no text at all play an important role as well, which demonstrates the importance that García and Bustos place on the image itself to not just punctuate the story and illustrate, but also to advance the plot and provide context to the reader beyond the text provided.

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[38] To gain a snapshot of the authors' panel transitions, I considered pp. 12-37 which contained 97 panels total (and 96 panel transitions). In these pages I observed 42 subject-to-subject transitions, 38 action-to-action transitions, 15 aspect-to-aspect transitions, and 1 scene-to-scene transition.

[39] To gain a snapshot of the authors' combinations of text and image, I again considered the 97 panels on pp. 12-37. I observed 65 interdependent combinations, 18 panels that had no text at all (images only), and 14 picture-specific combinations.

This artistic strategy keeps the reader in constant suspense, as Antonia digs deeper into what's happening and García himself pieces together how he was (and continues to be) betrayed and manipulated by his superiors and partners. At the same time, however, the narrative is occasionally interrupted by flashbacks to when García was in his prime, serving the Franco regime. These are distinguishable by a distinct art style (drawn by guest artist Manel Fontdevila, who favors abstract shapes and flat colors, in contrast with the rest of the comic). The expositional details on García's backstory that these interludes provide develops a certain situational irony, as the reader knows more about what happened to García than he himself does. While these aspects of the art style demonstrate how the comics medium is utilized to drive the story and the social commentary, it must be noted that aspects of noir play a key role as well. One of the key elements of noir as described by Conard is a dramatic contrast between light and shadow, which is observable throughout *¡García!* Frequently the authors will cast a character in shadow to build suspense, or will otherwise place an object or person in stark contrast to the background, either brightly lit against a backdrop of darkness or the reverse. As the close reading below will demonstrate, the comic is well in line with Holt's description of how the tone of noir represents how things really are, "not distorted but *conveyed* by expressionist techniques" (25). In sum, the combined artistic strategies produce a comic that presents a fierce social commentary that encourages the readers to visualize the corrupting forces that have led to the alienation that exists in contemporary neoliberal Spanish society because of the Francoist foundation upon which it was built, laying the foundation for a reader to begin to comprehend their own position within neoliberal Spanish society.

The comic enables this mapping by situating the narrative in a particular moment in Spanish history, which is important to highlight because as an astute eye will identify, this comic

does not appear to be explicitly about the crisis (or neoliberalism). In fact, the focus of the comic seems on the surface to be a deep dive into the memory of Francoism in the contemporary state apparatus. However, the authors make clear indications that the Spain that we see in this comic represents the post-2008 neoliberal Spain that exists today. This is conveyed not just through the story and the setting, whereby an upstart, leftist political party reminiscent of Podemos threatens the hegemony of the PP and the PSOE, but through the art as well. The leader of this left-wing political party, as previously stated, bears a striking resemblance Podemos' founder Pablo Iglesias, something that is certainly not an accident. In another example on page 115, García stares intently at a wall plastered with posters and graffiti, one of which bears the "*Juventud sin futuro*" ("Youth without a future") slogan. This slogan is one of the iconic protest slogans of the 15M movement that arose in the wake of the crisis (and also the name of one of its constituent organizations). Its presence here in this comic, juxtaposed with a literal agent of the old dictatorship is deliberate. The specter of Francisco Franco and its impact on contemporary Spain is indeed the primary focus of this comic, however, it is considered within the context of the post-2008 neoliberal Spanish state.

How the comic develops the opportunities for cognitive mapping in this context can be elucidated through an analysis and close reading of selected individual scenes. The comic opens with a flashback drawn by Manel Fontdevila (pp. 4-7), in which García is on a mission for the Francoist government. A consideration of this scene is important as more like it periodically interrupt the comic to provide background information and exposition to the story. The first thing to note is Fontdevila's artistic style, which is markedly different than that of García & Bustos. The most obvious difference is the use of color; while Fontdevila still uses mostly black and white, he punctuates this with bright red throughout. This use of flat, primary color is

reminiscent of classic superhero comics' artistic styles who used bright primary colors for emotional impact (McCloud 187-8). It is also a much more abstract and cartoonish style. This is used to illustrate a much more fantastic storyline (a train-chase scene) than the significantly darker themes that appear in the comic proper. In this way, this scene (and the others like it) serve as a foil to the primary plotlines of the comic[40]. These scenes in many ways represent the ideology of the dictatorship, or rather, of García himself. If, as Louis Althusser tells us, ideology is the representation of the "imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence," (693), what we see in these scenes is how García sees himself in relation to the reality of the brutal dictatorship he served: a hero and a crime fighter. In many ways it is as if the inclusion of these scenes is to signal to the reader that this imaginary relationship is the lie, one which is to immediately be challenged by the grim reality to come in the following scenes. This is crucial to the cognitive mapping that this comic enables, especially as this ideology is demonstrated by the comic in later scenes to be a false narrative.

The rest of the comic then develops how the Francoist legacy impacts contemporary, neoliberal Spanish society, an idea which is solidified in the depiction of the massive cross of the Valle de los Caídos monument in the scene spanning pp. 12-6. In recent years, the Valle de los Caídos has been at the center of fierce debate surrounding Francisco Franco and his regime more generally, as well as the painful memory of the Civil War. The images in this scene reflect this. In the first image on page 12, we see not the cross itself, but rather its ominous shadow, symbolic of the looming and painful legacy of Francoism that persists to this day. This is doubly true in the

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[40] Prior scholarship has also noted the importance of these interludes. López Martín, for example, notes that "With the collaboration of Manel Fontdevila at the drawing board, these sections and the leading duo are a clear reference ot the *cuadernos de aventuras* [adventure notebooks] of Roberto Alcázar and Pedrín, and to times when comic books as a medium were still struggling to grow, limited by censorship and isolation. The simplicity of these parts of the story and its escapist Manichaeism, deprived of specific contextual references and featuring an archetypical villain named Nefastus inhabiting a castle and surrounding himself with a horde of zombies, is a reference to a moral world in black and white, longed for by García" (López Martín 237)

subsequent image, a close-up of the massive cross itself. The monument consumes the entirety of the page, contrasted sharply against the night sky as it looms over the city of Madrid in the distance. There is no text at all; the foreboding nature of this monument is quite clear to the reader without it. This continues over the subsequent pages as the eye pans over the Valle de los Caídos. Eventually, it is revealed that García, who had been presumed dead, was kept cryogenically frozen for decades in a secret facility beneath this monument (though for what purpose is never revealed in the first volume of the comic that I consider here). Truly, there could be no more appropriate resting place for one of Franco's most deadly agents. The current Spanish state is implied by the comic to not just be a descendant of the Francoist apparatus, but also overshadowed by its problematic legacy. The artwork especially makes this clear for the reader, enabling them to see what, in the comic's perspective, is the underlying cause of the contemporary struggles of the neoliberal subject.

What aids the reader in making these connections is not only the artwork itself, but also the experience of the comic's two protagonists: Antonia and García. Let us begin with Antonia, a young journalist for the newspaper *El actual*. She and her outlet are caught up reporting on the political firestorm unfolding, in which the unity candidate for the PP and PSOE has been kidnapped. An anonymous source tips off Antonia to García's reemergence, and to the location of the facility where he was kept in cryogenic stasis. Her search for answers places her in the crossfire between a newly awoken García and several unidentified special forces agents who arrive for reasons unknown to her. This sets off an extensive, violent action montage (which spans the entirety of pp. 66-82) in which García fends off the agents that seem to have been sent

107

to kill him[41]. Antonia herself is nearly killed when she is caught in the crossfire, though she

manages to escape.

This event sets Antonia on a search for answers. Reporting back to Rafa, her supervisor at

El actual, he brings her to meet a colleague of his: Aquilino, a right-wing pundit that Antonia

loathes. After hostilely greeting each other as "¡Rojo mason!" and "¡Facha golpista!"

respectively[42] (100-1), they then jovially embrace and regale Antonia with tales of their youth

together as members of the anarcho-syndicalist *Confederación Nacional del Trabajo* (National

Confederation of Labor, hereafter CNT). After dismissing Antonia's shock at this revelation

("Bah, es el pasado. Todos tenemos uno" (102) / "Bah, it's in the past. We all have one" (102, my

translation)), Aquilino provides Rafa and Antonia with information on García. He explains that

García was a "fascist superhero" that resulted from Francoist esotericism, who disappeared one

day without a trace. The authors make extensive use of noir elements here, especially the sharp

contrast between light and shadow. As Aquilino regales Rafa and Antonia with tales of the

legendary García, his face is ominously cast in deep shadow, offset at the corner of the page as

depictions of García's great violence take up most of it. This gives the scene a sinister feel,

foreshadowing the extent of the machinations of power brokers behind the scenes.

I highlight this scene not because of the expositional information it gives about García,

but rather for what it reveals about the divisions that exist in Spain, as well as the fractious nature

of the various ideologies that contribute to the contemporary Spanish (neoliberal) state. This is

important given the fact that this comic places heavy emphasis on corruption and abuse of

power, or rather, of how an ideology can be utilized by those who seek to gain wealth and power

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[41] Later volumes of the comic reveal that they also sought to awaken his old nemesis Nefaustus, who was similarly kept in stasis and who doesn't appear again until a later volume.
[42] "Rojo masón" ("commie freemason") and "facha golpista" ("fascist coup plotter") here serve as insults for a left-wing and right-wing individual, respectively, referring to the long history of division and partisanship in Spain.

for their own ends. Both Aquilino and Rafa were, at one point in time, passionate members of the anarcho-syndicalist CNT, but in their later years have become almost flippant even towards the ideologies they now espouse – one on the right and one on the left, respectively. That these men – and especially the right-wing pundit Aquilino – espouse their current political viewpoints publicly yet fondly embrace their presumed political rivals behind the scenes implies that there are those who continue to engage in divisive politics for their own gain. Though neither of these men are the primary antagonists of the work, it paints the ongoing debates of public-facing pundits as contrived, something done for the benefit of the public audience while machinations occur behind the scenes. This is a key opportunity for mapping on the part of the reader, whereby they can begin to understand their position as victims of political scheming by elites who do not have their interests at heart.

This idea is furthered in a later scene when Antonia meets with Aquilino again so that he can aid her in her search for answers (pp. 133-4). They rendezvous at a protest in La Puerta del Sol decrying the kidnapping of the candidate put forth by the PSOE/PP coalition. It opens with an establishing shot of the multitudes in the plaza, chanting *"¡Asesinos!"* ("Murderers!") as government leaders vow to not just recover their unity candidate, but crush those who perpetuated her kidnapping. The reader, meanwhile, is still unaware of the fact that the whole scheme had been concocted by shadowy government forces and the secret police to frame the rising leftist party. Important here, however, is how the protest itself is depicted. Not only is light and shadow utilized to dramatic effect, but panels also vary widely and give the reader a panoramic view of the scene, ranging from the size of the protest itself to the individual viewpoints of Antonia and Aquilino. This enables the reader to absorb as much detail as possible.

What makes this significant is how strongly it resembles both gatherings of modern-day supporters of the old regime in memory the late dictator, particularly on the anniversary of his death, and also the mass protests of the 15M, again speaking to the divisions within Spanish society. This scene presents a level of grim realism that parallels this fact, and further cements the omnipresence of Francoism throughout the state apparatus within the comic. Thus, *¡García!* implies that despite the assertion by the Culture of Transition that Spain is a state that has left behind its troubled past (Echevarría 19-48), the opposite is in fact true. This point is solidified once the comic reveals that even the kidnapping crisis itself was manufactured by shadowy elements within the government. The comic demonstrates how ideologies and the political scene in general are utilized by the powerful to further their own ends, rather than to serve the people. Given the setting in contemporary, neoliberal Spain, the use of noir in this way is a reminder that the people have much about which to be indignant, not only because of the precarity and suffering of the crisis but also because of the corrupt government forces that continue to manipulate them even after a return to democracy.

García's own narrative within the comic demonstrates these themes vividly as well. Eventually, García is found wandering the streets of Madrid after his awakening and is brought to the head of the Spain's secret service – Antonia's father Don Jaime. Don Jaime was once García's young sidekick Jaimito and, though García does not remember it, is the man who betrayed him. The scene on page 126 details their reunion, in which the comic shifts from multiple panels per page to a full-page image, where the two share an emotional embrace. The two men are illustrated in stark white against a dark background, utilizing the sharp contrasts of light and shadow, punctuating the emotional nature of this reunion. This use of emotion is a clever tactic on the part of the authors, as the following scenes immediately undercut this notion

by revealing the true manipulations of Don Jaime. He tells García about the present crisis, in which the coalition government candidate has been kidnapped, but spins a key lie. He lays blame for the crime at the feet of the Soviet Union (which García believes still exists), and orders him to kidnap the candidate for the left-wing opposition party: "Nosotros le haremos hablar" / "We will make him talk" (138-9). García follows these orders (144-6), eager to prove himself still willing to serve and defend the government that, in Jaime's own words, is the "heredero de nuestro caudillo" / "heir to our *caudillo*" (132). Once García is successful, however, he is immediately betrayed by Jaime and hunted down by government agents. Jaime, it is revealed, intends to frame García for both the kidnapping and murder of the government's unity candidate *and also* the leftist candidate as well.

It is crucial how Jaime weaves the old ideologies of the Francoist regime into that lie to effectively control García, as it is a clear parallel to the ongoing discussion of how Franco's legacy influences the modern Spanish state. This comic depicts a literal inheritor to the Francoist legacy continuing to exert control over contemporary Spain, manufacturing crises to assert his own power. The implications of this are many. Spain has endured many crises over the decades since the death of Francisco Franco and the transition to democracy, of which the 2008 economic crisis was the biggest. The publication of this comic not only emerges during a moment in which the devastation of the 2008 crisis is fresh in the public's memory, but when criticisms of the neoliberal establishment are also at an all-time high. These scenes suggest a complicity on the part of the government, implying that corruption within institutions of the contemporary Spanish state deliberately keep the populace off balance and in crisis to further their own ends.

The full implications of this are revealed in the final scenes of the comic's first volume, in which Don Jaime reveals the full extent of his manipulations. In a montage of speech bubbles

overlapping a series of panels detailing the close-up, shadowed face of the head of the secret

police, we hear Jaime's end of a sinister call to the prime minister. As he demands the minister to

stop crying and listen, he promises to resolve the matter cleanly: "El comunista caerá, como

habíamos acordado. Y todo lo demás saldrá bien… si usted hace lo que yo le diga. Como prueba

de buena voluntad, le entregaré de inmediato al secuestrador del rojo. Luego, nos ocuparemos de

liberarla a ella" (151). / "The communist[43] will fall, as we had agreed. And everything else will

turn out fine… if you do what I tell you. As proof of my good will, I will immediately hand over

the red's kidnapper. Later, we will concern ourselves with freeing her [the government's

candidate]" (151, my translation). This is a clear example of the dark themes and convoluted

plotlines typical of noir. This depiction of the Spanish government as still being under the

influence of a cabal of those loyal to the old Francoist regime bring to the forefront the fact that

the modern (neoliberal) state apparatus is a product of the Transition process. This comic thus

reminds the reader that the legacy of Francoism lives on in the contemporary state apparatus. On

the following page, Jaime is revealed to be sitting in the office with the man who he plans on

elevating to the post of Minister of the Interior after blaming the present political crisis –

orchestrated by Jaime all along – on the present minister (his political rival). In the same stroke,

he plans to rid himself of García and secure his influence over the structures of power.

Again, this scene reminds the reader of the shadow that Francoism has cast upon the

entire contemporary Spanish political system. It opened with a view of the cross at the Valle de

los Caídos *literally* casting a long shadow over Madrid, and the authors have been very

deliberate in maintaining the sinister omnipresence of that shadow throughout. The violence that

that shadow brings with it soon catches up with García as the first volume of the comic ends. He

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[43] The "communist" to which he is referring is the left-wing candidate, who incidentally is not a member of the Communist Party (PCE).

is hunted down by the same masked soldiers that had accosted him and Antonia at the opening of the comic. He does escape, but Don Jaime's plot comes to fruition as the kidnapped government candidate is found dead in the scene on page 178. In this scene, in which the body of the candidate is discovered, the art style shifts again to a full-page, single-panel illustration. Square text bubbles cascade across the page which pulls the reader's eye across the entire scene, from the overcast sky to the ditch beneath the powerlines where the government candidate's body had been dumped after being killed by two gunshot wounds to the back of the neck. That such a noteworthy candidate has been assassinated by the machinations of Jaime's cabal is a grim turn in the comic, one that again brings the elements of noir to the forefront. This is perhaps the tensest moment of the work, as the narrative makes clear that tension in Madrid could explode at any moment. The first volume of the comic then ends with García seated on a busy metro train as Jaime calls him on the government cell phone he had been given. García refuses to answer, and angrily crushes the phone to pieces in his fist.

This comic displays all the hallmarks of noir, which helps drive its critical power. Sharp contrasts between light and shadow dominate the artistic style. Violence is rife throughout. Dark realism and complex plotlines predominate, especially regarding the contemporary Spanish state itself, which Don Jaime himself identifies as the inheritor of the old Francoist regime. This demonstrates that the omnipresent shadow of Francoism looms over the whole narrative. It is implied that the Spanish state is not just a descendent of the authoritarian Francoist system, but also a *continuation* of it in all but name. That men like Jaime are essentially running the government in a secret cabal through extorsion and the manufacture of political crises is a deeply pessimistic view of contemporary (neoliberal) Spanish politics.

With all this in mind, then, how does this comic relate back to the primary research questions of this chapter? That is, how does this noir comic enable readers to situate themselves and their own experiences within neoliberalism post-2008? What sets it apart from other mediums? In sum, *¡García!* directly situates contemporary, neoliberal Spain within the legacy of the authoritarianism of the old Franco regime, presenting them as inherently linked. Though this comic is not explicitly *about* the 2008 economic crisis or neoliberalism specifically, it does directly link the events of the narrative with contemporary Spain, presenting a parallel for the rise of Podemos as a challenger to the dual-party hegemony of the PP and PSOE. Thus, while the comic concerns itself predominantly with corruption and shadowy government figures manipulating the public for their own gains, it has broader implications for the 2008 economic crisis and neoliberalism, presenting them as inherently linked to the shadowy legacy of the corruption of the dictatorship. It is here that cognitive mapping is enabled for the reader. The comic's narrative allows a reader to situate themselves and their experiences post-2008 crisis by allowing them to conceive the root cause of this crisis: the corruption and machinations of the elites.

Thus, it is apparent that *¡García!* effectively aids in understanding the political and economic situation in Spain post-Transition and amidst the crisis. Not only does the comic make good use of the grim realism of noir – especially regarding the complicated nature of politics – it combines this with the ability of comics to abstract through cartooning and engage the critical thinking skills of its readers through closure. In this way it links contemporary neoliberalism with the ongoing issue of political corruption and its long history in Spain. This work stands apart from the other two considered in this chapter in that it doesn't engage with the consequences of the economic crisis in any specific way. Nevertheless, what it does do is

leverage noir aesthetics to grant a deeper look into the problematic systems of state power in contemporary Spain. It also reveals the depths of the political crisis that coincided with the economic crisis of 2008, laying bare the political divisions within the modern Spanish state. Throughout this dissertation I make much of the alienation of the individual, which can be seen clearly in this comic insofar as the structures of state violence marginalize the everyday citizen in its own pursuit of power. In this, readers can not only see themselves as victims of larger structural issues that have enabled their precarity and suffering under neoliberalism post-2008, they can also begin to understand their own relationships with these larger structures of power and how they are influenced by them. *¡García!* unflattens prior notions of the crisis by providing readers with a place to at least partially lay blame for their suffering under the crisis and contemporary neoliberalism: the corrupt government elites within the state apparatus. This criticism is powerful enough on its own, however, it is also important to note that it connects well with *Intachable* and *Cenizas* in important ways.

Intachable: 30 años de corrupción

To expand on this, the next comic to be considered in this chapter is Víctor Santos' *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* (2020). This comic, like *¡García!,* is true to the artistic traits of noir with its dark themes and illustration. What sets this comic apart is its explicit depiction of the corruption and speculation that gave rise to the housing bubble and subsequent crash. In essence*, Intachable* doubles down on the connection between Spain's history of corruption and authoritarianism and contemporary neoliberalism. Taking a deep look at the economic crisis through a depiction of the corrupt politician César Gallardo and his cabal of politicians and crime lords*, Intachable* helps the reader understand the political and economic situation in Spain during the crisis by providing a clear place to lay blame for the suffering of the crisis. In this way,

Intachable also bridges the narratives of *¡García!* and *Cenizas,* allowing a deeper understanding of the crisis. The aesthetics of noir are key to the development of this narrative.

Víctor Santos Montesinos is a Spanish cartoonist, hailing from Valencia and currently living in Bilbao. He has been nominated for the Eisner[44] and Harvey[45] awards and is the author of several graphic novels over the years, including *Filthy Rich* (2009)*, Rashomon* (2012)*, Bad Girls* (2018)*, Against Hope* (2020)*,* and *Violent Love* (2020)*.* He has published both in Spain and abroad, including the United States and France (Santos, "Bio"). He has also had his work *Polar* accepted for adaptation for film with Constantin Film and Dark Horse Entertainment, and has received six awards from the Salón Internacional de Barcelona, among others ("Victor Santos"). Prior scholarship has placed Santos' work (and *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* in particular) squarely in context with other notable comics artists who have taken up issues of the crisis and the 15M, including such creators as Manel Fontdevila, Aleix Saló, Marcos Prior, and Miguel Brieva, (Dapena, *"Nobody Expects the Spanish Revolution"* 61). This fits well with this chapter's consideration of the comic, given that *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* is a work that very effectively wields the noir mode to construct social criticism.

Intachable: 30 años de corrupción tells the story of César Gallardo, a conservative politician on the rise, as well as his childhood friend and associate in the criminal underworld Gabriel Solís. In 1987 César gets increasingly involved with an unnamed political party, and as he rises the ranks, his counterpart Gabriel becomes a leading figure in the criminal underworld. Together, the two manipulate the world of finance, real estate, and politics to gain ever more

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[44] The Will Eisner Comic Industry Awards, named for the prominent comic artist, are given at the Comic-Con International: San Diego and are often "considered the 'Oscars' of the comic book industry…" ("Eisner Awards History").
[45] The Harvey Awards "are one of the comic industry's oldest and most prestigious awards. Recognizing outstanding achievement in multiple categories, the Harvey's have been a fixture of the comic industry since 1988" (*Harvey Awards*),

power and wealth for themselves, in a depiction of the corruption of property speculation that led to the housing bubble and subsequent crisis. By the time of his rise, César controls nearly all construction in his city (left unnamed in the comic) in one form or another, and marries into a powerful political family, who themselves had significant connections to the old Franco regime. In parallel, the comic tells the story of Unamuno, an old, Basque police officer who is determined to uncover the full extent of César's and Gabriel's corruption. His sharing a name with the classic Spanish author is significant and is discussed in the close reading below. In his effort to expose César, he and his partner Fuster encounter significant resistance from their superiors and judges who are worried about the political ramifications of their investigation. Ultimately, the bursting of the housing bubble sends César and Gabriel's operations into chaos, and Unamuno succeeds in exposing César. However, while César does fall from political grace, he is never charged with a crime. The comic ends with his release from jail, Unamuno's attempt at justice having been thwarted.

Santos tells this story through a realistic artistic style that employs sharp angles and deep color/light contrasts. He does this through heavy line work and extensive use of color. This is important because as Scott McCloud describes, a liberal use of color can create an emotional kaleidoscope that only expressive color can provide (192). Taken together, the result is a certain foreboding atmosphere even when the colors seem bright and lively. This is further developed in Santos' use of panel arrangement and combinations of text and image. Santos uses a relatively large number of comics on each page, which keeps the story relatively fast-paced. This is aided by the transitions between panels[46]. Subject-to-subject transitions are the most common, due to

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[46] Regarding panel-to-panel transitions I refer as always to Scott McCloud's seminal volume *Understanding Comics,* which defines the various types of transitions between panels. Taking pp. 3-28 from *Intachable,* I analyzed the 188 panels (and 187 panel transitions) to gain a snapshot of the strategy used by Santos in his art. Of these 187

the heavy focus on character dialogue, with action-to-action and moment-to-moment transitions

punctuating character dialogue or action scenes by focusing on characters' actions and emotions.

This effect is also visible in the ways in which Santos combines text and image[47].

Interdependence is the most common combination, as large amounts of text are frequently laid

over very detailed images, encouraging the reader to process a large influx of information. Word-

specific combinations show importance as well where "voiceover" or expositional dialogue

(another common element in noir) is present. Santos punctuates this with wordless panels that

allow the (often violent) scenes to speak for themselves. This results in a relatively heavy amount

of information being delivered at any given time, and this interlinks with the comic's use of time

in a significant way. This narrative covers many years, frequently jumping forward in time such

that the reader sees the entirety of César's and Gabriel's rise and fall. Yet, this heavy amount of

information being delivered allows Santos to perform a deep dive into each moment, such that

character development takes place in-step with the fast-moving story. This allows the reader to

appreciate the realities of not only each character's motivations, but also the long-term

consequences of their actions. In short, form is equally important to content in *Intachable*.

Without the high level of grim realism in the artwork and the heavy emphasis on the minutiae of

character emotions and actions, much contextual storytelling would be lost.

Elements of noir play a key role in this artistic and storytelling strategy. Aside from the

typical hallmarks of the noir medium that are evident in *Intachable's* artistic style, such as the

stark contrasts between light and shadow, expositional narration (in text bubbles), grim realism,

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transitions, I identified 111 subject-to-subject transitions, 33 action-to-action transitions, 17 scene-to-scene
transitions, 10 moment-to-moment transitions, 10 non-sequitor transitions, and 6 aspect-to-aspect transitions.

[47] Again, I refer to McCloud's definitions of the various combinations of text and image in *Understanding Comics.* I
also again took the 188 panels from pp. 3-28 in order to gain a snapshot of Santos' artistic choices and observed 105
interdependent combinations, 34 word-specific combinations, 10 additive combinations, 4 picture-specific
combinations, and 35 panels that had no text at all and were image-only.

and so forth, this comic fits well within what scholars have called the "pedagogical moral value" (Skoble 41) in the moral ambiguity and dark realism inherent to noir. Indeed, the comic opens with a forward written by José Luis Córdoba that situates this comic very clearly within a didactic framework, describing *Intachable* as an example of the power of writing as a tool against the dark days of Spain's violent past. He notes that, with the passing of time, the use of poetic voices of protest "…parecieron diluirse, perder peso y quedarse como un lejano recuerdo…" / "…seemed to become diluted, lose weight and become a distant memory…" (Córdoba 1). In the same paragraph, he calls *Intachable* a loaded weapon of the future, presumably against this decline of the artistic voice of protest.

Córdoba goes on to place Santos and his work squarely in context with previous Spanish authors of historical memory, but notes that rather than draw from themes of *esperpento*[48] as other authors do, Santos draws specifically from film noir. In so doing, he says, Santos provides his own personal vision of Spanish politics, of a democracy that often feels like "una traición al gran sueño de libertad, porque aquellos que nos tienen que representar son unos tramposos llevados por su avaricia personal y sus palabras son huecas y están vacías de contenido real. La gran mentira que nos arrastra irremediablemente a decir, aunque sea falso, que todos los políticos son iguales" (2). / "a betrayal of the great dream of freedom, because those who must represent us are cheaters driven by their personal greed and their words are hollow and empty of real content. The great lie that inevitably forces us to say, even if it is false, that all politicians are the same" (2, my translation). All told, he says, the comic invites the reader to draw their own conclusions, driving indignation as a motivating force (2). This consideration fits well especially

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[48] *Esperpento* refers to the use of significantly distorted depictions of reality, themes of death and the grotesque, etc. as a means of social critique, as developed by Spanish playwright Ramón María del Valle Inclán in his iconic work *Luces de Bohemia* (1924).

with Sousanis' assertion that comics can provide new ways of seeing the world through combining new points of view. This foreword specifically frames the comic as a work of memory and political tool that draws upon noir to expose society's injustices. It states that through the protagonist César Gallardo, Santos deliberately provides his reader an image of corruption and manipulation of the media that takes place in the comic. Thus, the weaving of noir into comic art is wielded to enable readers to cognitively map their own experiences with the corruption and crisis depicted within this comic, conceiving of their positionality against the greater neoliberal totality as victims of men like César. How this operates in specific terms will be detailed in the close reading of individual scenes below.

The comic's prologue is an ideal place to start, as it immediately establishes the comic's didactic narrative. The prologue opens with the main character César Gallardo being detained. The art is dark, painted in black and shades of blue. Progressive panels push in on César's angry face, which is cast in shadow. Meanwhile, César's internal monologue overlays the panels, providing exposition in the voiceover dialog style common to noir. As he reflects upon the business practices that brought him to this point, he reveals something important about his character. César casts disdain upon the image of the self-made man in American popular culture: "Esa absurda idea de competición. La competición implica reglas. Un código al que atenerse. Un recorrido planificado. Odio todo eso. This is Spain. Tenemos nuestros propios héroes" (Santos n.p., my emphasis)[49]. / That absurd idea of competition. Competition implies rules. A code by which to abide. A planned path. I hate all that. This is Spain. We have our own heroes" (Santos n.p., my translation and emphasis). This monologue tells the reader much about César's viewpoint. He tells the reader that the story they are about to read has nothing to do with the

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[49] Please note that *Intachable* lacks page numbers, and for this reason they are not included in parenthetical references here.

120

unrealistic Hollywood fantasy of what the life of a self-made businessman is like. No, this is Spain; here, healthy competition is not part of the equation. It implies that, in César's view, the true heroes are those who take what they want, rules and personal codes be damned. César is thus established as the archetype of those at fault for the 2008 economic crisis that brought such misery to the precariat and, as the comic will reveal later, the lingering influence of Spain's authoritarian past. In essence, the prologue serves a cognitive function, providing a "villain" upon which the causal factors of the crisis are projected. That is, in visualizing a place to lay blame for their suffering, the reader can begin to situate themselves in the broader contexts of the corruption in neoliberal Spain.

Over the next few chapters, Santos fleshes this out by providing backstory. He reveals that César and his boyhood friend Gabriel collaborate with one another to establish a criminal enterprise; César gets involved in politics, rising rapidly through his political party's ranks (the name of which is never revealed), eventually becoming a candidate on its list in 1987. Gabriel, meanwhile, gets involved in the criminal underworld, and together they work to garner wealth and power for themselves. Consider the moment in which César and Gabriel are meeting in secret atop a high rise building under construction as the sun sets behind them. The men and the building are cast in deep shadow, developing a foreboding atmosphere that foreshadows the grim realities that are to come upon the bursting of the housing bubble. Though much of the of the realistic detail is lost, the stark light-and-dark contrast and heavy linework establishes the gravity of the moment. César tells Gabriel that the future is right beneath their feet – referring to his planned speculative real estate practices – they need only reach out and grab it. He goes on to say that he has manipulated the electoral system by betraying his party after getting elected as city

counselor, selling his vote to the opposition party and securing himself a place in the new city government.

This is an ideal site for cognitive mapping and social commentary. In the first place, the reader learns that César and Gabriel both were born to people with money and power – Gabriel refers to his father as having his mind still stuck in the "posguerra," referencing the early and most violent years of Franco's regime. Being born into the wealthy and powerful class we can surmise that they were also deeply influenced by the inheritors of Franco's legacy, informing their propensity for corruption and crime. César, for his part, is willing to do whatever it takes to gain power and influence for himself, including hiring Gabriel to do his dirty work. It also hints at the crisis to come. As César surveys the real estate under construction, he sees an opportunity for fast wealth in the speculative property market. The elements of noir in the narrative enable their readers to see themselves as victims of the manipulations of powerful men like César, whose corruption (in the comic's view) caused the crisis and the precarity with which an average Spanish reader would be quite familiar. This is furthered over the next few chapters as César and Gabriel's influence reach new heights, and César becomes a household name.

The opportunities for cognitive mapping are further developed in a later scene, in which César meets with his wife's grandfather, the head of his political party. Here, the depths of César's corruption are made evident, especially related to the legacy of Francisco Franco in contemporary, neoliberal Spain. In this scene, the old man is confiding in César. He tells César that he understands the road to power and influence that César is on, having walked it once himself. However, he says, in his day things were very different: "Pero era un camino más recto, más directo que el tuyo. Las cosas eran más fáciles cuando estaba él… Ah, el viejo general. Le echo de menos…" (n.p.) / "But it was a straighter, more direct road than yours. Things were

easier when he was here… Ah, the old general. I miss him…" (n.p., my transition). As the old man reflects upon the late dictator for whom he yearns, the comic provides a close-up of his face, which is cast in shadow. The scene is bathed in a sickly green light, establishing an ominous, uncomfortable atmosphere. This scene is crucial, because it not only directly links César's political and economic manipulations with the legacy of Francoism, it also directly links the contemporary state apparatus with that same legacy. Spain's transition to democracy is overshadowed by the legacy of the dictatorship, as the current Spanish state is the direct descendent of the authoritarian regime, one which took contemporary neoliberalism to heart as it looked to the future and sought to join the greater European (and world) community. Thus, this scene provides its reader the opportunity to map their own struggles with neoliberalism by enabling them to view the root causes of their suffering, which go back as far as the old authoritarian regime.

