


# SPANISH GRAPHIC NARRATIVES AND WOMEN WRITERS: INTERSECTIONS OF MEMORY, POLITICS, AND GENDER IN ILU ROS'S *COSAS NUESTRAS*<sup>1</sup>

## *LA NARRATIVA GRÁFICA ESPAÑOLA DE AUTORAS: INTERSECCIONES DE MEMORIA, POLÍTICA Y GÉNERO EN COSAS NUESTRAS DE ILU ROS*

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### Abstract

In recent years, Spanish women writers and illustrators have produced noteworthy graphic narratives, some of which have been winners of the most prestigious cultural awards in Spain. Those volumes have focused on issues related to Spanish historical memory, narrative self-consciousness, feminism, sexual dissidence, and the politics of the female body. The present study examines the thematic and aesthetics impulses of Ilu Ros's 2020 illustrated volume *Cosas nuestras*, a text that offers readers a reflection on 20th- and 21st-century Spanish history and (popular) culture through the memories and stories of the author's grandmother. Through a non-traditional usage of illustrations and artistic sequences that question the generic boundaries of the comics medium, a self-conscious version of the author-illustrator gives a penetrating look at intergenerational cultures of resistance, the construction of identity, and the discussion of gender roles during the dictatorship and beyond.

**Keywords:** Spanish Graphic Narratives, Comics Studies, Women Writers, Historical Memory, Ilu Ros.

### Resumen

En años recientes, escritoras e ilustradoras españolas han producido narrativas gráficas de mucha importancia, algunas de las cuales han sido premiadas con los galardones más prestigiosos del país. Tales volúmenes se han centrado en temas como la memoria histórica española, la autoconsciencia narrativa, el feminismo, la disidencia sexual y la política del cuerpo femenino. El presente estudio se enfoca en los impulsos tanto temáticos como estéticos de la obra *Cosas nuestras* de Ilu Ros, la cual ofrece al lector un viaje por la historia y cultura española de los siglos XX y XXI a través de las memorias y narraciones de la abuela de la autora. Mediante el uso poco tradicional de ilustraciones y viñetas de cómic, una versión autoconsciente de la autora-ilustradora ofrece una mirada penetrante a las culturas intergeneracionales de resistencia, la construcción de la identidad y la discusión de roles de género durante la dictadura y después.

**Palabras clave:** Narrativa gráfica española, Estudios de cómic, Escritoras, Memoria histórica, Ilu Ros.

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# Introduction

Comics, *tebeos*, and graphic narratives have flourished in Spain in recent years, leading to what some critics have called a recent “Golden Age” in Spanish comics production (Carrión, 2017; Constenla, 2017; Cocca, 2016: 13).<sup>2</sup> The institutional support from the Spanish government, shown in part through the establishment of the Premio Nacional del Cómic by the Department of Culture in 2007, underscores one focal point of growth, as does the creation of several specialized comic and graphic novel publishers dedicated specifically to the production and dissemination of graphic narratives. Entities including the Barcelona-based publishers Salamandra (2000) and ECC Ediciones (2012), Bilbao-based Astiberri (2001) and Madrid-based Dibbux (2004) have witnessed bolstered production in the 21st century even though some consider the graphic narrative bubble will burst in the coming years. Regardless of the long-term sustainability of the current boom in the Spanish comics market, authors and illustrators alike have taken advantage of the increased interest in graphic narratives and have produced works of great merit. Beyond the 20th- and 21st-century global fascination with comics devoted to superheroes and villains, Spanish comics published in the last 20 years have increasingly focused on weighty topics such as historical memory initiatives and Spain’s contentious Civil War; the Franco regime and Transition; race, gender, and LGBTQ+ identities; Spanish cultural icons like Don Quijote, Diego Velázquez, Francisco de Goya, Antoni Gaudí, Antonio Machado, Federico García Lorca, and Miguel Hernández; and recent debates around immigration, the tourism industry, and the memories of Spain’s forgotten villages.<sup>3</sup> Volumes centered on these themes have attracted the attention of scholars around the world who have engaged Spanish Comic Studies through international colloquia, special sessions at the MLA and other conventions, university courses, and a growing number of academic publications.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, graphic narratives such as these are extremely

