

# “Tudo melhora depois de uma guerra”: Prosthetic Memory and the Graphic Adaptation of Milton Hatoum’s *Dois Irmãos*

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## Abstract

*Milton Hatoum’s devoted readership has become an economic asset for crossover audiences the last ten years, and nowhere is this more visible than with his “modern classic,” the Jabuti Prize-winning *Dois Irmãos* (2000), which has been adapted for television, theater, and comics. Identical twin Brazilian cartoonists Gabriel Bá and Fábio Moon’s graphic adaptation of the same name in 2015 not only won the prestigious Eisner Award, but it was also accompanied by a strong marketing campaign from Hatoum’s editorial press utilizing the brothers’ fraternal status and mass cultural appeal to expand readership bases. Drawing on Angela Landsberg’s “prosthetic memory,” Pointner and Boschenhoff’s exploration of spatial embodiment in graphic adaptations, and recent Latin American comic scholarship linking military dictatorships and the rise of memory discourses, this article demonstrates that Moon and Bá’s hauntingly beautiful rendition, far from being derivative or merely “faithful,” is able to apply medium-specific strategies to even more effectively render Hatoum’s association between individual history and national allegory, in the process introducing new generations of citizens increasingly alienated from Brazil’s darkest period.*

**Keywords:** adaptation studies, Brazil, comics, dictatorship, Fábio Moon and Gabriel Bá, graphic novel, national history, spatial memory

Much twentieth-century critical work on Latin American comics and mass culture can trace its origins to *Para leer al Pato Donald* (How to Read Donald Duck, 1971), Chilean Ariel Dorfman and Belgian Armand Mattelart’s Marxist-inspired deconstruction of the ideological practices in Disney’s graphic representations of postcolonial regions. Jennifer Manthei makes this anti-capitalist genealogy explicit by citing the foundational text’s title in her own “How to Read *Chico Bento*: Brazilian Comics and National Identity” (2011), a case study revealing contradictory internal logics of developmentalism undergirding Brazil’s military dictatorship (1964-85). A watershed moment occurred in 1970 when artist Mauricio de Sousa successfully persuaded one of the largest publishing houses in Brazil to begin producing his decade-old *Turma da Mônica* newspaper comic in book form (Catalá-Carrasco et al. 8), and the media franchise and merchandizing universe that resulted, replete with multiple amusement parks dedicated to the

characters, earned him notoriety as the Walt Disney of Latin America. This popularity can in part be attributed to celebration of de Sousa’s works as representing quintessentially Brazilian themes and cultural concepts, yet, via the *Mônica* spin-off featuring the character “Chico Bento,” Manthei is particularly interested in why de Sousa’s were the only Brazilian comics permitted to be published under the censorship of Brazil’s military dictatorship (1964-85). In addition to exploring exactly what “vision of the nation—its history, populations, and future—are proposed through this cultural text” (143), the anthropologist disentangles de Sousa’s contradictory logics of national nostalgia, (under) developmentalism, and the regime’s economic modernization initiatives.

The study of comics as serious cultural artifacts appeared concomitantly with the consecration of memory studies during the 1990s. Across much of Latin America, the recovery of the comics industry and the rise of

memory discourses coincided with complex post-dictatorial/redemocratization processes and thus nationally-inflected attempts—from the formation of truth commissions to the informal judgments in the court of public opinion provided by exilic literature and, increasingly, cinema and television—to come to terms with human rights abuses. The initial focus on the recent traumatic past has increasingly expanded, however, to consider transnational meaning-making within historical discourses that extend beyond Cold War contexts, and in the process, “comics have adopted different historical, aesthetic, thematic, or contextual strategies” (Catalá-Carrasco et al. 19) to equally represent and reflect upon processes of memory transmission.

Thus, in *Posthumanism and the Graphic Novel in Latin America* (2017), Edward King and Joanna Page distinguish between ideological scholarship about the sequential arts and haptic approaches such as their own that foreground the materiality and organization of graphic presentations. The duo delineates market tendencies along regional and geopolitical lines, positing that, in contrast to the domination of autobiographical and para-journalistic modes in Europe and North America, across Latin America the most prevalent genre in the twenty-first century is speculative, with particular focuses on science fiction tropes. Significantly, while much of the mass cultural appeal behind posthumanist labels concerns the dystopian implications of how technological advances displace the autonomy of the figure of the human in future settings, science fiction comics “often serve as allegories of real-life [present] conditions and/or historical developments” (Espinoza 7). Thus, King and Page posit a second layer to the posthuman paradigm as a metacritical perspective. These less “nostalgic” and therefore less reactionary approaches can “explore ways in which the [problematic] construction of the category of the human as separate from and superior to nature is intricately bound up with the assertion of hierarchical differences among humans, both racial and sexual” (King and Page 4). The book examines case studies from several national traditions, and while Chile serves as a particularly rich nexus of production, the scholars briefly reference Brazil’s famous

twin-brother collaborators Fábio Moon and Gabriel Bá as the most visible embodiment of this trend in their home country. Presumably, this is in reference to the Eisner Award-winning *Daytripper* (2011) series, their acclaimed addition to the *Hellboy* universe and its Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense titled *1947* (2009), and Bá’s illustrations in the US serial *Umbrella Academy* (2007-2019), which has more recently been adapted into a multi-season Netflix superhero series.

