Editorial – Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, Special Issue Transnational Italian Comics

Introduction: transnational Italian comics: memory, migration, transformation

This special issue introduces for the first time to the predominantly Anglophone arena of Comics Studies a strand of the globalising comics culture of the 21st century, namely the transnational Italian comics scene. Our aim has been to highlight the mobility and the multilingualism of Italian comics culture as well as the avenues of research evident in this emerging field. Two elements have been key in such an endeavour: a transnational perspective that embraces the mobility of Italian (comics) culture across geographical and linguistic borders (Burdett, Havely and Polezzi 2020; Spadaro 2022) and the engagement of contributors from different academic backgrounds related to Comics and Italian Studies. In this framework, memory and migration have emerged as powerful narrative themes in comics production and simultaneously as avenues of research in Comics Studies. This introduction outlines the rationale of the project and points towards further directions within the emerging field of Transnational Italian Comics Studies.

Our starting point is that the phenomenology of the Italian fumetto cannot be contained within Italy and Italian language because it is intertwined with the long and ongoing history of mobility of Italian authors and readers and also because it springs from acts of translation – whether between languages, creative and industrial practices, or media. Comics and graphic novels help us think differently about the definition, the canons and the production of Italian culture, and this special issue calls for more robust theoretical investment from scholars in the field. Such expert engagement with the specificity of Italian transnational mobility – in terms of trajectories, practices, languages – highlights tensions within the globalising development of both comics culture and Comics Studies.

This special issue aims to intensify the scholarly engagement with Italian comics and with the rapidly establishing canons, categories, and research questions of the broadly defined field of Transnational Comics Studies. The latter has burgeoned across various journals and book series, questioning definitions of French or Francophone (Forsdick et al. 2005), US (Denson, Meyer, and Stein 2013), European (Grove, Miller, and Magnussen 2019), Asian (Brienza 2016; Ogi et al. 2019Spanish (Magnussen 2018), German (Kraenzle and Ludewig 2020), and postcolonial (Mickwitz 2015) comics and canons, focusing on comics genres, authors and productions exemplary of transnational and transcultural exchange. In this spirit, our project engages ‘with narratives, histories and imaginaries that transcend national boundaries as well as with practices of comics production indebted to multiple comics traditions” (Kraenzle and Ludewig 2020, 2), advancing current debates that seek to globalise Comics Studies. Over the last twenty years, this arena has witnessed a wealth of theoretical reflection and the emergence of avenues of research on comics histories and cultures, by foregrounding ideas of mobility and transcultural exchange (Maigret and Stefanelli 2012) and by calling scholars to embrace processes that, rather than integration, ‘necessarily involve transformation’ (Grove, Miller, and Magnussen 2019, 1). To such an endeavour, we bring an approach to memory and translation as inherently productive and multimodal practices that occupy a central position in processes of cultural transmission and transformation (Burdett, Polezzi, and Spadaro 2020; Spadaro 2020a). Our perspective foregrounds firstly the multilingualism of Italian memory, which – we argue here – is increasingly apparent precisely in comics production, with new authors exploring their identification with Italian culture from and across a diversity of linguistic backgrounds and geographical locations. Secondly, our translational perspective on memory foregrounds the multimodality of the comics medium, taking Kukkonen’s (2011) inclusive definition of comics (multimodal texts mostly made of a combination of words, images and panel arrangements) as an example of the expanding modes of translation which, as Loredana Polezzi has put it, ‘are articulated along a continuum of practices – a translation continuum which is constitutive of our mobile and multilingual world’ (Polezzi in Spadaro 2020a). Thirdly, our transnational approach breaks with the methodological nationalism that identifies culture according to territorial borders and linguistic frontiers (Burdett and Polezzi 2020; Wimmer and Schiller 2003). This to scrutinise two distinctive phenomena that, over the last decades, have been shaping at once the globalising comics culture and Italian graphic narratives, namely:

1. The emergence of migration as a catalyst for the narrative and aesthetic development of comics authors and practitioners, which resonates on one hand with the impact of the so-called refugee crisis on a globalising comics scene (Singer, 2020), on the other with longstanding traditions of underground comics in the Mediterranean. Whilst the deployment of the Mediterranean as a frontier of Fortress Europe is a powerful narrative catalyst for comics authors in Italy, an increasing number of Italian and *Italodiscendenti* [children of Italian migration] authors around the world use personal accounts, and in particular those of transgenerational relationships and memories, to explore complex histories of dislocation, violence, discrimination, trauma and resistance. Such processes are explored here in conversation with Elettra Stamboulis and in the articles by Francesco Ricatti and Barbara Pezzotti, Chiara Giuliani and Alessia Mangiavillano
2. The power of comics to develop communities of memory, whether in the sense of reclaiming and remediating history via the comics medium (the case of the Chinese community in Italy, examined by Chiara Giuliani) or in the sense of creation and development of new communities of memory, whether around a groundbreaking comic series (the case *Dylan Dog* in Daniele Comberiati’s article) or comics practices (the comics-based artivism scrutinised by Nicoletta Mandolini). Engaging with debates around comics and postmemory (Hirsch 2011), documentary and archive (Mickwitz 2015) and alternative memory narratives (Nabizadeh 2019, particularly reflecting on the intersection between ‘local’ contents and ‘global’ memories), our aim has been to point out how these communities of (comics) memory are powerful and increasingly relevant tools for the transnational rewriting and representing of Italian memory and culture – in other words, for the imagining and materialising of alternative presents and futures.

Memory and Migration are hence posited here as key areas of investigation to understand the contemporary Italian comics scene within a theoretical framework that captures transnational developments across comics cultures and in relation to the globalising arena of Comics Studies.