<sup>2</sup> There has been much debate surrounding terms such as “comics” and “graphic novels” (and the additional terms in Spanish, *tebeo* and *historieta*), words that in one way or another refer to what Will Eisner has called “sequential art” (2008), that is, a hybrid literary-artistic medium involving both text and images. Given that many Spanish authors and illustrators use the words interchangeably, I will do so here as well. And considering Hillary Chute’s usage of the more inclusive term, “graphic narrative” (2010: 3), I will also use that term in broad reference to the medium also comprised of “illustrated volumes.” For more on these terms, the interested reader could refer to Eisner, 2008: 148–49; Weiner, 2003: 17–20; García, 2014: 33–37; McKinney and Richter, 2020: 11; Kyle, 1964; Kiely, 2018; Romero-Jódar, 2013; and Márquez, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Notable volumes focused on these themes include Antonio Altarriba’s *El arte de volar* (2009), Paco Roca’s *Los surcos del azar* (2013), Jaime Martín’s *Jamás tendré 20 años* (2016), Sento’s *Dr. Uriel* (2013–2017), Ximo Abadía’s *Frank* (2017), Santiago García and Javier Olivares’s *Las meninas* (2014), El Torres and Jesús Antonio Iglesias’s *El fantasma de Gaudí* (2015), Carlos Hernández’s *La huella de Lorca* (2011), Enrique Bonet’s *La araña del olvido* (2015), Carles Esquembre’s *Lorca: Un poeta en Nueva York* (2016), Ana Penyas’s *Estamos todas bien* (2017), and César Sebastián’s *Ronson* (2023).

<sup>4</sup> Recent scholarship devoted to the study of Spanish comics and graphic narratives includes, for example, volumes such as the following: *El cómic hispánico* by Ana Merino (2003), *La novela gráfica* by Santiago García (2010), *Cómic, arquitectura narrativa* by Enrique Bordes (2017), *Consequential Art: Comics Culture in Contemporary Spain* edited by Samuel Amago and Matthew J. Marr (2019), *Memoria y viñetas: La memoria histórica en el aula a través del cómic* by David F. de Arriba (2019), *The Art of Pere Joan: Space, Landscape and Comics Form* by Benjamin Fraser (2019), *Spanish Graphic Narratives: Recent Developments in Sequential Art* edited by Collin McKinney and David F. Richter (2020), *Spanish Comics: Historical and Cultural Perspectives* edited by Anne Magnussen (2020), *Trazos de memoria, trozos de historia: Cómic y franquismo* edited by Isabelle Touton et al. (2021), and *The Political Imagination in Spanish Graphic Narrative* edited by Xavier Dapena and Joanne Britland (2023).

attractive, accessible, and engaging in the literature and culture classrooms of our highly visual Gen Z learners.

Given the interest in historical memory initiatives and themes since the turn of the century, it is possible that the Ley de Memoria Histórica of 2007 has also emboldened Spanish creators to produce material that has more freely delved into issues associated with topics that would have been considered more controversial during previous years. Those works, like the Historical Memory Law itself, have sought to give voice to those silenced during the Civil War and the ensuing Franco regime, as well as, according to Jo Labanyi, call attention to “the need for recognition of the stories of the victims, so that their pain [...] may at least be articulated in the public sphere” (2008: 119). In her writings on memory studies and recent Spanish comics, critic Anne Magnussen has suggested that “[a]n international interest in comics and memory gained speed from 2000, and in Spain it acquired a particular focus on memories of the Civil War and the dictatorship” (2018: 5). For Santiago García, whose *La novela gráfica* volume is considered a foundational study of the development of Spanish comics since their inception in the 19th century until our day, “[l]a novela gráfica histórica ha establecido un tipo de relación entre el comic y la realidad que no se había visto antes, y que es vecino de un fenómeno todavía incipiente pero muy interesante” (2014: 241). While many of the graphic narratives produced in Spain since the turn of the century have focused on themes related to historical memory, many other texts consider what critics such as Marianne Hirsch and others have referred to as “postmemory,” that is,

the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to *seem* to constitute memories in their own right. (2012: 5)

Indeed, considering the ongoing tensions and advances in Spain related to historical memory, contemporary Spanish sequential art continues to reflect upon and give voice to the many stories, histories, memories, and postmemories associated with Spanish identity and consciousness.

## Graphic Narratives and Spanish *Autoras-Ilustradoras*

In recent years, Spanish women writers and illustrators have produced noteworthy graphic narratives focused on Spanish history, politics, memory, gender, sexuality, and the body, yet much of the emerging Comics Studies criticism within Hispanism focuses on works written and illustrated by men. There are some notable exceptions to this, such as Adela Cortijo’s 2011 article focused on the “cómic femenino,” several articles by Elena Masarah (2015; 2016; 2019) and Esther Claudio (2021) that consider themes of historical memory and autobiography in Spanish comics, and a few book-length studies published in 2024 that examine the history and development of Spanish comics and graphic narratives