Importantly, the comic does not just enable the reader to map their own experiences with precarity and neoliberalism by depicting the corruption of César and Gabriel. It also does so by showing the internal battles within the police force, which on its own suggests an ideological struggle within the state apparatus. The comic introduces Unamuno, an aging, scarred officer from the Basque Country who becomes involved in the investigations into Gabriel's crime ring. His superiors make clear that they deeply disapprove of his lack of respect for the politics involved in the investigation of César. These ideological divisions within the police force are quite visible in a scene in which Unamuno is confronted by his superiors. Collarda, Unamuno's superior, looms large in his high-backed chair, flanked by massive windows that blaze with sunset. Unamuno, by contrast, appears a plain man. The stark color contrasts between light and dark set the tense mood effectively. It is clear from the overlaid text that Unamuno is a

challenger to the status quo, insensitive of political niceties. This makes him a threat in the eyes of his superiors, and his coworkers regard him with distrust.

This sort of ethical ambiguity amongst the state apparatus again brings noir to the forefront of the narrative, as the authorities struggle to bridge the pursuit of justice with the fear of muddying political waters. It is also important that this character is named Unamuno, as it reveals something important about him. Unamuno's superior Collarda jokes about him sharing a name with the Basque author Miguel de Unamuno. Miguel de Unamuno's own legacy is a complex one, notable for (among other things) his opposition to the Primo de Rivera dictatorship, his disillusionment with the Second Republic and initial support of the Francoist revolt, and eventually disillusionment with Francoism as well. Unamuno being his namesake in this comic sets him up for a similar narrative, in which he is engaged with the state apparatus but not always ideologically in its favor. Unamuno's frustrations at being unable to bring Gabriel Solís to justice (as well as César, who he suspects of being in collaboration with Gabriel) is one that the precariat reader can easily see, given the frustrations of trying to gain justice for the corruption that brought about the 2008 economic crisis.

Indeed, Unamuno does begin to close in on César, especially after Gabriel is murdered in a violent shootout with a rival crime syndicate. Nevertheless, Unamuno's superior Collarda informs him that there is not enough evidence to charge César, so he plans to leak information to the press: "Este es el único juego al que nos dejan jugar hoy en día. Tal vez sea lo mejor, dejar que la gente juzgue. Y si consideran que es inocente, ¿quiénes somos nosotros para condenarlo? De eso trata la democracia, ¿no?" (Santos n.p.). / "This is the only game they let us play these days. Perhaps it is for the best, to let the people judge. And if they consider him innocent, who are we to condemn him? That's what democracy is all about, is it not?" (Santos n.p., my

translation). What makes this exchange especially interesting is the fact that it highlights a challenge that the Spanish justice system must face. Unable to arrest and charge César for his crimes, they must rely on a manipulation of the press to achieve their goals for them. More than that, though, the flippant way in which Collarda refers to democracy in general – and his satisfaction with letting public opinion decide the matter – is indicative of corruption and inefficiency within the state apparatus. Indeed, at the close of the comic, the charges of money laundering fail to stick and César is released from custody. Subsequently, he is approached by a man who claims to work for an information firm in the private sector, which "se encarga de pone en contacto las voces que merecen la pena con los oídos que merecen la pena" (Santos n.p.) / "is in charge of putting the voices that matter in contact with the ears that matter" (Santos n.p., my translation), and they propose he put his talents to use in "un mundo donde el poder que se ejerce es real" (Santos n.p.) / "a world in which the power that is exercised is real" (Santos n.p., my translation). Thus, not only has César managed to escape punishment for his corruption, but he has also managed to get right back into the systems of power that manipulate from behind the scenes. Unamuno is furious, of course, mimicking the indignation of the people at the lack of accountability for those deemed responsible for the crisis in the first place, as embodied in the 15M *indignados* movement.

Indeed, this leads directly to the closing scene of the comic. As César strolls out of the police station, he steps out into a demonstration that looks very much like a 15M protest. The view closes in on César's face over a series of panels as the a monologue overlays it, posing the question of what could satisfy a man like César: "¿Pero qué ocurre cuando un hombre no es capaz de posar sus ojos en algo el tiempo suficiente? ¿Qué hacemos con alguien que quemaría el mundo por nada?" (Santos n.p., my emphasis). / But what happens when a man is not capable of

keeping his eyes on something for long enough? What do we do with someone who would burn the world for nothing?" (Santos n.p., my translation and emphasis). This monologue is interesting for multiple reasons. In the first place, it is again a common example of the aesthetics of the noir mode, in which expositional narration drives the point home for the reader/viewer. Indeed, it succinctly sums up the moral of the comic as a whole: that violence and corruption pervade the contemporary, neoliberal system that rose from the Franco regime and the Transition. It is also interesting because of the uncertain identity of the person to whom this voice belongs. Initially it seemed to be Gabriel who served as the voiceover narrator, but following Gabriel's death it is unclear who took up the role. Is it the shade of Gabriel, reflecting on his life and associations with César since childhood? Or is it the voice of the author himself?

In either case, this dialogue is indicative of the noir genre, which as previously discussed often provides commentary on social morality. It is especially important given the final two images over which this text is laid. As César steps out of the police station he is blinded by the sunlight, and a warmth of color blankets the scene. It highlights a massive crowd of protestors, a scene that is deeply reminiscent of the 15M demonstrations, complete with related slogans. In another situation, the scene might almost be hopeful. César, though, intrudes on this scene as a sort of corrupting force. The camera pushes in on him over successive panels, finally ending with only the second full-page panel of the comic: an image of César breaking the fourth wall and leering at the reader. That the comic ends on this note solidifies the comic's overall message – that it is men like Caesar who are the corrupting force in the contemporary Spanish state apparatus, and who embody both neoliberal ideologies and the legacy of Francoism. This is where cognitive mapping operates in this comic, enabling its readers to situate themselves within the larger systems of neoliberalism that led to the precarity they experience, especially by

126

showing César leering at the reader while surrounded by a protest that so strongly resembles the 15M. Corrupt men like César are represented as the true culprits of the crisis, and through apprehending this can a reader gain a deeper understanding of the larger societal forces at play. After all, as the front matter of this comic makes clear, this is an explicitly didactic narrative, one in which the author is encouraging his reader to engage deeply with the subject matter.

Many of the classic elements of noir can be seen throughout this comic, including dark and gritty themes, violence, and a general sense of nihilism/dark realism. However, although scholars have noted that noir can demonstrate the serving of justice and the return to the status quo (as in the classic American hard-boiled crime novel), this noir comic displays the opposite, showing an aborted attempt at bringing a corrupt politician to justice. This last point also aids in answering the question of how this comic aids in mapping the political and economic situation in Spain post-2008. This comic wields noir to directly situate the 2008 economic crisis, and the ongoing neoliberal economic and political system in Spain, with the legacy of the Francisco Franco dictatorship, much like *¡García!* does. Thus, when considered in context with the comic's forward, it can be said with certainty that *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* is a didactic comic that seeks to wield its narrative as a strong voice of opposition to what it views as a corrupt neoliberal order. It enables its readers to easily view themselves in this narrative, more specifically as victims of men like César.

In sum, the elements of noir in *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* enable the average reader to situate their own experiences and understand their place in a global neoliberal system that continue to place them in precarity in the name of corruption and profit. This facilitates an unflattening of the crisis, providing readers with a distinct vantage point into not only the crisis, but the bad actors that enabled it as well. Whereas *¡García!* dealt indirectly with the matter of

neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis while focusing primarily on the looming shadow that Francoism still casts over contemporary neoliberal Spain, *Intachable* directly and didactically links the two in its narrative, depicting the criminal enterprise of a corrupt politician with links to supporters of the old Franco dictatorship and his manipulations of Spanish politics and economic policy for his own ends. This comic enables cognitive mapping by not only demonstrating the root cause of the crisis but also by supplying its readers with a place to lay blame: the corrupt politicians and bankers who enabled it. It is here that we can see made manifest the statement in the forward that this comic is a loaded weapon of the future. It not only criticizes contemporary Spanish neoliberalism but also engages its readers directly, encouraging them to see themselves as an integral part of the systems at play.

Cenizas

This brings us to the final work to be considered in this chapter: Álvaro Ortiz's *Cenizas* (2012), which forms the final part of the progression in this chapter. Where the chapter began with an explicit consideration of the looming specter of Francoism over contemporary, neoliberal Spain, and then considered how Francoism and the corruption of the neoliberal system are depicted as inherently linked, *Cenizas* wields noir elements to depict the deep human cost of corruption and the crisis itself. *Cenizas* is the most unique of the works considered here, as Ortiz juxtaposes the dark themes of noir in his comic with an abstract and colorful artistic style. In so doing, *Cenizas* aids in an understanding of the crisis in Spain and the precarity it causes by depicting three otherwise normal people embarking on a journey to spread their deceased friend's ashes, during which the consequences of the desperation to which their precarity has been driven become evident. The dark themes and realism of noir are in full effect throughout the comic, demonstrating the current neoliberal status quo for the problematic system that it is.

What's more, *Cenizas* calls to mind Holt's description of noir's propensity to involve convoluted plotlines and "expressionist techniques" (Holt 10), as the main plot of the comic is often interrupted by various expositional interludes that initially seem inconsequential but ultimately add meaning and clarity to the comic. In the end, *Cenizas* presents its disillusionment with neoliberalism following the onset of the 2008 economic crisis by leveraging noir aesthetics to depict the extreme precarity suffered by the common person, as well as the desperation such vulnerability inspires. Ultimately, its characters are forced to leave their old lives of precarity behind upon the conclusion of the work, finding relief in community with one another. This is where the comic enables cognitive mapping, allowing readers to not only situate themselves within the broader context of neoliberalism post-2008 by witnessing the precarious positionality of the characters, but also by providing hints as to the ways in which these precarious positionalities can be combatted, even if neoliberal, hegemonic norms seem inescapable.

Álvaro Ortíz is the author of multiple works beyond *Cenizas,* including *Julia y el verano muerto* (2004), *Julia y la voz de la bellena* (2009), *Fjorden* (2010), and *El murciélago sale a por birras* (2020), among many others. Along with his contemporaries in the field of comic art, he has been acknowledged in the scholarly literature for his contributions to, among other things, "proyectos sociales que surgen en los años posteriors a la Gran Crisis de 2008 y las movilizaciones masivas del 15M en 2011…" (Bettaglio 65) / "social projects that emerge in the years following the Great Crisis of 2008 and the massive mobilizations of the 15M in 2011" (Bettaglio 65, my translation). Ortíz's oeuvre thus fits well with those of the authors previously considered in this chapter, especially in context with neoliberalism and the crisis. This chapter's analysis of *Cenizas* in context with noir below will show that this description is quite apt, as in

Cenizas specifically he successfully utilizes elements of noir to develop criticisms of the 2008 crisis and neoliberalism.

      Cenizas is the story of three friends, Polly, Moho, and Piter, who embark on a road trip to spread the ashes of their friend Héctor who recently died unexpectedly. Polly works in a café, for lack of a better paying job after being unable to finish her studies. Moho also failed to finish his studies and, unemployed, loiters in Polly's café. Piter, a hobbyist photographer, met the two as he was photographing a performance of Polly's band, and is also out of work and has no place to live. Though once they were all very close, time, work, and life circumstances have caused distance to form between them. However, Héctor has left them instructions – they are to drive to a location he has indicated on a map to spread his ashes, though he does not tell them what to expect there. What should have been a simple road trip quickly turns dangerous, as Moho's criminal past catches up with them. Importantly, it is their loyalty to their deceased friend Héctor that sees them through, a camaraderie that is reinforced by Héctor's ghost appearing to each of them on multiple occasions when strained by hardship. Whether or not this apparition is real is never addressed, and the reader is left to draw their own conclusions.

      Over the course of the narrative, the reader learns further details of each character's precarious existence, which is revealed slowly and in pieces. Though Polly had originally tried to start a new life in London after being unable to find work in Spain, her boyfriend there left her and consequently she could no longer afford to pay rent. Piter had been gifted an inheritance of a house by a patient at the assisted living facility where he used to work, but lost this inheritance when the woman's estranged nephew sues, leaving Piter with nowhere to go. Moho was forced to resort to crime to make ends meet, the consequences of which nearly get them all killed as they embark on this road trip. Ultimately, they succeed in arriving at their destination where they

discover that Héctor had purchased a small island upon which he built the hotel the four had always dreamed of opening together. He leaves this hotel to his friends with the instructions to start a new life there together. He named it *Hotel Existencia* (Literally: Hotel Existence).

This story is told with an art style that is distinct from the other two comics considered in this chapter. Whereas *¡García!* and *Intachable* feature highly realistic styles with heavy line work and deep contrasts between light and shadow, *Cenizas* heavily favors an abstract style. People, buildings, and landscapes are recognizable, but they are illustrated in a cartoonish fashion. Ortiz also uses bright and varied color throughout. Panel arrangement, panel transitions, and combinations of text and image are also distinct from other works considered here. In the first place, there are many more panels in this work than in the other works considered here: 327 in pp. 11-36 alone. In an interview with RTVE's Jesús Jiménez, Ortíz affirms the intentionality behind the use of many small panels. Upon realizing the story was going to be quite long and that he could not cut too much of it without compromising the story he wanted to tell, he says: "Intenté entonces recortar la historia, y aunque quité alguna cosa, la historia tenía que ser la que tenía que ser y no podia recortarla más por lo que no quedó más remedio que dividir la página en una retícula con muchas viñetas…"(Jiménez n.p., author's emphasis). / "I tried to shorten the story at that point, and even though I cut some things, the story had to be what it had to be and I couldn't cut it anymore, so there was nothing else to do but divide the page into a grid with many panels…" (Jiménez n.p., author's emphasis, my translation). This is evidence of *Cenizas'* use of convoluted plotlines and expressionist techniques which are common to noir. Throughout the comic Ortiz floods the reader with several disparate perspectives and a highly abstract style that keep the reader in suspense as the narrative slowly pieces itself together.

What's more, panels in *Cenizas* vary wildly in shape, arrangement, and relationship to one another. For example, where sometimes they are large and very distinctly delineated, at other times they are small and numerous with porous borders. There is also a high variation of panel transitions[50]. Much of the comic is made up of subject-to-subject, action-to-action, and aspect-to-aspect transitions, as the comic doesn't just focus on the minutiae of facial expressions and body movements but also magnifies them by drawing the reader's eye quickly across the page. Other times, aspect-to-aspect transitions cast a wide-ranging, wandering eye across the scene. Still other times the story jumps from timeframe to timeframe, using scene-to-scene transitions to move rapidly from main plot, to flashback, to exposition, and back again. As a result, time progresses variably throughout the comic, which is effective at keeping the reader engaged and in suspense. There is also high variability in the combinations of text and image within these panels[51]. Interdependent combinations are the most common, but word-specific combinations and panels with no text at all are also very common. This reveals that the comic does not privilege text over image, or vice versa. Both are equally important throughout, taking turns carrying the weight of the plot advancement. In sum, in this work we see a departure from other noir works considered in this chapter. The artwork is bright and highly abstract, in contrast with that of *¡García!* and *Intachable,* which is an effective tool in conveying a didactic message (as McCloud explains). The characters could be any one of the readers, who can see their experiences in the struggles of the protagonists.

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[50] To gain a snapshot of the author's use of panel transitions, the 327 panels (and 326 panel transitions) on pp. 11-36 were considered. Among these, I noted 137 subject-to-subject transitions, 58 action-to-action transitions, 53 scene-to-scene transitions, 49 aspect-to-aspect transitions, and 29 moment-to-moment transitions.

[51] To gain an idea of the author's combinations of text and image, the same 327 panels on pp. 11-39 were considered. In these panels, I identified 147 interdependent combinations, 94 word-specific combinations, 19 picture-specific combinations, and 67 panels that contained no text at all (only images).

The ways in which noir manifests in this comic are also distinct from the other two comics considered in this chapter. As previously mentioned, Ortiz favors bright colors and abstract illustration styles, which is visually distinct from *¡García!* and *Intachable*. Nevertheless, the elements of noir do play a key role here. This is not only because of the extensive crime and violence throughout, but also because of its convoluted plotline that involves numerous voices and perspectives. The result is a confusing experience on the first read-through, as the reader pieces together the various bits and pieces of the narrative before arriving at the final climax. Such defamiliarization represents a clever combination of noir and fantastic elements, especially once the spirit of Héctor begins to appear to his friends at key moments. What's more, despite the fantastic elements of the story, the comic endeavors to present the lived precarity and desperation of these characters in realistic fashion, which is a key element of noir. This is a key example of how this comic enables cognitive mapping on the part of the reader. As the comic lays out the precarious lives of each of protagonist, and their positionality within the broader social realities of contemporary Spain, the reader can also begin to apprehend the larger systemic issues at play in contemporary neoliberal society acting upon them and their own relationships to these last.

To demonstrate how noir and cognitive mapping operate specifically, let us now engage with a close reading of the comic. The comic's deep disillusionment with the neoliberal status quo is evident from one of the opening scenes. In a short chapter detailing Polly's backstory on pp. 14-5, for example, it is revealed that Polly's family has struggled with precarity since childhood, having been abandoned by her father and raised by an alcoholic mother. The scene is developed over two pages, each divided evenly into six square panels, in which Polly's face and torso are at the center and the backdrop reflects the voiceover narration. The scene reveals that in young adulthood, Polly would struggle to find secure employment, leaving her studies unfinished

and leaving Spain entirely as a result (15). Yet as she later reveals, even abroad she is unable to escape her alienation and precarity. The café in London where she worked continually reduced her hours and her boyfriend left her, leaving her completely unable to pay her rent (128-9). This mirrors the situation of young workers in Spain following the crisis, where more than 300,000 of these workers left Spain during the crisis between 2008 and 2012 (Segovia). I have discussed youth unemployment in Spain previously, however, it is worth noting again here that "in 2012, 2 in 10 adults, 3 in 10 young adults, 5 in 10 young people and 7 in 10 adolescents [were] unemployed" (Solér et al. 65). It is significant that Ortíz is citing this situation here, as unemployment and precarity proves to be a driving factor behind each character's motivations. Thus, the comic sets up a challenge to neoliberalism from the beginning.

It is not difficult to see cognitive mapping at work in this scene. The narrative squarely situates these characters as victims of a neoliberal system that has precaritized their existence, and the situations in which they find themselves (at the opening of the comic, at least) are likely experiences with which an average Spanish reader might be familiar. Seeing these characters' problematic relationships to contemporary Spanish society provides the foundation for a reader's own opportunity to develop a map of their own positionality to these hegemonic neoliberal norms. Ortiz wields the noir mode for a didactic purpose here. He is communicating to his readers that although the crisis and neoliberalism are never explicitly named in the comic, each of these characters is driven by their experiences with the defining feature of this crisis, namely, precarity and alienation. It is an opportunity for readers to see themselves in these protagonists, which will become important at the end of the comic where the resolution to their problems hinges on them embracing solidarity and leaving behind their former, precarious lives.

Even though the backstory of each of the protagonists provides ample opportunities for a reader to cognitively map their own positionalities post-2008, the comic's embrace of noir that drives this critical power as well. The first example of this is the omnipresence of death throughout the narrative, especially regarding the presence of Héctor's ghost. Héctor appears each to Polly (44), Piter (77), and Moho (117) throughout the narrative, often when danger is near or conflict between the friends is high. When he appears to Polly, the comic reveals that not only have the three recently fought, but someone is also being held against their will in an adjoining room of their motel. With Piter, the group is spending the night in the home of one of Moho's friends, who unbeknownst to the other two is setting Moho up for a drug deal that will soon go horribly wrong. When he appears to Moho, the drug deal has indeed gone awry, and the home in which he is being held captive in is on fire. It is unclear if this is truly the spirit of Héctor, or rather symbolic of how he weighs heavily on each of their minds. In either case, the omnipresence of death and the shade of Héctor appearing during strain or dangerous moments in the narrative serve as a grim reminder of the desperation to which these characters are driven (and the consequences of that desperation). Indeed, to escape from this drug deal in particular, Moho is forced to shoot one of his captors dead, a grim action that nearly shatters the group's unity.

The gravity of the aborted drug deal (and subsequent shooting of Moho's captor) is punctuated in a later scene, in which the artistic style shifts dramatically (121). The camera pulls back to provide a wide shot of the scene from a distance, where the house they were confined to is completely engulfed in flames, and a violent thunderstorm rages overhead. The only text is onomatopoeia, detailing the ear-shattering sound of the storm. Ortiz has shifted away from his typical style of many small panels per page that keep the story moving at a rapid pace to this full-

page panel that completely arrests the pace of the story. The reader is forced to stop and take in the seriousness of the moment, which is punctuated by the pathetic fallacy of the violent weather. This moment is the climax of the tension that Moho's criminal past and shady dealings had been building throughout the group's trip thus far[52]. This constant reference to crime and violence reminds us of the role of the shadow economy during and after the crisis, as discussed in the introduction to this dissertation (see: Standing 2011 and González-Fernández & González Velasco 2014). While certainly the average reader is unlikely to have been driven to these extremes to survive, through the "expressionist techniques and convoluted plotlines" that noir often details (Holt 25) the reader can begin to grasp the myriad of unfortunate circumstances that have brought Moho (and his friends) to this moment. Moho's own relationship with prevailing societal norms is one of extreme precarity and vulnerability, a relationship with which the average Spanish reader would be acutely familiar. Each of these characters has suffered because of neoliberalism and the crisis, although neither of these are explicitly named. While eventually they manage to navigate their way to safety, what is especially interesting is how the main characters' problems are resolved, as these resolutions also contain ample potential for cognitive mapping.

When the group finally arrives at their destination, they meet Gregorio and his daughter Melina, the latter of whom introduces them to Héctor's gift of *Hotel Existencia*. Héctor had befriended Melina and Gregorio, and through them discovered the plot of land that he leaves to his three former friends, such that they can begin new lives together. Melina's own story had been told in intervals throughout the comic in vignettes that interrupted the main plot and is itself

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[52] In another plot point, the group is pursued by two hitmen hired to punish Moho for offending their employer during Moho's short-time stint as a failed journalist, which itself climaxes in a dramatic moment in which the group members are kidnapped. It is only after Moho essentially buys them off with the spoils of his catastrophic drug deal that they are able to escape (Ortíz 142-9).

a significant example of a character who suffers extreme precarity. Consider the scene on page 152, when Melina is seen returning home to her father after a long sojourn in the city. In this scene, we see a shift away from Ortíz's usual style of many small panels coupled with extensive dialogue to varying sized panels with almost no words at all. Gregorio's face is the central image of these panels, overcome with emotion at the return of his prodigal daughter as she tells him that he had been right all along – "La ciudad es una puta mierda" (152) / "The city is fucking shit" (152, my translation). In many ways, Melina is a foil of Polly, Moho, and Piter. Whereas they journey to discover a better life than one they left behind, Melina's journey is a sort of bildungsroman, in which she leaves her life behind in search of something better and returns to take her place after personal growth and experience. At the center of the narratives of both Melina and the trio, however, is a distinct migration away from the city – the center of culture and capitalism – to the countryside, and an ostensibly better way of life. The narrative doubles down on the disillusionment with the neoliberal capitalist center, considering that not only does Melina initially leave in search of it, but is immediately disillusioned with it and returns home. In many ways, this represents a certain inversion of the typical narrative of the noir mode. Noir is often set in the city, which it depicts in disturbing ways. Here, however, we see a direct *rejection* of the city in the noir mode outright.

In the end, Melina brings the four to the Hotel Existencia, where they begin new lives together, having escaped their former precarious existence. Again, we see a shift in Ortiz's artistic style away from many panels per page to full-page images that arrest the story and force the reader to absorb this significant moment with the protagonists. Note the dramatic shift in color scheme as well; where previous scenes had appeared dark and grim, now by contrast the world is bathed in light, as if the characters have stepped into a new promising opportunity. Like

Melina, it seems that Héctor, too, had become disillusioned with chasing success in the city, and the best alternative that he could conceive was the building of the four friends' dream hotel on this island. Between this ending and the appearances of Héctor's shade to each of the friends, it is as if Héctor has been carefully leading them here all along. In this way the narrative presents a sort of escapist fantasy, one in which the alienated subject finds new purpose in community. Importantly, however, it is necessary to consider the fact that this escapist fantasy does not truly permit the characters to escape the hegemonic norms of neoliberal society entirely, as their alternative to their former struggles is to literally support themselves by opening a business. In this, the comic demonstrates the pervasiveness of hegemonic neoliberalism, and how it rules every aspect of daily life (as Wendy Brown describes at length).

Nevertheless, the comic suggests that the best recourse in the face of contemporary, alienating neoliberal society is to come together in community and *reject* the alienation inherent neoliberal life outright, leaving it behind to create their own communities. Here is the opportunity for a reader to begin to apprehend their own relationships to neoliberal Spanish society, especially following the 2008 crisis. Each of these characters has individually suffered in some way that mirrors the experiences of the precariat during the crisis in Spain, be that the housing crisis, the need to go abroad for work, or the complete lack of available work generally. That these characters can come together in community to forge a new life for themselves suggests the first inklings of the solidaristic themes that will be especially important in the final chapter of this dissertation, and presents a more hopeful vision than do the other two comics considered in this chapter. While the comic implies that the protagonists cannot fully escape from neoliberal capitalism's influence (since their alternative solution is to run a business), there is nevertheless strength to be had in community.

In sum, therefore, *Cenizas* critiques contemporary neoliberal Spanish society by wielding noir elements and the versatility of comic art to focus on themes of deep precarity and vulnerability. In this way, Ortiz makes clear to the reader the realities of contemporary neoliberal life. Through an abstract art style, convoluted plot lines, and grim realism, Ortiz makes these heavy and complex topics accessible to his reader who may begin to perceive of their own relationship with contemporary neoliberal Spanish society by witnessing characters with whom they can identify combatting those same societal pressures. Importantly, it is also the first narrative considered in this dissertation to present an alternative to the vulnerability of the precariat: the strength of community. This thread will be picked up by subsequent chapters of this dissertation, which flesh out the importance of solidarity and community building as it appears in graphic narratives like this one.

Conclusions

Each comic considered in this chapter leverages noir in its own style to develop a critique of neoliberalism post-2008. *¡García!* makes clear connections between the legacy of the Franco dictatorship and contemporary (neoliberal) Spain, demonstrating that Francoism and the contemporary Spanish state are inherently linked. While this comic never explicitly mentions neoliberalism or the crisis, it is directly situated in context with contemporary Spanish politics, making the connection clear to an observant reader. *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción* also links Francoism to contemporary Spain through an explicit depiction of the corrupt politics and business dealings that enabled the crisis in the first place. *Cenizas* demonstrates the alienation, vulnerability, and desperation of the average citizen in the wake of such corruption; its main characters are thrust into a world of violence and crime, ultimately only finding peace in forging their own communities as a foil for their former precarious lives. In reading these three works

together, a larger narrative emerges, one in which the legacy of corruption in Spain and the effects of the 2008 economic crisis are deeply linked. In seeing this linkage, a reader may begin to comprehend not only the historicity and root causes of contemporary neoliberal struggle, but the beginnings of a potential solution.

It is precisely the weaving of noir and comic art that allows these narratives to do this critical work. On the one hand, the weaving of text and visual art, the closure required from the reader, and the varying strategies in illustration all add up to an ability of comics to abstract via cartooning, making complex topics accessible in a way that other mediums cannot (per Scott McCloud). On the other hand, we must consider the importance of noir itself in these works as well. I have made much of the aesthetics of noir throughout this chapter, including elements of grim realism, dark and violent themes, and moral ambiguity (among many other factors), and as Skoble describes, noir uses these elements in such a way as to possess a certain "pedagogical moral value" (41) for its reader. The cognitive function of comic art and the constructing of such a pedagogical value through noir together enable a reader to perceive of their realities in an intricate way that other combinations do not. This is not to say that these are *only* pedagogical texts in a top-down sense, however, as the foreword to *Intachable* argues such noir narratives can and do serve as an effective didactic tool in the artistic voice of dissent.

Indeed, as that same introduction states, in a world where poetic voices of protest are becoming less and less common (Córdoba 1), comics such as these can be the answer to this decline. This fits well in conversation with Frederic Jameson's discussion of the need for cognitive maps in a depoliticized, fragmented world, and the noir comics considered in this chapter rise to that call. Taken as a whole, they enable their readers to situate their positionality within the broader totality of contemporary neoliberal society by providing them a place to lay

blame for their suffering (the corrupt elites fostered the crisis and failed to adequately address it), as well as portraying that very suffering as the result of systemic problems. This is well in line with Sousanis' considerations of comics' ability to bring together multiple vantage points to open up new perspectives, something that these three comics do well when read together. Indeed, these comics suggest that these systemic problems have roots as far back as the Franco dictatorship, whose effects are still felt today. This builds upon prior scholarship on Spanish noir media, which has previously demonstrated the importance of film noir and the *novela negra* in considering the effects of Francoism and the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis. This chapter contributes to these discussions by revealing not only how noir is equipped to consider neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis, but also how the intersection of noir and comic art is particularly well equipped to do so.

To conclude, therefore, this chapter has demonstrated how Spanish noir comics provide a unique tool for social commentary on contemporary neoliberal Spain and the 2008 economic crisis. Through an analysis of *¡García!*, *Intachable: 30 años de corrupción*, and *Cenizas,* in context with the theories of Scott McCloud (on understanding comics), Wendy Brown (on neoliberalism) and Guy Standing (on precarity), I have demonstrated how the weaving of noir aesthetics and comic can be a powerful tool of cognitive mapping post-2008. This weaving enables a reader to situate their own relationships with the broader societal norms at play in contemporary neoliberal Spain by identifying the root causes of the crisis and the suffering it has engendered. Through these narratives, a reader may find new ways to perceive their experiences and, perhaps, be mobilized by this new knowledge. Indeed, it is through the indignation inspired by mapping these relationships that the alienated, precarious individual in contemporary Spain can begin to not only understand the context of their own anxieties or identify those truly to

blame for their suffering, but to potentially envision resolutions to this problem. In this spirit, this dissertation takes its next step in understanding how comics can invite their reader to partake in such cognitive mapping. As has been discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, the revelation of the depths of corruption in Spain, both preceding the crisis and following it, inspired incredible amounts of indignation that were very quickly mobilized. The next chapter considers how contemporary Spanish comics wield this indignation, and how this is an essential tool for cognitive mapping.

Chapter 3 – Indignation as Source of Democratic Revolution in Contemporary Spanish Political Cartoons

To address how the indignation inspired by corruption and the crisis in Spain (discussed at length in the second chapter) has appeared not only in social movements like the 15M, but in comic art as well, this chapter will engage with contemporary Spanish political cartoons. Political satire and cartooning have a long history in Spain, and it has played an important role in Spanish politics since the 2008 economic crisis. This rich tradition makes them an especially fruitful site for research. Scholars of political cartooning have detailed how political satire can serve as a society's "moral mirror" (Chen et al. 134), exposing the hypocrisies of a society's master narratives and providing its own counternarratives (Hill 324-37). What is needed now is an analysis of the ways in which Spanish political cartoons approach the 2008 economic crisis and neoliberalism, the counternarratives they present, and where these counternarratives find their critical base. This is especially important given how political cartoons have often been left out of research in comics studies (Chen et al. 127-8). This chapter will seek to contribute to these conversations by considering the works of three Spanish artists: Manel Fontdevila's *No os indignéis tanto* (2013), Aleix Saló's *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* (2011), and El Roto's *Viñetas para una crisis* (2011). As this analysis will demonstrate, in each of these works a common thread emerges as a source of critical power: indignation. Through an analysis of these comics, this chapter will seek to answer a series of research questions. What role does indignation play specifically in each of these comics? How does satirical humor in conjunction with this indignation mobilize a reader? Finally, how does the political cartoon aid in understanding the present neoliberal reality (and aid in the building of cognitive maps) in a way that other mediums cannot?