While the above titles indicate the twins’ mass cultural appeal, this article examines Moon and Bá’s 2015 graphic novel adaptation of *Dois Irmãos*, Lebanese-Brazilian writer Milton Hatoum’s second novel. Considered a modern “classic,” Hatoum’s book won the prestigious Jabuti Prize for Literature in 2001, and the adaptation in turn achieved an Eisner Award, the so-called “Oscar” of the comic industry. The visual transposition, which took two years to script and another two to illustrate (Clark), showcases a different side of the duo’s writing and illustrating capacity; indeed, much has been made by reviewers of the novelty of identical twins adapting a literary work about the same fraternal relationship. Through flashbacks verging on stream-of-consciousness, Hatoum’s nonlinear, intergenerational novel poetically weaves through the cycles of love and loss between Lebanese immigrant father Halim and Zana, a Brazilian woman of Lebanese descent. The book’s motor, however, is the antagonistic relationship between the couple’s identical twins Yaqub and Omar, who are born in Manaus between the end of the first Amazonian rubber boom and implementation of Getúlio Vargas’ Estado Novo (1937-45). As teenagers, the boys covet the same girl, and after a violent incident in which Omar scars Yaqub’s face with a shard of mirror, their family sends Yaqub to Lebanon to prevent any violent retribution. Yaqub’s exile is unexpectedly prolonged due to World War Two, and when he returns, he initially struggles to communicate in Portuguese, although this is not the reason the two brothers cannot communicate. In fact, they never formally speak again, taking diametrically opposed paths towards adulthood and citizenship. The resourceful Yaqub “exiles” himself, moving to

São Paulo, where he enrolls in a university, becomes an engineer, and maintains a resentful distance from his family. Meanwhile, the coddled Omar shows little interest in any of the trappings of labor or societal expectations, remaining at home and spending his time philandering with a long line of women from different social and ethnic backgrounds. While Halim holds up Yaqub's progress and eventually disowns the lazy Omar, Zana demonstrates an almost incestuous protectiveness of her younger twin, constantly sabotaging his sexual relationships outside the community to bring him back home under her supervision.

The war between the two brothers takes on allegorical dimensions during the military dictatorship, for financially stable Yaqub's push to modernize the family's home and business align with the regime's economic "miracle" during the 1970s, while the dilettante Omar both represents the decadence of peripheral Manaus and the repression of the opposition (when he is eventually captured and tortured for his friendship with supposed subversives). In other words, the family saga both participates in Brazil's national history and comments upon the toll its conflicts take on individual citizens' lives. In a reflection on the "margins" of history, Hatoum has provided autobiographical details suggesting that the immigrant family details structuring the book are partially inspired by his own family history (Hatoum "Escrever"), yet as a US reviewer put it, "Whether the plot is invented or borrowed from reality, it takes second place to a teeming memory of place and culture. More exactly, to the imagination of memory: blurring the edges in legend while intensifying its emotional resonance" (Eder E40).

My analysis of Moon and Bá's visual and textual interpretation of this historical mediation is structured around by two axial considerations related to the "imagination of memory" cited above. In order to synthesize posthuman allegory and historical discourses relating to the exploration of trauma, I will apply the concept of "prosthetic memory" coined by Alison Landsberg to account for new technologies of memory. The cultural historian's primary interest lies in how these new collective means of representing the past, whether the rapid ascension of cinema

in the twentieth century or the emergence of experiential sites of trauma, are created by individuals who have no direct connection to the past events in question, as well as how this lack of ownership paradoxically helps foment greater empathy across a broader range of constituencies, a framework equally applicable to Moon and Bá's graphic adaptation. Significantly, while Landsberg believes prosthetic memory has been most clearly expressed through science fiction and film (28), her focus lies on sites of memory, a status she extends to Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *Maus* (1980-91). This lack of hierarchical criticism is important, for "graphic novels as material (and, when in cyber form, immaterial) objects operate as mediums or technologies of memory, similar to but also distinct from other memory devices such as photographs, memorials, or museums, which have received far more attention from scholars of memory" (Catalá-Carrasco et al. 5).