written and illustrated by women: Iria Ros Piñeiro's *El género silenciado: La mujer en la historia del manga*, Marika Vila Migueloa's *Desokupar el cuerpo: Las voces de las autoras en el cómic español*, and Elisa McCausland and Diego Salgado's *Viñetaria: Historia universal de las autoras de cómic*. While Esther Claudio asserts that historical memory narratives, comics among them, are most frequently dominated by men, she recognizes that "[e]studiar sus testimonios [de mujeres] es esencial para reconocer la pluralidad de vivencias que constituye la memoria histórica," since many contemporary Spanish graphic novels by (and about) women "problemizan la lucha por la visibilidad, equidad y justicia de las mujeres. Al proporcionar relatos de memoria histórica con identidades desconectadas del canon heteropatriarcal, allanan el camino hacia una mayor pluralidad a todos los niveles" (2021: 359, 360). In her study of the representation of the female body in comics, Marika Vila Migueloa notes that

[m]asculino y femenino continúan siendo adjetivos vigentes que denotan cualidades o defectos, valores positivos o negativos [...] pero es necesario destacar su condición más importante, es decir, su significado como herencia o legado: las mujeres no han tenido acceso a los ámbitos masculinos, han estado enclaustradas en lugares feminizados que, por serlo, han estado devaluados. (2024: 54)

Furthermore, Adela Cortijo suggests that works by women

no se imprimen con la misma facilidad en el mundo de la edición profesional. Han abierto el espectro de la representación de lo femenino, y aunque sus heroínas no son solo compañeras-víctimas o bombas sexuales también son capaces de parodiar y de dibujar mujeres explosivas. (2011: 234)

Notwithstanding the realities of a traditionally male-centered publication industry, the growing number of critical studies focusing on graphic narratives authored and illustrated by women attests to the increasing interest in and attention to the diversity of voices represented in Spanish comics.

Other critics recognize that the trends regarding the representation of women in comics are slowly changing, trends that correlate in some respects with other socio-political advances in the post-postmodern 21st-century milieu. In *Viñetaria*, the ambitious 2024 volume that traces the historical development of sequential art (including illustration, comics, and graphic novels) from the middle of the 18th century until our day, Elisa McCausland and Diego Salgado consider the ways in which *autoras* and *ilustradoras* experienced a breakthrough in the publishing industry in the 21st century, a development that is indebted to a growing feminist consciousness:

Entre 2008 y 2013 tiene lugar una confluencia muy fructífera entre las aspiraciones editoriales a dar más cancha a las autoras de cómic y una serie de convulsiones sociales que alteran por completo la perspectiva sobre el papel social y cultural de las mujeres. Lo cierto es que, desde principios del siglo XXI, el feminismo cobra un impulso y una definición cada vez mayores en lo político, lo académico, lo profesional y lo ciudadano [...] Las autoras de cómic españolas viven su particular despertar feminista en 2014, aunque se habían producido puntos de inflexión en 2010 y 2013. (2024: 431, 432)

The advances noted in a more inclusive Spanish publishing environment are linked, in part, to economic developments such as the creation of new presses dedicated more conscientiously to the work of female authors and illustrators, venues such as La Cúpula, Edicions de Ponent, Astiberri, and Ediciones Sin Sentido. Additionally, social mobilizations inherent to the 21st century have also sought to give women a voice, movements including “fourth wave” feminism, #MeToo, #TimesUp, and international women’s marches. As Carolyn Cocca describes in her reading of women in contemporary superhero comics, women have appeared in leading roles in comics more frequently in recent years, another symptom of the advancements described here:

The decrease in underrepresentation, sexualization, and objectification of female characters, I would argue, is due to all of the changes in the comics world noted above [reader push back, an expanding fan base, new media options, the digitalization of comics, more diversity among writers and artists, and more diverse characters], fostering new types of interactions between creators and consumers that have pushed parent companies to diversify their titles. (2016: 14)

While there is certainly still work to be done, much progress has occurred already, and this gives reason for great hope.