To answer these questions, this chapter will approach these three works in context with the throughlines of this dissertation: alienation, neoliberalism, and comics studies. It will also continue to engage with Frederic Jameson's considerations of cognitive mapping. Importantly, however, this chapter will also engage with scholars of affect to understand the critical power of indignation in these works, drawing connections to the writings of Stéphane Hessel who speaks directly to the power of indignation as source of peaceful revolution. In this way, this chapter will demonstrate that the political cartoons analyzed here mobilize their readers by leaning heavily into indignation, and it is through leveraging this emotion that they provide their readers the opportunity to see their own lived experiences with the 2008 economic crisis and neoliberalism on the page. In this act of seeing, they are empowered to attain new perspectives and lay the groundwork for their own cognitive maps, understanding their precarious positionality within the hegemonic structures of power in neoliberal Spanish society. Much as Sousanis describes, these cartoonists unflatten perspectives on the crisis by providing new vantage points into its causes and effects, laying bare the indignation that these relationships have caused. Though only Fontdevila cites indignation directly (by means of Stéphane Hessel's *¡Indignaos!*), this chapter will demonstrate how indignation manifests in each. These comics seek to challenge Spanish society's dominant narrative of the exemplary transition to democracy and the corresponding neoliberal politics and economics. Leveraging indignation allows them to construct an effective counter-narrative. Reading each work together not only highlights indignation as a powerful affect and political tool, but also demonstrates the critical power of comics to enable their readers to map their experiences and develop their own personal responses to their struggles with neoliberalism.

This analysis contributes to the fields of comics studies and Hispanic studies by investigating the ways in which political cartooning wields affect (and indignation in particular) to inform and motivate their readers. More than this, however, it constitutes the next logical step in this dissertation from the anxieties of neoliberal society and the political/economic corruption that has fostered those anxieties, towards a mapping of how the individual subject may not only understand their alienated relationships with neoliberalism and the crisis but also envision potential resolutions to that positionality. Whereas the second chapter investigated depictions of that very corruption as one cause of the crisis (and an integral part of contemporary neoliberalism in Spain), this chapter discusses how political cartoons make sense of the indignation that such corruption engenders, adding another discursive voice to the larger narrative presented in this dissertation. In this endeavor, this chapter will begin with the theoretical orientation of this analysis (particularly regarding affect) before engaging in a close reading of each of the works considered here. It will then close by synthesizing what is learned by reading these three comics together.

Introduction

As with the rest of this dissertation, this chapter will continue to find its basis in Frederic Jameson's considerations of cognitive mapping. In this, I am interested in how these political cartoonists work to aid their reader in understanding their own place within the larger global system of neoliberalism, and the alienation that it engenders. Considering how Brown describes neoliberalism as a hegemonic force that inserts itself into every aspect of day-to-day life (30), and those that it relegates to the precariat have yet to develop a sense of class identity (Standing 22), this population is an especially fruitful site for these political cartoons to aid in mapping their positionality. To understand how this operates, let us consider political cartooning and affect

theory, both of which are key to understanding each of the narratives considered in this chapter and how they construct their counternarratives and critiques.

As mentioned above, scholars have identified how political cartooning can serve as a "moral mirror" (Chen et al. 134) and provide counternarratives to society's predominant master narratives. As Hill describes, political satire is uniquely effective at building counternarratives to a given hegemonic master narrative:

> Emerging from the gaps and fissures of a master narrative, from the lack of fit between the perception created by a master narrative and an individual's lived reality, a counternarrative chips at a society's preferred frame, exposing the hypocrisy and inequality its master narratives work to conceal (329).

This goes well with Jameson's conceptions of cognitive mapping. For these comics to enable their reader to situate themselves within larger neoliberal social norms, it is first necessary for the master narrative to be challenged, which as Hill demonstrates is something political satire is adept at doing. Of interest to this chapter is how this operates in specific terms in Spanish political cartoons. One key aspect to understanding this is the critical power of the emotion of indignation.

Though the distinction between "emotion" and "affect" is not fully clear, affect theory can aid in understanding this dynamic. Affect has had many definitions, with applications in the humanities (including literary criticism), social sciences, and in sciences such as psychology (Figlerowicz 3). Indeed, so complex is the matter of affect that Seigworth and Gregg describe eight individual orientations to affect, one of which is significant to this chapter: "…critical discourses of the emotions (and histories of the emotions) that have progressively left behind the interiorized self or subjectivity" (7). Sarah Ahmed, when discussing affect as it relates to emotion

(and happiness specifically) describes affect as sticky: "Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (29). Much of these considerations emerge form important work published in and around 1995, such as the formative works of Massumi who equates affect with intensity which "…is characterized by a crossing of semantic wires: on it, sadness is pleasant. The level of intensity is organized according to a logic that does not admit of the excluded middle" (85). Also important is the work of Sedgwick & Frank who conduct a reading of psychologist Silvan Tomki's considerations of shame, along with the other basic affects and why this is important to affect studies: "Without positive affect, there can be no shame; only a scene that offers you enjoyment or engages your interest can make you blush. Similarly, only something you thought might delight or satisfy can disgust. Both these affects produce bodily knowledges" (520). Primarily of interest to this chapter is the matter of affect as emotion, and how this translates to literary and cultural studies.

Affect as emotion has a certain critical power in literary studies and beyond, but like the rest of affect studies there is substantial debate over how to define it and how emotions are formed and operate. Some scholars draw on neuroscientific research and consider emotions to be "…inherently independent of intentions. The affects are thus held to be a set of innate, automatically triggered brain-body behaviors and expressions operating outside the domain of consciousness and intentional action" (Leys 465). Others such as Massumi characterize the sciences "…as seeking to tame, instrumentalize, and render profitable the singularity, unpredictability, immanence, and liveliness of a world in flux" (467). The goal here is not to establish one as inherently better than the other, but to acknowledge the rich dialogue that has taken place amongst affect theorists in all its applications. Let us consider now what such considerations of affect as emotion can bring to the table of literary (and comics) studies.

For some scholars, the application of affect theory to literary and art studies brings up the issue of representation. Studies have argued that literature and art themselves are representations, and as such not only do they become representative of history or practice, but also "…at the same time the constructed, misstated representations that can never achieve the status of the real" (Moyano Ariza 3). In this, Moyano Ariza argues that this conflict can be addressed through considering the intersections of diverse thinking of scholars in line with Sedgwick and Massumi. In this, affect theory provides: "a richer theoretical corpus to deal with the gap produced in representation. Affect here offers a lexicon to expand on the analyses of pre-cognitive processes that lead to emotion in order to open a space to think how these processes are represented in literature and artworks…" (4). As a result, she argues, any work of criticism must always acknowledge this debate and place itself within this intersection of theory. Whatever approach a critic chooses to take, recent years have seen an explosion of interest in affect as it relates to literary and cultural theory. Patrick Hogan observes that "Literature is animated by emotion, both at the level of what it concerns and at the level of how readers respond" (2). Stephen Ahern notes that the matter of emotion as motivation for fictional characters has long been of interest to critics, however, notes that there is a need to move beyond this as well: "Also requiring attention are occasions when affect breaks free of the text or script to circulate through readers or audience members in ways that are hard to predict yet palpable nonetheless" (1). He also notes the importance of the reader's reactions to a text as well as the role the reader plays in establishing "literary meaning" (16). This chapter's analysis will associate more closely with the consideration of affect as something beyond the mere biological response of emotion[53]. In

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[53] The reasonings for this are in line with Hogan's description of "affect theory" as it contrasts with "affective sciences". Specifically: "The advantages of affect theory, however, come with its arguably greater diversity and even more with its vigorous political engagement. Among other things, it more readily fosters a critical attitude toward

specific terms, it will seek to reveal how each of these authors wields emotion in their works to

drive their critical power.

Affect as emotion is especially important to this chapter because the cartoonists

considered here wield emotion to allow their readers to fully comprehend their own experiences

with economic and political inequity, and by extension map their positionality within the broader

structures of neoliberalism in Spain. Specifically, the authors considered here invoke indignation

in order to build their criticism of neoliberal capitalism and of the 2008 economic crisis in Spain.

Indeed, the affect (or emotion) of indignation is cited directly by Manel Fontdevila in *No os*

indignéis tanto by engaging with Stéphane Hessel's *¡Indignaos!: El mayor alegato a favor de la*

insurrección pacífica (2011). Hessel's work provides a way to understand how the mobilization

of indignation develops in practice, and as such a brief engagement with it here is warranted.

Stéphane Hessel's *¡Indignaos!: El mayor alegato a favor de la insurrección pacífica*

(2011) is a reflection of the author on his time in the French Resistance against Nazi despotism in

France (and Europe at large) and the state of the post-war world. He references his capture by the

Gestapo, his time as France's ambassador to the United Nations and role in the development of

the UN's Universal Declaration on Human Rights, as well as his positionality as a Jewish person.

In context with this, he highlights the importance of peaceful resistance in the contemporary era,

as the freedoms and basic human rights he fought for over the years continue to be undermined

by the power of capital. He provides a scathing criticism of this trend, expressing disbelief at the

claim that the State cannot guarantee the costs of the social safety net when wealth has grown so

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some unquestioned presuppositions of empirical science and its associated institutional structures that can lead to systematic biases. We may distinguish three areas in which affect theorists are likely to engage in critique: social ideology, language, and general mental operations or contents (e.g., unacknowledged desires). All three have potentially valuable consequences for the study of literature and emotion" (Hogan 6).

considerably since the end of the Second World War. The reason for this, he asserts, is because

the power that money possesses in the contemporary world "nunca había sido tan grande,

insolente, egoísta con todos, desde sus propios siervos hasta las más altas esferas del Estado. Los

bancos, privatizados, se preocupan en primer lugar de sus dividendos y de los altísimos sueldos

de sus dirigentes, pero no del interés general. (Hessel 94). / "had never been so large, insolent,

selfish with everyone, from its own servants to the highest spheres of the State. The banks,

privatized, worry first about their dividends and the high salaries of their directors, but not about

the general interest" (Hessel 94, my translation). The appropriate response to this threat,

according to Hessel, is peaceful revolution driven by indignation, an emotion which has a unique

power: "Os deseo a todos, a cada uno de vosotros, que tengáis vuestro motivo de indignación. Es

un valor precioso." (94) / "I wish that everyone, every one of you, has your reason for

indignation. It is a precious value." (Hessel 94, my translation). The worst possible attitude, he

argues, is indifference (141). The importance of this narrative cannot be understated. Scholars

have identified that not only has Hessel's work had a cultural impact, but it is also indicative of

the importance of "political anger" in our contemporary neoliberal society (Peters 563).

Though Hessel's work focuses on a global perspective and not solely on the Spanish

context, the Spanish-language edition[54] that cited here is firmly grounded in the Spanish

experience by the edition's front matter. Spanish economist, novelist, and academic José Luis

Sampedro writes a prologue in which he firmly identifies his own experiences living in Spain

with those of Hessel in France, stating that he, too, was born in 1917, endured a war, and was

forced to live through a dictatorship. Citing Hessel's calls to embrace anger and use it as the

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[54] Hessel's book was originally published in French under the title *Indignez-vous!* The Spanish translation
("*¡Indignaos!")* is said by scholars to have been a major source for the naming of the 15M movement as the
Indignados (Romanos 15-6).

driving force of a peaceful revolution, Sampedro poses the question of whether we are truly

living in a democracy when the financial sector, which he labels as indisputably responsible for

the economic crisis, continues to act as though nothing has happened. In response, he echoes

Hessel's call to action:

> ¡INDIGNAOS!, les dice Hessel a los jóvenes, porque de la indignación nace la voluntad
>
> de compromiso con la historia. De la indignación nació la Resistencia contra el nazismo y
>
> de la indignación tiene que salir hoy la resistencia contra la dictadura de los mercados
>
> (Sampedro 31, my emphasis).

> 'GET ANGRY!' Hessel tells young people, because from indignation is born the will to
>
> commit to history. From indignation was born the Resistance against Nazism and from
>
> indignation the Resistance against the dictatorship of the markets must emerge"
>
> (Sampedro 31, my translation and emphasis).

This quote speaks directly to the counternarrative that the political cartoons considered in this

chapter develop. Sampedro's prologue is then immediately followed by a dedication from Hessel

himself to his Spanish readers that cements this message within the Spanish context: "La España

rebelde y valiente de siempre puede favorecer este impulso hacia una Europa cultural, fraternal,

y no una Europa al servicio de una financiarización del mundo" (Hessel 32) / "The always

rebellious and brave Spain can favor this impulse towards a fraternal, cultural Europe and not a

Europe at the service of the financialization of the world," (Hessel 32, my translation). It is

obvious therefore why Fontdevila positions himself in conversation with Hessel's work, whose

message mirrors his own counternarrative to the neoliberal dominant frame. As this chapter will

demonstrate, however, this understanding of indignation as a powerful force can shed light on how affect develops the critical power of each of the comics considered in this chapter.

In order to fully understand the intersection of indignation and the art of political cartooning, let us now consider how political cartoons have been considered in the academy. Though political cartoons are relatively understudied in the realm of comics studies, they share a closely linked history with comics in general in that "…they share many formal features in their use of text and image, methods of representation and drawing techniques" (Chen et al. 127). This is important, they argue, because political satire such as that found in political cartoons has a large focus on moral purpose, acting "as moral mirrors" (134) in the building of their discourses. These factors are well in line with Scott McCloud's consideration of comics' ability to abstract complex topics through cartooning and Nick Sousanis' observations that comics fuse multiple vantage points to "unflatten" preconceived notions of the world, which makes comics (and political cartoons in particular) adept at enabling cognitive mapping on the part of their reader. This is because in the counternarratives provided by these comics against Spain's master narrative of neoliberalism, the reader can begin to perceive their own positionality within this master narrative and, as Hessel describes, even conceive of how they may act on this greater understanding.

It is important to note that these considerations map well onto a discussion of the Spanish context of political satire, political cartooning, and the intersection between these two, which has been important in documenting the political scene in Spain both during the dictatorship and since the transition to democracy. Since the Transition, the Spanish press have had a particularly important role to play in the sphere of political humor, with artists like Peridris, Máximo, Gallego, Rey, Mingote, Martin Morales, and Perich contributing political cartoons in such

publications as *El País, Diario 16, Cambio 16, ABC,* and *Interviu* (Martin 161). One 1987 study

points out that these cartoonists (and their distinct points of view) focus in on the hurdles faced

in the process of the Transition: "Quite important, they have brought to the traditional sober

Spanish press a needed input of humor and reflection as well as critical and, in some cases,

caustic commentary" (161). Martin pays particular attention in this study to the political cartoons

of José María Pérez, (pen name Peridis), whose comics began to appear in *El País* as of 1976 and

whose drawings "provide a record of every major change in Spanish politics" from 1976 to 1987,

telling the story of the political and social theater of the country (162). Given the historical

importance of political cartooning in Spain, therefore, what is needed now is an exploration of

how political cartooning specifically engages its readers, and how this can enable cognitive

mapping such that readers can better understand their own positionality within contemporary

neoliberalism and the 2008 crisis.

This is where this chapter intervenes, considering Manel Fontdevila's *No os indignéis

tanto* (2013), Aleix Saló's *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* (2011), and El Roto's *Viñetas

para una crisis* (2011). It examines how indignation is wielded in each, and the impact it has on

the narrative and critiques of each work. While this chapter should not be construed as a

comprehensive survey of all political cartooning in Spain (contemporary or otherwise), the

works considered here are a useful tool in understanding the potential role of political cartoons in

the cognitive mapping that is the focus of this dissertation more broadly. It will first consider

each work individually, and then explore how they intersect and how reading them together

provides a clearer picture of the power of indignation in Spanish political cartoons. This is

important because while other media are certainly capable of enabling cognitive mapping,

understanding the unique ways in which political cartoons do this will provide new insights into

the unique ways in which neoliberalism and the 2008 crisis are critiqued in this medium and

address the relative paucity of research into the subject up to this point. It also begins to consider

how the indignation at the alienation and corruption of neoliberal society (both of which were

discussed at length in the first two chapters of this dissertation) can be mobilized to not only map

one's positionality against greater global systems but to also begin to comprehend ways to push

back against these hegemonic norms.

No os indignéis tanto

Let us begin with Manel Fontdevila's *No os indignéis tanto* (2013)*,* a foray into the long-

form, book-length comic, as opposed to the single panel vignette (and compilations thereof) for

which he is well known. Published directly in response to Stéphane Hessel's *¡Indignaos!* (and

the 15M *indignados* movement itself)*,* it presents a challenge to the master narrative of

neoliberalism and the myth of the exemplary Transition. It does this by presenting a

counternarrative that questions not just neoliberalism in Spain, but also the entire political system

that has established itself on the remains of Francoism and continues to discourage dissent. This

fits well with previous analyses in this dissertation, particularly with the discussions within the

second chapter. Specifically, this analysis will demonstrate that indignation is developed in *No os*

indignéis tanto to allow the reader to conceptualize their own anger in order to effectively inform

(and potentially mobilize) them.

Though Hessel's themes of peaceful revolution through the indignation of the oppressed

run throughout *No os indignéis tanto*, Fontdevila does cite him directly. The long-form comic

allows Fontdevila to go into extensive detail, producing a didactic comic in which an illustrated

version of himself informs the reader of the history of the economic and political crisis while

simultaneously analyzing contemporary politics, the 15M, and how they connect to the Franco

dictatorship and the Transition. In so doing, he considers the social upheaval and conversations that have occurred and are occurring around the 15M and seeks to inspire his reader into political participation. He analyzes everything from the Culture of Transition (CT)[55] to the occupation of the parliament building entrance in Barcelona during the 15M protests, and the channels of communication that have attempted to apprehend these occurrences, including humor and satire magazines (some of which he has contributed to himself).

Manel Fontdevila hails from Manresa, Catalonia, Spain. He has a long history of working with political cartooning, having spent 25 years with *Regió7,* and multiple years with *Público* and *ElDiario.es.* He has also worked with *El Jueves* and *Orsai,* among other publications, and has published such books as *Matecatos* (2004), *Súper puta* (2007), and *¡La crisis está siendo un éxito!* (2012) ("Manel Fontdevila"). The latter work is a volume that compiles several of Fontdevila's political cartoon vignettes that have appeared in journalistic outlets over the years; another such volume is *¡Esto es importantísimo!* (2012). *No os indignéis tanto* (2013) is one of his most recent book-length publications and will be the work I consider here. He has also been previously considered in the academy, with *No os indignéis tanto* being identified as an excellent example of a "graphic essay" (Catalá-Carrasco 172). This graphic essay responds directly to the crisis and the 15M, but has also been noted to possess "un tono divulgativo, aunque constituye una clara lectura política de la situación posterior a la crisis por parte de Fontdevila" (Hernández Cano 103) / "an informative tone, although it constitutes a clear political reading of the post-crisis situation by Fontdevila" (103, my translation). Hernández Cano goes on to note the

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[55] In particular, I am again referring to the Culture of Transition or CT, which as discussed in the introduction can be defined as the relationship between the state and culture in which culture is expected to not interfere with politics unless it aims to uphold the state (Martínez 15), and one in which the objective is a social cohesion in which every citizen accepts their assigned role and remains in that role (Fernández-Savater 38). Further, it seeks to mystify the Transition to democracy to create the image of a democracy of consensus (Delgado 18).

importance of Fontdevila's own authorial voice in this comic, which Fontdevila uses to offer his own reflections about the reality of post-crisis Spain "sin abandoner el humor…" (104) / "without abandoning humor…" (104, my translation). This chapter's analysis will build on these discussions, as these elements are greatly important in the way Fontdevila builds his critique. Specifically, this chapter demonstrates how he makes use of them to situate indignation and why it has such critical power.

An analysis of the artistic style used in *No os indignéis tanto* reveals a comic that makes deliberate artistic choices to further its didactic purpose rather than pursue experimental art. Fontdevila leans very heavily towards abstraction and cartooning in this volume, in which he favors exaggeration and highlights the absurd. This is furthered by the way Fontdevila handles panel arrangement and transition. As the comic is essentially an illustrated version of Manel Fontdevila himself speaking directly to the reader, he tends to favor subject-to-subject and non-sequitur transitions, as the comic either consists of his avatar presenting historical or political information or sudden and jarring transitions to political cartoons[56]. Being a book-length comic, Fontdevila's page layout and organization of panels is variable, which allows him to shift his strategy from section to section according to the needs of the storytelling. In this we see Fontdevila exploring new ways of his illustrative political satire.

As a result, the use of time in this comic is also highly variable and, in some cases, even nonexistent. This is largely because the comic is not a fictional narrative told in comic form, but rather a true graphic essay. Line work is similarly highly variable, but is present for shading and synaesthetics, even though the images themselves are generally very abstract. It is also important to note that often panels are not delineated by firm boundaries, with some panels having barely

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[56] Taking the first 25 pages as an example, I observed 47 panels in total and 46 panel transitions. 27 of these were subject-to-subject transitions, 12 were non-sequiturs, and 7 were action-to-action transitions.

any delineation at all. Combinations of text and image, however, are more consistent. Being a didactic work, most of the arrangements are given over to interdependent combinations, montages, and word-specific combinations, as the author is attempting to fulfill an informative role[57]. Supporting this, the comic is almost entirely drawn in black and white, which is appropriate given that Scott McCloud explains that black and white illustrations are effective at conveying a didactic message. In sum, *No os indignéis tanto* is grounded far more in content than it is in form. It does not push the boundaries of what comic art can do, but rather strategically utilizes the medium to accomplish the promulgation of Fontdevila's primary message and counternarrative to the neoliberal norm in Spain's time of crisis.

Fontdevila sets the tone of the comic early, opening with a humorous depiction of himself on an airplane whose takeoff has just been delayed, complaining about the abysmal service airlines provide these days. Among other things, he laments that they no longer provide newspapers, juice, or snacks, all in the name of maximizing profit margins: "Pero claro, tienen que ganar dinero, ¡tanto como puedan! Y los comprendemos porque es *justo lo mismo* que queremos nosotros… ¿Un buen servicio? *¡POR-FA-VOR!"* (Fontdevila n.p., author's emphasis)[58] / "But of course, we must earn money, as much as possible! And we understand because it's *the exact same thing* that we want… Good service? *PLEASE!"* (Fontdevila n.p., author's emphasis, my translation). This is largely in line with his critical viewpoints of corporations throughout his work, though the acidity of the criticism is tempered somewhat here by his humorous depiction of himself as a grumpy old man. As the close reading of the comic will demonstrate, this sets the tone for the rest of the comic. Hilariously, his seatmate, who is trying to read in peace, mollifies

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[57] Taking the first 25 pages as an example, I observed 25 of the panels included interdependent combinations of text and image, 10 montages, 8 word-specific combinations, and 7 panels that were image only, with no text present.
[58] Note that *No os indignéis tanto* has no page numbers, and for this reason none are provided in parenthetical citations throughout this chapter's analysis.

Fontdevila by providing him a copy of Stéphane Hessel's *¡Indignaos!* As he describes, it is the "libro del momento" (the "book of the moment"), surging in popularity as the 15M takes hold. As the very description of the comic describes, in many ways *No os indigéis tanto* is a response to Hessel's book. The close reading that follows traces how this develops over the course of the narrative.

Following Fontdevila receiving a copy of Hessel's book on the airplane, the comic then shifts into an informative piece, in which an illustrated version of Fontdevila informs the reader of the details of the crisis. Over the course of four pages, Fontdevila's avatar spells out everything one can expect to see at the "nueva edición del Festival de la Democracía" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.) / "new edition of the Festival of Democracy" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.*,* my translation), illustrated in relief at the bottom of each page. These pages are divided into seven distinct panels, the first six of which distinguish each of the six "crimes" committed by the political elite, each of which is demonstrated by an illustrated pundit. In the seventh panel, Fontdevila says to the reader, "En cuanto a sacarnos de la crisis… ¡marca la opción que más te convenza!" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.) / "Regarding getting ourselves out of the crisis… Mark the option that convinces you the most!" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.*,* my translation), with the options being "no tienen ni idea" ("They have no idea"), "Les da absolutamente igual" ("They do not care at all"), and "Una mezcla de ambas" ("A mixture of both"). The artwork utilizes predominantly black and white in its color scheme, along with a pronounced use of caricature. Not even Fontdevila himself is exempted from caricature, which gives the impression that he is humbling himself to the level of the reader, speaking to them with a sort of comradery.

These pages are a very clear example of both Fontdevila's conversation with Hessel's

¡Indignaos! and prior studies who have identified that counterattitudinal political satire is prone

to inspire anger – and political participation – in the reader. Though he utilizes humor,

particularly in his caricature-style drawing and his tongue-in-cheek references to how politicians

don't seem to know (or care about) how to pull the country out of the crisis, Fontdevila presents

a scathing criticism of the political approach to the matter here. The highlighting of these sins in

the government's response to the crisis, especially when exemplified by caricatures of the elites

who perpetuate them, are clearly an attempt at triggering the indignation of the reader. For

example, the "Corrupción" panel clearly depicts a politician that strongly resembles Francisco

Franco, reminding the reader of the contemporary State's connection to the legacy of Francoism.

The "Represión" panel, meanwhile, depicts a politician or businessman debating whether to

work towards improving things when prohibiting complaints seems so much more attractive,

which invokes the Culture of Transition's propensity to silence any culture that does not directly

uphold the state. The mobilizing of indignation in these panels in sum is developed by means of

this caricature, essentially ridiculing the officials whose responsibility it was to reverse the

effects of the crisis but instead continue to look at for the best interests of capital. Thus,

Fontdevila presents the relationship that he – and his readers – have with these political elites is

one of exploitation (and alienation).

This is brought to fruition in the next two pages in which Fontdevila draws a direct

connection between the "cardinal sins" committed by the political elite and the indignation he

seeks to mobilize. He does this through a direct citation of the 15M *indignados* movement. These

pages depict a generic politician downplaying the crisis and the brutal precaritization of the

populace: "Sí, vale, los de abajo lo pasan mal y los de arriba siguen a lo suyo… pero a ver, *¿qué*

esperaban? ¡Es la vida, lo saben perfectamente!" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.) / "Yes, fine, those at the bottom will have a bad time and those at the top will keep doing what they do… but look, *what did you expect?* That's life, you know that very well!" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.*,* my translation). This speaks to the precaritization, and vulnerability of the average citizen expanded upon by Guy Standing, in which they lack appropriate mechanisms of community support in times of struggle. As a result of politicians taking this sort of stance, Fontdevila says, what else is there to do besides to protest and demand change? At this moment we see the dark images in relief that have been running at the bottom of the past six or so pages crystalize clearly into a representation of the 15M which, as Fontdevila notes, was predated by other demonstrations whose slogans would become integral to the *Indignados* encampments ("Juventud sin futuro", "¡Democracía real ya!", etc.). As national elections approached, however, Fontdevila highlights how these 15M encampments would remain until the elections had taken place, a literal manifestation of counternarrative-against-master-narrative that Fontdevila is highlighting and citing to drive his criticism.

Over subsequent pages, Fontdevila continues to inform the reader about not only the history of the 15M, but about its specific demands as well. Notable in these pages is one of Fontdevila's hallmarks in his artistic style: his experimentation with his artistic strategy. Here, Fontdevila lays out some of the demands of the *Indignados,* each accompanied by a satirical illustration. For example, regarding the first demand for "Severos cambios en la ley electoral" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.) / "Strict changes to electoral law" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.*,* my translation), the associated illustration depicts a faceless politician clinging desperately to his seat in parliament. Fontdevila has shifted from distinct panels delineated by hard, dark lines to a style more akin to montage, flowing across the page in such a

160

way that the reader's eye is drawn hither and thither, with captions, speech bubbles, and images combining in fluid, almost chaotic ways. The reader's eye is drawn to all corners of the page to gather every ounce of information in the text and the illustrations. In so doing, Fontdevila abstracts difficult content through cartooning and makes the 15M – and its demands – accessible to his reader whom he is working to spur into political action. In other words, Fontdevila here allows his readers to better understand their emotions inspired by present political realities, as well as the reader's own relationships to and positionalities within those realities. There are plenty of opportunities for indignation in these pages, in which each illustration demonstrates some reason to be angry, be it an image of a politician scoffing at proposed reforms or an illustration of a worker suffering from mistreatment.

And indeed, Fontdevila takes care to inform the reader of how the Spanish state's disdain for – and violence against – peaceful demonstrations is an integral part of its master narrative of neoliberal values and the myth of the exemplary transition to democracy. In one scene Fontdevila provides two images that depict essentially the same thing – police violence levelled against demonstrators. One is labeled 2011, representing the 15M's mistreatment by police. The other is labeled 1976 and shows similar police violence. This represents the Transition, a historicity which the author explains is vital to understanding what is happening in the present day:

> Recibir hostias como balcones no es nuevo: las que recibió el 15-M vienen brotando a buen ritmo desde la Transición, ¡o incluso antes! Hay una diferencia, aparentemente: las de la Transición vienen coartada histórica; las del 15-M son desorden y chisgarabís. Sea como sea, valen, en esencia, lo mismo: ¡La democracia se peleó en los despachos! ¡O así nos lo han contado! (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.).

Receiving blows is not new: those the 15M received have been coming at a good pace since the Transition, or even before! There is a difference, apparently: those from the Transition come with historical excuses; those from the 15M are disorder and commotion. Whatever the case may be, they are worth, in essence, the same: Democracy was fought for in offices! Or that is what they have told us! (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.*,* my translation).

Essentially, Fontdevila argues that although popular demonstrations were an important part of the Transition, along with the unjust violence they experienced, this is something the CT conveniently leaves out of the contemporary narrative surrounding the Transition and, later, the 15M. As Fontdevila puts it, the only way the master-narrative can conceive of working to change the system is *inside* that system, through what it deems acceptable. This is, of course, despite the fact that these systems, these "offices" are almost entirely inaccessible to those at the lowest and most vulnerable levels of society. This is the primary source for indignation in this scene, acknowledging the fact that the system punishes those who speak out against it when in fact, at least in Fontdevila's eyes, it is the wielding of indignation that has the greatest propensity to affect change, as was the case in the Transition and the 15M.

Fontdevila doubles down on the historicity of Spain's contemporary political and economic issues, tracing them as far back as the dictatorship and the difficult Transition to democracy. In one vignette, Fontdevila illustrates himself standing next to an annotated timeline, speaking on the years following the Transition. We can see here that Fontdevila's strategy has shifted significantly. The wry sarcasm and irony have been set aside in favor of a page construction that is extremely text-centric, with illustrations serving only to illustrate an otherwise complete textual narrative. Fontdevila's avatar has changed its demeanor and facial

expressions as compared to previous scenes as well. Here he is mostly serious as he explains the political troubles since the Transition and narrates directly to the reader in second person. Narratively, several things are happening in these pages. Fontdevila himself stands next to this historical timeline, indicating important points in history, in particular the Franco regime, Franco's death, and the Transition. On the one hand, he explains the details that the CT's master narrative likes to highlight about the transition – that it was brought to fruition by means of meetings, concessions, agreements, and pacts, all in the name of building a path for the future Spain that everyone could agree upon. However, Fontdevila is simultaneously giving voice to the parallel course of indignant protest and civil disobedience that accompanied the path to democracy, one that the government would work hard to demonize for not adhering to its master-narrative, considered a "terrible falta de respeto al *espíritu de la Transición!"* (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p., author's emphasis) / "terrible lack of respect for the *spirit of the Transition!"* (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p., author's emphasis, my translation). All of this was in the name of preserving the delicate balance of Spain's fledgling democracy.

However, true to Fontdevila's counternarrative that seeks to present the fallacies and hypocrisies of the hegemonic neoliberal system post-Transition, Fontdevila critiques the narrative of the CT. Acknowledging that the Transition to democracy was a difficult process, he notes: "¡Han pasado 40 años! ¿Aún hay que vivir en la democracia *de prestado?* ¿El '*difícil equilibrio de la Transición'* no debería ya relajarse en algún tipo de tierra firme?" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto* n.p.., author's emphasis) / "40 years have passed! Do we still have to live in a borrowed democracy? Shouldn't the *'delicate equilibrium of the Transition'* relax now on some kind of firm ground?" (Fontdevila, *No os indignéis tanto in.p.,* author's emphasis, my translation). This is at the heart of Fontdevila's counternarrative and connects well to Hessel's

¡Indignaos! to which he has been responding throughout the comic. What makes this quote especially powerful is that it is perhaps the first time throughout the comic that we see Fontdevila's own indignation fully developed. Previously his social commentary had been veiled in humor, but here the humorous front has been dropped. This is an opportunity for the reader to not only gain context for their own indignation, but to also share in that of the author as well. It is also important to note, however, that this quote is responding not only to Hessel's text, but to the hegemony of the Culture of the Transition and Spanish neoliberalism as well, where affect (and indignation in particular) play a key role. Note the use of bold text throughout, highlighting the author's extreme displeasure at the amount of time spent catering to the delicate equilibrium of the transition. The anger here is palpable. He has established the fallacies of a system that has demonized indignant dissent to, ostensibly, "maintain the delicate balance" when in fact such dissent has been central to driving the country's path to democracy. He is presenting the current crises – economic, political, etc. – as directly historically linked to these problematic structures of power and to the CT, and laying out indignation as a means of effective resistance.