Landsberg's transmedial approach points to a second, larger question that is vital for understanding both the evolving sociocultural viability of graphic novels in Latin America and their uneven global production, distribution, and reception. To wit, what is the relationship between graphic novels and other media, including literature, film, and digital creation? Just as Maurício da Silva's economic empire is synergistically built on a network of adaptive relationships and receptions of his various media enterprises, how does a "material" approach to adaptation (Murray 7-8) illuminate the hidden processes behind graphic adaptation? Indeed, rapid consolidation of the field of adaptation studies in the last two decades has turned from literature-to-film paradigms towards complex intertextual networks that acknowledge both transhistorical and transmedial processes. Similar to graphic novels, adaptations have long been marginalized as derivative artifacts, but as Thomas Leitch has argued, not only fiction but all nonfiction forms of knowledge production (science, journalism, history, biography, etc.) are essentially acts of adaptive revision (14-15).

Numerous international comic adaptation case studies have since appeared, and the same year that Moon and Bá's graphic adaptation was published, so too was the first volume explicitly

dedicated to the intersection of the two modes, *Comics and Adaptation*. I contend that while Moon and Bá's existing oeuvre of adaptation must be understood in the marketing and circulation of their literary comic, so too must Hatoum's work be understood as a form of adaptation rather than an "original." And in a final twist in connotation, I will demonstrate how the twin artists' adaptation is graphic in a second sense, attaching a more affective association with individual and national trauma through their hauntingly beautiful visual depiction of Hatoum's dreamlike prose. Contrary to futuristic posthuman takes, the graphic novel establishes its characters' subjugation to the entropic forces of tropical nature that eventually consume most of the family. Thus, if Hatoum's book captures the experience of forgetting, Moon and Bá utilize an array of techniques to involve the reader to become viscerally involved in remembering. If, on the one hand, the artists intend to draw greater attention to Brazilian literature and sequential arts fields, historically peripheral within Latin American paradigms, on the other the duality of Hatoum's novel is also an appropriate analogy for understanding the adaptation of literature to comic books.

### Comics, Adaptation, and the Marketplace

A majority of adaptation scholarship on comics has focused on the new global domination of Hollywood superhero films, as the publicity mechanisms of cinema overshadow adaptive relations between comics and literature.[1] Yet while comic books are published in smaller batches, the number of literature-to-comic adaptations in Europe far outweighs heritage films. Similar to trends across Latin America, literary classics have historically served as vital resources in cultural and economic terms, allowing cash strapped publishers and cartoonists to update cultural heritage via texts entering the public domain, while also acting as a metric for illustrating the industry's legitimacy and profitability (Mitaine et al. 6-7). The practice dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, and though the adaptation of classic literature in Brazil dates back to the 1930s (Santos and de Paula 322), its importance to the comics industry became central shortly after World War Two. In

this sense, adaptation has "been an integral part of the history of comics from the very beginning, facilitated, no doubt, by the polysemiotic nature of a medium that draws its capacity to tell stories both from images and words" (Mitaine et al. 7). Indeed, it is important to note that adaptation has been integral to the growth of popular genres incorporating words and images beyond literature and cinema. And as Pointner and Boschenhoff posit, comics are not only closer to literature as a medium than cinema, but also consumers "should treat comics based on literary texts as emulations of their sources rather than cheap illustrations, which unfortunately remains the chief approach of self-appointed guardians of western civilization" (89).

Milton Hatoum's devoted readership has become an economic asset for crossover audiences in visual and stage adaptations in the last ten years, and the relationship has been mutually beneficial. Bestseller *Dois Irmãos*, for example, sold one hundred thousand copies in its first decade (Monteiro), but transpositions to other media have stoked renewed sales of the hypotext. Known for his methodical, dedicated writing process rather than prolific output, Hatoum's critical consecration was seemingly immediate, with his first three novels—*Relato de um Certo Oriente* (1989), *Dois Irmãos* (2000), and *Cinzas do Norte* (2005)—all taking home the honor of Brazil's Jabuti Prize. And as the author's popular cache has increased, several of his novels and short stories have been adapted to different media, both reinforcing his cultural valence and establishing newfound appreciation for Brazil's marginalized northern region (Almeida). Most recently, Sérgio Machado's *O Rio do Desejo* (2023) was inspired by Hatoum's "O Adeus do Comandante," taken from his first collection of short stories, *A Cidade Ilhada* (2009). Machado is now in talks to adapt *Cinzas do Norte* (Fonseca), while director Marcelo Gomes's feature-length adaptation of *Relato de um Certo Oriente* is in pre-production. Scriptwriter Maria Camargo also intended to adapt *Dois Irmãos* to the large screen, but when the project fell through, she developed it instead into a six-part limited series for TV Globo in 2017, with a simultaneous release of the script with commentary the same year serving as marketing tie-in. While Camargo