Considering that three of the last seven winners of the Premio Nacional del Cómic in Spain were women—as in the cases of Ana Penyas (2018), Cristina Durán (2019), and Bea Lema (2024)—, this study seeks to highlight the works of recent women authors and illustrators of Spanish graphic narratives.<sup>5</sup> Notable creators along these lines include Laura Pérez Verneti (*Amores locos*, 2005; and *El brillo del gato negro*, 2008; both with Antonio Altarriba; *Pessoa & Cía*, 2011; *Ocho poemas*, 2016), Cristina Durán (*Una posibilidad entre mil*, 2009; *El Día 3*, 2019; and *María la Jabalina*, 2023; each with Miguel Á. Giner Bou), Clara-Tanit Arqué (*¿Quién ama a las fresas?*, 2010), Ana Penyas (*Estamos todas bien*, 2017; and *Todo bajo el sol*, 2021), Ana Galvañ (*Pulse Enter para continuar*, 2018), Laura Pérez (*Ocultos*, 2019; *Tótem*, 2021; and *Espanto*, 2022), Susanna Martín Segarra (*Residencia de estudiantes*, 2019), Laura Suárez (*Los cuentos de la niebla*, 2019), Cecília Hill (*Antonio Machado: Los días azules*, 2019; with Josep Salvia), Agustina Guerrero (*Diario de una Volátil*, 2014; *La Volátil. Mamma mía*, 2015; and *La compañera*, 2023), María Medem (*Cénit*, 2018; and *Por culpa de una flor*, 2023), Bea Lema (*El cuerpo de Cristo*, 2023), and Ilu Ros (extensive mention below). These *autoras-ilustradoras* have produced graphic novels, comics, and illustrated volumes in recent years with topics that engage Spanish historical memory such as the Civil War and the Franco regime, texts that pertain to what some have called “graphic medicine” narratives (Ian Williams et al., 2015), volumes focused on poets and regional folkloric traditions, and books that call attention to narrative self-consciousness, feminism, the female body, and eroticism.<sup>6</sup>

In the same spirit as Elena Masarah Revuelta’s assertion that “la memoria desde la perspectiva de las vivencias específicas de las mujeres en nuestra historia requiere de una

<sup>5</sup> Five of last 15 Salón de Cómic de Barcelona Grand Prize “lifetime” award winners were women: Ana Miralles (2009), Purita Campos (2013), Laura Pérez Verneti (2018), Trini Tinturé (2023), and Marika Vila (2024) (McCausland and Salgado, 2024: 441).

<sup>6</sup> In her study of the representation of women in comics, *Graphic Women: Life Narrative and Contemporary Comics*, Hillary L. Chute gives a similar account of the many women authors and illustrators of comics in a more global context (2010: 1).



mayor profusión y profundización” (2016: 67), in what follows, I examine the thematic and aesthetics impulses of Ilu Ros’s 2020 illustrated volume *Cosas nuestras*, a text that offers readers a reflection on 20th- and 21st-century Spanish history and (popular) culture through the memories and stories of the author’s grandmother, Resure, “la chispa y la sal de esta historia” (Ros, 2020).<sup>7</sup> Through a non-traditional usage of illustrations and artistic sequences that question the generic boundaries of the comics medium, a self-conscious version of the author-illustrator gives a penetrating look at intergenerational cultures of resistance, the construction of identity, and the imposition of gender roles during the dictatorship and beyond. As such, this volume constitutes not only a memoir of and homage to the author’s ancestor, but also a compelling visual narrative that reflects on our modern-day understanding of memory, politics, and gender in the Spanish context.

## Ilu Ros and *Cosas nuestras*

Spanish author and illustrator Ilu Ros hails from Murcia and graduated in Fine Arts and Audiovisual Communication from the University of Granada. She is the author and illustrator of various books, such as her first, *Hey Sky, I’m on My Way: A Book About Influential Women*, published in English in 2018, which highlights the life and works of impactful women throughout history. She is also the author and illustrator of a 2021 illustrated biography about Federico García Lorca, titled *Federico*; she has illustrated versions of classic Spanish texts, including *Una trilogía rural: Bodas de sangre, Yerma, La casa de Bernarda Alba* (2022) and adaptations of Emilia Pardo Bazán’s *Insolación* (2024) and *Los pazos de Ulloa* (2024); and most recently, she has published a more personal volume titled *Una casa en La Ciudad* (2025) wherein she reflects on the eight years she spent living in London. In 2023, she published a collaborative project with Lara Moreno titled *La Menuda*, and she has illustrated for publications such as *Vogue Spain*, *El País*, *Público*, and *El Salto*, in addition to other freelance and commissioned work.

Ros’s 2020 book, *Cosas nuestras*, takes its title from a conversation with the author regarding the content of one of the many conversations between herself and her grandmother, a question and answer that serve as the epigraph to the book:

—¿De qué has estado hablando con la abuela que os habéis pasado las dos todo el día dentro de la casa?

—Nada. Cosas nuestras.

In a manner similar to *Estamos todas bien* (2017) by Ana Penyas, *Cosas nuestras* offers readers a series of dialogues between its author and her grandmother. As a pre-adolescent, the author frequented her grandmother’s rural house on Sunday afternoons and, since she did not want to play outside with her cousins, she stayed inside chatting with her grandmother, Resure. What continues in the text, then, are memories and reflections that trace Resure’s life from her birth in 1930 until more recent times.