In many ways this is what sets *No os indignéis tanto* apart from Fontdevila's other political cartoons, and in particular his single panel vignettes. While a similar – if not identical – counternarrative can be gleaned from an analysis of the compilations of his single-panel vignettes, such as *¡La crisis está siendo un éxito!* (2011) and *¡Esto es importantísimo!* (2012)*,* the long-form comic has given Fondevila the opportunity to be much more explicit and detailed with his critiques, creating a didactic work that not only informs the reader but invites them to act by analyzing Spain's present political and economic crises in conversation with other important thinkers on the topic – in this case, Stéphane Hessel. Indignation, Fontdevila's works suggest, is the key to peaceful, democratic revolution, despite the ruling elite's attempt to

demonize it for straying from the official narrative. And indeed, the most powerful aspect of this comic is its ability to wield indignation to not only inform the reader about this moment in Spanish history but also to inspire them to potentially act on their newfound understanding.

But how does the wielding of affect in this comic, and the wielding of indignation specifically, connect to the throughlines of the dissertation, and what bearing does that have on cognitive mapping? This project continues to consider not just neoliberalism and the cognitive mapping of it, but also of alienation. Both are plentiful throughout *No os indignéis tanto.* Fontdevila starts off with a humorous joke about his dissatisfaction with his plane trip, railing against the drive to support the bottom line at all costs, but this trend becomes a primary theme for the comic. He explains in very explicit terms the ways in which the neoliberal state act upon the alienated individual, content in their suffering while the political and economic elites sequester large amounts of wealth. This is the essence of the positionality of alienated individual within the larger hegemonic systems of neoliberal Spain, and the resulting precarity and alienation is displayed plainly for the reader in satirical terms. The answer to this predicament, in Fontdevila's analysis, is the coming together *in indignation* against this alienation and precarity. Citing Stéphane Hessel explicitly, Fontdevila lays bare the opportunities for peaceful revolution inherent in the indignation felt by the precariat class. Thus, the importance of affect emerges, as it drives the critical power and primary counter-narrative of the work.

In sum, Manel Fontdevila's *No os indignéis tanto* (2013) challenges the master narrative of neoliberalism and the myth of the exemplary Transition by means of a direct citation of Stéphane Hessel, highlighting the power of indignation as a source for peaceful resistance. Fontdevila here develops a didactic comic in which he not only informs the reader of the history of the 2008 economic crisis and the social movements (such as the 15M *indignados)* it inspired,

but also how these movements wielded the indignation inspired by their precarity and alienation to affect real change. Thus, the opportunities for cognitive mapping are clear, as the reader comes to view their own (alienated) relationship to the larger structures of power in contemporary, neoliberal Spain and the power of indignation to allow them to resist their alienated positionalities. Not only can a reader grow to understand the root causes of their own suffering post-2008, but also learn about specific examples of resistance fueled by indignation, reminding them that they too have a voice that can affect change.

Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda

This brings us to the second work to be considered in this chapter: Aleix Saló's *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* (2011). This work is also a long-form, satirical comic, though one that bridges the gap between the didactic political cartoon and the fictional graphic narrative. This comic focuses on a fictional group of friends who travel to the allegorical nation of Españistán's center of power (the financial sector) to seek reprieve from a predatory mortgage. Along the way they cross paths with several influential figures in Españistán, from government functionaries to religious leaders, whose portrayals provide scathing commentary on the Spanish power brokers that they are meant to represent. This work's fierce sartorial criticism develops indignation as affect very clearly throughout, and the characters who experience it allow the reader to identify with their struggles and perceive of their own relationships to the hegemonic structures that Españistán is meant to represent. It is in this way that Saló works to present a counternarrative to the neoliberal capitalist master narrative.

Currently a resident of Barcelona, Aleix Saló hails from the Catalonian town of Ripollet. It was in a local publication of his home town that he began to publish his earliest cartoons at age fifteen and continued to do so well into his university studies of architecture, which he would

later abandon in favor of publishing comics full time (O. Rodríguez). He published his first book *Fills dels 80: La generació Bombolla* in 2008, followed by *Españistán* in 2011. His other works include *Simiocracia: Crónica de la Gran Resaca Económica* (2012), *Euro Pesadilla: Alguién se ha comido a la clase media* (2013), and most recently *Todos nazis: Cómo España se llenó de "fascistas" hasta que llegaron los fascistas* (2020). As the titles of his work suggest, Saló's comics are deeply political and focus on contemporary issues. Like Fontdevila, Saló's work (and *Españistán* in particular) has been identified as a prime example of the graphic essay, especially as it relates to the 2008 economic crisis in Spain (Catalá-Carrasco 172). This analysis is predominantly concerned with how Saló wields indignation in *Españistán* to drive its critical power, which fits well with prior scholarship that has identified how this comic has been observed to be "a user friendly interpretation of the roots and causes of Spain's experience of the post-2008 financial crash" (Prout 6). Indeed, in Saló's two follow up comics (*Simiocracia* and *Euro pesadilla*), Prout notes that he extends the critique established in *Españistán* and "situates the fallout of the financial crisis in Spain within a panoramic history of urban and agricultural development – since the beginning of human society – and within global patterns of boom and bust" (6). Saló has been well established, therefore, as a dedicated protest artist and it is within this context that I analyze how he wields indignation as a critical tool.

The artistic style Saló employs in these works has been considered extensively in previous studies, which have detailed the importance of his use of multimodality and abstraction. For example, previous analyses of Saló's work (including *Españistán)* show how he deliberately utilizes this multimodality, "using specific shapes, colours, fonts and components of orality" (Muñoz-Basols & Massaguer Comes 107) to create a humorous but scathing and informative narrative on the political and economic crisis. Importantly, though, Muñoz-Basols and

Massaguer Comes highlight the fact that his works have often been described as handbooks of economic critique for the common reader, something that was particularly important in his first work *Fills dels 80* which was published in Catalán and based on the economic inequalities he observed around him (109). The result is a humorous style that is immediately accessible to his reader. Noting that Saló's work contains high levels of intertextuality and multimodality, the authors observe that: "This has to do with the way in which the cartoonist designs an array of different semiotic methods to produce humour. The system of signs becomes interpretable because of the design of a specific perception process, which is deliberately used by Saló to configure his narratives" (112). This is precisely what gives *Españistán* its critical power, and what allows Fontdevila to mobilize indignation.

In line with the prior studies described above, Saló's art style in *Españistán* is highly abstract, almost a caricature of normal human, building, and animal shapes. This is punctuated by his use of flat colors and heavy line work, which serves both to delineate these abstract shapes but also to insert synaesthetics into the comic, for example, to display sound when a small figure beats their fists on a table or to demonstrate emotion (i.e., via a heavy unibrow changing shape to indicate a character's emotional states). As with Fontdevila, this abstraction demonstrates a focus more on *content* than *form;* the art style was chosen to be a delivery vehicle for the author's primary message. An analysis of the way Saló combines this strategy with careful panel arrangement is especially revealing. In the first place, panels are not separated by dividing lines or "gutters" as one might expect. Rather, there are no dividing lines at all; multiple "panels" are divided only by open white space. Saló uses this organizational tool to place an emphasis on moment-to-moment and action-to-action transitions, with subject-to-subject transitions serving to establish contexts. The result is a focus on dialogue and moment-to-moment interactions between

characters within an established conversations and scenes/ideas[59]. This is furthered by Saló's combinations of text and image[60]. The most common combination type here is interdependent (the most common more generally, per McCloud), which does make sense given the abstract artistic style - both text and image are working together to form meaning in a way that neither could alone. Still, he does make use of other forms to give exposition, for example, in word-specific combinations in which the disembodied narrator provies expositional information about the fictional nation of Españistán.

As I have mentioned previously, *Españistán* develops indignation as affect via a scathing critique of the Spanish state developed through the allegorical nation of Españistán. This name is an excellent point of departure as it immediately calls to mind a part of the world outside the Iberian Peninsula. As journalist Olga Merino observes, "El tono sarcástico ya se intuye desde el título: el sufijo *istán* (tierra, en persa) alude a remotas repúblicas en Asia Central, cuyos regímenes se asocian de inmediato con pobreza a ras de suelo y corrupción en las alturas" (O. Merino n.p.) / "The sarcastic tone can be intuited from the very title: the suffix *istan* (land, in Persian) alludes to the remote republics of Central Asia, whose regimes are immediately associated with poverty at ground level and corruption at the top" (O. Merino n.p., my translation). This is important, because the allegorical nation of Españistán casts an

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[59] The first 25 pages of storytelling, pp. 3-28, were used to gather a snapshot of the different panel-to-panel transitions used by Saló. Using Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics* as a guide, we can observe that of the 62 panels (and 61 panel transitions) on these 25 pages there are 17 moment-to-moment transitions, 20 action-to-action transitions, 21 subject-to-subject transitions, 3 scene-to-scene transitions, and zero aspect-to-aspect transitions and non-sequitor transitions.

[60] Using the same 25 pages (pp. 3-28), we can observe that among the 62 panels, 40 of them demonstrate interdependent combinations of text and image, 10 are word-specific combinations, 5 are picture-specific, one has no images at all, and 6 have no words at all. There are no duo-specific, additive, parallel, or montage combinations at all in these 25 pages.

orientalist[61] eye on Spain as a country, comparing it to supposedly less stable, more corrupt

governments to the East. This is not the first time such a phenomenon can be identified in

Spanish literature and popular culture; orientalizing discourses have been identified for

example it in the likes of the novel *Carmen* and its associated retellings and the way it is

viewed by the public (Colmeiro 127-44). What is interesting about the case of *Españistán,*

however, is that the author himself is casting this image of Spain into his comic. This is

used as a (problematic) rhetorical advice by Saló in an effort to enable a reader to

contextualize their indignation by comparing the situation in Spain to a problematic vision

of the Middle East.

To gain a full understanding of what this looks like in practice, we must first

consider the accompanying video titled *Españistán, de la Burbuja Inmobiliaria a la Crisis,*

released in conjunction with the comic itself. Though the main focus in this chapter will be

the comic, the video is important because where the comic is allegorical, the video by

contrast is directly didactic, serving as an educational tool to help his readers understand

how Spain "…ya no era España, sino Españistán" (Saló, *Españistán, de la Burbuja…* n.p.).

To do this he combines the highly abstract artistic style that appears in his comics with

infographics. For example, at timestamps 0:49 and 3:39 Saló is demonstrating the new

"Ley de Suelo" / "Land Law" given to José María Aznar (who is pictured here as being

crushed by the stone tablet on which it is written) by "El Dios del Neoliberalismo" / "The

God of Neoliberalism" and its long-term effects. This joke is likely referring to the 1998

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[61] I refer, of course, to Edward Said's *Orientalism,* where he describes the term thusly: "In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand… Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is – and does not simply represent – a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with "our world" (Said 7, 10).

Ley de Suelo passed under the PP government of José María Aznar, in which the state liberalized land use laws in an effort to make all land available for urbanization (to great pushback from regional governments in the autonomous communities) (Ponce 321). Despite these neoliberal reforms, economic inequality and affordable housing would continue to be problems in Spain (340), problems this comic addresses.

This maps well onto the narrative of this scene. As Saló explains, while this new law was intended to create a neoliberal utopia, the actual result was skyrocketing home prices and stagnating wages. The multimodality within this video is quite effective, pairing comical, abstract cartooning with visualizations of hard data to guide the reader towards an understanding of the crisis ahead of reading the comic, in which the meat of his criticism is developed. The video, thus, allows the reader to approach the comic with a greater understanding of that which it intends to criticize, namely, the PSOE and PP governments' mismanagement of the crisis throughout its duration and the deep, systemic problems which gave rise to it in the first place. It also allows them to better map their own relationships to and positionalities within these last, as the reader is empowered to understand the landscape of the crisis and have their indignation effectively mobilized by the comic itself. Indeed, this scathing criticism of the Spanish neoliberal landscape is carried over into the comic.

Let us begin with the first page of the comic[62] which immediately establishes the tone for the rest of the work. the text establishes the setting of the story, a faraway land named Españistán which is suffering one of the most convulsive periods of its history. That this is referring to Spain and its economic/political crisis seems rather obvious, but the next bit of text

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[62] Please note that because *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* has no page numbers, none are included in parenthetical references here.

expands upon this: "Más concretamente una de sus regiones, en un rincón del mapa, a duras penas conseguía levantar cabeza. Era el País de los Curritos" (Saló, *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* n.p.) / "More concretely, one of its regions, in a corner of the map, could barely manage to get ahead. It was Workers' Country" (Saló, *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* n.p.*,* my translation). Immediately this description situates Spain as a country of (precarious) workers, grounding the story in context with their struggles. This is a prime opportunity to invoke the anger of the reader who may have their own experiences with precarity. This text is accompanied by a map of Españistán, which adds detail to this narrative. It is immediately noticeable that not only is the País de los Curritos in a corner of the map, but it is also completely separated from the rest of the kingdom by a mountain range, shut off from the three major centers of power that would govern it. These are, from left to right, the Ciudad Burocrática ("Bureacratic City"), the Aldea Santa ("Holy Village"), and the Distrito Financiero ("Financial District"). That the land in which the precarious workers must reside is literally cut off from all the centers of power and influence is a bold beginning to the comic, one which invokes the exploitation of the precariat in the neoliberal Spanish landscape.

The story then follows a group of friends as they traverse Españistán, seeking reprieve from a predatory mortgage that has left the primary protagonist Fredo at risk of eviction. This, in the first place, is a direct invocation for the housing crisis discussed in the introduction of this dissertation (and analyzed at length in the fourth chapter). Unable to find a job or sell his car to raise funds, Fredo is desperate and closing himself off from the world, which inspires his friend Samu to intervene to try and lift his sprits. After a few comical scenes of them watching television and going to the cinema, they venture into a corner bar which sets them on their journey. The scenes in this bar give the reader much to consider. In the first place,

172

it is a good example of the phenomenon I described earlier, in which panels are not divided by any hard lines or "gutters." Rather, they are separated only by blank space, with speech bubbles from neighboring panels encroaching on or overlapping them. This pairs well with the moment-to-moment and subject-to-subject panel transitions, as these moments place a heavy emphasis on the individual conversations happening here, rather than actions in the background.

It is also an opportunity to see Saló's satire in action, as he pokes fun at Spanish perceptions of Chinese immigration. In the first place, Saló draws the Chinese workers in this bar in a highly stylized manner and represents their accents in Spanish in the text, which out of context might border on problematic. However, as the two workers talk to one another in their own language, Fredo and Samu wonder amongst themselves whether the two are talking about them: "Tú crees que nos ponen a parir?" (Saló, *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* n.p.) / "Do you think they are badmouthing us?" (Saló, *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* n.p., my translation). This anxiety upon hearing a language one does not understand is interesting, because anti-Chinese sentiment (and anti-immigrant sentiment in general) is an extant problem in Spain. Indeed, scholars have observed that many of the Spanish population maintain prejudices and stereotypes against the Chinese immigrant community which they consider to be closed-off and "mysterious" (Nieto 215). By extension, analyses of depictions of Chinese immigrants in Spanish film observe that "Particularly since the onset of the 2008 economic crisis, the Chinese have regularly been portrayed in the news media as an economic competitor and as a potential threat to a distinctly Spanish way of life," (Donovan 369). That Saló is poking fun at this by having even the main characters fall into problematic discourses around immigration is important, especially considering the closing of the comic, in which it is revealed that Españistán's politics are being manipulated by "The Master" who turns out to be a Chinese

173

immigrant (discussed in more detail below). In any case, the bar scene serves as inciting incident for the rest of the comic because it sets the characters on their path and demonstrates one of the first instances of not just indignation in the comic, but also *mobilization* of that indignation into tangible action. In the first place, it is worth noting the way in which the comic relief character Gandalf is introduced as a formerly very important magician who has been left destitute by the crisis and whose pension is quite insufficient, which speaks to the pension system itself and how it is in "imminent crisis" (Nader Orfale & Pérez De La Rosa 157). It is for this reason, presumably, that he joins Samu and Fredo on their journey.

More importantly, though, is the moment of epiphany that follows. As Fredo drinks his beer and feels sorry for himself, Samu admonishes him for wallowing in self-pity and demands he do something about it. This admonishment results in the full-page scene in which Fredo experiences his epiphany. He stands at the center of the page and declares (with a hilarious mistaken word that Samu corrects[63]) that he will free himself from his mortgage at all costs, which sets off the protagonists' journey. Here we must observe the shift in page arrangement from previous scenes. Saló has gone from using multiple panels per page to a full-page spread, which effectively arrests the pace and forces the reader to dwell upon this important moment. Alternating between these styles is something Saló does multiple times throughout the work, keeping the reader engaged with a rapidly developing story but punctuating this with scenes like the above that encourage us to appreciate certain moments or details. This moment is significant because Fredo is motivated by his indignation, and decides he doesn't have to meekly accept his predatory mortgage. Though by the nature of Saló's scathing satire it can easily be said that

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[63] Fredo attempts to say, "pongo a Dios por testigo" ("with God as my witness"), but instead uses the word "testículo" ("testicle") in place of "testigo".

indignation has been in effect throughout the narrative thus far, this is the first moment the reader can see it manifest as a mobilizing force in one of the characters.

This is an early but clear example of cognitive mapping through a mobilization of affect, especially for a reader who may themselves be victims of predatory mortgages. Saló has presented this image in a way that perfectly captures McCloud's concept of abstraction through cartooning. Fredo is a representation of the working class who has perhaps struggled the most in the times of crisis. His problems are real problems in daily Spanish (and global) life – unemployment, predatory mortgages, desperation, and so forth. The reader is invited to identify with Fredo's anger and especially with this comical moment that he decides to act on that indignation. In seeing Fredo's own (alienated and precarious) positionality in relation to the larger systems of neoliberalism in Españistán, the reader can begin to lay the groundwork for their own map of their positionality within neoliberal Spain, as well as understand what they can do about their own alienated positionality. This is supported by the extremely abstract way that people are drawn here, since as McCloud tells us abstract forms are more generalizable as icons. It is also supported, however, by the comical dialogue in Fredo's slip of the tongue. Comedy plays a key role here, allowing the reader to approach a serious topic in a lighthearted way. It gives the reader a way to identify themselves in a very serious situation in a way that is accessible[64].

In any case, the group takes on the name of the "'Compañía del Ajillo' (por el aliento a ajo de Gandolfo)" (Saló, *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* n.p.) / "The Company of Garlic

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[64] While *Españistán's* connections to other works in the dissertation will be discussed in more detail in the conclusion chapter, it is important to note that this work does indeed have powerful connections to comics I have analyzed in other chapters as well. For example, the driving force behind this narrative – unemployment, mortgages, eviction – are strikingly similar to those in *Aquí vivió: Historia de un desahucio,* which is analyzed in the final chapter of this dissertation. There are even similar plot elements between the two, in which victims of the mortgage crisis seek relief and justice in collective action and a forming of community. Much of the same happens in this comic, demonstrating the many approaches one can bring to this text.

(because of Gandalf's garlic smell)" (Saló *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* n.p., my translation), a clever reference to *The Lord of the Rings* and a play on the words *anillo* (ring) and *ajo* (garlic). The first stop they make is the Ciudad Burocrática. Again, Saló has returned to the single-panel, full-page spread in a text-centric combination as he provides the reader with exposition. This depiction of a bureaucratic center of power represents a scathing caricature of Madrid, and the leveraging of indignation is immediately obvious. For example, the images lay out how the city was raised on public funds to further the welfare state (and humorously implies that the offices themselves *are* the glory of the welfare state). However, the illustrations present a stark contrast to this description. In the first place, the ministries and public offices pictured are all dedicated to comical and absurd concepts, including the promulgation of black pudding and sudoku. This is furthered even more by the fact that the person cutting the ribbon to open this grand bureaucratic center resembles Francisco Franco, a reference to the fact that the new democratic system emerged from the Francoist legal system in the first place. This last point invokes the Culture of Transition and the analyses of previous chapters of this dissertation, implying neoliberal Spain's problems have a systemic source.

The illustrations then continue the satirical description of the Ciudad Burocrática, detailing the significant bloat in government positions and bureaucracy. More importantly, however, is the final line of the page: "La reciente crisis, que había asolado el país, obligó, por otra parte, a amurallar la ciudad para protegerla de las hordas de curritos hambrientos que llegaban en tropel huyendo de la miseria" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p.) / "The recent crisis, which had devastated the country, obliged the city to wall itself off to protect it from the hordes of hungry workers that had arrived, fleeing misery" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p., my translation). The criticism of the Madrid central government is

obvious here; as hungry workers looking for work and relief come to the central government for aid, it simply closes itself off from them. Again, the workers depicted in the images here are drawn in an extremely abstract way, such that they could be anyone – even the reader, who themselves may be suffering unemployment and starvation.

Ultimately, the group is forced to smuggle themselves into the city where a functionary named Sufrida Toldía (literally: "*Suffering All Day"*), or Frida, informs them that not only is Fredo unlikely to free himself from his mortgage, it is actually much worse than they had thought: "Es possible que tu banco tenga que vender tu casa a precio de ganga, ya que ahora ni dios quiere comprar pisos… así que es probable que te quedes sin casa y aún le debas al banco 80.000 euros" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p.) / "It is possible that your bank will have to sell your house at a bargain price, since now not even God wants to buy flats… so it's probable that you will be left without a house and you'll still owe the bank 80,000 euros" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p., my translation). This is a direct reference to a particular aspect of Spanish law, whereby even after being evicted, people were still legally required to pay their mortgage; importantly, in 2013, a European Union court ruled against these housing laws as being "too tough on homeowners who default on their mortgages" ("European Court Rules against Spanish Eviction Laws"). Frida thus tells them that their only recourse is to seek out the bank headquarters in the Distrito Financiero to see if they'll refinance the debt. This is a very direct reference to the housing crisis (discussed in detail in the final chapter of this dissertation), and as such is a perfect opportunity for this comic to mobilize the reader's anger. While *Españistán* does frequently rely on exaggeration and satire, Frida's statements are very close to the truth of the housing and financial crisis in Spain.

In any case, the party sets off on their mission to refinance Samu's mortgage. On their

way to this city, they pass through Las Tierras Muertas ("The Dead Lands"), to which all the

country's scientists and experts have been banished, and eventually the Aldea Santa (the "Holy

Village"), where the Church tries to offer its own brand of aid. Saló pokes fun of the Catholic

Church at length in this segment of the comic, and judging by the imagery alone it is not difficult

to place the mobilization of indignation here. Saló provides a text-centric arrangement of text

and image, in which he describes how Españistán embraced the Church and gave it significant

political power. It is important to note that he illustrates high-ranking church members marching

side by side with an unnamed figure who resembles Francisco Franco, a very clear criticism of

the church not only being on good terms with the Franco dictatorship, but actively supporting its

violent overthrow of the Second Spanish Republic. This is the second major time in the comic

where Franco appears, as if Saló is adamant to not let his readers forget that the former dictator's

touch remains on everything. This is a common thread amongst the comics considered

throughout this dissertation, and in particular the chapter on noir comics. Rather predictably, the

group finds no help here; the church offers to help Fredo by means of the benefits of faith alone:

"Lo único que os ayudará en la vida es una fe sólida y un estilo de vida piadoso… y austero"

(Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p.) / "The only thing that will help you in life

now is a solid faith and a lifestyle of piety… and austerity" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a

la mierda* n.p.*,* my translation). This is a direct reference to austerity measures put in place after

the crisis, and especially the framing of this austerity as a necessary measure (discussed at length

in the introduction). In this it calls to mind one of the motivating factors of the *Indignados*

movement, and as such is a prime example of the comic's mobilizing of the reader's indignation

as a driver of cognitive mapping. Following this, the group is chased out of the city for falling

asleep during a church service, labeled as heretics.

Finally, the group reaches their destination, the Distrito Financiero, and sets off in search

of the headquarters of the servicer of Fredo's mortgage. This section of the comic is arguably one

of the most important, as it comments directly on the failures of those in power to mitigate the

crisis. In one scene, the group approaches a businessman in the street who offers to assist them,

and with whom they discuss the crisis in an elevator. As Fredo confesses to him the dire state of

his mortgage, the businessman claims to understand his plight, stating that his business suffered

deeply at the hands of the crisis. This moment is significant because Saló is not only calling upon

the indignation of the reader but also allows the reader to visualize the mobilization of Fredo's

indignation as well. If we pay close attention to the way in which Fredo is illustrated, we can see

the sudden transformation in which his heavy, singular eyebrow is inverted to show his anger as

the others look on. This is accompanied by the following quote, which drives the point home:

"¡Un momento! ¿Me está diciendo que yo me voy a quedar en la calle y con una deuda de 80.000

euros por no poder pagar un piso de mierda y usted deja de pagar 3 millones y se va de rositas?"

(Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p.) / "One moment! You're telling me that I am

going to be out in the street with a debt of 80,000 euros for not being able to pay for a shitty flat,

and you don't pay back 3 million and get off easy?" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la

mierda* n.p., my translation). This is again referencing the Spanish law that obliged evicted

individuals to pay their predatory mortgages, meanwhile, the government acted to bail out

floundering banks and businesses. That businesses could be forgiven millions of euros while the

common person faces eviction for an inability to pay seems shocking to Fredo, as it should to the

reader, for this is a very present issue (as discussed especially in the analysis of *Aquí vivió:*

179

Historia de un desahucio in Chapter 4). It is small moments like this that drive Saló's

mobilization of indignation in the comic, and allow the reader to begin to trace their own

positionalities within this political and economic structure; after all, Fredo's plight is a common

one during and after the housing crisis. Ultimately, the party are unable to find help from the

president of Fredo's bank, who attacks them after transforming into a hideous monster. They

escape as, comically, Gandalf holds off the monster in a reenactment of the iconic Balrog scene

from *The Lord of the Rings* and allows them to escape.

At this they are left with only one more option for relief from Fredo's mortgage: La

Moncloa (a direct reference to the residence of the Prime Minister of Spain of the same name).

They hope that the prime minister of Españistán himself might be able to shed some light on the

situation, however upon arriving they discover that the entire government is being liquidated. In

this scene, the group enters in search of the prime minister, only to find that La Moncloa no

longer exists – the building is merely a façade, behind which the prime minister himself is selling

off everything, from public schools, to public hospitals, to savings accounts, and more. This is an

obvious dig at the deep spending cuts and austerity imposed following the onset of the crisis.

Upon being confronted about this on the following page, the prime minister attempts to explain

before breaking down in a panic: "Tuvimos que inyectar algunos milloncejos para salvar al

mercado financiero… y ahora tenemos algunos problemillas de liquidez sin importancia… y…

¡Buaaa! ¿A quién quiero engañar? ¡Estamos en la más absoluta ruina! ¡Este país se va a la

mierda!" (Saló, *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda,* author's emphasis n.p.). / "We had to

inject a few million to save the financial market… And now we have a few minor problems with

liquidation… and… Buaaa! Who am I kidding? We are in total ruin! This country is going to

shit!" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p., author's emphasis, my translation).

This moment is important because it marks a continuing trend throughout the comic of characters referencing the title of the work as they lament the state of the country. ("This country is going to shit"). Having this be stated by the prime minister himself clearly references the powerlessness of national governments within the European Union when it comes to fiscal policy (and austerity), suggesting that perhaps the Spanish government's handling of the crisis (be it led by the PP or the PSOE) may have been hamstrung somewhat from the outset, further lamenting the state of current affairs.

Ultimately, of course, the prime minister cannot help them – he directs them to the office of "The Master" who is the one that controls everything. At first it seems to be Jordi Huntado, a longtime Spanish radio and TV personality, but Gandalf returns as Gandalf the White (as he does in *The Lord of the Rings*) and a gag running several pages ensues as they continually remove masks to reveal the Master's "true" identity – José María Aznar, Spongebob Squarepants, María Antonia Iglesias, and finally, someone whose identity is blocked by a grey censor box: "Imagen censurada por los servicios secretos de Españistán… Voz retocada por los servicios secretos de Españistán" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p.) / "Image censored by the secret service of Españistán… Voice retouched by the secret service of Españistán" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p., my translation). This person, as well, offers them no help, but it does not matter – Frida eventually reveals that she is incredibly rich due to having inherited a dead relative's fortune, and when she and Fredo declare their love for each other, she pledges to pay off his mortgage so they can live happily ever after. They leave, and as they do so, the man in charge drops the grey box that had been censoring his face, revealing his identity to be the Chinese immigrant who ran the bar at the opening of the comic.

That there is no true resolution to the crises facing Españistán is key to understanding the comic. It is important that Fredo and the rest have traversed the entire country to find relief from a predatory mortgage in the powers that be, only to discover that there is no help to be had. The governing systems of Españistán are powerless in the best-case scenario and corrupt in the worst-case scenario. The only reason Fredo finds any relief at the end of the comic is that Frida has inherited a wealthy relative's fortune, or as she puts it, "Estoy tan forrada que un día se me cayó la calderilla del bolsillo en un campo de patatas y el estado lo consideró la mayor inversión en suelo agrícola de la historia…" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p.) / "I am so loaded that one day loose change fell out of my pocket in a potato field and the State considered it the greatest investment in agricultural land in history" (Saló, *Españistán: Este pais se va a la mierda* n.p.*, my translation). Fredo's problems might be solved due to private wealth, but nobody else's are. At the end of the day, Españistán still "se va a la mierda," / "is going to shit," as it were.

Beyond this, however, it is also important to consider this final image itself, depicting the same immigrant bartender being the one pulling the strings all along as the "Maestro". There are a few different ways that this could be interpreted, though in this reading this represents a mocking of those who view immigrants as a danger and source of competition for local workers and businesses, as discussed earlier. This is because it comes at the end of a relatively long-running gag in which the identities of true person in charge keep getting "revealed" and as such the depiction of the "final" reveal being the waiter from the beginning of the comic is especially absurd. As immigration remains an extremely relevant issue in Spain, this representation is especially timely. Though some scholars had previously noted that Spain seemed to be an exception to the rise of far-right parties channeling feelings of fear and xenophobia of the

populace (Encarnacion 167-185), the rise of populist radical right parties in Spain such as Vox in recent years (and especially since the national elections of April and November 2019) have changed this (Ribera Payá & Martínez 410-34). The absurdity of the above image drives home the absurdity of such hatred of immigration by making this "reveal" equally absurd.

How, then, can we trace the mobilization of affect – and of indignation in particular – in this comic? How does Saló wield this indignation as a counternarrative to politics of neoliberalism, austerity, and populism, and as potential driving force to peaceful revolution, as Hessel describes it? Saló presents an allegory of Spain in the form of the floundering nation of Españistán, essentially orientalizing Spain to stoke the indignation of the reader at how Spain as a country is "going to shit" by comparing it to countries of the Middle East and Central/Southern Asia. Key here is the matter of corruption, which the comic seeks to highlight by depicting Spain in this way (corruption having been discussed in detail in both the introduction and the second chapter of this dissertation). However problematic this orientalism may be from a postcolonial/decolonial standpoint, insofar as it fails to account for the West's direct involvement in the instability of many of the nations of the region, it is an effective strategy to stoke indignation at the failures of the Spanish state to protect its citizens from the dangers of late-stage capitalism and care for them during the depths of the financial and economic crisis. It also clearly traces these problems to Spain's history of authoritarianism and to the Culture of the Transition that seeks to erase (or at least silence) its memory. More than this, the extremely abstract illustration style and the every-day nature of the problems facing the main characters (predatory mortgages and risk of eviction) allows the reader to potentially map their relationships to these problematic structures of power by seeing these same (alienated) positionalities of the characters play out on the page. This is augmented further by the multi-modal combination of not

183

just the comics medium, but infographic video as well, which lays out the facts of the real-life crisis before the reader even engages in the plight of the allegorical Españistán. Indignation as affect, then, is at the heart of this work.