deviated in a few key moments from Hatoum's novel, the author approved of the transposition, and had even given Camargo complete control over the cinematic end-product. His rationale for not controlling the final product echoes the "total liberty" he gave Moon and Bá for the graphic novel (Al'Hanati; Clark): "Não quis me envolver e nem poderia, porque é uma linguagem diferente da literatura. O roteiro não é literatura, é uma escrita para ser filmada. Mas gostei do roteiro e do resultado, foi um filme que passou na TV" (Medeiros).

It is no accident that reviewers have been captivated by the concept of Moon and Bá visually (re)interpreting Hatoum's epic of twin sibling rivalry, given their own fraternal relationship; this was the planned intent from its inception. Editorial house Companhia das Letras has published all of Hatoum's award-winning books, and its subsidiary, Quadrinhos na Companhia, has emerged as one of the primary platforms for graphic novels to gain traction across Brazil, from mass cultural tomes to adapted canonical biographies, including Jon Lee Anderson's *Che: Uma vida revolucionária* (2023). While the relatively low cost of production means that comic adaptations often originate via an artist's personal choice (Mitaine 8), the sibling cartoonists' involvement was first and foremost a marketing ploy, for Hatoum's editor took advantage of a propitious meeting between Hatoum and the brothers at the 2009 Paraty International Literary Festival (FLIP) to propose the twin-on-twin project as publishing novelty (Al'Hanati; Betancourt). Moon and Bá initially rejected the offer, believing Hatoum's dense lyricism would not effectively distill into a comic format, yet the challenge that this transposition posed would eventually cause them to reconsider the offer. Additionally, after several projects in the U.S. had seen them provide separate illustration services, the book allowed them to collaborate together again (Hennum).

According to Jasmin Wrobel, in addition to serving as sites of resistance during the postwar military dictatorships dominating the continent, Brazilian comics have more recently begun to address the region's cultural heritage, violence, and gender debates (108). Wrobel notes that a parallel tendency has involved

graphic adaptations of canonic literature and biographies of canonical figures (122 n. 1); Anderson's famous work on Che Guevara above is only one of many published by Quadrinhos na Companhia. Yet while the protagonist of Moon and Bá's *Daytripper*, Brás de Oliva Domingos, and his various manners of death at the end of each chapter clearly find inspiration in Machado de Assis' *Memórias Póstumas de Brás Cubas* (1880), Wrobel criticizes their decision to adopt a white middle-class perspective instead of utilizing ethnicity in more socially engaged ways. Because migrant ethnicity and alterity are constantly at odds with hegemonic Brazilian culture in Hatoum's novel, the visual storytellers' status outside the Lebanese community adds an additional layer to the process of intended faithfulness to the source. In fact, I would suggest the question of identity (racial, class, or otherwise) must be further unpacked within the framework of "classic literature," for the artists had previously graphically adapted Machado's novella *O alienista* in 2008 with the purpose of attracting crossover readership (Prado). To provide authenticity to Hatoum's project, therefore, the Paulistano brothers performed research, visited Manaus for an extended period to learn about its people and to examine its architecture, and also corresponded with Hatoum, who sent them pictures of his family when taking issue with some of their depictions of Zana (Betancourt; Prado).

The twin cartoonists' preexisting adaptive incursions into Machado de Assis are not entirely out of place in the present discussion, for just as comics/adaptations are not merely derivative, Hatoum's "original" novel was not created in a vacuum. Multiple Anglophone reviewers interpret the book as a secularized version of the Cain and Abel (Eder). But as Hatoum has revealed, he took a tale heard while studying comparative literature in Paris and refracted it through Machado de Assis' final novel: "Ouvi em Paris uma história incrível de irmãos marroquinos. Tinha na cabeça *Esaú e Jacó* (1904), de Machado de Assis. E na minha família havia irmãos rivais. O mito é o pretexto da literatura, que deve se transformar num relato realista. Levei dez anos para publicar de novo" (Monteiro). While beyond the scope of this

article, consideration of Machado's novel as a central intertext helps understand both the plot and structure of *Dois Irmãos*. At the same time, Hatoum's focus on the Amazon region provides a voice to a region historically ignored, while his focus upon Arab immigrant communities also plays into the increasing popular interest in marginalized ethnic discourses.