<sup>7</sup> Ros’s *Cosas nuestras* does not contain page numbers. I will provide approximate location of referenced text and images throughout my essay. This quote, for example, appears near the end of the book, on the “Agradecimientos” page. Images from *Cosas nuestras* are used with permission from Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial, S.A.U. © 2020, Ilu Ros.

Through the memories and observations of the grandmother, and by way of constant visual and literary analepsis and prolepsis (flashback and flashforward), the reader of *Cosas nuestras* witnesses experiences related to the Second Spanish Republic, women's suffrage in Spain, the Civil War, the family's exile in France, life in rural Spain, and the years of the dictatorship and Transition to democracy. And beyond the reflection on historical memory that the book offers, the volume also dialogues with and includes visual reference to a substantial number of cultural artifacts spanning several decades, images that connect past and present such as poems, song lyrics, newspaper clippings, and drawn photographs. References from prior periods include Resure's memories of singers, actors and actresses, writers, and other important intellectuals from her youth: Conchita Piquer (singer and actress, 1906–1990), Miguel de Molina (singer, 1908–1993), Clara Campoamor (politician and feminist, 1888–1972), Federico García Lorca (writer, 1898–1936), Lola Flores (actress, 1923–1995) and Juanita Reina (singer and actress, 1925–1999). The stories and memories of those figures are considered alongside more contemporary individuals who form the cultural backdrop of Ilu Ros's upbringing, figures such as Rocío Jurado (singer and actress, 1944–2006), the Beatles (music group, 1960–), the Backstreet Boys (music group, 1993–), the Spice Girls (music group, 1994–), Leonardo DiCaprio (actor, 1974–), Rosalía (singer, 1992–), and Nathy Peluso (singer, 1995–), among many others.

In his introduction to *Voces que cuentan*, a 2021 anthology of short graphic narratives written and illustrated by women, editorial director of Planeta Cómic, David Hernando, discusses the importance of hearing women's stories by suggesting that these voices “no solo cuentan, sino que importan. Son un ejemplo de historias personales, de superación, de darse cuenta en momentos puntuales de sus vidas de a qué querían dedicarse o por qué son como son hoy” (2021: 6). The many cultural icons presented to the reader in *Cosas nuestras* serve, in many cases, as important representations of the crossroads between art and politics, in conjunction with themes of rebellion and protest, and as voices of feminist resistance and freedom. This appears alongside the discussion of gender roles, household chores, and fashion from the 20th century until the present; a consideration of art, lyrics, and poetry; an interest in creating inter-generational family bridges; and the compassionate humanization of one's ancestors.

## The Question of Literary-Artistic Genre

One element of *Cosas nuestras* that immediately captures the reader's attention is that of the literary-artistic genre of the text. The book exemplifies aspects of graphic novels, illustrated volumes, photo albums, and comics and sequential art, in addition to including within it inter-textual meta-texts such as the many poems, lyrics, and newspaper articles previously mentioned (Fig. 1). According to Darío Adanti, “[n]o es fácil definir *Cosas nuestras*, de Ilu Ros: novela gráfica, relato ilustrado, diario personal y enciclopedia breve de cultura popular española, todo en uno” (2020a: para. 1). Or as Irene Morilla mentions, the volume contains “un estilo a medio camino entre cómic y storyboard” (2020: para. 4). Another assessment of *Cosas nuestras* suggests that the book is “[u]n hermoso libro

que es cómic, diario, ensayo y poesía. Todo al mismo tiempo, como una abuela. [...] Dos generaciones mezcladas en una misma casa, en una única y hermosa conversación dibujada con el original estilo de Ros" (Cabrero, 2020). The book certainly blurs generic boundaries in its hybrid form as it breaks with conventional norms of comics and sequential art, but it is also not simply an illustrated biography. In my own conversation with the author, Ros suggested that if the book must be qualified by some category of genre or literary-artistic medium, it would be a "libro ilustrado con recursos del cómic" and that the project "salió así naturalmente" (personal communication, November 7, 2023). What is more, the great variety of inter-textual references and meta-texts included therein destabilize any chronological or linear reading of the book, in addition to enriching the connections between historical memory and culture throughout.



Fig. 1

In the introduction to their 2021 volume *Trazos de memoria, trozos de historia: Cómic y franquismo*, Isabelle Touton et al. suggest that illustrated and comic genres are particularly adept at addressing issues of history and memory since the visual aspects constitute an effective modality through which to consider the act of remembering and its representation. In this sense, they write that comics'

carácter fragmentario, visual y subjetivo de la memoria hacen del cómic una potente herramienta para integrar las experiencias disgregadas de una memoria que no es lineal ni coherente, ni homogénea, sino fragmentada, subjetiva y plagada de olvidos y sombras.