In sum, although Aleix Saló's *Españistán: Este país se va a la mierda* does not cite Stéphane Hessel's *¡Indignaos!* directly as Manel Fontdevila does in *No os indignéis tanto,* indignation is still a driving factor behind the narrative. Using scathing satire, Saló presents a (problematically) orientalist viewpoint of Spain in order to stoke the anger of his reader, as he tells the story of a citizen who is desperate to escape his predatory mortgage. It is here that Saló enables his reader to develop a cognitive map in the wake of the alienating experiences of hegemonic neoliberalism in Spain. Not only can the reader see their own struggles with the housing crisis and the economic crisis more generally play out on the page, but they can also map their own alienated positionality and relationship to the policies and government that have systematically failed them before, during, and after the crisis. This is especially true given the way in which the comic ends, offering no solution to these systemic problems. The protagonist is only rescued from his mortgage because he had the good fortune to fall in love with someone who is fabulously wealthy. Thus, Saló makes clear to his reader that there is much left for the average reader to be angry about, and much change that still needs to be realized to form a more equitable system.

Viñetas para una crisis

This brings us to the final work to be considered in this chapter: *Viñetas para una crisis,* a compilation of the daily political cartoons published in *El país* by Andrés Rábago García under the pseudonym El Roto. This work is a departure from the first two considered in this chapter, being a collection of his one-off satirical, political cartoons pertaining to the economic crisis in

Spain, with critiques aimed at the ultra-rich and the politicians of the time's handling of the crisis. Indignation plays an important role in constructing a counter-narrative critical of the master narrative of neoliberalism and the exemplary transition. El Roto's work has garnered significant critical attention, a corpus to which I seek to contribute by analyzing the ways in which it leverages indignation especially to enable cognitive mapping on the part of the reader. As with the other two works, Hessel's understanding of the key power of democratic revolution through indignation ring throughout the volume, as this selection of cartoons aim to provoke indignation through wry humor and a counterattitudinal view of the state of contemporary Spanish politics.

Andrés Rábago García was born in 1947 and has published under the pseudonyms OPS and El Roto with collaborations in *El Jueves, Tótem, El Cuervo,* and *Madriz* among many others. His published comics in *El País* have resulted in multiple books, including *Viñetas para una crisis* (*Andrés Rábago, El Roto*). He first began to publish as El Roto in the publication *Hermano Lobo* in 1972, and under this new pen name "…his cartoons became more overtly critical of the social situation in Spain, with the use of caustic humor and direct attacks on capitalism" (Mourenza 83). As Mourenza notes, these works stand out "for the simplicity of his drawings, with stark shadows and a short but striking text" (83).

In addition to *Viñetas para una crisis,* these cartoons have been compiled into other books as well, namely *Camarón que se duerme (se lo lleva la corriente de opinion)* (2011), *A cada uno lo suyo* (2013), and finally *El libro verde* (2014) (84). This point made by Mourenza regarding El Roto's art style combined with short texts will especially be important in this chapter's analysis of the ways that it seeks to mobilize the indignation of his readers.

Other scholars have noted that El Roto is a particularly good example of the "emancipatory richness that still suffuses political cartoons as well as comics," (Romero & Dahlman 21), especially in context with the economic crisis. In more specific terms, in the context of the economic crisis and the slashing of the welfare state, "'El Roto' has consistently worked in undermining the cultural and ideological matrix that has made this crisis possible by translating into visual codes its obscene cruelty" (21). These considerations underline some significant parallels with themes found in Manel Fontdevila's and Aleix Saló's works, in particular abstraction through cartooning and cognitive mapping. From this perspective we can begin to understand the ways in which indignation specifically is mobilized to create a counternarrative to neoliberalism, and how this counternarrative enables a reader to understand their own position within the larger neoliberal system.

Daniel Mourenza dives into some of the specifics of what sets El Roto apart as a political cartoonist. He observes that El Roto avoids focusing on real politicians and other notable public figures (as we have seen in the works of Manel Fontdevila, for example) and instead concentrates on what Mourenza refers to as social types, enabling El Roto to focus more intently on root causes of contemporary issues instead of media interpretations. Specifically, Mourenza uses the concept of ideology (especially as Stuart Hall understands it[65]) to approach El Roto's comics which are heavily critical of the state of the Spanish economy and its politics:

> He thus accuses the powerful of presenting a distorted image of reality that hides the real,
> material causes of conflicts. His ideology critique aims, therefore, to unveil hegemonic

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[65] "In this line of thought, Stuart Hall has defined ideology as 'the mental framework—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works' (29). Ideology, in this sense, can also be understood as the "strategies used by a class or social group to legitimize its power—sometimes, turning back to the previous definition—by masking, denying, or rendering as inevitable the material conflicts and internal contradictions of a given political and economic system" (Mourenza 85).

discourses in order to discover the real social relations that lurk behind the ideological

surface with which reality has been dressed up (85).

This, of course, is very much in line with other theorists that I have highlighted throughout this

chapter, in particular Hill's understanding of comics from a narrative studies standpoint that

understands their critical power as able to present counternarratives to society's hegemonic

master narrative. This also maps well onto the concept of cognitive mapping, which also seeks to

enable the individual subject to perceive their relationships to greater hegemonic discourses, in

this case postmodern, neoliberal society. This present study will seek to build upon this by

exploring the ways in which affect – and indignation especially – plays into this critical power,

and the specific ways in which El Roto utilizes indignation to carry out the ideology critique that

Mourenza is describing here. Indignation will prove to be a fruitful affect to enable cognitive

mapping on the part of the reader, especially considering that the Jameson's basis for cognitive

mapping is also related to ideology (although Jameson refers to Althusser and Lacan rather than

Hall, as Mourenza does).

This dissertation's analysis of previous works spent time on a detailed analysis of the

types of panel-to-panel transitions within the comic, but this form of analysis does not prove as

useful here, given that all entries in this volume represent single-panel, independent vignettes.

However, there is still much that can be gleaned from an analysis of the art. El Roto makes

extensive use of abstraction and caricature which, again, is a useful tool in cartooning that

enables the accessibility of complex topics. Where El Roto differs from other cartoonists

considered here, however, is his method of abstraction. He favors hard, dark line work in broad

strokes. The vignettes are mostly illustrated in black and white, which as previously discussed

allows for the ideas behind each cartoon to be communicated effectively. However, he frequently

punctuates these with a splash of (usually flat) color to accentuate an important detail or draw the reader's eye. Specifics will be discussed below, but such a strategy is important because as McCloud explains, "In flat colors forms *themselves* take on more significance. The world becomes a playground of *shapes* and *space"* (McCloud 192, author's emphasis). Given that many of these cartoons rely heavily on caricature, the effect of this use of color highlights unusual forms. This strategy is used to very great effect to convey emotion or atmosphere. In many instances it amplifies the feeling of dread and anger in an otherwise mundane looking scene, which drives the potential for cognitive mapping.

Before I can engage with the vignettes themselves, it is important to begin with El Roto's own introduction that he writes for *Viñetas para una crisis*, which enables us to not only gain an idea of author intentionality in his illustrations, but also help us begin to situate the power of indignation specifically. He opens with the following line: "Todo libro es en cierto modo un exorcismo, una manera de soltar lastre, un intento de dejar atrás una pegajosa fantasía o una insistente pesadilla" (El Roto 12) / "Every book is in a certain sense an exorcism, a way to discharge scraps, an attempt to leave behind a sticky fantasy or an insistent nightmare" (El Roto 12, my translation). This gives the reader certain insight into the mentality of the author. Though it perhaps goes without saying that any comic illustration reveals something about the author themselves, El Roto is presenting this as a product of his own ruminations, an attempt to exorcise the (neoliberal) nightmare in which we are living: "La sátira es aquel niño que señaló un día que el rey iba desnudo y que, cuando se hizo mayor, comprendió que ni siquiera había rey" (24) / "Satire is that child that points out one day that the King was naked and that, when he grows older, understands that there was no king in the first place," (24, my translation). His intentions are thus explicit. He hopes to demonstrate to the reader the fallacies of the present neoliberal

188

system, fallacies which have long existed regardless of whether people realized it. Thus, we can begin to see the seeds for cognitive mapping being sown by El Roto here, stating his intention to be the figurative child that points out the king's lack of clothes, to cite the old fable.

Further, however, he presents to his reader a direct call for action, asking for them to join him in attempting to foster change. Though we are all blinded by the bright lights of the stock market and the screens of our computers and cell phones, he says, "Es evidente que todos hemos participado de alguna manera en la creación del monstruo económico que nos devora, pues ningún ídolo es capaz de subsistir sin la ayuda de cuantos lo adoran…" (12) / "It is evident that we have all participated in some way in the creation of the economic monster that devours us, because no idol is capable of subsisting without the help of those that adore it" (12, my translation). This speaks, on the one hand, to Jameson's description of contemporary postmodern society as one that is driven by consumerism, alienation, and fragmentation, one in which we cannot help but be complicit. It also speaks to the hegemonic nature of neoliberalism. As Wendy Brown notes, neoliberalism inserts itself into every aspect of human existence, and as such we are all taken by the problematic systems of neoliberal economic policy. Accordingly, we all have work to do to affect real change. The wording of this quote and its lead up are familiar fare for what we have come to expect of satirical commentaries on the crisis, using humor to engage the reader and then using that hook to inform the reader that the vignettes that follow not only represent the author's own opinions, but also an invitation for the reader to engage with the issues and utilize whatever anger they inspire to do something about them. This is where cognitive mapping can do its good work.

The compilation of vignettes that follows this brief introduction from the author carries its satirical momentum upwards, opening with a vignette that attempts to place the economic

189

crisis as not a singular tragedy, but an event with deep historical ties. Artistically, a few key

things that are characteristic of El Roto are immediately apparent. The first is the heavy

linework, consisting predominantly of black and white with very limited color (in this case

golden writing on the dark windowpane) to punctuate it. It depicts a storefront named LA

CRISIS, and upon the window are stamped the words "Casa fundada en 1530" (28) / "House

founded in 1530" (28, my translation). In front of the storefront is a stooped individual in a

heavy overcoat, looking through the window. Their gait (and the clothing they wear) suggests

cold, hard times, which adds to the hopeless and dire mood of the comic itself. What specific

historical event the date on the window could be referencing is not clear[66], however, the author's

message is clear: the present crisis is not just due to recent events, be it the housing bubble or

neoliberalism more generally. Spain has always been in crisis.

That the work opens with this sentiment is important because the idea of a Spain that is

always / has always been in crisis is a common one, including amongst his satirist colleagues.

Manel Fontdevila, for example, published his cartoon "Una reforma urgente" in 2008 which

depicts the same message, though in a distinct way, essentially drawing a diagram of economic

crisis as cyclical in which crisis inspires an attempt to reform capitalism but always leads back to

that savage capitalism and speculation and, ultimately, a return to crisis (Fontdevila, "Una

reforma urgente" n.p.). Indeed, in an interview with Marta Caballero of *El cultural* on *Viñetas*

para una crisis and specifically on this vignette, El Roto is asked if the crisis is a never-ending

story. He had this to say: "Claro, son cíclicas. No sé si llamarlo una recogida de fondos en la

mesa de los tahúres que dominan todo y que, cada cierto tiempo, recogen sus fichas. Lo que hay

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[66] The 16th Century of course had numerous important happenings in Spanish history, amongst which Charles the 5th was formally crowned Holy Roman Emperor by the pope in Bologna in the year 1530, though he'd of course already been previously crowned King in each of his holdings, including in Spain (de Ferdinandy).

que hacer es salirse de esa mesa de juego" (Caballero, author's emphasis) / "Of course, they are cyclical. I do not know whether to call it a fundraiser at the gamblers' table who dominate everything and who, occasionally, collect their chips. What we need to do is leave this gaming table" (Caballero, author's emphasis, my translation). The connections here, thus, are obvious and powerful, and effective at stirring indignation. El Roto is again providing an opportunity for the reader situate themselves amongst the problematic (and cyclical) elements of neoliberal society. He is inviting them to recognize that their suffering is not something new or temporary, but rather something that must be dealt with for things to improve, lest history repeat itself.

In a later image, we can see yet another example of how El Roto mobilizes indignation to enable cognitive mapping. In this example, rather than call upon historical precedent, El Roto keeps the focus of his scathing satirical critique in the present moment. In this vignette, we can see an older, bald man in a suit standing at a desk and announcing that "Los empobrecidos por la crisis están poniendo en peligro a los bancos que la crearon" (35) / "Those impoverished by the crisis are putting the banks that caused it in danger" (35, my translation). Everything about the man and his surroundings suggests luxury, wealth, and decadence. His pinstriped suit looks expensive, of the type typically worn by bankers. The chair behind him looks high-backed and intricate, while the table before him seems to be made of some expensive, polished wood. Here again we see El Roto's use of a single splash of color to punctuate an otherwise totally black and white image, in this case adding a bit of luxury to the scene. Even in El Roto's hard lines and broad brush strokes, we can see the details of the man's hands reflected in the polished table as he speaks. It is satirical because the words do not match the image; certainly, a high-ranking bank official is in no danger from the crisis. The absurdity of the panel is one way in which indignation can be visually mobilized, precisely because of the tone of condescension in the

191

banker's voice – a man who lives in luxury at the expense of the crisis' victims stands behind a desk and dares to deflect blame. This is reminiscent of the concept of neoliberal guilt that Clara Valverde develops, and it is this very placing of blame on the victim that the *Indignados* organized around, among other factors. El Roto is effectively utilizing abstraction through cartooning to make it clear to his readers that placing blame upon the victims of the crisis is an alienating strategy of those who orchestrated the crisis in the first place, and who continue to enrich themselves upon the backs of the precariat.

This same sentiment is clearly communicated in other vignettes in the compilation. Consider a later image that appears to depict a man who has lost his job. Here, once again, we see a predominantly black and white image with a single splash of color for emphasis. The comic depicts a balding man in a tie and glasses with a window behind him, carrying a lidded box (colored yellow) and some sort of frame. The items the man is carrying suggest that he has lost his job. This is drawn abstractly and minimally, with dark linework and broad strokes. The image is captioned "Temíamos que los comunistas destruyesen el capitalismo, y resulta que al final lo estan hacienda los brokers" (36) / "We were afraid that the communists would destroy capitalism, and it turns out that the brokers are doing that" (36, my translation). Perhaps this man was once a banker or a businessman of some kind and has been a victim of his colleagues' mishandling of the economic crisis. Perhaps he was a politician, either voted out of office or otherwise compromised by neoliberal economics and politics. In either case, this vignette speaks to the indignation of various groups of people. In the first place, we can identify the plight of the unemployed, especially of those who lost their jobs in the wake of the economic bubble and the crash. The depiction of the man as older, when paired with the caption, also invokes the old fears of communism (which has been wielded by the far-right in Spain as far back as Francisco Franco

and his Nationalists, for example). In either case, the opportunities for cognitive mapping are clear here, leveraging indignation by pointing out those that are the true cause of the crisis: the political and financial elites.

What is especially intriguing is that this very same message is persistent throughout *Viñetas para una crisis,* and across social status lines. Where the previous image depicted someone in the white-collar sector suffering (or claiming to suffer) because of the crisis, a later vignette brings the issue back to those who have suffered the most throughout the crisis – the lower classes, the hard laborers – what Guy Standing refers to as the precariat. This scene, differing from the other vignettes featured here, is completely devoid of color, with only an abstract, black and white drawing of two men in heavy work clothes and hard hats, laboring on what appears to be a construction site. As they work, one of the workers states, "No podemos aumentar nuestra productividad al ritmo de su codicia" (48) / "We cannot increase our productivity at the rate of their greed" (48, my translation). This is a clear reference to the continued precaritization of working individuals, as they are pushed to the limits by the greed of the rich. Being devoid of color here is an important change for a few reasons. In the first place, as Scott McCloud explains, black and white images are most effective at conveying a didactic message, which this vignette does. As the workers go about their business, faces down and heavily lined, the exhaustion is apparent in their expressions and the ways in which their backs are bowed, as one clearly states their inability to maximize production to keep pace with the increasing demand of their employers. Importantly, therefore, this image can be said to be wielding indignation by means of evoking the truest suffering experienced by those under the heel of neoliberalism and austerity.

Indignation as a site of resistance in this compilation – and peaceful revolution, as Hessel describes it – climaxes with two vignettes, which each mark a departure from all the vignettes I have examined thus far in this chapter. In the first place, we can see a shift in El Roto's artistic style. Where normally his comics are almost entirely black and white with a single color added for emphasis, in these examples we see multiple colors at play, specifically as he illustrates the crowds. The effect, of course, is that it takes these highly abstract representations of people and transforms them into something that signifies multitudes. Each of these is then paired with a caption that pertains to one of the most iconic instances of indignation fueling peaceful resistance within the last decade – the 15M. The first caption reads "Los jóvenes salieron a la calle, y súbitamente todos los partidos envejecieron..." (65) / "Young people went out into the street, and suddenly all the [political] parties got old" (65, my translation). The message here is quite clear: the political parties in Spain had lost the faith of the people (and young people especially) as it (mis)managed the crisis. The second caption celebrates the marching of the multitudes as they answered the call to mobilization, depicting the multidues assembled in front of what appears to be the Moncloa. This scene is deeply reminiscent of the 15M demonstrations.

Locating indignation here is not difficult; after all, this affect is what granted the *Indignados* movement its name. What's notable here, however, is a distinct shift in tone. The vignettes that we have previously examined from *Viñetas para una crisis* are all quite grim both in terms of their content and the ways in which they are illustrated. This, however, marks a bit of a shift towards a more hopeful tone. After all, we clearly see a celebration of demonstrators answering the call, implying that there may yet be something that can be done about the crisis, and the neoliberal hegemony that fostered it. This small modicum of hope is carried over into the final vignette of the compilation.

In this final vignette, we see a hunched, exhausted-looking man sitting on the edge of his bed, surrounded by darkness. As he stares into that encroaching darkness, he says "Oscurece, por lo tanto amanecerá" (65) / "It is getting dark, therefore the sun will rise" (65, my translation). Taken out of context, this vignette might seem grim. It could represent, for example, a tired man relegated to precarity who must convince himself that things could get better, however unlikely that may seem. In context with the rest of the collection, however, this vignette ends the compilation on a high note, fresh off the celebratory images of the 15M *indignados*. Much as El Roto asserts in his introduction, we do have the power to affect real change and bring about the dawn at the end of the long, dark, night. As I have demonstrated throughout this close reading, El Roto routinely mobilizes indignation by using scathing, satirical satire to lay bare the lies of neoliberal capitalism and make the true depths of the crisis at hand accessible to his common reader, thereby potentially motivating them to act. This alone could have been enough – he could have ended the compilation on this note, with pure indignation. However, by ending *Viñetas para una crisis* on a high note – by first celebrating the 15M (which contained elements of communal joy, as discussed especially in Chapter 4) and then suggesting that even in the darkest of times daylight will still come, he is offering his reader hope. In essence, he suggests to his reader that should they be motivated by the indignation that they feel, some good may yet come of it. If the need for maps, as Jameson describes it, can be met through a mobilization of indignation, there may yet be hope for the future.

In sum, El Roto's *Viñetas para una crisis* presents a compilation of daily political cartoons from *El País* that challenge the master narrative of neoliberalism in Spain by means of a scathing satire and abstract cartooning that effectively enables his readers to cognitively map their precarious positionalities within hegemonic neoliberalism post-2008 by speaking directly to their

indignation. He does this by placing a heavy emphasis on both the suffering of the precariat because of neoliberal politics, and also upon the greed of the elites that fostered the crisis in the first place. This is in line with previous studies of El Roto's work, which have described him as consistently working toward "undermining the cultural and ideological matrix that has made this crisis possible by translating into visual codes its obscene cruelty" (Romero & Dahlman 21) and presenting an "ideology critique" that seeks to "unveil hegemonic discourses in order to discover the real social relations that lurk behind the ideological surface with which reality has been dressed up" (Mourenza 85). This fits well with this dissertation's focus on cognitive mapping, which itself is based in considerations of ideology (Jameson 90). By invoking the indignation of his reader through his cartooning, El Roto enables his reader to essentially see past ideological facades in order to map their relationship to the dominant structures of hegemonic neoliberal society.

Conclusions

Analyzing each of these volumes individually, the elements of indignation are easy to pinpoint, especially as they seek to challenge the prevailing master narrative of neoliberalism and the Transition. However, in reading them together the role indignation plays in each of these comics comes to the forefront, along with how this can mobilize a reader, and how political cartoons in general aids an understanding of the present neoliberal reality in a way that other mediums cannot. Throughout the body of this chapter, I have engaged with a combination of comics theory, affect theory, and a consideration of Stéphane Hessel's 2011 book *¡Indignaos!* Despite only being cited directly in Fontdevila's *No os indignéis tanto* (2013), Hessel's call for peaceful resistance driven by the indignation at the eroding of basic human rights in the name of capital runs as a powerful throughline throughout the three works considered here. Considering

that political satire can serve as an effective moral mirror of society (Chen et al. 134) and also

that studies have shown counterattitudinal political satire possesses the ability to inspire political

participation through the inciting of negative emotions (Chen 3011), this chapter fits well with

the established literature. But what does this look like in practice, and what precisely can be

gleaned from reading all three of these works together?

In conjunction, these three comics demonstrate that contemporary political cartooning in

Spain effectively challenges the master narrative of neoliberalism. Readers can identify their own

struggles in these pages, and thus put a name to that which plagues them. What they must then

do, these comics suggest, is seize the indignation that such identification engenders and use that

to fully comprehend their alienated position amongst the greater neoliberal social norms. The

counternarrative these comics present, in conclusion, is in line with Hessel's. They assert that

apathy is the worst thing an individual can exhibit in an age where late-stage capitalism is

eroding civil liberties and basic human rights. To achieve the peaceful, democratic revolution

that is necessary to maintain these, these works argue, one must embrace indignation. Affect

theory is useful here in helping us understand just how potent a driving factor indignation can be

– it helps them form literary meaning and see their own struggles represented, and perhaps be

motivated by this new understanding.

In conclusion, this chapter has sought to consider the rich tradition of political cartooning

in Spain and how it approaches neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis in Spain. As prior

scholars of cartooning have noted that political satire can provide a "moral mirror" for a given

society (Chen et al.) and expose the hypocrisies of a society's mater narratives (Hill), I have

sought to unveil how this operates in contemporary Spanish political cartoons, considering

Manel Fontdevila's *No os indignéis tanto* (2013), Aleix Saló's *Españistán: Este país se va a la*

mierda (2011), and El Roto's *Viñetas para una crisis* (2011). Specifically, I have sought to

understand what role indignation in particular plays in this endeavor, how it can mobilize a

reader in conjunction with satirical humor, and how the political cartoon enables cognitive

mapping in ways that other media cannot. To do this, this chapter continued to ground itself not

only in affect theory, but also in the throughlines of the dissertation, namely, precarity, alienation,

neoliberalism, and comics studies, as well as with Frederic Jameson's conceptions of cognitive

mapping. In so doing, this chapter demonstrates that these comics utilize indignation (and in one

case, directly cite Stéphane Hessel's call to indignation as source of peaceful revolution) to

challenge the dominant narrative of the exemplary transition to democracy and the ascendancy of

neoliberalism. In this, these works enable their readers to begin to develop their own maps by

demonstrating the harsh truths of the contemporary neoliberal order that oppresses them,

delivered through scathing satire and dark humor. This provides the reader a place to direct their

own anger and indignation. While I do not argue that these comics themselves mobilize their

reader, the analysis here demonstrates that they, at the very least, provide their readers with the

tools they need to become mobilized.

This is an important contribution to the field of comics studies and Hispanic cultural

studies as well. Political cartooning remains an important and promising field within the

umbrella of comics studies' and perhaps through a deeper consideration of them we as scholars

can continue to discover new ways that popular culture influences the society in which it was

produced, just as much as society influences popular culture. This is also an important

advancement in the narrative of this dissertation. Whereas we began by describing how the

experience of alienation and despair is depicted in dystopian comics, subsequent analyses have

demonstrated that comics are also capable of laying bare the depths of the corruption involved in

contemporary neoliberalism and the 2008 economic crisis, and how the indignation this corruption has inspired can be mobilized towards peaceful, democratic revolution (as described by Stéphane Hessel). The final chapter will take this discussion to its final logical step: how comics engage with the actual mobilizations of this outrage in Spain, and what can be learned from these mobilizations.

Chapter 4 – Joy and Precariat Awakening in Spanish Comics of Crisis

When Guy Standing described the new precariat class, he identified one of its characteristics as its failure to (as-yet) identify as a class-for-itself. As this chapter will demonstrate, this lack of class consciousness makes the precariat an ideal site for cognitive mapping, as the didactic comics considered in this chapter depict the potential stirrings of such an identity in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis. This chapter grounds itself in the protest and activist movements that arose from the crisis, such as the 15M *indignados* movement and the Plataforma de Afectados por la Hipoteca (Platform for those Affected by Mortgages, hereafter the PAH), and the ways in which they are depicted and cited in these fictional narratives. These didactic comics that consider the 2008 economic crisis in Spain have been extensively considered in the academy, which has demonstrated that they challenge the notion of the individual as the central axis of society (Vargas-Iglesias 247) and highlight the importance of forging interdependent relationships (Fraser 56). What is needed now is an in-depth consideration of these didactic comics, and what they bring to the discussion of neoliberalism in Spain post-2008. This is where this chapter intervenes, considering three such comics of crisis: Miguel Brieva's *Lo qué me está pasando* (2015) which cites the 15M, Isaac Rosa's & Cristina Bueno's *Aquí vivió: Historia de un desahucio* (2016) which engages directly with the PAH, and Isaac Rosa's and Mikko's *Tu futuro empieza aquí* (2017) which depicts a fictional mobilization with striking similarities to both of these movements.

In reading these comics, this chapter will seek to unveil what these didactic works mobilize in specific terms, and what critical power they leverage that other media that consider the crisis do not. To achieve this, this chapter will continue to ground itself in comics theorists (Scott McCloud, Thierry Groensteen, and Nick Sousanis), in theorists of precarity, alienation,

and neoliberalism (Guy Standing and Wendy Brown), and in cognitive mapping (Frederic Jameson). However, it will also engage with studies of the crisis and the protest movements that these comics depict (such as Luis Moreno-Caballud and Mayo Fuster Morell). What will become clear from these conversations is that in the face of the alienation that undergirds the protagonists' precarity, these comics celebrate the transformative joy of coming together in collective resistance against mutual struggle. As Moreno-Caballud details at length, a key factor to these social movements is the power of the voice of the Anyone, of the fusion of not just expert voices but of the common person as well in these collective acts of resistance. Important here is the protagonists' move from alienation and isolation to community, which depicts the potential stirrings of class consciousness among the precariat. This dynamic allows these comics to speak directly to the precariat individual suffering under the crisis, enabling them to better understand and cognitively map their own positionality against larger neoliberal social mechanisms. While this chapter does not argue that the comics themselves mobilize their readers, it demonstrates that fiction can intervene in this endeavor, facilitating the process of changing a reader's relationship to ideology and helping them understand their situation such that they can effect change.

This consideration builds upon previous scholarship of these comics that have considered such works as explicitly supportive of the 15M and other social movements. More than this, however, this chapter also represents the final step in the larger narrative of this dissertation project, which began with depictions of anxiety and feelings of ultimate alienation and has moved steadily towards a mapping of the individual's place in relationship to hegemonic neoliberalism and how an individual can visualize alternatives to that alienation. If such dystopian despair can be placed in context via depictions of the corruption that engender it and

the indignation that corruption inspires, a deep look at the real solidarity movements that mobilized this indignation (and their representation in cultural production) can provide the reader the information necessary to fully map their own alienated positionality in neoliberal Spain post-2008 as well as present hope for a better future. These comics represent a manifestation of those alternatives: the radical joy of coming together in resistance against mutual struggle.

Introduction

Let us begin by discussing the theoretical orientation of this analysis, in particular this chapter's understanding of the "Anyone" in context with the throughlines of this dissertation. When I speak of the voice of the "Anyone" I refer to the concept developed by Luis Moreno-Caballud, who discusses the 15M, the PAH, and the Mareas[67] protest movements at length. He highlights, among other things, these groups' open, non-hierarchical structures where anyone is welcome to participate and contribute, regardless of the nature of their knowledge or skillsets. In context with the 15M specifically, he explains that:

> In essence, if the new 'cultural power' coming from the 15M movement is capable of creating 'cultures of anyone' able to challenge the monopoly over cultural authority that experts, media, and intellectuals attempt to exercise, it's partly because it is capable of gaining access to a technopolitical infrastructure that allows it to 'construct the meaning of what happens in real time.' In other words, it can construct alternatives to the spin that cultural officialdom keeps putting on 'what happens' (224).

This chapter understands the voice of the Anyone as what is described in the text above – the active fusion of diverse voices that challenges neoliberal norms of exploitation and the control of "expert voices" over the official narrative. This focus on the fusion of diverse voices and

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[67] See: Revilla-Blanco & Molina-Sánchez

viewpoints is appropriate not only because its characteristic of the cycles of protest in the wake of the crisis, but also because of comics ability to unflatten readers' perspectives through bringing together distinct viewpoints (as Nick Sousanis describes). Thus, these comics assert that the precariat can make their own voices and experiences heard and in doing so work together to effect change., citing real cycles of protest to build their narratives. This chapter will briefly engage with these movements below to establish a greater connection between them and this framework, but in essence the conceptualization of the voice of the Anyone informs this chapter's analysis of how these comics enable the cognitive mapping of an individual's relationship to hegemonic neoliberalism (and the alienation that it engenders).

Importantly, in this analysis of how these comics are able to "endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system…" (Jameson 92), this chapter does not attempt to claim that such a mapping mobilizes society on its own. Instead, will argue that the creation of cognitive maps provides the reader with the information necessary to make informed decisions and judgments based on their own experiences with neoliberalism in Spain and the subsequent alienation that it exacerbates, which is even further compounded by austerity such as what was implemented during the crisis. Thus, as I consider neoliberalism as a hegemonic force (in context with Wendy Brown), these comics considered in this chapter respond to this hegemony by focusing in on the overcoming of alienation as experienced by the precariat individual through solidarity and direct action – a true celebration of the voice of the Anyone. Indeed, these comics suggest that the lack of identity within the precariat may well be changing (at least in Spain). Social movements such as those considered in this chapter, and the narratives that celebrate them, may demonstrate evidence of the precariat beginning to develop this consciousness, forged in part from the joy of solidarity and collective acts of resistance. The

comics considered here leverage this art form to take part in this developing consciousness, and create explicitly didactic narratives in so doing.

In connection with this theoretical orientation, it is important to engage with the solidarity movements that emerged in response to the 2008 economic crisis in Spain precisely because the comics that are considered here cite and engage with them. Two movements in particular are worth discussing here: the 15M and the PAH. While these are by no means the only two important movements that emerged during this time (we can think of the Mareas movements as another example), they are the two most obviously cited by these comics. They also respond directly to austerity in Spain in the wake of the crisis and the pressures placed upon the precariat individual as a result. Let us begin with the 15M demonstrations and the associated *Indignados* movement. The 15M is key to understanding the comics considered here, in particular *Lo qué me está pasando* and *Tu futuro empieza aquí,* which both cite the movement. Scholars note that the 15M is notable because it had many diverse components which synergized to form a larger whole; various mobilizations converged into the movement, including multiple generations and political newcomers: "Following the occupation of public squares, the movement negotiated a convergence of anti-austerity mobilizations, the student movement, the occupation of social centers and alternative practices resulting from the previous wave of the GJM[68]" (Morell 391). Some very important convergences happened in this context, especially regarding anti-austerity movements that had existed prior to the 15M. This is important because participants considered themselves a movement of persons rather than activists in an explicit sense: "Individuals,

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[68] The GJM refers to the Global Justice Movement, which predates the 15M. The GJM was a truly transnational movement made up of multitudinous groups: "At the organizational level, the flexible networking of many and different groups brings about experimentation with not only participatory, but also deliberative models of democracy" (Della Porta 43). In many ways these descriptors resemble those made of the 15M, as discussed both in this chapter and in the introduction.

organized groups and informal groups take part without losing their identity. They self-organize with messages that do not easily fit into the left-right ideological axis…" (Sampedro & Lobera 71). An important result is that three out of every four citizens between 2011 and 2013 reported being sympathetic to the movement, with a high degree of support for political change (75).

Prior research has shed light on how this looked in practice, arguing for the importance of collective identity and culture for the movement's success. Cristina Flesher Fominaya observes that many scholars attach theses of spontaneity to the 15M movement, which she acknowledges has some usefulness (especially in making new members of the movement feel welcome and involved). However, Flesher Fominaya notes that the movement can also be traced to prior solidarity movements, such as the GJM, regarding its mobilization practices, prominent figures, and focus on direct action and direct democracy. Engaging with the historical nature of this solidarity movement is important, she insists, because "It is not possible to adequately analyse social movement dynamics and development without considering the culture and history of the movements and how they are shaped by local and national contexts" (158). In sum, the 15M had at its heart a distinctly coalitional nature.