The third instance of this Special Issue is transformation, especially in terms of transformation of comics genres and scene. The project captures the diversity of a transnational Italian scene within globalising trends that have been taking comics ‘from the underground to everywhere’ (Chute 2017, book’s subtitle). Whilst the comics authors featured here are interested more in expressing their aesthetic instances than in questions of genre and scholarly definition – a common authorial attitude negotiated by comics scholars – it is worth stressing how the contributors advance the scholarly debate on comics practices and genres. The articles shed light on multiple examples of such transformation, spanning from the newsstands of the commercial series to the artivism of urban graffiti, via the rise of the graphic novel. Focusing on comics-based artivism against gender violence, Nicoletta Mandolini’s article charts the diverse production of feminist graphic narratives in Italy, from graphic novels to handbooks and participative vignettes, providing a highly original contribution to the study of feminist comics practices (Munt and Richards 2020; Streeten 2020). Furthermore, by weaving transnational activism (#MeToo, #NiUnaMenos) into the specific context of Italian mobilisation against gender violence, comics-based artivism highlights the productive role of translation in relation to comics genres and practices. Another significant example of the productive role of translation in respect of comics genres – this time tracing back decades of movements of the Italian underground scene – is graphic journalism. The conversation between Barbara Spadaro and Elettra Stamboulis retraces the rise and development of comics journalism since the 1990s as an expression of the transcultural and translational mobility of the Mediterranean, US and postcolonial comics cultures and aesthetics. Stamboulis is a Mediterranean legend of the underground comics scene: an independent comics writer and curator, she was (with Gianluca Costantini) the artistic director of the *Festival Komikazen del Fumetto di Realtà* [Komikazen Festival of Reality Comics] between 2005–2015, and curator of many exhibitions and publications of international comics authors in Italy. Based in Ravenna (Italy), the Komikazen Festival galvanised a vibrant and diverse scene of authors, activists and independent publishers from the Mediterranean and the Middle East, and its political and translational ethos would further expand into the magazines ‘Inguine(Mah!) Gazine’ and ‘G.I.U.D.A.’. Stamboulis’s intellectual and creative trajectory testifies to a collective research process that has been pushing the boundaries of the comics medium while exploring the intersection of memory, subjectivity and ‘reality’, a concept central to major development in the comics scene, as a number of initiatives and prestigious prizes for reality-based comics show. Yet, as Stamboulis points out, reality is a concept loaded with complexity, and in their situated perspective, works associated with this testify to the urgency of making political societal interventions rather than to any realism of images and narrative linearity. Translated into English, this conversation allows readers to appreciate how the tensions between fiction and non-fiction in the representation of memory, trauma and migrant experience have been driving forces in (Italian) graphic journalism, which more than a genre of Italian comics production should be considered as an expanding strand of graphic narratives key to the transformative and transnational processes under our scrutiny. In this respect, the two comics reportages examined by Alessia Mangiavillano in her article – Bonaccorso and Rizzo’s Salvezza (2018) and . . . a casa nostra (2019) – testify to the variety of genres and forces taking comics journalism from the underground to the mainstream of the transnational media landscape. Published by Feltrinelli Comics, the commercial comics series inaugurated in 2018 by one of the major Italian publishers (Feltrinelli Editore), both have benefited from a powerhouse of publicity and distribution leading to translation into French and Spanish. Most importantly, being produced and published within a landscape of restrictive anti-immigrant policies in Italy, both comics are considered by Mangiavillano as works of critical inquiry with documentary value and historical significance. Salvezza is indeed the first report in comics form from a rescue vessel – the Aquarius, operated by the NGO SOS Méditerranée in partnership with Médecins sans frontières – where drawing in-situ was a unique tool to gather data, personal narratives and individual stories obscured in data-driven reports, as per the increasingly widespread approach in comics-based research and anthropology (Kuttner, Sousanis, and Weaver-Hightower 2017). Salvezza and . . . a casa nostra are indeed mainly targeted at the broader Global North audience which does not have a background in South-North migrant experience. In other words, they could be encompassed under the categories of refugee comics, as identified by Candida Rifkind (2017), Nina Mickwitz (2020) and others (Spadaro 2022) in their discussion of representation and voicing of migrants in graphic narratives of journeys towards Europe. Yet Mangiavillano focuses in particular on the authors’ approach centred on humanness (Rizzo in Mangiavillano, this issue) and their attempt to offer nuanced understandings of migration to counterbalance narratives of the migration crisis focused on security and border control. Drawing on Alison Phipps’s decolonising approach to multilingualism (Phipps 2019), Mangiavillano highlights the authors’ attempt to encourage reflections upon multilingualism, translation and the dominant role of English on the rescue vessels, concluding that these two examples of comics journalism have the potential to contribute to strategies of decolonising knowledge.