A través de una extensa paleta de recursos como el trazo expresivo, la capacidad sugestiva del dibujo, los juegos cromáticos, el diálogo entre imagen y texto y entre viñetas entre sí, las elipsis, los flash-back, y la polifonía, el cómic parece el medio idóneo para expresar lo indecible, lo inaudible, para representar las ausencias, los olvidos, las deformaciones, o lo que no se puede representar: el horror, el sufrimiento, los rostros deformados por el dolor o poseídos por la violencia. (Touton, Carballés, Sanz-Gavillon, Jareño Gila, 2021: 23)

In *Cosas nuestras*, the conversations with Resure indeed underscore a series of fragmentary memories fraught with oblivion, suffering, and trauma inherent to the experiences of 20th-century Spanish realities. What is more, for Marika Vila Migueloa, many of the more recent experimental illustrative interventions by Spanish *autoras* and *ilustradoras* constitute a rupture from prior standards and norms:

La apuesta por la ruptura de modelos—personajes fijados en la repetición—abandona la fidelidad al estilo y opta por el experimento como característica de tratamiento que atraviesa las clasificaciones tradicionales del cómic; de esta forma, rompe el estancamiento de los géneros para abrirse a nuevas vías de expresión. (2024: 230)

The blurring of generic boundaries that occurs in the Ros's book confirms what comic studies critic Charles Hatfield asserts regarding the "unfixability" of the comics genre since illustrated stories "are likely to remain an unresolved, unstable, and challenging form, [...] a form of reading that resists coherence, a form at once seductively visual and radically fragmented" (2005: xiii). As such, in both form and content, *Cosas nuestras* questions boundaries and norms as it opens a space for voices historically relegated to private spaces.

## Feminism and Protest

The aesthetic act of breaking with fixed generic boundaries is mimicked in the text's thematic content, which also rebels against established societal norms. Much of the cultural production that is highlighted throughout the text focuses on individuals who challenged the artistic, political, or gender expectations of their time. The topic of feminism—understood broadly as the opposition to sexism and to the oppression of women in economic, political, social and psychological contexts (Tyson, 2023: 70)—is undoubtedly one of the central themes of the book, and it is discussed frequently in the conversations between the author and her grandmother. In the double splash pages that appear roughly two-thirds through the book, Ros's images show women young and old protesting with signs emblematic of the March 8th International Women's Day marches, which sought recognition and rights for women worldwide (Fig. 2). Part of the conversation between Resure and her granddaughter appears as follows:

Resure: ¿Nieta, tú estuviste el otro día en la manifestación esa?  
Ilu: ¿La feminista? Sí.

R: La vi yo en la tele, salió en las noticias.  
 I: Claro, si es que fue un montón de gente. ¿Tú qué piensas de eso?  
 R: ¿Yo? ¿De qué?  
 I: Del feminismo, abuela.  
 R: Yo no entiendo de esas cosas, nieta...  
 I: Sí que entiendes.  
 R: En la tele dicen unas palabras muy raras. (Ros, 2020)



Fig. 2

Even though Resure is perhaps not interested in an in-depth consideration of contemporary feminism, women's rights, the March 8 protests against gender inequality, or ongoing manifestations of sexism in society, it seems that she does understand feminism in practice. Ros suggests as much when she says "[s]í que entiendes," and through the many cultural interests that the two discuss throughout the text, such as rebellious figures like Conchita Piquer, who "hacía un poco lo que quería" (Ros, 2020), and who on various occasions publicly rejected Franco's requests. In other instances, including when the author indicates her resistance to gender norms by stating that she does not plan on getting married, Resure offers words of support and understanding: "Luego tú ya pues harás lo que quieras. Ahora las mujeres se quedan solteras y no pasa na" and later when she responds, "[p]ues no te cases si no quieres, nena. Pero cómprate una cama grande, que duermas ancha" (Ros, 2020). Along this line, Ros's volume confirms what Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes as "a variety of oppositional strategies to the depiction of gender institutions in narrative" (1985: 34).

In this sense, Ros suggests that her grandmother pushed against what Helen Graham describes as the “‘ideal’ image of womanhood as ‘eternal’, passive, pious, pure, submissive woman-as-mother for whom self-denial was the only road to real fulfillment” (1995: 184) that was promoted by the Franco regime. Through their discussion of the need for women to freely express themselves at home and in society, Resure and Ilu achieve a mutual understanding of gendered expression reaching across generations. In her essay on Ana Penyas’s *Estamos todas bien*, Joanne Britland discusses the way that graphic narratives by women encourage this type of understanding between women since

[t]he comic medium provides a forum for feminist movements to take place, offering stories of others to encourage solidarity among women. It is also a medium that assists in telling the story of female oppression. It aids in broaching the difficult past and present of trauma and violence. (2022: 548)



Fig. 3

As Resure and her granddaughter explore the stories of women who have expressed themselves openly throughout history, their understanding of one another also grows.