Because of the 15M's direct democracy and coalitional focus, its positionality was and is driven by many distinct voices. Spanish feminists were one such voice. Despite many of their proposals facing rejection early in the movement, Spanish feminists "emerged as discordant voices, re-activating the Spanish feminist movement as a political subject and contributing to repositioning the very knowledge on social justice defended by the 15M…" (Gámez Fuentes 361). This too emerged from historical feminist activisms and has resulted in a successful focusing of feminist groups in the 15M on "rendering visible within public space the oppressions suffered in the private sphere" (364). Similarly, feminist and queer politics played a critical role

in the development of the 15M's coalitional nature even in how the 15M camp itself was structured and organized by making their presence visible (such as with pride flags) and pushing the narrative of the movement as a whole. Despite facing sexual harassment and heterosexist criticisms, groups such as the Transmaricabollo Assembly and Feminismos Sol would play an integral role, combining their queer activism and anti-austerity demands, in particular regarding how capitalism exacerbates the discrimination against queer people (Navarro 94-5). Navarro expands on this by highlighting that the queer and feminist assemblies developed a sort of double agenda, addressing global issues for queer perspectives. Without their voices and actions within the coalitional framework, these perspectives would never have seen light (97). This serves as just one key example of the importance of coalition building and the voice of the Anyone in the 15M's work, something that these comics cite heavily in their narratives.

While similar in some ways to the 15M, the PAH is distinct from it in important ways as well. The PAH is the primary movement cited by *Aquí vivió: Historia de un desahuicio*. Pre-dating the 15M *indignados* movement, PAH was founded in 2009 by groups of people affected by the housing crisis and advocates active in the *V de Vivienda* movement. It became known for its simultaneous policy advocacy and civil disobedience practices like organizing squatting and occupying bank branches (Berglund 854). It is especially notable, according to Bergland, as producing "a new, hybrid 'revolutionary subject'" (855) through the combination of "anarchist influence in the movement, the Marxist analytical frames, and reformist proposals" (855). The tensions between these different advocate perspectives are what drives its revolutionary and novel nature.

Importantly, as scholars have observed, it is impossible to consider the PAH without understanding its makeup of local collectives that directly represent the interests and basic needs

of those they represent (Bereményi & Montero-Díaz 2). Bereményi & Montero-Diaz observe in their study of the organization that ultimately, the horizontal organization (both formal and informal) of the PAH gives those who are actively involved with it a real source of social capital, both to help them cope with their precarity and to gain leverage to escape from it (9). The organization has also proved adept at communicating their positions in the mainstream media and even receiving positive coverage across publications of varying ideological bases (Alonso-Muñoz & Casero-Ripollés 27). According to some scholars, the issues around which the PAH organizes are much larger than simply a matter of having a place to live, but rather the cultural significance of having a place to live: "La vivienda representa a la persona moral y económicamente. Por ello, el desahucio no solo despoja a la gente de un espacio geográfico fundamental sino que la destituye y margina socialmente (Suárez 86). / "Housing represents the moral and economical person. Because of that, eviction not only strips the people of a fundamental geographical space but also displaces and marginalizes them socially" (Suárez 86, my translation). Considering this social pressure to procure living space, the PAH offers a space for political dialogue, participation, and support in the face of the housing crisis (86). The social capital it provides can enable the individual to overcome the social exclusion that their alienation engenders.

The connections this movement has to the didactic narrative that the comics below seek to develop is clear, especially in context with community building and direct action as a source of resistance to the alienation that these comics depict. Moving from alienation to community, from depression to joy, is precisely how these comics empower their reader to better comprehend their own positionality within hegemonic neoliberal norms, as well as the didactic call to consciousness for the precariat these comics present. In line with these considerations, this

chapter will focus not only on the story these comics tell, but also on the artistic choices made by each author, as the rests of this dissertation has done. It is through these artistic choices that the authors can bring the reader into the narrative and reveal that the issues faced by the protagonists are not just ideological in nature, but also are examples of real-life struggle. More than this, however, they also document a moment of joy in Spanish history: the beginnings of an awakening in the precariat class.

This chapter intervenes at this juncture, analyzing three comics: Miguel Brieva's *Lo que me está pasando* (2015), Isaac Rosa's & Cristina Bueno's *Aquí vivió: Historia de un desahucio* (2016), and Isaac Rosa's and Mikko's *Tu futuro empieza aquí* (2017). While this chapter should not be construed as a comprehensive consideration of all such didactic comics, the goal is to demonstrate that the comics considered here are demonstrative of the ability of comics to approach such matters as the 2008 economic crisis and neoliberalism, and to complete the move from complete estrangement to direct action that the larger narrative of this dissertation has been tracing. In this, this chapter's analysis is grounded in throughlines of this dissertation, in particular neoliberalism, alienation, and cognitive mapping, and draw connections to the real-life protest movements that inspire these comics. In so doing, this chapter demonstrates how comics depict the move from alienation to community building, and why that matters, how these comics cite real solidarity movements to achieve this, and finally how does this all enables cognitive mapping for the reader. The short answer to these questions is the following. These comics celebrate the voice of the Anyone, of the coming together of diverse, multitudinous voices in the face of mutual struggle. Through this celebration these comics depict a move from alienation and isolation in contemporary neoliberal Spanish society to community building as a source of resistance, highlighting the transformative joy that this entails. This is significant because it

builds on previous scholarship of these works, detailing the undercurrent that unites their narratives: how a depiction of such joy enables a reader to better understand their own positionality amongst the greater contemporary neoliberal totality, and how this understanding can be mobilized towards a better future.

Lo qué me está pasando

Let us now move forward with a direct engagement with the comics to explore the didactic narratives they present. The first comic to be considered in this chapter is Miguel Brieva's *Lo qué me está pasando* (2015), which engages heavily with the 15M and thus provides a good starting point. As discussed in the introduction to this dissertation, previous scholars such as Benjamin Fraser has highlighted that this comic demonstrates an important evolution in Brieva's artistic style and propensity to engage with society from a counter-cultural perspective, and celebrates collective action as a means of resisting alienating neoliberal ideology. Building upon Fraser's observations, this analysis asserts that Brieva specifically does this by celebrating the 15M movement directly, highlighting the inherent joy in coming together in the face of mutual struggle in a sort of awakening of the collective power of the precariat. This emotional appeal, especially considering the protagonist Victor's own depression, drives the critique that it presents. This comic is not a depiction of the internal formation and negotiation of structure and group identity of the 15M, but rather a celebration of the ability of the collective voice of the Anyone to empower the individual through collective action to drive political and social change. It is an apprehension of the alienation of the individual in the time of the crisis and the offering of an alternative within a new social formation.

The author, Miguel Brieva, is a Spanish comic artist who has been active as a voice of protest since long before the crisis with a history of works that are critical of capitalism,

including the comics *Dinero* (2001-5) and *El otro mundo* (2009), among many others. His work

has been extensively studied in the academy and Brieva is considered a producer of comics of

protest whose style has evolved substantially over time (Fraser 18). Indeed, *Lo que me está*

pasando itself has been considered extensively, and emerges as a significant comic of protest,

especially in its approach of challenging the individual as the central axis to which society

should revolve (Vargas-Iglesias 247). Benjamin Fraser, for example, observes that the comic

pays close heed to the desperate need to overcome the effects of contemporary neoliberal

ideology. Especially in relation to Fraser's analysis of Brieva fusing his new long-form technique

with his tried-and-true full page vignette style, he highlights how Brieva uses his artistic choices

to drive the narrative with a particular focus on dreaming. Víctor's hallucinations routinely play

an important role in the comic. One important scene Fraser highlights is one in which Víctor is in

his therapist's waiting room, where he experiences a hallucination of a ficus tree admonishing

him on contemporary humanity's obsession with individualism and advocating for collective

action and community:

> Yet it is equally important to see the act of dreaming as intimately connected to the ability
>
> we have to enact a better world than the one that exists—by forging interdependent
>
> relationships and advancing collective interests. The speech given by the ficus tree[69] in

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[69] The monologue that the ficus tree delivers to Víctor, which Fraser is referencing here, is the following quote, which sums up the moral of the comic quite efficiently: "Desde que el mundo es mundo todo ha estado siempre unido, entrelazado, interdependiente lo uno de lo otro... ¡¿o qué os habéis creído?! Esta sobredimensión actual de la psique, los problemas personales y la subjetividad del sujeto es una anomalía biológica, un contrasentido empleado para mantener desorientado al personal... Los problemas no son de nadie, son de todos, ¡y es entre todos que hay que resolverlos!" (Brieva 64). / "Ever since the world has been the world, everything has always been united, interlinked, dependent upon one another… Or what have you believed?! This current overextension of the psyche, these personal problems and subjectivity of the subject are a biological anomaly, a contradiction used to keep the people disoriented... Problems don't belong to anybody, they belong to everybody, and it is everybody together that needs to resolve them!" (Brieva 64, my translation).

the office of Víctor's psychologist, chosen as the epigraph for this article, highlights the central idea of the story… (56).

Thus, for Fraser, *Lo qué me está pasando* identifies Brieva as a committed *quincemayista,* especially in context with his previous work which has always shown a commitment to counterculture and engaging with the problems of neoliberal and post-Franco Spain (46).

Importantly, Xavier Dapena puts this directly in context with Spanish neoliberalism and argues that the comic "es la consumación del escenario de impotencia y precarización de la vida" / "is the consummation of the stage of impotence and precaritization of life" (my translation) in the neoliberal phase of Spanish capitalism and proposes a constituent outlook and advocacy for community as cure for precarious life (101). This provides a very useful connection to this chapter's analysis of the comic, which presents joy as a direct source of relief against alienated precaritization. I seek to expand upon these considerations by analyzing how Brieva's work engages with the inherent joy to be found in the mutual resistance against a common struggle, incarnated especially by the voice of the Anyone. This joy can be read as an endpoint in a journey from alienation to community building in *Lo qué me está pasando*. This is how the comic enables cognitive mapping, demonstrating through its fictional narratives a potential solution to the readers' own alienated position within hegemonic, contemporary neoliberalism. In sum, through seeing the move from alienation to community on the page, the reader can begin to conceive of their own ability to make the same moves.

Lo qúe me está pasando tells the story of Víctor, a 32-year-old man from Madrid in the grip of a deep depression. Víctor has struggled with unemployment - and precarity - because of the crisis. Having been unable to find work in geology, his field of study, Víctor has been reduced to a series of low paying and temporary jobs to make ends meet, living in his deceased

grandmother's apartment. The narrative of this comic is a deeply personal one. It is narrated in first person by Víctor himself, being a personal journal that he starts at the insistence of his therapist Milagros. As a result, the reader gets a deep look into Víctor's deteriorating mental health. He begins to experience strange hallucinations and manifestations of his depression, while his neighborhood park - the center of his local community - is threatened by development and construction of a shopping center. Just as importantly, however, the reader gets an equally personal look into Víctor's recovery, as he becomes involved in solidarity movements (from local activism to a protest movement that is strikingly similar to the 15M) and through this finds the joy and purpose in community that he seeks throughout the narrative.

Miguel Brieva's art style is crucial in the development of this narrative, as he is very deliberate with his combinations of text and image. In line with the personal journal format of the comic, the characters and scenery are drawn almost as sketches, as if Víctor himself is drawing the panels as much as he's narrating the story. The panels are overlaid by Víctor's cursive script, fully sealing the unity of Víctor's personal narrative with the often-fantastic depictions of his life and struggle with alienation and depression. This narrative is supported by the predominantly colorless art style. The comic is illustrated almost entirely in black sketching on a beige background, which communicates Víctor's feelings of hopelessness and purposelessness. Importantly, however, this drab visual scene is punctuated by the bright-orange hallucinatory manifestations of Víctor's depression, which often directly demean him, affirm his self-loathing, and/or provide him with a sort of imaginary friend (in the form of the stuffed bear Aparicio, for example), filling a need in his sense of alienation from those around him.

As part of this artistic strategy, Brieva makes use of delicate and intricate linework to enhance shading and the level of detail, not only in human faces but also in backgrounds and

212

environments. This is unlike the latter two works to be considered in this chapter, which favor a more abstract illustration style that encourages readers to see the face of the Anyone (and, indeed, themselves) in these characters. In Brieva's art by contrast the reader is very much looking upon the face of another - of Víctor above all else. Whereas later comics' more abstract art grounds the reader in the experiences by encouraging them to see themselves in the protagonists' struggle, in the case of *Lo qué me está pasando* there is instead a higher emphasis on text and first-person narrative, combined with this heightened realism, that evokes the reader's emotions by means of Víctor sharing his misfortunes with them directly. The Anyone is invoked differently here, as if the readers themselves are forging a sort solidaristic connection with Víctor the way he does with his comrades in arms in the comic.

A further, more detailed breakdown of the art using Scott McCloud's criteria makes this distinction much clearer. For example, an analysis of the panels of the comic and the transitions between them reveals much about Brieva's storytelling strategies. The comic is quite variable in the ways in which it transitions between panels[70], resulting in a widely variable depiction of the passage of time; the narrative routinely jumps from Víctor's present moment to reflections on his past, to details of his otherworldly fantasies. Also telling are Brieva's combinations of text and image, which illustrate a high importance placed on text, furthering the "personal narrative" structure of the work[71]. The result is a work that is equally grounded in form as much as content.

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[70] Taking the first 25 pages as an example, we can see that there are 107 comics panels in total, and 106 transitions between panels. Of these, the most common are subject-to-subject transitions (34 total), wherein the artist stays within the same moment or scene. The next most common are scene-to-scene transitions that jump significant distances in time and/or space and aspect-to-aspect transitions that cast a wandering eye over a scene while generally ignoring time otherwise (at 21 each). Also present are action-to-action transitions (16 total), moment-to-moment transitions (10 total), and non-sequitur transitions (4 total).

[71] Of the 98 panels that combine both text and image, the most common type is the word-specific combination (33 total), in which images only illustrate an otherwise relatively complete text. The next most common is the interdependent combination (31 total) in which text and image together create meaning that neither could alone. Also present were the duo-specific (15 total) with text and image essentially telling the same story, picture specific

Not only is Brieva developing a didactic message (i.e., the joys of being together as an antithesis to the alienating effects of neoliberalism and precarity) but is also simultaneously exhibiting extensive flexibility in his artistic style, with high levels of variation in panel arrangement, transition, and combination of text and image. This makes sense with Brieva's choice to illustrate in a manner that is almost entirely devoid of color, which Scott McCloud notes often more effectively promotes the story or message of a work than one in color (McCloud 192). The notable exception to this is the occasional insertion of bright color, most often orange, where Víctor's hallucinations appear or when the reader is transported to fantastic scenes of Víctor's imagination. The form of the comic, in sum, appears not to be just a vehicle for the telling of the story, but rather is an integral and purposeful part of the storytelling itself.

Let us now turn to a close reading of the comic to see how this works in practice. As a close reading will demonstrate, this artistic style is integral to the development of the comic and its didactic message. This analysis contributes to these conversations by highlighting the inherent joy depicted in these works formed from the coming together of the many voices of the Anyone – a joy that is deserving of its own special attention because of the power it possesses and the potential awakening of the precariat collective power it represents. This is important because it represents and cites the inter-generational and synergistic nature of the 15M and similar movements themselves.

Describing Víctor's mental state and how it is portrayed in the art is the ideal place to start for this analysis, as it sets the stage for the remainder of the chapter. In Víctor's "Miércoles 27" entry (18), Víctor is describing how unlucky he has been in finding work. He lies awake in

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(8 total) where the image is dominant and words merely provide "soundtrack", parallel combinations (6 total) where text and image seem to be telling different narratives, and finally additive combinations (5 total) where text and image complement and enhance one another.

bed tormented, as the cleanliness of his dead grandmother's flat deteriorates around him and subject-to-subject panel transitions[72] offering variable views of Víctor and his surroundings. Periodically the monochrome scene is punctuated by the bright manifestations of Víctor's depression, as in the scene above from the opening of the comic, depicting the unemployment office wherein Víctor imagines himself dead in the middle of the floor, bright orange tentacles emerging from his chest. It appears as if these tentacles are seeking aid and connection with another human being, though not a single person takes notice. Benjamin Fraser also highlights the importance of this scene: "In what could just as equally function as an isolated one-off, the protagonist's body becomes, from the outset, a concrete visual metaphor for Brieva's indictment of a normalized alienated and alienating social environment" (Fraser 53). It represents an important and interesting use of Brieva's single-page vignette historical style intermixed with his multi-panel storytelling in the comic. It's also a prime opportunity for cognitive mapping, as Víctor's story is very much a representation of the extreme levels of precarity fostered by the crisis. The reader is encouraged to view themselves in Víctor's suffering, and perhaps be inspired by Víctor's transformation at the end of the comic.

Other notable examples include the scene in Víctor's bathroom from the entry on "Jueves 28" (21), as he is lectured about the crisis by his (bright orange) fish-shaped soap dish. This again highlights Víctor's alienation and depression quite well. Notice how the use of color here highlights not only the soap dish, but also the grotesque – his urine in the toilet, for example – as the author includes onomatopoeia of Víctor's urination and bowel movements. The inclusion of the grotesque – in the depiction of the mess that is his flat as much as this bathroom scene – parallel in many ways how Víctor feels about himself and his life. Everything is hopeless – so

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[72] Or panel transitions that switch between subjects while generally staying within one scene or idea (McCloud 74).

215

what's the point? As the fish points out, "*el crisismo*" ("crisis-ism") will soon take over

everything, and the crisis will be permanent. There is no hope of overcoming his present reality.

This is deeply reminiscent of previously discussed narratives of crisis as being inherently

cyclical (as Fontdevila and El Roto indicate). Also appearing in this entry is what will become

one of the most important of Víctor's hallucinations, though it is not bright orange like the rest. It

takes the form of an image that begins to appear to him in the mirror, first as a spot he cannot

clean and then slowly manifests as the human face of a prehistoric man. This mysterious figure

does not speak to him but is always present – and will serve as a key driving point in the plot

later in the comic. For now, though, the man is silent, always observing Víctor.

The occasional injection of color into the monochrome artistic style is not the only

important artistic choice that Brieva makes as he constructs his narrative. What gives this comic

particular power is the fact that it is structured and narrated as a journal, making the narrative

deeply personal. It is also a notably *individual* narrative. In a very real way, this presents a foil to

the building of community that happens late in the comic, a community that rescues Víctor from

his pit of despair. This individual narrative is recording Víctor's alienation and precaritization, as

it was an assignment given to him by his therapist – something that parallels Guy Standing's

understanding of the precariat experience well. As he explains: "People are being encouraged to

seek out counseling to combat their anxieties and ailments, and to resort to therapy, particularly

cognitive behavioral therapy, to handle the stresses and strains of their insecure lives" (Standing

126). This also calls to mind Clara Valverde's conceptualizations of neoliberal guilt, where the

blame is placed on the precaritized individual for their suffering and as such the onus is on them

to deal with it. This is not to say, of course, that therapy is not a good or beneficial thing; rather,

what is on display here is the fact that alienating neoliberal ideology has pushed Víctor – and the

216

Anyone that he represents – to solving some imagined internal problem with himself rather than conceptualizing the greater cause of his alienation. After all, as Valverde explains, the neoliberal system only desires normative bodies that can be effectively exploited (16). In this we can see cognitive mapping at work, speaking directly to that reader who may find themselves in similar circumstances to Víctor (isolated and living a life of precarity). In conceiving of this positionality, as Víctor ultimately does, there is the potential to conceive of alternatives.

Though alienation and Standing's conceptualizations of the precariat form a basis for this chapter, the true focus is on the inherent joy in the coming together of the Anyone that allows the protagonists to overcome their alienation and find a measure of peace and purpose in their lives. It essentially encapsulates a journey from alienation *to* the community building that enables this finding of purpose, which is where the greatest opportunity for cognitive mapping lies. There are two early examples of this in *Lo qué me está pasando* that must be noted. One of the earliest incarnations is the *Congreso Nacional de Jóvenes Emperdedores* ("National Congress of Young Losers") that Víctor joins as a member of its organizing committee, made up of him, Yolanda, Héctor, el Salvi, and his love interest Pepa. This scene in which they are introduced is interesting precisely because it highlights the ability of this *congreso* to provide its members with a sort of escape from the alienation, vulnerability, and overall precarity that rules their day to day lives, as they meet to discuss their quotidian troubles and missed opportunities (28). They are forming a community in opposition to their isolation, one which will drive their mobilizations going forward. It could also arguably represent a direct reference to (and parody of) the real *Congreso Nacional de Jóvenes Empresarios* ("National Congress of Young Entrepreneurs"), an organized event of the *Confederación Española de Jóvenes Empresarios* ("Spanish Confederation of Young Entrepreneurs") which celebrates young entrepreneurs as the key driver of the economy ("La

217

Región acogerá el Congreso Nacional de Jóvenes Empresarios en 2021"). Víctor's *congreso*, however, is the opposite – not a neoliberal ideal of young people furthering the free market economy, but rather a group of those harmed by it, and being given a space to air their grievances. It also, in this reading, satirizes the neoliberal ideology that celebrates entrepreneurship. Though in the beginning this is not a formal activist movement, this "committee" will become integral to Víctor's belonging in the solidarity of the larger protest movement that directly cites the 15M.

The other early incarnation of this community building and coming together of the Anyone that helps radicalize and drive Víctor towards activism is his encounter with who he deems the "Invisible Man," seen in the entry "Jueves 5": "Hoy he conocido al hombre invisible. O al menos eso es lo que él sostiene, que nadie puede verle. Si me preguntan a mí, yo diría que, para ser invisible, no pasa precisamente muy desapercibido. Y, para ser sinceros, locuacidad tampoco le falta al hombre…" (Brieva 43). / "Today I've met the Invisible Man. Or at least that's what he insists, that nobody can see him. If you ask me, I would say that, for being invisible, he doesn't go very unnoticed. And, to be sincere, he also doesn't lack loquacity" (Brieva 43, my translation). The man, who Víctor assumes to be homeless, claims that he lives everywhere and nowhere and speaks to Víctor of many of the same things that plague Víctor himself: no pensions, low pay, a broken justice system, climate change, partisan politics, and so forth. Yet he offers Víctor a potent piece of advice: "Mira, chaval… Da igual dónde estés… Lo único importante es saber qué te ha llevado hasta allí" (Brieva 44) / "Look, young man… It doesn't matter where you are… The only important thing is to know what has brought you to that place" (Brieva 44, my translation). This is one of the earliest incidences of the coming together of the Anyone, as the Invisible Man and Víctor here form a bond that carries through the rest of the

218

narrative. Víctor must learn to trust this man, especially as he later aids Víctor in rescuing his friends and fellow organizers of the *Congreso Nacional de Jóvenes Emperdedores* when they are arrested. He is also heavily implied to be the ghost of a man killed by police violence, a precaritized soul like Víctor who faced a much darker fate.

One of the first times this coming together produces direct action emerges in the entry "Lunes 9" (62). The *Congreso Nacional de Jóvenes Emperdedores* is wandering Madrid together, intoxicated, when they find themselves in the financial district and crash an economic forum by stealing entry passes. As Víctor's narration explains, their infiltration gets out of hand, as the friends see an opportunity for protest and subversion. They storm the stage, take control of the cameras to demand action against the precarity they find themselves in, and smash a screen – a true venting of the indignation of the precariat's experience which was the focus especially of the third chapter of this dissertation. These scenes are interesting for a couple of reasons. The monochromatic artistic style persists here, but in this situation the periodic injection of orange isn't due to manifestations of Víctor's depression or vices, as is so often the case. Rather, here it can be seen highlighting the object of the group's ire – the giant screen they smash, or the TV screen on which they appear to demand change and action. These pages also represent a relatively higher variability in transition styles between panels. In some instances, we see subject-to-subject transitions which take us around the scene and demonstrate the various antics Víctor and his friends get up to, while in other moments we see action-to-action transitions, such as the chair being thrown through the screen. This gives the scene a chaotic feel, especially when coupled with the relatively large number of panels on these pages, which parallels the frustration and indignation of their precarious existence. Coming together, however, has helped them piece together the larger systemic problems at play here and has inspired them to act, even though in

this case it is disorganized and spontaneous. This is one of the earliest sparks of precariat awakening we see in the comics, and another opportunity for cognitive mapping.

For Víctor and the others, however, things will only get worse. It is announced that their local park will be demolished for the construction of a shopping center, which officials insist will economically benefit the neighborhood. The community is angry, however; they gather to discuss the situation, and it is revealed that not only will this construction project eliminate the park that they had to fight for in the first place, much like their schools and health center, it will also displace people from their homes. Víctor's love interest Pepa and her father, for instance, live on the periphery of the park, essentially occupying the space because they have nowhere else to go. This shopping center represents gentrification, a literal neoliberal invasion into the lives of those already alienated and precaritized by neoliberalism in the first place. It also calls to mind Guerín's 2001 film *En construcción,* which focuses on the experiences of the people of a neighborhood being gentrified, with striking parallels to this plot point in the comic. This is significant precisely because the film was released as the housing bubble itself was "under construction", so to speak, under José María Aznar.

Víctor is thus at his lowest at this point in the narrative. It seems that his *Congreso* is powerless to stop the demolition of the park, and he has been alienated from Pepa due to her encountering him having an argument with Aparicio, the teddy bear-shaped hallucination that he has substituted for belonging throughout the narrative. Construction begins on the shopping center, and the park is levelled in the process. In one of the most important moments in the comic, however, Víctor is given a choice. Consider the artwork from the entry "Domingo 15" (80). At this point, Víctor has almost entirely given in to his depression. Here Víctor reveals that he has closed himself inside his home, as manifestations of his anxiety and depression literally

entangle and strangle him, whispering in his ear that there is no hope, that all is, indeed, lost. Brieva shifts his artwork to a slightly more regimented style – instead of many panels with varying arrangement, we have an even six on each page, equally sized, and the transition style has shifted to action-to-action transitions, as these manifestations of his anxiety slowly ensnare and strangle him.

Importantly, however, Víctor breaks free from these tendrils of depression. As he does so, he is visited again by the prehistoric man that throughout the comic has been appearing in his mirror, slowly becoming clearer and clearer but never speaking. As the man becomes more distinct and pronounced, Víctor begins to see him not just in his mirror, but in his reflection elsewhere as well – and others begin to appear with him, others that appear to be from all time periods and walks of life. Now, in this moment, the prehistoric man appears more clearly than ever before, and for the first time directly interacts with Víctor. He reaches through the mirror and offers Víctor a handmade flute. This is significant because the prehistoric man, as with the other multitudes from all places and time periods that later appear in Víctor's reflection, shares one essential thing with Víctor – their humanity. He, and the multitudes that later follow him, represent the species-essence and the fellow man from which Víctor has been estranged. In this light, what Víctor experiences here reminds us of the mirror image (Lacan 441-7), though rather than recognizing *himself* as symbol here, he is coming to recognize the solidaristic identity that he had heretofore been denied. Being offered this flute presents Víctor with a choice. He is symbolically being offered the chance to embrace his fellow man from whom he has been alienated, to join the voice of the Anyone and to find strength in community. Víctor must decide to not only trust himself, but those around him as well. There is joy to be found in community and the mutual struggle for a better life, but he must choose to embrace it.

This moment sets everything else in motion, as Víctor is quickly given another opportunity to choose to trust in the Anyone and in community. Met with rejection on all sides, and his friends having been arrested, he overlooks the destruction of his park in despair and receives his next call to action from the other true figure of the Anyone in the narrative – the Invisible Man himself. He calls Víctor to action and together they go to the police station and break Víctor's friends out of jail. This is significant because, again, Víctor is given a choice to either meekly accept alienation and precarity or to take a change and trust in the power of the collective Anyone to make change. He does not know how this situation will play out, and so he must decide to trust in the Invisible Man; it is essentially a leap of faith. Importantly, as he and the Invisible man head to the police station, Víctor looks sees not only himself in his reflection, but also a crowd of human beings from all eras of human history behind him. They symbolize the choice Víctor has made to stand in solidarity with others against the oppressive systems that have kept them down. What joy has existed in Víctor's precaritized, alienated life up to now has always been in community, and now he must choose to fully embrace that.

This symbolic choice is brought to fruition a few pages later, as Víctor and his friends – now liberated from jail – are engaged in a fictional demonstration that very strongly resembles the 15M. As they experience brutalization at the hands of the police and Víctor is pushed up against a police van (reminiscent of Fontdevila's reflections on police brutalization of dissent in *No os indignéis tanto*), the prehistoric man appears to him and speaks for the first time – telling him that now is the time for action. Víctor plays the flute this apparition had previously given him and for the first time, the orange manifestations of Víctor's imagination do not plague him, but rather come to his aid. In the following pages orange roots burst from the ground, ensnaring the police that had been brutalizing them, and orange tetrahedral spaceships emerge from the

222

clouds in the otherwise colorless sky (100-1). Brieva here makes use of the single-panel, full

page spread, which forces the reader to stop and truly fixate on this moment – the moment in

which Víctor has embraced the joy in being together, the hope that is to be found in mutual

resistance. It is also a leap of faith, in which Víctor decides to take what could very well be a

manifestation of psychosis seriously.

Indeed, for Víctor the joy in being together is not just metaphorical. For making the

choice to embrace the power of the Anyone, to stand in solidarity with those from whom he has

been alienated, he is immediately rewarded. The manifestations of his imagination immediately

stop tormenting him. Later, he wakes up next to his love interest Pepa, an important development

as previously his depression (and interactions with his hallucinations) had distanced him from

her. He reflects upon the successful wave of the demonstrations from earlier, a fictitious

depiction of the 15M (drawn as a literal orange wave sweeping the streets). He and Pepa seem

happy. Even if there remains work to be done, Víctor seems to have found a sense of belonging

and purpose, marked not only by the contented way in which he and Pepa exist together, but also

in the fact that he is no longer beset by fantastic manifestations of his depression. His soap dish

is no longer orange and does not speak to him. There is no prehistoric man in his mirror. Joy in

community and mutual resistance has reshaped Víctor's life entirely. He has successfully

completed a journey from complete isolation and depression to community, and in so doing has

found strength and purpose. This is significant also because of the possibilities for cognitive

mapping on the part of the reader. Not only can a reader contextualize their own experiences

with precarity in this narrative in order to conceive of their positionality against broader

hegemonic neoliberalism in Spain, but also visualize one possibility for relief as well: the joy in

coming together against mutual struggle. The comic implies that the answer to the alienation and

fragmentation of postmodern, neoliberal society is to embrace the voice of the Anyone, to identify one's own relationship with and oppression by hegemonic neoliberal norms and come together in solidarity to push back against it. The answer to the extreme neoliberal anxieties discussed at the opening of this dissertation is its opposite: the radical joy to be had in coming together in solidarity.

Approaching this comic with joy in mind reveals that Brieva's commitment to his protest art highlights a celebration of the Anyone, as Moreno-Caballud conceptualizes it. Certainly, joy is not the only important factor in the narrative – I have detailed the anger, anomie, and especially the alienation that plagues these characters and, as Guy Standing argues, plagues the precariat in general. Nevertheless, the desire to be together (as Scott Boehm describes it in his analysis of *microteatro)*, and the joy to be found in solidarity against mutual oppression brings about the transformation in these characters in a very real way and drives the narrative by providing a foil for the alienation and precarity that the protagonists (and particularly Víctor) experience. The narrative of community building out of disparate peoples is unmistakable. Víctor is an educated young person who had wanted to pursue a career in science but was denied that because of the crisis. In addition, each of the members of the *Congreso Nacional de Jóvenes Emperdedores* has suffered in their own unique way. Even the figments of Víctor's imagination represent people from diverse walks of life – such as the prehistoric man in his mirror and the crowds of people from all times and places he sees behind him in his reflection. The Invisible Man, too, implied to be the spirit of a victim of police violence, comes to Víctor's aid, and it is through the joint effort of all these individuals – and Víctor making the choice to stand with them and trust in them – that allows them to be triumphant.

This is an exercise in celebration of the 15M. The direct connection is drawn by Brieva intentionally citing the 15M, not just in the artwork but in the coalitional nature of Víctor's collective throughout the comic. As I have previously elaborated through a consideration of Morell and Flesher Fominaya's analyses of the 15M movement, the movement is defined by its intergenerational, multidimensional, and synergistic nature. Essentially, Brieva has fully embraced what Scott McCloud understands as comics' ability to abstract complex topics such as the economic crisis and neoliberalism more generally and make it accessible to a wider audience, in this comic, celebrating the movement by celebrating the joy in community building and mutual aid in times of crisis, particularly in the face of alienation and precarity. In sum, abstraction through cartooning and the fusion of multiple vantage points (in the spirit of the voice of the Anyone) enable the reader to not only understand their own experiences with and relationships to contemporary neoliberalism in Spain, but also conceive of a potential solution to these problems –solidarity and mutual resistance, and the voice of the Anyone that this entails.