Moving to narratives of Italian migration, Francesco Ricatti and Barbara Pezzotti consider three graphic novels that challenge stereotypical representations of Italian migration by positioning migrant memories within broader transnational histories of colonial settlement, class exploitation, sexism, racism, and acts of resistance. Elizabeth Povinelli’s The Inheritance (2021), Joshua Santospirito’s Swallows Santospirito (2015) and Pia Valentinis’ Ferriera (Valentinis 2014) are all works created by children of Italian migration born in Italy (Valentinis), Australia (Santospirito) and the US (Povinelli). They map transnational lives and identities through complex artistic processes of autobiographical (re)orientation across languages – English and Italian – and memories. Pezzotti and Ricatti build on the postmodern concept of carto-graphic memoirs (Mitchell 2007; Norment 2012) to consider how the recurrent use of maps in these graphic narratives, rather than dictated by preoccupations with objectivity, becomes an essential tool for the expression of subjectivity, representing the mnemonic relation of the subject to specific historical localities. Ricatti has written extensively on the dominant narratives of Italian Australians redeeming the struggle and shame of migration through individual success, upward mobility, and racial ‘whitening’ (Ricatti 2011a, 2011b; 2018) and this article engages with the potential of the comics medium to investigate and remediate complex histories of displacement and trauma (Appleton 2021) whilst expressing the privileged perspectives of descendants of migrants. Integrating factual, creative and conceptual elements into narratives that bring together personal, family and societal dimensions, these graphic memoirs avoid the failure to acknowledge the difference white privilege makes, a recurrent failure in discourse on European diaspora (Moynihan 2013). In particular, Santospirito and Valentini’s use of narrative and visual gaps to mirror the fragmented and incomplete patterns of memory reveal the elusiveness of Italianness, foregrounding their silences. Whilst Povinelli’s explicit self- identification as ‘nothing more than a typical white kid with the privilege of not knowing or not having to be affected by knowing’ (Povinelli 2021, 273) represents a significant turn in self-representation and narratives of Italian migration and Italian hyphenated identities, hopefully in the process inspiring the self-positioning of new authors – and scholars – expressing and reading memories of Italianness and migration. As these and many other works show (Spadaro 2022, 2023), over the last decade a stream of graphic narratives in multiple languages has sprung from the intergenerational memory of Italian migration, redrawing geographies of Italian (comics) culture by experimenting with comics genres and expanding the ‘Italian’ scene – e.g. Palacinche by Caterina Sansone and Alessandro Tota (2012), or Naftalina by Sole Otero (2020). It’s time to engage with this cultural production.

Transnational Italian Studies have taken the cue from literature and cinema, with comics long marginalised from discussions about the canon of Italian culture, to the point of being mentioned only within inverted commas, as Umberto Eco remarks in his seminal essays on media and mass communication: ‘fumetti’ (Eco, 1996: xvii). Since the 1980s, scholars of Italian literature have focused on emerging of authors of transnational lives and multilingual backgrounds, defined initially as ‘migrant’ (Gnisci 1992), then ‘postcolonial’ (Parati 2005), then ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ postcolonial (Romeo and Lombardi Diop 2012). Italian cinema is unthinkable within nationalistic frameworks – whether we look at established exponents such as Emanuele Crialese, Paolo Sorrentino and Luca Guadagnino, or at emerging filmmakers such as Dagmawi Yimer or Elia Moutamid – and Italian Film Studies have engaged increasingly with migrant trajectories and representations (Duncan 2008), postcolonialism (De Franceschi 2013), cultural hybridity (Nathan 2017) and transnationalism (O’Healy 2019) for more than a decade now. The Italian fumetto, on the other hand, has only recently been identified as a medium that expresses and exposes the transnational and transcultural dynamism of Italian culture (Spadaro 2020a, 2020b), reflecting the lingering marginalisation of the medium in literary and nationalist scholarly canons. Recent scholarship in Italian has just begun to focus on questions of representation of migration in the comics medium, from a variety of vantage points and through a sheer diversity of international case studies, beyond any specific engagement with Italian cultural production (Busi Rizzi, Gallo Bonomi 2006). Aiming to advance early approaches to Italian comics from Italian Studies, this special issue considers comics not only as a historical and historicised medium of popular culture in Italy (Gallo and Bonomi 2006; Horn 1983) but one that enables an expanding series of narrative practices inside and outside Italy. The transnational approach also allows us to ask some fundamental questions about contemporary Italy: what does it mean today to speak of ‘Italian’ cultural production? How, in which places and through which dynamics are ‘Italian’ comics produced? We believe that comics, with their long history within Italian culture, provide responses to these questions while contributing to advancing scholarly understanding of Italian culture. The transnationalism of Italian comics emerges here through different patterns: the continuous flow of migration of comics authors to and from Italy, the impact of comics translations, the memory of Italian migration across the globe, the diversity of memory within Italy itself, the circulation of professional practices and cultural influences – from the well-known case of Hugo Pratt in Argentina to the apparent, and much less studied, influence of manga on contemporary Italian authors such as Zerocalcare and Vincenzo Filosa. This special issue builds on pioneering studies of the circulation of Italian comics and authors across Francophone and Latin American comics cultures (Comberiati 2018; Stefanelli 2016) to develop further a transnational perspective on Italian (comics) culture, towards the establishment of Transnational Italian Comics Studies as a field of studies positioned at the intersection with the increasingly globalising field of Comics Studies.