As their previous work adapting "highbrow" or classical cultural texts suggests, the two cartoonists are aware of the expectations that come with engaging the collective legacy of canonical texts, whether that is for economic or pedagogical reasons:

É um risco: quem é muito fã de um original deve enxergar a adaptação também como algo original. Pensando ao contrário, em quem nunca ouviu falar e descobre *Dois irmãos* por quadrinho, se quiser depois pode ler o livro, ou outra coisa do Milton. Queremos mostrar que o interessante é conhecer o trabalho do Milton e o nosso. E não negamos a preocupação em fazer quadrinhos para quem não lê quadrinhos. Tem umas adaptações incríveis, e tem outras que são só para constar. Acho que o Bá e eu temos esse pensamento excessivo de como transformar a adaptação numa boa história em quadrinhos. (Prado)

The brothers claim their purpose was fidelity to Hatoum's novel. The concept of faithfulness to a perceived originary source is problematic at best and has become a trope in contemporary adaptation scholarship critical of early practitioners. As Brazilianist Robert Stam has famously noted, "Terms like 'infidelity,' 'betrayal,' 'deformation,' 'violation,' 'bastardization,' 'vulgarization,' and 'desecration' proliferate... Too often, adaptation discourse subtly reinscribes the axiomatic superiority of literature to film" (3-4). The situation changes, however, when such valuations emerge from the producer rather than the critic. Another much-debated early methodology in the field involves medium-specificity, which originally stipulated that fidelity is impossible because of the separate languages and conventions that govern literature and cinema. Emblematic of this approach is Seymour Chatman's "What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (And Vice Versa)"

(1980). As the discipline of adaptation studies evolves in line with expanding media options and possibilities for crossover, so too has the idea of how and where media converge. As a corollary to Chatman's approach, Frank Pointner and Sandra Eva Boschenoff's "Classics Emulated: Comic Adaptations of Literary Texts" (2010) details the capabilities of graphic novels that can exceed prose alone, and their typology will in turn structure our entry into the comic version of *Dois Irmãos* before the penultimate section examines the symbolic portrayal of Brazil's dictatorship within the context of prosthetic memory.

### Spatial and Discursive Parallels

Adaptation across media always entails particular challenges related to language, yet the disembodied style of Hatoum's novel posed a particular problem for Moon and Bá, who would need to adapt the unfixed nature of prose into realist visual languages requiring concrete location and character representations. Not only does the novel lyricism seamlessly transition between past and present through flashbacks, but it only becomes clear in the third chapter who the narrator is. Nael, the daughter of the family made Domingas, narrates past events in the third person (based on conversations with Halim before his death that are documented in the novel), but as he grows up gradually expresses his own memories in the first person. As the visual storytellers explained,

The way that the story is narrated [in the book], you don't always know where the characters are when things are happening or...there are a lot of things that were told to the narrator, so we had to choose: were we going to show the things they're talking about? Are we going to show someone talking to the narrator? Are we going to show the narrator? Whenever we wanted to show the narrator: is he going to be in the scene? He's [narrating] something that he saw, he's going to be in the scene or he's going to be talking about it. All these visual decisions were one of the hardest parts of the work that was not in the book (Hennum).

Curiously, Nael is never directly informed of his paternity by his mother, but he infers it is either the philanderer Omar, who is revealed to have raped Domingas and dismissed her ever since, or Yaqub, whose socioeconomic success and distance lead to idealization by the family, including Nael and his mother, who later confesses her love for him. In this sense, the boy is both insider and outsider within the family circle, and his tale is equally private and prosthetic (he has not lived the memories involving the brothers' adolescence).

Aspiring to reproduce the novel as closely as possible, Moon and Bá's "transcodification" of the book focuses on the visual by minimizing interpretation of its discourse (Santos and de Paula 326). This is to say that exposition and dialogue are lifted verbatim from Hatoum's prose, although the artists streamline entire paragraphs down to key excerpts. Despite the discrepancy in word count, however, there is not as large a distinction in each medium's length as might be expected; Hatoum's first edition runs two hundred and sixty-six pages, whereas the



Figure 1. Nael's mother refuses to reveal the identity of Nael's father, but his status as both employee and family member mark his hybrid status and access to family secrets.

graphic version comes in around two hundred and forty. Perhaps in honor of the novel's fluid treatment of time and memory, the comic's pages are unnumbered, meaning that structure is constructed purely through visual referents.