Aquí vivió: Historia de un desahucio

Let us now consider the next comic to be analyzed in this chapter: Isaac Rosa and Cristina Bueno's *Aquí vivió: Historia de un desahucio* (2016). Whereas *Lo que me está pasando* heavily cites the 15M in its fictional representation of a protest movement, this comic depicts a real organization in its narrative: the PAH. This comic highlights the suffering of the individual relegated to the precariat, as *Lo qué me está pasando* does, but here Rosa and Bueno double down on the issue of housing, and the real-life implications of those who have fallen victim to the housing crisis following the 2008 economic crisis. Like *Lo qué me está pasando,* however, it presents the joy in mutual resistance as a means of resistance to alienation and precarity, as more people pushed into the precariat find themselves increasingly unable to obtain and maintain

affordable housing. As the protagonist's family comes face to face with the implications of the eviction crisis, her deepening involvement in direct action and mutual aid networks within the PAH provide an escape from precarity through mutual aid and direct action, and through this act of resistance a certain measure of joy in solidarity returns to her life. In this, the comic presents the PAH as a hero of the story, effectively celebrating this solidarity network. This is where the comic enables cognitive mapping for the reader, not only enabling them to perceive of their own relationships to the issue of housing in contemporary neoliberal Spain by representing the real issues of the housing crisis post-2008, but also by encouraging the reader to learn about and identify with one real organization working to combat these issues.

Isaac Rosa, who authored the story for *Aquí vivió,* is no stranger to political commentary in his works, which themselves are not limited to the economic crisis. One notable example is his body of novels that are fiercely critical of the legacy of Francoism and of the ways in which concepts of historical memory are approached (such as his 1999 novel *La malamemoria*). Indeed, previous scholars have argued that Rosa's works advocate for an approach to memory and history that enables the understanding of the Spanish present reality and the issues with its democracy, arguing that any reparations for Spain's brutal past should go beyond the mere literary (Detry 21-2, 29). More importantly, Rosa has also taken up the issue of Spanish neoliberal democracy and the economic crisis, and important research has been done on his literary production on these topics as well. Previous studies have observed that when Rosa takes up the matter in his novels, such as *La mano invisible* (2011) and *La habitación oscura* (2013), one of the key factors in his writing is a mixing of discourses and perspectives (Rossi 132). These novels also mark a shift to the metaphysical, which had not been present in his earlier works, and which also makes an appearance in *Aquí vivió* (as the close reading below will

discuss). Cristina Bueno, the illustrator for this comic, is an artist hailing from Barcelona. She has collaborated on many works in the comic and editorial scene, including *El incendio* (with Rafa de los Arcos), *Ausencias* (with Ramón Rodriguez), and has produced her own comics as well, including *Sostres* (2012) (Bueno). This latter work is an autobiographical comic, published as a result of her winning a grant to pursue the project. She also won the Cómics Ciutat de Cornellà contest in 2013 ("Cristina Bueno"). Although the majority of her works have not yet been considered in the academy, her work with Isaac Rosa on *Aquí vivió* has received such scholarship, as shall be discussed below.

Prior research has considered *Aquí vivió's* ability to consider the power of collective action, alongside another of Rosa's comics, *Tu futuro empieza aquí* (also considered in this chapter). One study observes that as these comics confront the crisis, they enable the authors to conceptualize collective action in a way that apprehends the damage done by the crisis in Spain, especially in terms of its human cost. "Counter-realism" is an important strategy in these comics (as in Rosa's previous works), which is a way of writing that "no se echa atrás a la hora de ir literalmente 'en contra de' una realidad insatisfactoria y paradójica con la cual no está conforme" (Rossi 133) / "does not hesitate to literally 'go against' an unsatisfactory and paradoxical reality with which it is not content" (Rossi 133, my translation). As Rossi explains, both *Aquí vivió* and *Tu futuro empieza aquí* base themselves in the young viewpoint, *"lo cual universaliza la narración y permite emanciparla del desencanto o desasosiego –previsibles y justificables– del personaje adulto ante las cuestiones tratadas, a la vez que resalta la vulnerabilidad y la propensión al cambio de los protagonistas (133-4). / "which universalizes the narration and permits it to imancipate itself from disillusionment and unrest – predictable and justifiable – of

the adult character in the face of well-discussed issues, at the same time as it highlights the vulnerability and the propensity for change in the protagonists" (133-4, my translation). This is important, as these comics imagine "reality" otherwise, which works against the sense of inevitability associated with reality.

This is a reminder of the potency of indignation and the mobilization of it. Particularly important here are the highlighting of the young point of view – precisely because these two works focus on the youth who have been denied the futures they were promised or that they would have expected based on their parents' experience (as Guy Standing discusses in detail) – *and also* the propensity for change in these protagonists, faced as they are with extreme precarity and driven to seek out solidaristic networks that allow them to do something about it. In both *Aquí vivió* and *Tu futuro empieza aquí* the protagonists are fundamentally transformed, arguably for the better. As in the case of *Lo que me está pasando,* this transformation via a journey from alienation and community is what drives the comic's enabling of cognitive mapping for its readers. While it cannot be said that this comic itself mobilizes its readers, the PAH that it references does have this ability. In sum, multimodality, closure, and abstraction and cartooning (per Scott McCloud) alongside comics' potential for "unflattening" perceptions of the world (per Nick Sousanis) enable a reader to begin to engage in cognitive mapping. In seeing the alienated position of the protagonists of this comic abstracted through cartooning can they begin to better perceive their own such position (and what can be done about it).

Much as the other two works considered in this chapter center themselves on specific aspects of the crisis, Rosa's and Bueno's *Aquí vivió* focuses on the issue of housing and its impact during the crisis at large. The comic tells the story of the teenager Alicia and her mother Carmen, who move into a small flat purchased from the bank after falling on hard times and

228

losing their house to foreclosure. Soon, however, Alicia and Carmen discover the "ghosts" that still inhabit this home. One evening, an elderly woman (also named Carmen) shows up in their living room, claiming that the home is hers and mistaking the two of them for her own family, who share their first names. Around the same time, Alicia discovers a forgotten journal in her wardrobe belonging to the elder Carmen's granddaughter – also named Alicia. Seeing the plight of their own family reflected in that of the family that came before them, Carmen and Alicia get swept up in the fight for fair housing. Alicia gets involved in the PAH, fighting evictions, and finding a sense of community. In so doing she works to improve the situation of not only herself, but everyone around her, discovering the joy to be had in solidarity, in the coming together against mutual struggle. Her journey even brings her shattered family back together, her separated parents appearing to reconcile in the process.

Like the art style of *Lo qúe me está pasando,* Cristina Bueno makes strategic artistic choices to drive the narrative of *Aquí vivió*. The imagery is drab and monochrome, illustrated in shades of teal, white, and gray, with black line work. The bluish hues effectively capture the feelings of exhaustion and desperation that come with the precarity of the crisis, a significant parallel to the art of *Tu futuro empieza aquí* especially. Also like *Lo qúe me está pasando,* the comic periodically injects color into the otherwise monochrome scene to punctuate and drive the narrative. Whereas Brieva uses bright orange to highlight the protagonist's depression-driven hallucinations, Bueno uses green to highlight the PAH and the protests Alicia gets involved with (though it is not as vibrant as in the case of *Lo qué me está pasando)*. This will be examined in greater detail in the close reading below.

There are also some key artistic points that make *Aquí vivió* unique, however. Bueno illustrates people in a more abstract, cartoonish way than does Brieva. Facial features are drawn

minimally and abstractly, which, as McCloud explains, allows the reader to see anyone in these characters - even themselves (30), which is where potential for cognitive mapping can begin to form. This is an interesting distinction, because while Víctor's story in *Lo qué me está pasando* did depict the embracing of the joy and collective power of the Anyone, that was a distinctly personal narrative – a journal. *Aquí vivió* presents a different story telling strategy, encouraging the reader to see themselves in the abstracted main characters, who in turn are learning to see themselves in the plight of the family who came before them. Interestingly, however, the setting and background of each scene are not illustrated quite as abstractly as are the characters. Much more detail is paid to the specifics of a setting, especially within Alicia and Carmen's apartment - the furniture, the wallpaper, cracks in the walls, water stains, etc. The combination of these two factors results in a situation where the reader can identify with the characters and see themselves in them, but must pay special attention to the constricting and depressing narrative of space in the comic that drives the storytelling. This is especially apt given the importance of housing – of having a space in which to live – to the broader narrative.

When Bueno's abstract artistic choices are combined with other elements of her art, it can be said that this comic seeks to ground the reader in the present moment above all else, placing heavy emphasis on the daily struggles, emotions, and experiences of the characters. When it comes to panel-to-panel transitions, Bueno is much more dynamic than the other two authors considered here[73]. The most attention is paid to transitions that, as previously stated, keep the reader in the present moment, shifting between participants in the same conversation and the same moment (subject-to-subject) and transitions that indicate a single subject engaged in an

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[73] To illustrate this, I analyzed all of the transitions (84 in total) in the first 25 pages of the work. She places heavy emphasis on subject-to-subject transitions (32 of 84 transitions total in the first 25 pages), as well as on action-to-action transitions (25 total). Also present were aspect-to-aspect (13), scene-to-scene (8), and moment-to-moment (6) transitions

230

action (action-to-action). An analysis of the different types of combinations of text and image supports this, with most combinations being interdependent, in which image and text together create the whole story[74]. In almost all cases, the reader is required to pay close attention to the setting as much as the events taking place, grounding the reader in the here and now. Bueno combines this with a strategic use of color, which like *Tu futuro empieza aquí* straddles the line between black and white and flat color drawing. As McCloud indicates, black and white comics place more emphasis on the *meaning* and *message* of this comic itself, whereas flat colors give *forms* more significance. On the one hand, the monochromatic setting establishes the alienation and quotidian struggle of the protagonists, while the emphasis on shading in a flat blue color gives the background much more detail, situating *space* at an equal level of importance. In sum, the work seems to be grounded in *content* more than form, that is, the form is used as a vessel for the specific story that Rosa and Bueno are seeking to tell, as opposed to an experimental form that seeks to push the boundaries of what comic art can attain.

Aquí vivió constructs its narrative by overlaying a fictional story onto a framework that heavily cites the real PAH movement. Basing itself in real-life activism gives this comic its power, this comic celebrates direct action by championing the cause of a real solidarity network that arose in response to the crisis. Here, Rosa and Bueno allow the reader to approach the complex issue of housing in Spain (especially post-2008) as well as comprehend the greater situation of generalized precarity. This allows a reader to map their own relationship to these issues by seeing representations of them play out on the page, and through these narratives visualize potential solutions to their problems. The first few pages of the comic detail the human

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[74] Of the 72 panels in the first 25 pages that contain both text and image, 48 are interdependent (where text and image together convey meaning where neither could alone), 16 are additive (where the text further elaborates and fleshes out the scene set by the image), 5 were picture-specific, and 3 were duo-specific

cost of the housing crisis, as a man gets caught up in a misunderstanding with the law (5). His locks are forcibly changed despite his protests to the authorities who are there to enforce the court order for his eviction. This is a useful frame not only because it lays out the plight of the average person facing precarity but also because it allows an analysis of Cristian Bueno's artistic style in practice. While faces in general are illustrated abstractly, Bueno nevertheless pays close attention characters' emotions, gestures, and body language. This is used to great effect throughout the work. Also note the strategic variation in panel arrangements. Bueno sets the tone of the comic with a single page spread, fixating the reader's attention on the ominous situation in which this homeowner has found himself. Then, on the next page, she makes use of not just subject-to-subject transitions between panels (common in situations where multiple subjects are conversing) but also shifts perspective between panels, giving the reader multiple viewpoints and doubling down on the homeowner's sense of fear and desperation.

When the reader first encounters the protagonists themselves – the young Alicia and her mother Carmen – Rosa and Bueno again immediately make clear the alienation they experience because of their financial misfortunes during the crisis. Having lost their house, the two are forced to live in a tiny flat that Carmen purchased from the bank (which itself had previously been repossessed from another family who shares their names, as they will soon discover). Alicia's deep disillusionment from having lost her childhood home is made immediately evident by overlaying her dialogue with her mother over the floor plan of the flat (10-1). Carmen is trying to make the best of a bad situation, planning out their new life in their new home. Yet, no matter how they attempt to arrange the space, it is clear to Alicia that there is simply not enough space for them to live their lives in the way in which they are accustomed to living them. A later overhead illustration of Alicia attempting to study in her room makes this point well, creating a

sense of claustrophobia as Alicia is literally closed in. The close quarters reflect the tight margins by which they are forced to live. They have been alienated from their way of living, but it also becomes evident that they face alienation from their new neighbors as well, all of whom immediately shun them when they learn in which flat Alicia and Carmen live. Though the two do not immediately realize it, this is because each of these neighbors fought against the eviction of the previous tenants – an elderly woman named Carmen and her young granddaughter Alicia. For this reason, their neighbors are suspicious of them. Thus, the comic has established the beginning point of these characters' journey away from alienation towards community and solidarity.

Alicia is quickly radicalized however, when while cleaning she discovers a journal[75] left behind by the young granddaughter of the elder Carmen (also named Alicia) who previously occupied the space. The journal contains quotes from *The Diary of Anne Frank,* and as Alicia becomes absorbed by it, Bueno shifts artistic strategies, switching from multi-panel storytelling to full page vignettes of individual entries of this notebook. This is a significant shift from image-centric panels to text-centric illustrations, which begins to illustrate for the reader the importance of Alicia's connections to the ghosts (both literal and figurative) of the previous tenants. This goes on for four pages, and fragments of the text contained within the journal appear around Alicia as she carries on with her life, haunting her despite reassurances from her father that it's probably not as serious a find as Alicia believes. Nevertheless, she continues to feel that there is something more to this journal than just quotations from a book.

It doesn't take long for the seed planted by this journal to bear fruit. Soon after, an elderly woman named Carmen shows up at their flat in the middle of the night. Asking the neighbors,

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[75] Alicia's finding of a journal is an interesting connection to *Lo qué me está pasando,* which also prominently features the journal of an alienated individual.

they discover that Carmen and her family had been evicted from that very same flat in which they now live, after they had come under hardship and unemployment from the crisis. The more Alicia learns about the family whose members share their names, the more she can't help but see "ghosts" of them throughout the apartment (96). That this family shares their names is important as it enables a cognitive mapping on the part of Alicia, who begins to not only see herself in the struggles of those who came before, but to perceive the relationship that she, her mother, and the previous family have to the problematic issue of housing. Bueno illustrates Alicia wandering throughout the apartment, seeing phantasmal images of the elder Carmen's family arguing, lying awake in fear of their impending eviction, and caring for their children the best they can. Little do Alicia and Carmen know, however, that the elder Carmen is herself implied to be a true ghost, as she in fact passed away shortly after being evicted. The two will not become aware of until the end of the comic, however.

The artistic direction here is important, as it highlights the alienation and precarity in which everyone involved lives. They have been estranged from one another, driven apart by the stresses of precarity, from themselves and from the right to have fair, affordable housing. These scenes are fundamental because at the appearance of the elder Carmen, Alicia cannot help but see the human cost of the crisis unfolding around her. She sees herself in this struggling family and comes to realize that her family has a place to live only at the expense of the previous family. This is punctuated by the artwork on page 93 when these phantoms chillingly mirror the opening pages of the comic, as Carmen and her family are finally served their order of eviction and are violently forced from their home by the police. The arrival of the elder Carmen's literal phantom further punctuates this – a woman returned to deal with unfinished business, who suffered so

much from her own precaritization and eviction that she comes back to the only place she can think of – her home.

The injustices of the housing crisis become clearer to Alicia the more time she spends with the elder Carmen and learns how she was taken advantage of by a predatory mortgage. Through these events the reader observes Alicia's path towards mobilization. In one scene, she and an elderly neighbor are walking with Carmen downtown until they reach the bank where Carmen acquired her mortgage, and they enter to confront the staff. The bank manager tries to eschew responsibility, parroting the adage that nobody forced anybody to take out the loan, reflecting Guy Standing's and Bill Bradan's descriptions of the precariat being forced into complicity in their own oppression, as well as Valverde's conceptions of neoliberal guilt. AN important transformation in Alicia occurs in this moment. Standing side by side in solidarity with the neighbor who had previously shunned her, Alicia is empowered to challenge the problematic structures that she has become aware of, even if this bank manager is powerless to change the system or improve the elder Carmen's situation. It is also the epitome of the inter-generational nature of movements like the PAH and the 15M. The three find strength in one another – strength that will bring them joy and transformation by the end of the comic. That is, a journey from precarity and alienation to one of joy in community is visible in this comic, much like in *Lo qué me está pasando.*

Alicia is fundamentally transformed by this experience, after suffering through the crisis herself and seeing how dire the situation of previous tenants of her current home was. One day, when the elder Carmen suddenly disappears, Alicia searches frantically for her, and when she is unable to find her, she becomes involved with the PAH for help. The scene in which she engages with them (162) is the first time that the PAH appears explicitly in the comic. These two pages

open with a panel that takes up most of page 161, giving the reader a purposeful look at the flat in which this family is struggling to remain. A PAH banner hangs from one of the windows, and *Okupa* graffiti adorns the wall, indicating to the reader before encountering any dialogue that the occupants find themselves in a similar position to Alicia and Carmen in terms of struggling with housing. Importantly, however, not only is the comic providing an opportunity to identify with these struggles, it is also providing an opportunity to conceive of a solution as well. The comic demonstrates the ability of the PAH to offer a respite from the alienation and struggles the characters (and the reader, perhaps) have faced, much as prior scholarship has identified the PAH's ability to provide social capital to those struggling with precarity and empower them to fight back against that precarity. The mapping of one's positionality in relationship to the larger neoliberal structures that have brought them to this position is only the first step; upon this perceiving, this awakening of precariat consciousness, the subject on the page (and perhaps by extension the reader) can begin to move away from their alienated position and towards the transformative joy in solidarity and community.

On the next page, the format is reversed, with the bulk of the page given over to a wide shot of the interior of the apartment. Though Alicia and her father are seen in the background, the focus of the image is the PAH activist Víctor counseling the struggling family. It is important to point out the use of color here. Like in *Lo qué me está pasando,* the overall art direction of the comic is mostly monochrome which, as previously discussed, conveys the depression and alienation the characters feel at having been placed in a disadvantaged, precarious position. In *Lo que me está pasando*, however, this was punctuated by bright colors that, in the case of that comic, indicated the manifestations of the protagonist Víctor's imaginations, allowing the reader to trace his mental state and the purpose he finds in solidarity. In *Aquí vivió,* however, this has

largely been absent, until this moment over halfway through the volume. For the first time here is an injection of color in the otherwise monochrome illustration: green, in the form of Víctor's green PAH t-shirt. While not as shocking and distinct as in *Lo qué me está pasando* (being green against a teal background) it still serves to highlight the PAH and, in this image especially, center it as the focus of the image. The symbolism here is unmistakable. Much as the 15M was a source of hope and solidarity in the previous comic, Rosa and Bueno are communicating the hope that the PAH is meant to represent in this comic, shining through the drabness of alienation. Indeed, Alicia is so marked by this encounter in her search for the disappeared, elder Carmen that she continues to engage with him and with the PAH, as we see in later scenes.

The more Alicia spends with Víctor (occasionally at the cost of her attending school), the more she comes to see how many others are suffering the way she and her family have suffered. The full-page image on page 168 indicates one such crucial moment in Alicia's development of her own maps, and towards the discovery of the joy in mutual resistance in the face of a struggle that is collective, not individualized. An overhead shot, this scene depicts an assembly of neighbors, each in some way victimized by the housing crisis and enduring precarity. At the center is Víctor, with his bright green PAH t-shirt, which (along with the couple other PAH shirts in the image) represent an injection of color into the scene, while everything else remains mostly colorless and drawn in minimalistic fashion. Again, the symbolism is clear – the PAH is illustrated as a sort of foil to the drabness of the experience of being alone and lost in precarity, which serves as a direct signal to the reader.

Over the next several pages, attendees at this gathering recount the trouble they've faced trying to remain in their homes or getting evicted. These scenes continue for another 12 pages, and Alicia is very clearly moved. Bueno illustrates her with glassy eyes, moved almost to tears

before standing up and leaving with a determined stride. She begins to attend PAH demonstrations on her own, connecting with others in her neighborhood who have struggled, and learning how many within just a few blocks from her own flat have faced eviction. Eventually she gets arrested at a PAH demonstration, much to the chagrin of her parents. In the end, however, Alicia's radicalization is complete when she finally meets with her namesake, the elder Carmen's granddaughter who inhabited the flat before her. The other Alicia is unenthusiastic about the meeting, jaded after seeing her family being thrown out of their home much as Alicia herself had lost her house.

It is here she reveals that in fact the elder Carmen had died shortly following her eviction, which makes it seemingly impossible for her to have visited Alicia and her mother. This is never fully explained; was Carmen a ghost, come back to right an old wrong by connecting with the family who is so much like her own? The younger Carmen does mention to Alicia that all homes have their ghosts. Whatever the nature or original intent of the phantom Carmen's appearance, the result is Alicia's radicalization, as she discovers the transformative joys to be found in standing in solidarity and forging connections severed by the alienating social pressures of neoliberalism. The ghost of Carmen inspired the young Alicia to not only take a hard look at the neoliberal system's failures and her positionality within them, but also to do something about it, specifically through contributing to solidarity networks such as the PAH. This is symbolized at the end of the comic, as the PAH installs a plaque in memory of the late Carmen as the two families look on, arm-in-arm (254). Much like with Víctor in Brieva's *Lo que me está pasando,* Alicia and her family have completed the journey from alienation and precarity to strength in community.

238

The implication that the elder Carmen was in fact a ghost all along is key to understanding this comic, and reminds us of scholarship of the topic of hauntology[76]. Invoking hauntology poses numerous questions about what Carmen's spectral presence could indicate about the larger narrative of *Aquí vivió*. As Jacques Derrida suggests, specters (and learning to live with these specters) would also be a politics of memory:

> It is necessary to speak *of the* ghost, indeed *to the* ghost and *with* it, from the moment that no ethics, no politics, whether revolutionary or not, seems possible and thinkable and *just* that does not recognize in it principle the respect for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there,* presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born (Derrida xix).

Thus, engaging with Carmen's ghost, so to speak, can reveal the spectral past (that is, the memories and past traumas) of Alicia's new home and the implications this has for the present, lived realities of her family and neighbors. It is precisely through the elder Carmen's appearance that Alicia begins to comprehend her own relationships to the greater societal forces that had forced her out of her previous home and into this current flat, which itself is "haunted" by the traumatic eviction of the previous family. It is through these experiences – through engaging with Carmen's ghost – that Alicia becomes radicalized, able to see the suffering of not only the

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[76] Hauntology can be said to hail from multiple scholars, for example, Abraham & Torok and (especially) Jacques Derrida's *Spectres of Marx*: "The crucial difference between the two strands of hauntology, deriving from Abraham and Torok and from Derrida respectively, is to be found in the status of the secret. The secrets of Abraham's and Torok's lying phantoms are unspeakable in the restricted sense of being a subject of shame and prohibition. It is not at all that they cannot be spoken; on the contrary, they can and should be put into words so that the phantom and its noxious effects on the living can be exorcized. For Derrida, the ghost and its secrets are unspeakable in a quite different sense. Abraham and Torok seek to return the ghost to the order of knowledge; Derrida wants to avoid any such restoration and to encounter what is strange, unheard, other, about the ghost. For Derrida, the ghost's secret is not a puzzle to be solved; it is the structural openness or address directed towards the living by the voices of the past or the not yet formulated possibilities of the future. The secret is not unspeakable because it is taboo, but because it cannot not (yet) be articulated in the languages available to us. The ghost pushes at the boundaries of language and thought" (Davis 378-9).

family that she and her mother replaced, but also the larger systemic issues of housing and eviction. More than this, however, it is through this engagement with Carmen that Alicia discovers the joy in coming together, of the voice of the Anyone that the PAH represents.

And indeed, the joy and the transformation of community building are palpable in these final scenes, something that this work shares with Brieva's *Lo qué me está pasando.* In the first place, each of the major living characters are brought together for the first time and done so in a happy context. This includes the protagonist Alicia, her parents (who the comic implies are reconciling), and even Alicia's namesake and the neighbors who had supported her grandmother Carmen during her eviction. Secondly, it's important to note that each of these characters has been rewarded for their embracing the call to come together and exercise the voice of the Anyone, as it were. Each of them is emotional, happy, and fulfilled in the work they have done together, which individually they never would have been able to accomplish. Importantly, it ends with a callback to the title of the comic: a memorial to the deceased Carmen Fuentes. As it goes up on the wall, the two families embrace happily – a celebration of an act of memory, commemorating the lives lost in the fight for fair housing. As Derrida says, engaging with these specters of the past and their impact on the present constitute a politics of memory (xix), and so it is appropriate that the comic closes with an act of memory to celebrate these characters' newfound community.

What's notable about this narrative is that like Brieva's *Lo qué me está pasando,* the solidarity that is the focus of this comic is not just presented as an alternative to neoliberal alienation, it is presented as *the* alternative. Read alone, this comic can be seen as a celebration of the work of the PAH, especially in the face of the rise in evictions following the 2008 economic crisis. When read with *Lo qué me está pasando* (and *Tu futuro empieza aquí,* which is

analyzed next) we can begin to trace the emergence of a pattern in these works. Though both *Lo qué me está pasando* and *Aquí vivió* are telling the story of (and celebrating) individual solidarity movements, what they have in common is something much larger – a celebration of the power of the Anyone, of the collective, to effect real change in the face of mutual suffering. One of the most potent places this power rests is in the inherent *joy* found in these subversive acts. These comics bring us down from the realm of the philosophical into the realm of the visceral, aiding its readers in comprehending the real-life struggles of those lost in alienation and precarity, as well as their own relationships to the structures of power that contribute to them. This line of thinking will be further developed in the analysis of the final comic of the chapter: *Tu futuro empieza aquí.*

Tu futuro empieza aquí

Like the previous two comics considered in this chapter, *Tu futuro empieza aquí* (authored by Isaac Rosa and illustrated by Valencian illustrator Mikko) has at the center of its narrative the collective power of the voice of the Anyone, the inherent joy in coming together against mutual struggle, and the foil this joy presents to the alienated precaritization that its characters face. The protest/solidarity movement that it depicts, the #NiniInfiltradxs movement, is entirely fictional, nevertheless, the issues discussed in the narrative are as real as those discussed in the previous two works. Rosa and Mikko focus their attention on the youth of Spain and their struggle to find stable employment, invoking the popular, pejorative conception of *la generación ni-ni* ("la generación que ni estudia ni trabaja" / "the generation that neither studies nor works"). Through this, Rosa and Mikko reference the very real issue of youth unemployment in Spain, and how so many are forced to emigrate to find work. Thus, the opportunity for cognitive mapping here is focused not just on the general reader, but specifically to the young

person in Spain who, like Víctor in *Lo que me está pasando,* has struggled to find work but has been blamed for their own misfortune by neoliberal guilt. The framework of the fictional solidarity movement in *Tu futuro empieza aquí* develops a certain call to action. *Lo qué me está pasando* and *Aquí vivió* reflected the rumblings of precariat awakening in the 15M and PAH movements respectively and used that to present their didactic call to action. In this comic the authors achieve something similar, pointing to an awakening in the precariat (and more specifically the precariat youth). It cites movements like the 15M and leverages fiction to call on the alienated youth of Spain to recognize the collective power they possess and seek out the joy in collective action that I have traced in the other two comics in this chapter.

To demonstrate this, it is important to briefly discuss the term *ni-ni* that this comic so heavily cites in order to situate its critical power. The "*Generación Ni-Ni*" is a politically charged term that emerged as a media label facing increasing youth precaritization in Spain, particularly after the 2008 crisis. The term gained notoriety about the same time as the *Indignados*, which scholarship has described as two sides of the same coin: "First, the Ni-Nis, young people who supposedly neither study nor work: a metaphor for the dramatic consequences of the state of unemployment some young people find themselves in… (Soler et al. 64-5). Then, on the other hand there is the 15M, "opposing the Ni-Ni image with that of yes-yes-yes: that of the young person who as well as studying and working – though in unstable conditions – still has time to commit to finding a way out of the crisis…" (Soler et al. 64-5) Soler et al. place this in context with the drastically high unemployment rates for young people which increased exponentially between 2008 and 2012, up to 72.65% for adolescents and 49.13% for young people aged 20-24 at its height (and 32.19% for the general population) (65). Though the authors trace this to failures in youth policy and austerity both before and during the crisis, the term *ni-ni*: "became a

media label, inverting the axis of blame: instead of the education and labour system, the young

people themselves were to blame for this situation" (67). The 15M movement emerged as an

alternative to this, and rejected both the *ni-ni* label and also neoliberal guilt (which is discussed

in detail by not only Soler et al. but by Clara Valverde as well).

Also important is the significant exodus of young people in Spain because of the

unemployment crisis, observable as well in *Tu futuro empieza aquí* when the protagonist Jorge is

forced to leave Spain as an economic exile for Scotland at the end of the comic[77]. As Hughes

explains, "Due to the absence of effective job creation initiatives and sluggish economic growth,

many of those affected will be left with a stark choice; either leave Spain to find work elsewhere

or join the ranks of the long-term unemployed" (410). Indeed, *El mundo* reported that over

300,000 Spaniards left Spain for this reason between 2008 and 2012 (Segovia). In more specific

terms, between 2008 and 2013 "The data on outbound migration since 2008 shows that the

emigration of Spanish citizens born in Spain was most intense in the year 2014, with a total of

51,267 emigrants and a higher proportion of the 25–39 age groups" (Domínguez-Mujica et al.

208). Thus, despite media characterizations of the "Generación Ni-Ni", the situation is quite

complex and challenging for the youngest of those pushed into alienation and precarity.

Interestingly, *Tu futuro empieza aquí* does not reject the term *ni-ni* entirely, but rather

deconstructs, reclaims, and reconstructs it in a sort of call to awareness for the young precariat, a

call to cognitively map their alienated relationship to the broader neoliberal totality in Spain that

has blamed them for their own precarity.

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[77] This strongly resonates with the film *En tierra extraña* (2014), a documentary by Icíar Bollaín that details the plight of the "generación perdida" (the lost generation) forced to flee Spain in order to find work in the wake of the crisis. Importantly, the film is set in Scotland, which presents yet another striking similarity to the comic.

This connects well to prior scholarship on *Tu futuro empieza aquí,* such as Rossi's considerations of how Rosa wields counter-realism as a narrative device to confront the crisis and its human cost. Rossi has this to say about the collaboration between Rosa and Mikko in *Tu futuro empieza aquí*: "Una acción colectiva parecida –todavía no real, pero imaginable– es el elemento narrativo que vertebra *Tu futuro empieza aquí*, una obra que ahonda en el extendidísimo desempleo juvenil proyectando al lector en el mismo viaje por "Precarilandia" que emprende Lola…" (Rossi 137). / "A similar collective action – not yet real, but imaginable – is the narrative element that supports *Tu futuro empieza aquí,* a work that delves into the widespread youth unemployment by projecting the reader into the same journey through "Precarity-land" that Lola undertakes…" (Rossi 137, my translation). The "not yet real, but imaginable" nature of the #NiNiInfiltrados movement that Rossi mentions is key to an understanding of this comic. It serves as a direct citation, Rossi says, of several real-life campaigns and slogans that protest the crisis of youth precaritization and lack of work resources, notably "ni nos dejan estudiar, ni nos dejan trabajar" ("They neither let us study nor work"), where collective action has allowed *ni-nis* who have previously been led to believe themselves at fault for their misfortune to voice their unhappiness. It also goes further by imagining a specific identity/subjectivity organized collectively around a particular aspect of precarity.

As Rossi describes, counter-realist reactions, those against an unacceptable reality, drive this work's individual power. Coupled with her considerations of the propensity for change and transformation in this type of action, we can trace this power in detail throughout the comic in a more in-depth analysis below. In presenting a fictional protest movement, not unlike the 15M in many respects, Rosa and Mikko are presenting the precariat youth with a call to action, to realize their collective power and positionality within the voice of the Anyone and to embrace that joy in

244

mutual resistance that can be so fundamentally transformative. As an engagement with the text here will show, this same mapping can be observed in *Tu futuro empieza aquí'*s protagonists.