As mentioned above, the Italian transnational scene reveals how the comics medium is increasingly exposing and expressing Italian memory, understood as a series of multimodal processes of identification. Starting from the theoretical reflections, among others, of Mickvitz (2015) and Erll and Rigney (2009; Erll 2014), this issue explores specifically how comics enable the transgenerational and transnational nature of memory in the 21st century. Rewriting and representing reality through comics is an expanding phenomenon in cultural memory which develops both in a chronological sense, through different generations, and in a transnational cultural context, where the comics in question acquire different meanings and interpretations. The production of different cultural memories through comics, in the transnational Italian context, has generated a series of local narratives that have contributed, in the sense analysed by Nabizadeh (2019, 89), to the creation of a collective memory on issues that are highly topical: inter-generational conflicts and tensions, processes of identity formation, and the ways in which these memories are constructed and received. Having identified comics authors and works representative of the transgenerational and transnational movements of Italian memory at the turn of the century, the articles explore different aspects of collective memory production and negotiation, across four decades of Italian comics history that marked substantial transformations in both industry and readership. Daniele Comberiati’s long term approach focuses on Dylan Dog, a ground breaking Italian comics series designed in the 1990s by the commercial publisher Bonelli in an attempt to revamp the classic format of 20th-century Italian comics (i.e. the commercial series) and attract a new generation of readers of punk taste and transnational lives. The article ‘Comics and Transgenerational Memory. The case of Dylan Dog’ analyses – through the creative and commercial strategies developed by the authors of the series until today – how elements of the cultural memory of different generations have resonated within this comic series and which factors have facilitated or impeded identification between the consecutive series of Dylan Dog and its readers. Comberiati hence sheds light on the contemporary phenomenon of the afterlives of iconic comics characters – Hugo Pratt’s Corto Maltese being another transnational Italian example – as much as on changes in the relationship between comics and communities of memory.

Chiara Giuliani, on the other hand, examines the development of alternate narratives and memories in graphic narratives (Nabizadeh 2019) through the trilogy by Ciaj Rocchi and Matteo Demonte on the Chinese community in Milan. These are the first comics books representing the history of the Chinese community in Italy from a Sino-Italian perspective, after the early attempt of the commercial series Long Wei (Cajelli and Genovese 2013–2014) to feature the Chinese community in a crime noir depicting multilingual and multicultural Milan as ‘a foreign and suspicious universe, derived from migration’ (Pezzarossa 2022). The remarkable novelty of Rocchi and Demonte’s project is the use of comics to disrupt racialising stereotypes of the Chinese in Italian popular culture, rather than remediating them. This is of course a critical issue across contemporary comics culture and Comics Studies, as we confront the form’s complex and troubled histories of depicting race and ethnicity (Nijdam 2020). In this landscape, Primavere e Autunni (Rocchi and Demonte 2015), Chinamen: un secolo di Cinesi a Milano (Rocchi and Demonte 2017) and La macchina Zero: Mario Tchou e il primo computer Olivetti (Rocchi and Demonte 2021) stand out from the Italian comics scene as remarkable examples of deploying the comics medium to reclaim history and reshape cultural memory. Begun as personal and artistic research around Demonte’s Chinese background, the project expanded into a collective history of the Sino-Italian community, drawing on institutional archives and public engagement events in Milan, and remediated into comics and animations. By reclaiming a migrant community’s history in a transnational framework, the project challenges mainstream progressive narratives of capitalism; for example the third chapter is a biography of Mario Tchou, Adriano Olivetti’s Chinese assistant and an important figure in the dissemination of Olivetti’s distinctive approach to community and enterprise capitalism. Giuliani focuses on the authors’ documentarist approach, the ways in which personal biographies are embedded in the story of Italy’s resident Chinese community and in the history of Italy, and finally on the comics’ intergenerational and diasporic testimonial value.