If outdated critical narratives have presumed that graphic adaptations surgically gut their source texts of significant content, Pointner and Boschenoff instead foreground the advantages that comics' visual dimension enables in terms of constructing spatial relationships and the immediacy of emotion (89-90), two issues that will guide my subsequent reading of the adaptation. The duo notes a double standard; while film and cinema are increasingly evaluated on separate terms, "[l]iterature based comic books, on the other hand, are generally judged with regard to the faithfulness of their rendering of 'original' material, and, with this as the basis for their evaluation, the genre cannot help but fall short" (88). The additional visual components in comics, like painting and photography, both represents space and influences the viewer's perception of that setting along with the characters who inhabit such spaces. In relation to ethnic minority groups, via the "depiction of phenotypical identities comics panels may be much more suggestive, abstracting from the appearance of real-life characters. Consequently, ethnic and

cultural stereotyping—not necessarily a bad thing—is inherent in the system of comics" (92) and can enhance the sensation of alienation depicted by characters or otherness perceived by readers.

The different ways the two media approach in-group identity (that of Lebanese immigrants in Hatoum's hometown) is instructive, and it begins paratextually with the messaging that each book cover communicates. While subsequent editions of Hatoum's novel have emphasized abstract designs (prior to the tie-in edition after Globo's limited series hit televisions), the original front cover is designed to evoke the tension between human civilization and human nature circumscribed by their environment. The solid, leafy green covering the bottom half of the cover image fades into the Rio Negro, out of which emerges an archival (circa 1900) black and white photograph of Manaus' bustling riverside market. In other words, a literal establishing shot. Beyond the grainy quality of the image, its historicity is instantly recognizable both from the type of boats appearing in the foreground to the dress of citizens who walk its promenade in the background. At the same time, while not necessarily exoticizing, the architecture in the image acts to mark the space as other in relation to the São Paulo-Rio cultural axis.

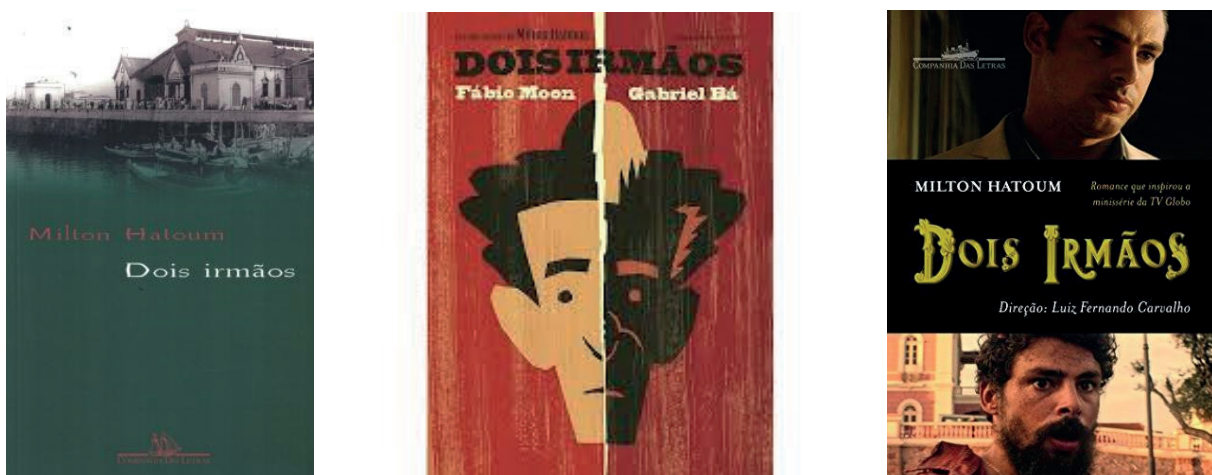


Figure 2. The first edition cover of *Dois Irmãos*, the graphic novel's dust jacket, and the updated edition's cover featuring actors from the Globo television series.



By contrast, Moon and Bá's cover art foregrounds characterization by embodying the rift between Yaqub and Omar. The vibrant orange and red background is emphatically split in half via a line resembling a lightning bolt, which also splits the brothers' countenance into two. Yaqub appears in dark relief, his cheek marked by a red scar. At once a symbol of doubling and alterity, the cover markets the disharmony through which national historical events are both reflected and filtered. Of course, its purpose is distinct, for readers familiar with the novel will already know the plot, while the stark design contrasts act to guide for first-time buyers.

Significantly, the importance of setting via establishing shots is expanded once readers open the book in a way that highlights comics' prowess in terms of spatial embodiment. The title page reproduces a drawn version of the same riverfront market appearing on novel's first edition cover, but situates the bustling space in relationship to a greater cross-section of the city's core to create a more embodied sense of space, yet it is noteworthy trees tower above buildings or circumscribe street layouts, as the tension between human development and nature's chaos is constantly at play. (The title page in fact is a reproduction of a scene in Chapter Five when Yaqub tours the city Nael in one of the few moments of emotional vulnerability.) And to further relate the scene to the larger network of locations and events dotting the novel, an aerial

map of the Manaus colonial center's grid system frames the title in the upper quadrant.