Ros also highlights her mother’s interests as another example of female voices that have pushed the limits throughout history. In their discussion of Spanish singer and actress, Rocío Jurado, “la que le gusta a mi madre / la más grande / la mejor voz de la



copla" (Ros, 2020), Ros calls attention to the cultural icon who challenged the limits of expression in the 1960s–80s through revealing clothing, songs that openly discussed sexually explicit themes, and her liberated perspectives about divorce and women's rights (Fig. 3). In an interview with Juan Losa, Ros comments about the feminist thrust of the volume by suggesting that

[m]uchas veces caemos en el error de pensar que la transgresión y la lucha feminista son exclusivas de nuestra generación, cuando en realidad no es nada nuevo, estas mujeres demostraron agallas en un momento en el que lo tenían todo en contra. (2020: para. 2)

Ros's text celebrates the risks taken by the liberated expression of Jurado's music, calling special attention to the lyrics of the song "Amores a solas," which deals with female sexuality. Comics and illustrated texts have a long history of challenging social norms in their depiction not only of sexuality, the body, and autobiography, but also of trauma, history, and feminism. According to Hillary Chute, graphic narratives by women frequently focus on two important factors of identity, "hybridity and autobiography, theorizing trauma in connection to the visual, textuality that takes the body seriously. I claim graphic narratives, as they exhibit these interests, 'feminist'" (2010: 4).<sup>8</sup> Ros's text and illustrations create a clear linkage between imagery and ideology with examples of feminism and rebellion both past and present. In this sense, and considering *Cosas nuestras's* innovative generic hybridity discussed above, the volume offers a convincing visual narrative that engages important issues of our day related to gender, politics, and expression.

## Humanization of the Other

A final aspect of Ros's text that gives voice to her grandmother is the way in which the dialogue and images humanize her ancestor. Throughout the many conversations represented in the volume, the reader frequently sees Resure singing and dancing as she does daily chores like cleaning the house or preparing meals (Fig. 4). These scenes, which often appear through sequential art frames typical of comics discourse, establish a link between past and present based on mutual understanding, compassion, and empathy, with the intention to more fully give voice to the thoughts, passions, and feelings of the author's grandmother. As Ros stated in a recent interview,

[a] la hora de hablar con una mujer de la edad de mi abuela sobre feminismo, inmigración, etc, ves que los puntos de vista son diferentes pero luego, hablando, encuentras puntos comunes. En el fondo, aunque no lo parezca, nos queremos entender con los otros. (Adanti, 2020b: respuesta 3)

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<sup>8</sup> In her chapter in *Spanish Cultural Studies: An Introduction*, Rosa Montero details the many social and cultural advances made in Spain after the death of Franco, especially considering that "until very recently, our cultural traditions have discriminated heavily against women" (1995: 381).