In concluding this introduction, we want to highlight some of the tensions lingering in the transnational Italian comics scene that deserve further reflection and investigation. From the perspective of the Anglophone, globalising arena of Comics Studies, Hillary Chute writes that ‘comics expand modes of historical and personal expression’ and ‘explore the conflicted boundaries of what can be said and what can be shown at the intersection of collective histories and life stories’ (Chute 2008, 453). The articles in this special issue show how graphic narratives increasingly challenge nationalist, monolingual, top-down and white-and-male-centred representations of Italian history and memory. Yet the transnational Italian comics scene – and the Italian comics industry – has been and continues to be predominantly white, and there are difficult questions to ask around the context and power at play in comics production and storytelling, in the past, present and future of Italian comics. This project has shown the need to engage more critically with issues of positionality and whiteness in the representations of migrant refugees in comics, especially when authors and scholars express the ambition to counterbalance top-down narratives of the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean. It has been written that ‘race cannot be omitted, or unstated, in drawings’ (Burrell and Hörschelman 2019: 6) yet the structural colour-blindness (Portelli 2003) and the elusiveness of Italian language and culture around race – withdrawal of the term from legal and public discourse after the defeat of fascism with the Second World War (Pesarini and Tintori 2020) – forecloses Italian comics culture as much as any actual debate around race in the Italian public and political spheres (Spadaro 2022). In this respect, the call to confront the complex and troubled histories of comics depicting race and ethnicity (Nijdam 2020) and to ‘“acknowledge our complicity in the muting” of any particular positions or voices’ (Spivak in Burrell and Hörschelman, 2019, 47) takes a very specific meaning for Italian authors, especially those invested in re-presenting someone else’s stories or in collaborative action. Beyond the points analysed in many of the contributions to this special issue, the dynamics of power and inclusion within different forms of comics activism calls for deeper questioning of who is welcomed, through which codes and into whose spaces (Burrell and Hörschelman 2019). Our case studies highlight the presence of new subjects and practices, calling for further investigation of the cultural and representative tensions within the transnational Italian comics scene, towards a deeper questioning of what is still missing – or still marginal – to definitions of the Italian fumetto, and why.

On the other hand, this project has also shown transnational Italian comics taking explicit stances about acknowledging and reimagining the heritage of Italian white privilege; and authors of mixed Italian background adopting comics to visualise marginalised histories. Yet Ciaj Rocchi and Matteo De Monte are remarkable exceptions in an overwhelmingly ethnically homogeneous transnational Italian comics scene. Over the last decade, a handful of authors of diverse backgrounds, children of migration born and raised in Italy – Takoua Ben Mohamed, Elisa Macellari, Croma – interweaving personal and collective biographies, have been experimenting with comics genres and formats. Drawing from manga, comics journalism, and the graphic novel, and investing their energies in practices of making and disseminating comics that aim also to galvanise societal change, they contribute to the reshaping of ideas of Italian memory and culture, challenging mainstream and top-down representations of racialised people in Italy.

This discussion is necessary to fully understand a comics scene that has been implicitly transnational since its inception and now calls – we believe – for more robust and critical theoretical tools. A study of the whiteness of the contemporary Italian comics scene is beyond the scope of this special issue, and we can envisage some of the parameters to be taken in consideration: it should be placed into the context of changes in the ethnic composition of Italian society, and against a comparative analysis of other sectors of the media and art industries (cinema, literature, theatre, television, etc.); it should identify the most common educational and training trajectories of Italian comic artists (schools, costs, timing, etc.) and their relation to class, ethnicity and location (North/South in particular). Such study deserves to be conducted in comparison with those of other contexts – from the historical to the emerging referents of Italian comics authors: the Francophone, US, Argentinian and Japanese, as well as the burgeoning Turkish, German and North African comics scenes.