In addition to maintaining Hatoum's prose, Moon and Bá also preserve the book's structure. The novel consists of twelve chapters preceded by an unlabeled, two-page preface that establishes the tragic arc of the siblings' alienation from the outset. Moon and Bá divide their adaptation into a preface and eleven chapters followed by an epilogue, each of which narrates the events corresponding to Hatoum's corollary chapters. Yet, the visual storytellers greatly expand on the preface's textual function to perform something that Pointner and Boschenoff label "atmospheric setting," in which "the subject's own associations, whether negative or positive, are reflected by the space surrounding him or her" (91), a practice that is typically established between dichotomies of dark and light, order and chaos, etc.

This is particularly visible in the graphic adaptation's preface, where the city's duplicitous nature reflects (or rather, determines) the brothers' jealousy. Whereas the cover's clash of bright, amber colors easily conjures up anger or discomfort, the book is, unexpectedly, entirely chiaroscuro. As the authors have noted in multiple interviews, the binaric choice of black and white was designed to increase categorical contrasts between characters and their setting while minimizing distractions for the reader (Clark). By way of example, Hatoum's book begins with descriptions of space: "Zana teve de deixar

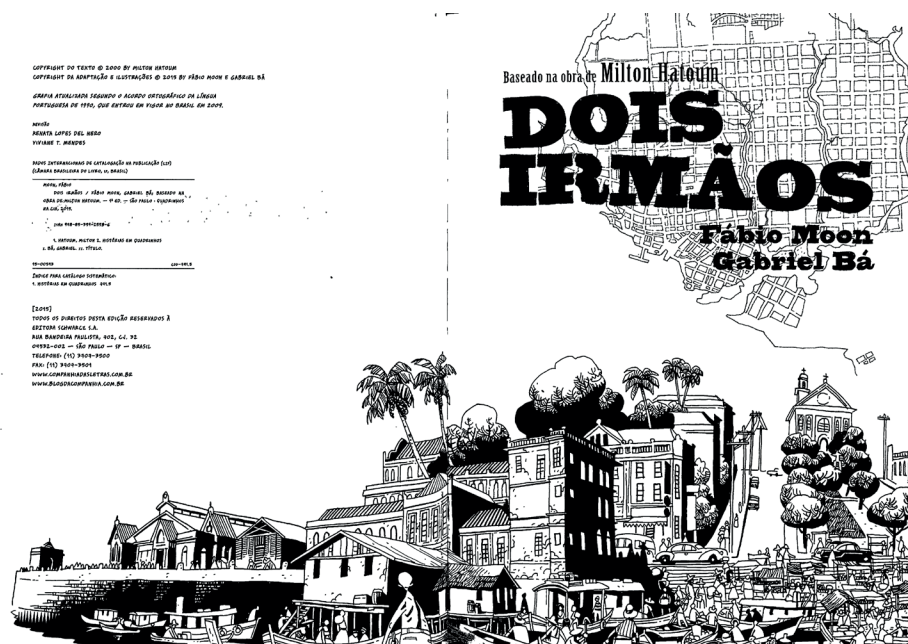


Figure 3. The graphic novel's title page evokes the book's setting image and expands upon its spatial range to involve the surround neighborhood.

tudo: o bairro portuário de Manaus, a rua em declive sombreada por mangueira centenárias, o lugar que para ela era quase tão vital quanto a Biblos [no Líbano] de sua infância" (11). And while the comic begins with the same sentence spread across a single panel that takes up more than half a page, these words here occur only after four pages of atmospheric setting via what appear to be stills of filmic establishing shots of various locations in the city, all of which promote an absence of human subjects, an emptiness that hints at the tropical city's decadence that becomes full-on dissolution in time with the crumbling of familial and national bonds during the dictatorship (Sava). The dark sky and clouds framing the opening shot of the river ambiguously evoke either dusk or dawn, though the gradual transition to white in subsequent panels reveals that it is the latter. By the second page, the camera eye shifts from a partial shot of river boat deck moored against the market's landing before heading inland to highlight the profiles of several colonial architectural landmarks. The emptiness of these spaces is in turn accentuated by the wild foliage of flora that frames buildings and fills entire panels on its own, characters in their own right.



Figure 4. The second page of the comic begins a visual tour of the city where concrete and nature are constantly in tension.

