

## Book Review

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**Jorge L. Catalá Carrasco, Paulo Drinot, and James Scorer, editors. 2017. *Comics and Memory in Latin America*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.**

With its compilation of articles on the relationship of comics and graphic novels to political and historical discourses, *Comics and Memory in Latin America* represents a landmark contribution to a burgeoning academic field established only a decade ago. The editors' insightful introduction meticulously traces the history of Latin American comics in the modern era from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries. It locates the scholarly importance of research on this cultural medium squarely in the realm of memory studies, especially as related to national transitions from civil conflict to resolution through the process of national reconciliation and truth commissions.

The combination of aesthetics and politics in this cultural product can serve as a powerful strategy to shape collective memory across socially stratified societies. As contributors to this collection argue, this is the situation in Latin America, where comics and graphic novels have informed both popular culture and political discourse, especially in the twentieth century. *Mafalda*, *Condorito*, and the analysis of Disney comics in *Para leer al Pato Donald* stand as icons of cultural expression, as do many others, whose impact on thought and practice exceeded mere entertainment.

Jorge L. Catalá Carrasco's analysis of *La emboscada* in "Raising the Cuban Flag: Comics, Collective Memory, and the Spanish-Cuban-American War (1898)" discerningly relates efforts in the 1980s to imbue the war with revolutionary zeal consistent with the identity of the modern Cuban nation-state. In a similar way, "How to Make a Revolution with Words (and Drawings): History, Memory, and Identity in Oesterheld's Comics" by Edoardo Balletta recounts how the ideology of left-wing Peronists was infused into comics to promote the Montoneros political agenda and found expression in anti-imperialist messaging in Argentina. Both Oesterheld's *Latinoamérica y el imperialismo: 450 años de guerra* (1973-74) and his science fiction comic *La guerra de los Antartes* (originally 1970 and 1974; reedited 1998) represent the role of memory in molding national identity in accordance with revolutionary ideals, the first during the Dirty War and the second during the postconflict era.

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Isabella Cosse in “*Mafalda*: Talisman of Democracy and Icon of Nostalgia for the 1960s” maintains that Quino’s character embodied centrist liberal values in an era marked by the transition from military dictatorship to democracy, while at the same time challenging the Argentine status quo in terms of gender roles, social mores, and political repression. Indeed, Cosse asserts that Mafalda’s identification with other activist youth of the 1960s made her at once emblematic of sociopolitical ideals that had been lost during the Dirty War and also of the collective memory of a social sector that wished to revive those ideals during the return to democracy.

Christiane Berth, in “Comics in Revolutionary Context: Education Campaigns and Collective Memory in Sandinista Nicaragua,” explains how the politics of memory informed the creation of 120 comic strips in the 1980s in order to cement revolutionary values. Framed by Sandinista ideology meant to build a new society in the post-Somoza period, these comic strips published in *Barricada* highlighted the importance of using graphic media to reach all segments of the population, especially the illiterate, on topics that ranged from public health, the economics of exploitation under Somoza, and the history of the Sandinista Revolution with its roots in the political revolt of its predecessor, Augusto C. Sandino, in the 1930s. Berth finds the creation of a collective revolutionary consciousness particularly evident in several educational series, including *Matagalpa: ¡Insurrección de agosto!*, that the Ministry of Culture initiated in commemoration of the first anniversary of the triumph of the Sandinista revolution.

In the case of Peru, Paulo Drinot’s examination of the online version of Juan Acevedo’s original comic strip *El Cuy* from the 1970s and 1980s, along with his blog “El Diario del Cuy” in “Cyber-Cuy: Remembering and Forgetting the Peruvian Left,” provides a cogent understanding of the role of memory and technology in bringing the political past into sharp alignment with the present. According to Drinot, it is the blog rather than the comic strip that elicits the collective memories of the emergence of the Peruvian Left and the insurgency of the Sendero Luminoso during Peru’s transition to democracy. At the same time, these cultural memories prompt salient questions about the viability of the Peruvian Left as a political force in the twenty-first century.

Referring to the same turbulent period in Peruvian history, Cynthia E. Milton deftly examines the 2008 graphic novel *Rupay* in “Death in the Andes: Comics as a Means to Broach Stories of Political Violence in Peru.” For Milton, *Rupay* represents participation in the discourse of truth telling in response to the *Final Report* published by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2003. She contends that, due to differences of genre and style, the graphic novel is able to provide a more complex narrative of events, such as the 1983 deaths of eight journalists and their guide in Uchuraccay, even if the account is partly fictionalized. She concludes that the comic form has value in terms of constructing “public memory” in order to provide insight to future generations.

In “Memory on the Road: American Highways and Prosthetic Pasts in Gonzalo Martínez and Alberto Fuguet’s *Road Story*,” James Scorer examines the crucial interplay between politics, memory, and identity in the graphic version of a short narrative first published in the 1996 story collection, *McOndo*. His analysis underscores the transnational nature of identity as discovered by the main character on a journey through the Americas during the postdictatorship period in Chile.

Similarly, memory and identity are key components of a global view of social and political systems according to Edward King in his article, “Prosthetic Memory and Networked Temporalities in *Morro da favela* by André Diniz.” King’s keen assertion is that the medium of the 2011 Brazilian graphic novel juxtaposes individual and collective memories in order to highlight identity within Rio de Janeiro’s favelas, which then provides critical spaces for social and cultural discourse.

In summary, *Comics and Memory in Latin America* represents a salient contribution to the ever-growing field of memory studies as it examines comics and graphic novels in terms of major social and political crises in Latin America during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The essays posit the graphic form as a unique medium for presenting multiple views with varied goals: to define national identities, promote political resistance to authoritarianism, reshape historical narratives and thereby create new political and social orders, and, perhaps most importantly, provide an understanding of the turbulent past in postdictatorship societies. Individual and collective memories merge, as do art and politics, in comics and graphic novels that expound on the most pressing issues in Latin America’s past that continue to inform the present.