In taking up the matter of skyrocketing youth unemployment in the years following the onset of the crisis, *Tu futuro empieza aquí* centers on the children of one Madrid family who are each struggling in their own way as a result of the crisis. Lola, the youngest, is unmotivated and struggling with her grades and her older brother and middle child Jorge is assigned to help her. Jorge has struggled to find success after school, unable to land and keep a job. Tired of being labeled a "*ni-ni*", Jorge begins showing up to work at random establishments, inadvertently kicking off a movement protesting the lack of employment opportunities: #NiniInfiltradxs / #QueremosTrabajar ("#NiNiInfiltrators / #WeWantToWork"). In this mass movement Jorge finds purpose and community, and in witnessing Jorge map his own alienated positionality to his broader global totality, the reader has the opportunity to do the same.

Though *Tu futuro empieza aquí* is written by Isaac Rosa, as is *Aquí vivió,* this comic is illustrated by Mikko, an illustrator hailing from Valencia, Spain. Mikko has illustrated for several mediums and venues, including for the press, theater, and editorial scenes among others, and defines his illustrations as "based on daily observation and are defined by a clean line artwork of Franco-Belgian influence and a remarkable use of color that creates striking images that connect with the viewer" (Mikko). This self-observation is certainly visible in the artwork of *Tu futuro empieza aquí,* which makes extensive use of very strategic color and abstraction combinations in order to make the characters relatable to the reader. As Scott McCloud describes, abstraction through cartooning has the power to make complex topics more approachable to a reader (30-1), and it is not difficult to see how Mikko's artistic inspiration is extremely useful in the task of cognitive mapping the issues presented by this comic. Let us engage with an analysis of this now.

245

Artistically, this story is developed in similar ways to *Aquí vivió.* On the scale of realism to abstraction, Mikko's illustrations lean toward abstraction. Facial features, for example, are reduced to the barest essentials, with points for eyes and simple lines for mouths, eyebrows, and noses. As McCloud explains, the more cartoonish a face appears, the more people that face could be said to represent. Therefore, the reader is able to see themselves in this family, rather than viewing them merely as the faces of another. The favoring of abstraction extends to environments and backgrounds as well, which as McCloud explains, places more emphasis on the world *within* than the world *without*. That is, the focus of this comic is less on the external world than on the internal struggles of the protagonists. In addition, an analysis of the choices that Mikko makes in panel arrangement and transition demonstrates that the artwork places a very high focus on the characters *in the specific moment* in which the narrative is taking place, highlighting their quotidian struggles, conversations, and real time emotions[78]. The passage of time in the comic, thus, very seldom leaves the present moment, with major jumps in time and/or space being only occasional. This is further punctuated by the occasional single panel image, encompassing an entire full-page or two-page spread, which periodically arrests the pace of the story to force the reader to focus on a particular moment. In terms of the combinations of text and image, the majority are interdependent combinations, whereby neither text nor image can be said to be dominant. The two together are necessary to form the essential meaning being conveyed in each panel[79]. Again, this has the effect of grounding the reader in the here and now, rather than casting a wandering eye over a larger scene.

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[78] When it comes to panel-to-panel transitions, I analyzed the first 25 pages of the comic in order to glean a snapshot of the artistic choices made here as with the other two works. The first 25 pages contain 93 panels (and 92 panel transitions). Mikko places a very high emphasis on subject-to-subject transitions (62 total), with aspect-to-aspect and action-to-action transitions being tied for the next most common type (12 each). Also included were four (4) moment-to-moment transitions and four (4) scene-to-scene transitions, with non being non-sequiturs

[79] 81 of the 93 total panels in the first 25 pages combine text and image. 62 of these 83 panels fall in the category of *interdependent combinations.*

Other observations of Mikko's artistic choices demonstrate marked similarities in strategy and art style with Cristina Bueno in *Aquí vivió.* The line work is heavy, with everything drawn in dark black outlines. Speech bubbles are simple, and the use of synaesthetics (or the use of linework to represent sound) is minimal. For example, the dark linework will occasionally be used to represent the presence of sound, as in when Jorge's father opens a wine bottle or knocks on his bedroom door. Color is similarly minimalistic, as I observed with both *Lo qué me está pasando* and *Aquí vivió*. The only colors present in the comic are black, white, grey, and blue. Mikko seems to straddle the line between black and white illustrations and flat colors, like the artwork in *Aquí vivió*. The monochrome setting puts the emphasis on meaning over form (or form as a vehicle for meaning) while the insertion of the one flat color - blue - to direct their attention to a specific object. In sum, Mikko in general favors abstraction over realism, in order to place emphasis on the comic's didactic narrative they have to share about the alienation and precaritization of youth, in particular the "*Generación Ni-Ni*".

Let us now engage in a close reading of *Tu futuro empieza aquí,* where its celebration of the voice of the Anyone can be situated*.* The plight of the alienated youth is at the center of this comic, and is visible from the earliest pages. Consider a scene on pages 82-3, in which the flexibilization of the labor market and the alienation it engenders is at the forefront of the story. The narrative presented on these pages is a familiar one: if a worker does everything they're told, follows each of the important steps to success, they will be able to reap the benefits of that hard work down the line. This is the prevailing master narrative of contemporary neoliberalism in Spain and abroad. However, as Lola's mother makes clear, things are different now, post-crisis. "Ahora han cambiado las reglas," / "Now they have changed the rules," she tells Lola; "Ya no jugáis al mismo juego. En realidad no sé ni qué juego es ahora" (Rosa & Mikko 82) / "You aren't

playing the same game anymore. In reality I don't know what game it is now" (Rosa & Mikko 82, my translation). Lola and Jorge's mother freely admit that the old rules of making a living no longer exist; however, the best thing they can think to do is to forge onward with their preconceived notions of labor and earning a living anyway. Or, perhaps more to the point, this is the best that Lola's parents can imagine. Lola's brother Jorge, however, is presented as a clear foil to this in these same scenes, locked in his room playing poker with a sour expression. Note too how the artwork reflects this narrative, drawn in a predominantly colorless style, except for shading in blue. Like in the previous two comics, the artwork reflects the emotions of the protagonists, who are struggling with precarity and alienation.

How this is developed over the course of the comic can be analyzed in a later scene on pp. 88-9, as Lola brings job postings to Jorge to help him find work. This section, which goes on for several pages, is important for many reasons, not only because of the narrative it constructs, but also because of its artistic choices. Let's begin with the latter, which speaks strongly to Rossi's highlighting of counter-reality in the narrative to protest the current, problematic reality. The two leap into the pages of the wanted ads, exploring the dark and precarious nature of the job market, reminiscent of Guy Standing's descriptions of the tertiary market in Spain and its leading to extreme levels of precarity[80] (Standing 35).

What's interesting is that these sections lay out in specific detail how much of the work that is purportedly available to "*ni-nis*" like Jorge is not as reliable or available as it seems. In subsequent pages, Jorge breaks down for Lola just how disingenuous these advertisements are.

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[80] "Spain meanwhile has become the epitome of a multi-tier labour market, with half of its workforce on temporary contracts. In 2010, the OECD estimated that 85 per cent of the jobs lost in Spain following the financial crash were temporary. It claimed permanent employees were being kept in jobs because it was costly to dismiss them. But the high costs of salaried staff had already induced the shift to temporaries as well as to outsourcing and employment of migrants. Government and trades unions had reacted to the earlier pressure for flexibility by preserving securities for regular workers and creating a buffer of temporaries. This not only led to a multi-tier labour force but resentment by the precariat towards the unions that had looked after their own members at its expense" (Standing 35).

When they say "Disponibilidad horaria" / "Scheduling availability," for example, what they really mean to say is "Con suerte, dormirás en casa" / "With luck, you will sleep at home." When they say "Ganas de trabajar y crecer" / "Desire to work and grow" what they really mean is "Te vamos a explotar" / "We are going to exploit you." A few things can be garnered from this narrative, the first and most obvious of course being a direct criticism of the flexibilization of the labor market and the exploitation of the precariat class that Guy Standing describes. It also tells the reader something about Jorge: that he is the epitome of the young precariat. He lacks adequate income-earning opportunities, protection against arbitrary dismissal, the opportunity to gain skills, the assurance of a stable income, and more, and his situation does not seem likely to improve.

Of course, when Lola suggests half-jokingly that he simply go to work without waiting to be hired, this plants the seed of an idea. In the artwork on pages 114-5 Jorge does just that, infiltrating the construction crew across the street from his family's apartment. What's immediately noticeable about these scenes is the transformation in Jorge himself. Mikko clearly illustrates him feeling satisfied, with sweat on his brow and a determined look on his face. The theme repeated most often over the length of the comic is how Jorge just wants to work – something reflected by the #QueremosTrabajar slogan that emerges from the movement he inspires. This isn't the last time he infiltrates – he does so again, almost by accident, at a pizza place who mistakes him for the new delivery person. Eventually, he and Lola come up with the idea to take one of their older brother's work uniforms and infiltrate a department store chain he works for. Jorge is ultimately discovered and thrown out of the store, but importantly, Jorge is clearly positively affected by these experiences – and feeling like he has a purpose to fulfill.

The primary focus of this chapter is the joy in being together and working in solidarity against mutual struggle as an alternative to the neoliberal alienation that each of these characters experience (and the potential precariat awakening this could signify), and it is this final infiltration of a department store that helps Jorge make his first step in that direction. Here he meets Sonia, a worker at the store and a sometime journalist, who herself has been unable to find a job in her chosen career. She approaches him about the possibility of telling his story, though he is resistant to the idea. He did not infiltrate workplaces because he thought he was being subversive or founding a movement. For him it was mostly a joke, a way to give himself a little bit of agency in the powerlessness of unemployment he had been enduring for some time (not unlike Víctor's group of friends in *Lo qué me está pasando*). His initial reaction to Sonia's proposal is that it would just make him a laughingstock.

Jorge doubles down on this position when Sonia suggests the title "El ni-ni infiltrado," ("The *ni-ni* inflitrator"), as he does not want to be associated with a term that he feels is pejorative. Importantly, however, she suggests deconstructing the term, and using it to create something subversive: "Ni nos dejan estudiar, ni nos dejan trabajar" ("They do not let us study, they do not let us work"). This literally reclaims the term and turns it on its head by reformulating the original, accusatory slogan ("the generation that neither studies nor works") by shifting the blame away from themselves and towards the true culprit of their precarity: social actors that push neoliberal reforms. She also suggests introducing him to others who would be interested in his story. The scene has been set for the larger solidarity movement to come. Though Jorge does not yet realize it, this is the moment in which the seeds have been planted for his involvement in something much larger than himself, where he will find purpose and transformative joy in community with others in his situation. This is where cognitive mapping

250

can begin to occur. The reader, upon seeing Jorge come to understand his own positionality within the broader scope of the crisis and of neoliberalism in Spain, can begin to do the same, visualizing not only the root causes of their struggles but of potential solutions as well (collective action and solidarity).

What follows Jorge and Sonia's conversation is very interesting, artistically. Upon the publication of the article that Sonia pitched to Jorge, Mikko provides the entire article in a full-page spread (148), something they do only sparingly throughout the comic. This arrests the pace of the story, and the reader is encouraged to read the full text of the article, from which quite a bit of interesting information can be gleaned. This includes details of Jorge's inner monologue – about how he decided to go to work without waiting to be hired just to prove that he is worthy and capable. Especially important, however, is the following quote that appears at the bottom of the full-page image on page 148:

'Somos ninis, sí: ni nos dejan trabajar por el paro y la precariedad, ni nos dejan estudiar por culpa de los recortes y la subida de tasas en los estudios superiores,' asegura. 'Nadie hace nada por nosotros, y nos estamos volviendo invisibles. O te vas del país, o te mueres de asco. Ojalá mi acción sirva para que nos vean' (Rosa & Mikko 148)

"We are *ni-nis*, yes: they neither let us work because of unemployment and precarity, nor do they let us study due to budget cuts and rising tuition rates" he affirms. "Nobody does anything for us, and we are turning invisible. Either you leave the country, or die in disgust. I hope my action allows us to be seen" (Rosa & Mikko 148, my translation).

There are two things that must be highlighted from this quote. The first is the deconstruction and reclamation of the term *ni-ni* that Jorge and Sonia had discussed in previous pages, giving birth

251

to one of the primary slogans that dominate the broad protest movement that Jorge inspires later in the comic: "Ni nos dejan estudiar, ni nos dejan trabajar" / "They neither let us study nor work". All the most powerful instances of collective resistance that dominate Jorge's story spring from this moment, as it is this article that kicks everything off for him. It marks the birth of a potential new class consciousness, as an entire movement springs forth from the seed of protest that Victor and Sonia plant with this article.

Indeed, this moment speaks to the larger point of this chapter – that despite the alienation and precaritization experienced by these protagonists (and the real-life precaritized youth that they represent) they do have the power to resist by coming together in community. Guy Standing says that one of the defining features of the precariat is that it lacks a sense of class consciousness, however, what seems to be happening in this quote – and in the comic as a whole – is a certain transformative awakening, a collective call to action that could spark this consciousness that, as of now, the precariat desperately needs (vii). There is also a notable reference to a real-life protest slogan and movement formed by economic exiles, the Juventud Sin Futuro ("No nos vamos, nos echan" / "We are not leaving, they are throwing us out"), which itself references the exodus of young workers from Spain to find work. This is important because it lends a certain amount of critical power to the narrative, connecting this fictional solidarity movement to a real one that is actively bringing attention to the issues in which this comic finds its base. This is especially important later in the comic, because even though Jorge's act of protest does indeed inspire a larger movement that affects real change, he is nevertheless forced to leave Spain for Scotland, because that is the only way for him to find meaningful work in the short term. This leaves the reader with the sense that there is much work yet to be done.

Jorge could not have predicted the impact that his small act of resistance would have. However, the article goes viral, inspiring a movement of young people infiltrating workplaces and leaving behind their slogans to mark them having been there. This eventually leads to further news coverage, and the scene on pages 188-9. Observable here is an assembly of those involved with the #NiniInfiltradxs movement, gathered to discuss its goals and priorities. This image is strikingly similar to that in *Aquí vivió,* wherein Alicia attended the PAH assembly. In this assembly, debate over their slogans is prominent – whether #QueremosTrabajar ("#WeWantToWork") captures the entirety of the issues at hand, for example. The discussion of inclusive language is also highlighted, as well as discussion of the church and its corruption, and of people bringing in the experience of similar gatherings from Spanish immigrants abroad. What's key here is that there is no central organizer, nobody leading the group or directing it in any specific way. This is a clear citation of actual solidarity movements that have arisen during and since the crisis. In some ways it reminds the reader of the PAH, which functions by means of assemblies much like this. In others, it is deeply reminiscent of the organizing structure of the 15M, which organized as a coalition of many individuals, groups, and priorities in a horizontal democratic way, constantly pushing one another to drive the movement's progressive ends. It also, like the movement depicted in this comic, functioned via assemblies much like that pictured. Take, for example, the work of queer and feminist activists in the 15M encampments who would organize both against the neoliberal city and also organize towards improving the protest counter-city that the 15M represented (Navarro 89). The parallels do not end here, however, as the following scenes show in detail.

In the end, the #NiniInfiltradx movement culminates in scenes that are deeply reminiscent of the 15M Movement, not only because of the march in the streets but also because it

culminates in the Puerta del Sol, the square which served as the center for the 15M encampment in Madrid (234). This is a direct citation of those key moments in contemporary Spanish history. These explicit parallels invoke images of the real-life movements for the reader to visualize themselves and their experiences under contemporary neoliberalism in Spain, and by extension come to understand now only their own positionality within neoliberalism more generally, but also visualize how they can respond to their alienation. Artistically, these scenes also parallel those in *Lo qué me está pasando* that depict the 15M – a symbol of the joy in working together against mutual alienated precarity that is certainly not accidental. The opportunity for cognitive mapping here is clear. Rosa & Mikko clearly call for the reader to remember the 15M and its message, as well as view themselves in it, or at least view themselves as equally capable of solidarity and collective resistance against mutual struggle. Combined with the marked transformation in Jorge and his family, it is easy to see this comic as a useful tool towards mapping one's own positionality against the larger neoliberal totality in Spain that caused such an employment crisis.

The overall effect is a celebration of the solidarity movements in Spain by celebrating their social impact, and allowing readers to use this information to map themselves within the greater totality of neoliberalism in Spain. In the first place, a marked evolution in Jorge himself is apparent, who successfully completes the journey from alienation to community as the protagonists of the other two comics considered in this chapter do. In the above images he is literally transformed from an unemployed and depressed young person to an activist, embracing the family with whom he was previously at odds over the circumstances of his situation. This parallels both *Lo qué me está pasando* and *Aquí vivió* explicitly, especially in the celebration of the voice of the Anyone. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, Rosa and Mikko make clear

that the movement Jorge inspired produces real, actionable results, securing a promise from the Madrid government to pursue legislation to address the issue. Unfortunately, however, these reforms do not come to fruition in time to help Jorge, who is ultimately forced to leave Spain for Scotland in search of work. This implies that there is much work yet to be done. Nevertheless, in demonstrating how young people like Jorge were able to conceive of their alienated position within greater neoliberal norms and fight back against that alienation within the pages of the comic, the authors are suggesting that a similar mapping and mobilization on the part of the young precariat contains multitudes of possibilities for actionable change.

In sum, *Tu futuro empieza aquí* is heavily tied to the experience of the precariat (and the alienated, precaritized youth especially) and one of the defining features of this emergent class is its distinct lack of class consciousness. What is observable in this comic, however, is a sort of awakening of that class consciousness amongst the precariat's most vulnerable and alienated groups. When this is considered in context with comics' ability to abstract a concept through cartooning to make complex topics accessible to a wider audience it becomes apparent that comics such as these can assume a distinctly didactic role. In this case, Rosa and Mikko's *Tu futuro empieza aquí* is making use of the medium to inform the "Generación Ni-Ni" of their powerful place within the voice of the Anyone, and that the joy in mutual resistance can serve as an escape from their alienated precaritization in contemporary society. In seeing Jorge

Conclusions

In sum, each of these comics individually engages in a particular aspect of the economic crisis in Spain, as well as the cycles of protest in response to austerity and neoliberal policies. Miguel Brieva, true to his *quincemayista* reputation, celebrates the 15M and its power to unite; Isaac Rosa and Cristina Bueno's *Aquí vivió: Historia de un desahucio* engages with the PAH and

the housing crisis; and finally, Isaac Rosa and Mikko's *Tu futuro empieza aquí* develops a narrative of a fictional solidarity movement that heavily cites the 15M to develop its imaginative power for mobilizing precaritized youth. Each of these comics has received attention from critics and the academy individually, however, reading these three works together provides a useful perspective on the critical power that they employ within the larger societal happenings and framework in which they were produced. It reveals something that they each mobilize individually towards a common didactic goal: the joy in mutual resistance against mutual struggle. It is precisely the voice of the Anyone – the fusing of diverse voices and perspectives – that this joy can be achieved. In seeing this transformative joy play out in the page, whereby the characters are empowered map their relationships to the oppressive hegemony of capital in contemporary, neoliberal Spain, a reader is empowered to do the same. Since comics themselves bring together diverse vantage points in their narratives (per Nick Sousanis), the medium is well suited to engage in this type of critique.

Indeed, these comics place the joy in community building and resistance as a direct foil to the alienation of the neoliberal subject, and directly leverage the comics medium in order achieve a didactic end: the potential stirring of a class consciousness within this precariat. The juxtaposition of text and image, closure, and abstraction through cartooning engages the reader in a specific way, encouraging them to view themselves in these characters and identify both with their struggle and their liberation. Through this these comics are presenting a call to action to the precariat, a call to become cognizant of their alienated positionality against the broader hegemonic cultural systems in Spain (and beyond). This is important since, as Guy Standing elaborates, until the precariat fully comes into its identity as a class-for-itself, it will not be able to effect real change to the system that continues to alienate and precaritize it. These comics

256

demonstrate that the precariat does not have to accept its alienated position at the fringes of society. Through community, coalition building, and direct action there is a viable alternative.

These comics accomplish this especially by highlighting the transformative joy that each of the protagonists in this chapter experience in embracing the power of the Anyone, and in finding new purpose in community. In a sense, these comics encourage the reader to seek out this joy for themselves and become a part of that change. The solidaristic movements considered here are presented as a form of not only social support (that the precariat individual sorely lacks, per Standing), but a way to resist the problematic apparatuses of the neoliberal state. This radical solidarity in each comic is presented in some form or another as the literal saving grace of each of their protagonists, as the source of this newfound joy and community that lifted them out of the darkness of alienation and precarity. Each comic highlights the fact that the central power of these organizations comes from the individual collaborating with others in solidarity to affect real change.

In sum, these comics work to spark the desire in readers to be a part of these movements and experience this type of joy for themselves, allowing them to cognitively map their own relationships to contemporary, hegemonic neoliberalism and imagine ways to improve their own lives. In this, this chapter marks the final step in the larger journey of this dissertation, one which began with dystopian depictions of neoliberal anxieties and alienation and subsequently charted a path towards not just understanding the root causes of the crisis, but also the burgeoning class consciousness that may yet come to fruition with a complete and comprehensive mapping in the face of the alienation and fragmentation of postmodern, neoliberal society. The comics medium is not only uniquely suited to help us perceive of our own relationships to the world in which we live, but also of how we may imagine a better future.

Conclusion

Comic art is an indispensable tool to understand how cultural events and traumas manifest in the public consciousness. Indeed, as Scott McCloud notes, "Today, comics is one of the very few forms of mass communication in which individual voices still have a chance to be heard" (197), and in this spirit, this dissertation investigates how contemporary Spanish comics responded to or were influenced by the 2008 economic crisis and neoliberalism in Spain. I provide a comprehensive case study of contemporary Spanish comics and how the medium has addressed the issue of the crisis across genre lines, which builds upon prior scholarship of cultural production that critiques the crisis, such as literature (e.g. Bezhanova, Seguín, Valdivia), theater (e.g. Boehm, Wheeler, Feinberg), and film (e.g. de la Fuente, Moreno-Nuño, Allbritton). It also builds on prior scholarship of comics of crisis as well (e.g. Fraser, Dapena, Rossi, and others). More specifically, I have sought to reveal what makes comics unique in their approach to neoliberalism and crisis in Spain and why this makes them deserving of study. I will conclude the present study by briefly summarizing my research findings, before synthesizing their implications and discussing their contributions to the field. I will also discuss the limitations of this project and propose avenues for future research.

Throughout this dissertation, I assert that comics of crisis demonstrate a deep disillusionment with neoliberalism in Spain and fiercely criticize the 2008 economic crisis that resulted from it. Specifically, comics of crisis wield their multimodality, high degree of reader closure, and the ability to abstract complex topics through cartooning in order to enable cognitive mapping on the part of their readers. That is, comics of crisis wield graphic narratives to enable their readers to better understand their own positionality within the larger social realities of contemporary, neoliberal Spain. While other mediums can perform similar functions (as film is

258

also multimodal and requires a degree of closure from the viewer, for example), comics are unique in this approach because, as Scott McCloud describes, comics offer extensive resources to their creators and consumers, including: "*faithfulness, control,* a chance to be heard *far and wide* without fear of *compromise…* It offers *range* and *versatility* with all the potential imagery of *film* and *painting* plus the *intimacy* of the *written word* (212-3, author's emphasis). In this, comics are an extremely accessible and democratic medium, well suited to describing how the alienation and fragmentation of contemporary neoliberal society can be challenged and perceived in new ways. Indeed, as Nick Sousanis describes, comics by their very nature enable new ways of seeing the world through a combination of distinct viewpoints, an appropriate consideration considering the cycles of protest that inspire many of these comics of crisis share similar elements. This is not to suggest that these comics of crisis themselves mobilize society, as gathering such data is beyond the scope of this dissertation project. However, what they do accomplish is the enabling of the average citizen to not only understand the root causes of their precarity post-2008, but to specifically map their own positionality against their larger neoliberal reality, both within Spain and globally. Comics thus possess distinctive qualities that set them apart from other media and justify their scholarly exploration.

I demonstrate this point by tracing a journey from the complete alienation and exploitation of the neoliberal subject towards a perception of how this ultimate subjectification can be overcome through solidarity and community (in line with the social movements in Spain who have fought to accomplish these last, such as the 15M and PAH). I began with Spanish dystopian comics, exploring how they capture extant anxieties in contemporary neoliberal society. I demonstrated that through focusing on the inherent alienation of the neoliberal subject, they present the social nightmare of the contemporary neoliberal dystopia, where the

estrangement of the individual subject is absolute. In these narratives, the characters are completely isolated from their own humanity and from one another by extreme, almost caricatural capitalism, creating an admonitory atmosphere that extolls the dangers of unfettered, unregulated neoliberal politics and corporate greed. Using these dystopian anxieties as a point of departure, I then began a move towards a contextualizing of these anxieties by examining comics that examined their root cause: the rampant corruption in neoliberal Spanish society. The second chapter thus analyzed how noir comics inextricably link contemporary neoliberalism with Spain's authoritarian past and the Culture of Transition (CT, described by Guillem Martínez and others), thereby presenting the crisis as a result of systemic societal and political issues. Corruption is indeed the key word in understanding the comics in this chapter, as they bring the difficult realities of neoliberal life for the lower classes into focus, depicting the corruption at the top of the hierarchy and the precarity it engenders at the very bottom. In this, it enables a reader to not only see their own experiences with alienation and precarity, but also provide them with a place to lay the blame for this suffering: corrupt political and economic elites.

The realities of such corruption and the alienation that it enables has been the source for high levels of indignation in Spain. To understand the importance of this indignation, the third chapter elaborated upon the power of affect in Spanish political cartoons, analyzing how these artists have wielded indignation as a source of peaceful, democratic revolution (as described by Stéphane Hessel). Each of these artists leverages indignation to enable their readers to contextualize their own experiences in context with didactic and satirical depictions of the neoliberal reality in Spain. When read together, they present a certain counternarrative to the dominant neoliberal imaginary that urges readers to use their indignation to comprehend their position in contemporary neoliberal Spain, and in so doing eschew apathy when neoliberal

capitalism is actively eroding basic human rights. The dissertation then took the final step in this

narrative in its fourth chapter, which analyzed not only the critical power of indignation, but the

specifics of how it has been and continues to be mobilized to effect change. In this chapter, I

considered how Spanish comics of crisis depict the potential stirrings of class consciousness

amongst the new precariat class (as described by Guy Standing), and the power that can be found

in the solidarity resulting from such an awakening. These comics ground themselves in the

protest movements that actively mobilized indignation, most notably the 15M and the PAH. In

this way they celebrate the transformative joy of collective resistance against neoliberal

alienation. It is their depiction of the move from alienation to community that is fundamental to

this reading of these comics, and it is here that the comics enable cognitive mapping. In essence,

these comics demonstrate to their reader not only where they stand as alienated, precarious

individuals, but a real potential solution to that alienation based in the experiences of real-life

movements. In this, the journey from complete alienation towards a mobilization of the

indignation at the depths of the corruption of the political and financial elites leading to the crisis

is complete. In these comics, readers not only can come to understand their own relationships to

the broader neoliberal totality but also discover how they can effect real change within those

hegemonic social structures that make it up.

Indeed, the move from alienation to solidarity and community in the fourth chapter

mirrors the larger narrative of this dissertation. Taken together, these considerations across the

project demonstrate that Spanish comics of crisis, regardless of their genre, are well suited to

considering the 2008 economic crisis and neoliberalism in its multitudinous aspects. Their

democratic and approachable nature, along with their ability to make difficult concepts

approachable and open up new viewpoints means that they are capable of constructing didactic

narratives and enabling cognitive mapping in ways that other mediums cannot. The implications of this research are wide ranging. Comics and comics studies have long fought for legitimacy in the academy (see: Groensteen), and as such this dissertation fits well within this burgeoning field of study, working to consider this body of work that has long failed to receive due critical attention over the decades. Specifically, this study broadens the study of comics as they pertain to neoliberalism in Spain and demonstrates that these comics can not only offer critique on this moment in Spanish history, but to also foster a cognitive mapping in context with crises of the magnitude of the 2008 crisis and the social and political realities of neoliberalism that enable them. They are, indeed, a way of seeing, as Scott McCloud describes at length, and through this way of seeing we can gain new understandings of the world in which we live.

This builds not only upon comics scholarship, but also upon important work that has been done on other forms of popular culture and their depictions of the crisis in Spain. Olga Bezhanova's iconic work *Literature of Crisis* reveals the critical power of the literature of crisis, for example, which works in tandem with such social movements as the 15M to challenge the predominant narrative of the neoliberal economists (Bezhanova xv-xviii). Boehm, Wheeler, and Feinberg demonstrate that theater also has an important role to play in this, much as Manuel de la Fuente, Allbritton, and others discuss the importance of film in the wake of the crisis. It also builds on previous studies of comics of crisis by the likes of Benjamin Fraser, Xavier Dapena, and Ana Merino. This dissertation interfaces with these discussions by analyzing a panorama of Spanish comics of crisis in a variety of contexts, and in so doing revealing the highly original ways that comic art approaches the challenge of questioning the dominant neoliberal imaginary and revealing the depths of the precarity that rampant corruption of the system causes. This is especially important considering that in the decades following the 2008 economic crisis both

262

Spain and the global community have experienced new economic downturns and social

upheavals, due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the furthering of this

discussion will remain an important topic in Spanish peninsular and Iberian studies in the years

to come.

With the implications of this research established, there are certain limitations to this

study that are worth discussing, as they provide many avenues for future research. The first is, as

identified in the introduction, the scope of the project. This dissertation represents a selection of

comics that consider or are influenced by the crisis, but should not be construed as necessarily

representative of *all* comics within this realm. Future research endeavors can continue to survey

the booming comics medium and the ways in which it represents the cultural traumas related to

the 2008 economic crisis (and other, more recent crises) going forward. In addition, there are

limitations to the methodology of this study. While I have chosen to approach these comics from

a predominantly cultural studies perspective, leaning heavily upon Frederic Jameson, Wendy

Brown, and Guy Standing to situate the narratives within the context of neoliberalism and

cognitive mapping, there are many other possible approaches that could prove fruitful in future

research endeavors. Other theoretical approaches, such as feminist theory, degrowth studies, and

fan studies are all promising sites of future research. A fan studies approach in particular could

prove useful in providing empirical data as to whether the reader base for these works takes

advantage of the opportunities for cognitive mapping identified in this dissertation. In addition,

this dissertation did not conduct an analysis of the visual grammar of these works, based in

Cohn's Visual Language Theory or another model based in linguistics and/or cognitive science

(see: Bateman & Wildfeuer). Such an analysis, while outside the scope of this project, would

provide additional insights into these works' critical power.

In conclusion, it is undeniable that despite their long search for legitimacy, comics can serve not only to entertain but also to serve a didactic, cognitive function for their readers. Comics leverage their unique qualities as a medium, including abstraction, closure, and multimodality, as well as their approachable and democratic nature, to potentially enable a reader to cognitively map their positionality within the broader social structures of neoliberalism in Spain (especially following the crisis) and gain the knowledge they need to understand the root causes of the struggles they experience. Rather than mobilizing society themselves, these comics instead equip their readers with the tools needed to draw their own connections and conclusions. This contributes to the fields of Hispanic Studies and comics studies, building upon prior research by providing a comprehensive case study of Spanish comics production post-2008 across genres. In so doing, I have revealed the highly original ways that comics art approaches the challenge of questioning the dominant neoliberal imaginary and revealing the depths of the precarity that rampant corruption of the system causes. Considered as a whole, their considerations trace a path from the absolute alienation of the neoliberal subject towards a conceptualization of ways to combat that alienation, citing real social movements to do so. This is especially important considering that in the decades following the 2008 economic crisis both Spain and the global community have experienced new economic downturns and social upheavals, due to factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, the furthering of this discussion will remain an important topic in Spanish peninsular studies and Iberian studies in the years to come, as we continue to learn more about the impacts of neoliberalism, the 2008 economic crisis, and the newer, emerging crises brought about by ongoing neoliberal policies and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Understanding these processes within contemporary Spanish comics is an important exercise precisely because no work of art is produced in a vacuum; societal events leave an indelible mark upon cultural production, which in turn influences society and the public consciousness. Literary and cultural studies provide a means of examining the societies in which we live and the political landscapes with which we grapple. If comics are a way of seeing, as Scott McCloud suggests, then they are also an important tool to understanding the cultural contexts by which they are influenced – and the influence they in turn wield. Indeed, while throughout this dissertation I have stressed these works' critical power, this is not to imply that there is not more work to be done. The Spanish comics artists I have considered here extensively highlight the cyclical nature of economic crisis in Spain, and as the impacts of more recent crises (such as those brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and its own interaction with hegemonic neoliberalism) become ever more apparent in coming years, considering how cultural production can enable an apprehension of our lived experiences and positionalities will continue to be an essential endeavor both inside and outside of the academy.

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