Finally, a call for further research on some popular, commercially successful – increasingly canonical – staples of Italian comics in a transnational comics framework. Authors such as Zerocalcare, Hugo Pratt and Milo Manara, or the spaghetti western genre, that since the 20th century have unquestionably contributed to the transnational dimension of the Italian comics scene, are missing from this publication. There are many reasons for these gaps, starting from the coherence of a project that revolves around memory and migration in order to develop a reflection on the transnational Italian comics scene, in tension with other ideas of the canon of Italian comics. In our view, any canon should be critically acknowledged as one of the possible ways of reading and studying (Italian) comics. Readers seeking for more classic state of the art of Italian comics might still want to refer to established scholarship (Stefanelli 2016). Secondly, the project went through several iterations – contributors to our Transnational Italian Comics Seminar (see below) are still finalising their articles on iconic case studies of the 20th century, which we hope to see published soon in the future, as part of the further impact of this project. Indeed, most of the examples covered in this special issue engage with 21st-century authors and comics – the main exception being Dylan Dog. Yet this only reflects the intensified transnational and transcultural nature of contemporary comics production.

Comics research has traditionally been defined by publications in either English or French, with Italian comics scholars tending to contribute to the latter more than the former, for historical and cultural reasons. Since the 1960s, following on Umberto Eco’s pioneering contributions on comics and mass communication (Pelliteri 2019), in Italy a rich tradition of studies on semiotics and visual communication engaging with US and European production has contributed to international studies on comics and seriality, comics and cinema, and comics and media (Barbieri 2009; Frezza 2020; Tirino 2019). Whilst some of the authors, notably Daniele Comberiati, have drawn from these studies, the overall approach of this special issue develops towards different direction and disciplinary fields, with the aim to scrutinise the transnational and translational processes that characterise the Italian comics scene. This special issue features a new generation of comics authors and scholars, moving between languages and academic cultures. The theoretical perspective and the research questions of this project stem from our transnational and translingual trajectories and from our respective academic backgrounds, which are – just like those of most scholars of our generation! – only tangential to Comics Studies. Trained in Literature (Daniele Comberiati) and History (Barbara Spadaro), our first encounter occurred around questions of the cultural representation of Italian colonialism and migration in private memory and literary production, and their resonance in contemporary Italian culture. In other words, our approach to comics stems from our studies on postcolonialism, migration and identity, and from related questions around contemporary forms of memorialisation and the rewriting of history, which resonate with the field of Transnational Comics Studies. Rather than providing a classic ‘state of the art’ of a field pre-determined both geographically and linguistically, this special issue brings for the first time to the Anglophone arena of Comics Studies some Mediterranean and diasporic protagonists of the Italian comics scene. We are proud of a pioneering research project that brings together fresh voices in the field of European Comics Studies with colleagues in Transcultural Italian Studies writing about comics for the very first time. We are delighted to showcase the outcomes in the Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, highlighting its attention to transcultural and transdisciplinary development of Comics Studies, and we are grateful to the editors and to the anonymous reviewers of the Journal for their support, and feedback. Also, we would like to thank the three discussants who have engaged with the early stage of the project – Matteo Stefanelli and Ivan Pintor Aranzo from Comics Studies, and Loredana Polezzi for Italian and Translation Studies – for their generous responses and encouragement. Our sincere gratitude for the intellectual curiosity and commitment shown by the contributors to a seminar hosted by the University Paul-Valéry Montpellier 3 (France). Finally, thanks to our home institutions for supporting the Visiting Fellowship of Barbara Spadaro at the University of Montpellier in 2022.

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