

## Comics & Nation: Editorial

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## **Editorial: Comics and nation**

**Armelle Blin-Rolland and David Miranda-Barreiro**

This special issue on ‘Comics and Nation’ stems from a conference that took place at Bangor University in July 2017, with the generous support of the Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France. One of our main aims for this conference was to bring together comics scholars working on minority contexts to explore a range of perspectives on creation in, and text/image representations of, stateless cultures. Indeed, whereas comics from and about the nation state (e.g. French comics and American comics) are widely represented at research events, stateless nations and minority cultures have traditionally received less academic attention. The articles included in this special issue are a representation of the variety of aspects discussed at the conference, from issues of language and identity, to politics, trauma and history, in several European minority cultures (Wales, Galicia, Majorca and Brittany).

At the same time, we did not want to lose sight of the presence of the nation state in comics, and we therefore also aimed to establish a dialogue between academics working on the range of meanings that the ‘nation’ can have in different geographical, historical and political contexts. In this respect, the presence of academics from the United States fostered a much-needed transatlantic dialogue between European and American comics traditions, which is also encapsulated in this special issue (in articles exploring the political use of comics in 1940s America and Afro-Caribbean transnational identities in superhero comics). We therefore hope that this special issue will help to posit the productivity of examining the relationships between comics and nation, both to provide a fresh take, through a hybrid and popular medium, on a concept that has been widely applied, theorized and debated, and to develop the diversity of comics scholarship.

Opening the special issue, Alice Vernon examines the representation of rural Wales in Carol Swain's *Gast* (2014). Swain's focus on an isolated Welsh community makes this comic a fruitful locus to address identity issues from a liminal perspective as boundaries between English and Welsh languages and identities become blurred and fluid. Vernon also places this comic within existing literary and audio-visual articulations of Wales. Moving from Wales to Galicia, the following article, by David Miranda-Barreiro, examines the biographical comic *Bóveda* (2012), about the eponymous Galician politician who was executed by Francoist forces at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Miranda Barreiro's article draws on 'ghostly' metaphors used in historical memory studies to describe the repression of the traumatic memories of the civil war and ensuing dictatorship. The article explores the potential of the comics medium to 'conjure' memories and 'bring back' the bodies of the victims of the war to make younger generations aware of their own repressed history.

Trauma is also at the core of Guillem Colom-Montero's article, which focuses on the representation of mass tourism as cultural trauma in Majorca. Colom-Montero addresses these issues with reference to the comics *Els darrer dies de l'Imperi Mallorquí* ('The last days of the Majorcan empire') (2014) and *Un infern a Mallorca (La decadència de l'Imperi Mallorquí)* ('Hell in Majorca [The decadence of the Majorcan Empire]') (2018). In particular, the article examines the representation in comics form of cultural disorientating resulting from traumatic experience. Armelle Blin-Rolland's article provides another take on the role that comics can play in the expression of sociopolitical conflict in minoritized stateless cultures and nations. Blin-Rolland explores this through the prism of two comics re-framings of the Breton Liberation Front (FLB), an underground independentist movement that was particularly active in the 1960s and the 1970s: Alain Goutal's 1980 'Instantanés d'une sinistre farce' ('Snapshots of a sinister farce') and Stéphane Heurteau's 2013 *Sant-Fieg*.

The last two articles then turn to the United States context. Edward Shannon's piece focuses on American folksinger Woody Guthrie's unpublished and little-known response to anti-communist propaganda comic book *Is This Tomorrow: America Under Communism* (1947), which features early work by Charles Schulz. Shannon explores the insights that *Is This Tomorrow* and Guthrie's response provide into not only the later part of the folksinger's career, but also the beginnings of comics censorship, in the context of an emerging national discourse on comics as a political medium. Closing this special issue, Paul Humphrey's article analyses the ways in which Afro-Caribbean superheroes engage with questions of identity, hybridity, movement and belonging. With reference to Marvel characters the Santerians, Brother Voodoo/Doctor Voodoo and Groot, Humphreys argues that these transnational superheroes, while challenging stereotypical and hegemonic representations of racial and ethnic alterity, are nonetheless still marginalized in ways that reinforce the primacy of the metropolis over the periphery.

Whereas the advent of global capitalism, the power of multinational corporations and the integration of nation states into supranational organizations have questioned the relevance of the nation, recent events in Europe and the United States have put the concept back on centre stage. Both state nationalism ('making the nation great again') and nationalism from stateless nations (gaining sovereignty and independence from the hegemonic nation state) have resurfaced, making the issues explored in the articles brought together here highly topical. As such, we hope that this special issue will contribute towards providing new, transnational and transdisciplinary insights into the multifaceted relationships between comics and nation.

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