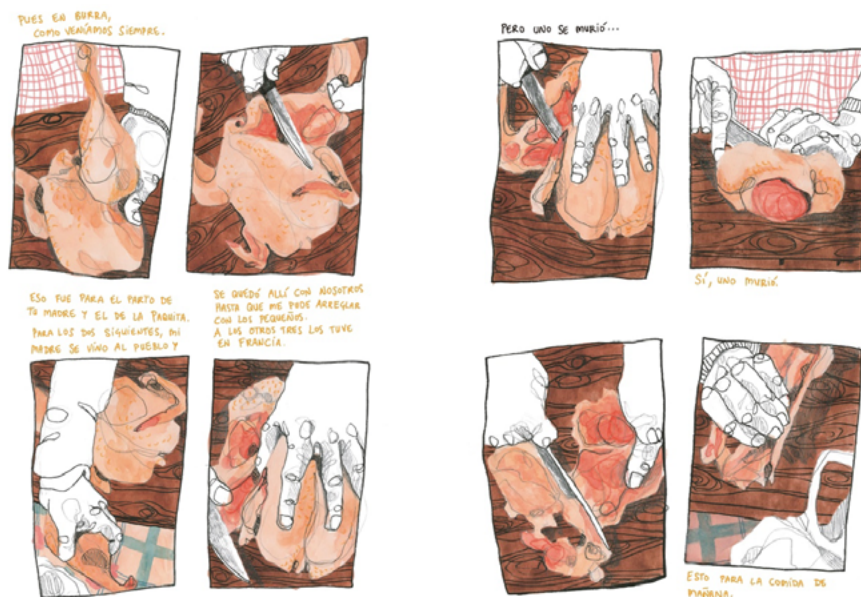


Fig. 4

According to Darío Adanti, Ros's text is based in an attempt to "construir este puente entre dos generaciones que, a primera vista, pueden parecer completamente distintas" (2020a: para. 5). In this sequence of images of Resure methodically cutting chicken, for example, the author humanizes her grandmother as they discuss the family's experience living in exile in France. The close-up images that zoom in to the wrinkles and textures of Resure's hand suggest a long life of labor and, like the process of cutting chicken that spans eight panels, one's work continues even into old age. Furthermore, the text from this sequence recounts the emotional story of the death of one of Resure's children, all the while juxtaposed with the graphic images of cutting the chicken into pieces to be consumed. This visualization of the physical cutting and separation of flesh seems to echo the trauma and loss inherent to living in exile during periods of political turmoil and violence.



Fig. 5



This impulse to humanize the author's ancestor is emphasized in another illustration, which constitutes a culminating image and sequence in Ros's *Cosas nuestras*. Near the middle of the novel, Ros reflects on her grandmother as a young woman with her own passions, dreams, and desires. Ros depicts Resure riding a bicycle across the rural fields of her youth in seemingly total independence and "yendo muy rápido. Casi volando" (Ros, 2020) (Fig. 5). With respect to this scene, the author states that "[t]endemos a imaginar a las personas que nos han precedido siempre con la edad que tenían cuando las conocimos, como si hubieran sido eternamente abuelas y vivieran ancladas en su propio tiempo" (Losa: 2020, para. 4). Along this line, Juan Losa suggests that a central message of the book, therefore, is to "intentar ver de otro modo a la persona que admiramos, un esfuerzo por librarla de esa vieja foto color sepia" (2020: para. 5). The double splash pages of this sequence contain a large red stain that appears as a shadow or trail left behind the young Resure on her bicycle, an image that could symbolize at once lifeblood, the blood of menstruation, the blood of suffering, trauma, or death, or even the vibrant coloring of hope and freedom. What is more, Resure is illustrated here wearing pants, which further demonstrates an act of rebellion during that time and another instance in which the grandmother appears to sympathize with feminine acts of resistance. The illustration of Resure riding her bicycle animates and enlivens the youthful exuberance of the grandmother and attempts to represent her in her complete humanity, at once asserting her strength and embracing a gendered spirit of resistance.

In an interview with David Alarcón, Ros states that one purpose of her book is to show the similarities between people from different generations. This level of understanding and empathy for others is accomplished, at least partially, by recognizing that "tenemos mucho que aprender porque ellos también han sido jóvenes; se han enfadado, se han enamorado, se han escapado..." (Alarcón, 2020: respuesta 4). While his poem does not serve as an explicit intertext in *Cosas nuestras*, Dámaso Alonso's poem "La madre" from his 1944 "diario íntimo," *Hijos de la ira*, attempts a similar humanization of his mother as the lyrical subject tries to see her within the dreams and desires of her youth:

No me digas  
que estás llena de arrugas,  
.....  
No importa madre, no importa.  
Tú eres siempre joven,  
eres una niña,  
tienes once años.  
Oh, sí, tú eres para mí eso: una candorosa niña. (Alonso, 1986: ll. 1–2, 5–9)

The result of this type of humanization creates understanding, compassion, and empathy, seeing another not in a role with which they are often perceived, but as a more fully embodied subject inhabiting their own unique life aspirations.

## Conclusion

Frequently in our day, Ilu Ros declares, “[c]ometemos el error de hablar únicamente con gente de nuestra generación y tendemos a aislarnos. Está muy bien hablar, hablando se entiende la gente. Tenemos que saber ponernos en el lugar del otro” (Alarcón, 2020: respuesta 17). *Cosas nuestras*, which is at once an illustrated book, photo album and memoir, compilation of songs and poems from one’s youth, and collection of comic sequences, attempts to do just that. It establishes a dialogue between generations in a hopeful act of understanding, of putting oneself in the place of another. Through the many voices of the past, of the grandmother of course, but also of artists, poets, singers, and actresses from a prior age, the book links the present with the past, the contemporary with the historical, the act of remembrance with compassion. The discussion of issues of memory and history in relation to recent Spanish graphic novels by women seeks to underscore the persistence of gendered discourse during the current “Golden Age” of Spanish comics. The figures evoked through memory in Ilu Ros’s *Cosas nuestras* highlight the importance of the feminine voice, acts of rebellion, and protests that seek women’s rights, all the while bearing homage to and keeping alive the memories and legacy of one’s beloved grandmother.

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