The atmospheric scene setting reaches its apex on the last page of the preface. In the final paragraph of Hatoum's original prose, an (as yet) unidentified Nael claims not to have seen Zana's death, but shortly beforehand heard her ask in Arabic while in the hospital whether her children had finally reconciled ("Meus filhos já fizeram as pazes?"). The answer is silence: "Ninguém respondeu. Então o rosto quase sem rugas de Zana desvaneceu; ela ainda virou a cabeça para o lado, à procura da única janelinha na parede cinzenta, onde se apagava um pedaço do céu crepuscular" (12).

Compare this to the sequential version's final panel communicating Zana's heartache, a borderless splash that fills the entire page and includes only the words "Ninguém respondeu." Instead of showing a hospital room, the artists again assert the subjugation of human spirit by the jungle's incessant reconquest of human spaces. Zana is shown collapsed in the backyard of the renovated house that Yaqub's money has financed, her small figure dwarfed by the shrubs and trees threatening to swallow up the house. The silence is thus verbal and visceral, her solitude and despair presaging the bitter loneliness each brother maintains inside.



Figure 5. The graphic adaptation situates Zana's the painful silence to Zana's plea for her sons' reconciliation within the lush garden of her yard, her isolation and despair established through her small size relative to the encroaching entropy of nature.

## Prosthetic Memory and Graphic History

In *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, Alison Landsberg considers a different connotation of space, positing that cultural commodification is not limited merely to the dangers associated with hegemonic ideologies. She therefore coins the term “prosthetic memory” to theorize “the production and dissemination of memories that have no direct connection to a person’s lived past and yet are essential to the production and articulation of subjectivity” (20). While these memories are thus not organic, highlighting their artificiality additionally delineates the interchangeability that underlies the commodified form through which they are communicated. The production and acceptance of memories that we have not personally experienced is not a new phenomenon, but what distinguishes this new modality is its transmission by mass media technologies starting in the twentieth century. Landsberg traces this dissemination via experiential forms of mass-media, starting with the rise of cinema up through the appearance of “serious” comics engaging with history and experiential museum exhibits at the turn of the twenty-first century dedicated to traumatic collective events (whether local or international). For her purposes, “Through such [transferential] spaces people may gain access to a range of processual, sensually immersed knowledge that would be difficult to acquire by purely cognitive means” (113).

Of course, this adaptation of the past into accessible formats is never neutral, and Landsberg is interested in how memory is instrumentalized in the service of diverse cultural practices, noting the role of mass culture in these memory projects has had unintended consequences. As one caveat, she describes how they complicate the distinction between memory (i.e., internal/private) and history (i.e., collective/transhistorical), which can be misappropriated in the wrong hands (19). Furthermore, these transmission projects have been largely undertaken with the aim of preserving a group’s memory in the face of historical dislocations and/or silencing. Yet the turn to mass culture has paradoxically made

what was once considered a foundational part of in-group identity available to a much broader public. In this process, memories have ceased to belong exclusively to a particular group and instead have become part of a common public domain (11). While these transferential spaces may rob the memory of its specific subjectivity, it is also fundamentally democratic in that it introduces images and narratives widely to different constituencies, communities, classes, and cultures, providing the possibility to produce a pedagogical form of empathy and social responsibility (21). In their best form, Landsberg maintains, invented political alliances can transcend race, class, and gender.

The advantage of comics is that they blur the line between ingrained assumptions of highbrow and “popular” culture in the process of breaking down the distinction between truth and memory, making complex topics just as immediately accessible as they do escapist adventures. The immediacy and visceral nature of the experience help transmit what once might have been firsthand accounts as forms of what has more recently been labeled post-memory. Indeed, Nael’s hybrid account of personal and collective alterity in an immigrant community already intertwines experienced and post-memory, and this shift in experiential medium is only further enhanced by the shift in authorship to mainstream artists whose work becomes globally accessible via its immediate translation into French and English followed by a multinational media tour. It is telling that one reviewer meant as a particular form of praise the observation that Moon and Bá’s narrative is designed with such beauty that it somehow feels that the cartoonists have shared their own autobiographical referents, rather than Hatoum’s (Jones).

Chapter One details Yaqub’s return from Lebanon after World War Two ends. Whereas the book lingers on his culture shock and unawareness of social norms to express his outsider status (much to his father’s chagrin, he nonchalantly urinates on a public street), the sequential adaptation jettisons these details to strengthen his later symbolic association with the new, militarized Brazil. The first encounter between the two brothers takes place inside

the family home. Omar's performative behavior is on display as he enters the party, but after hugging and kissing various family members, he and Yaqub maintain a silent distance on either side of their father. This visual symmetry is also metaphorical, as each son has inherited one side of the patriarch's traits: Omar his father's passionate sexual exuberance and Yaqub his ambition. The bottom panel zooms into a medium shot that takes advantage of the chiaroscuro aesthetic to contrast the siblings' clothes and countenance. Their protracted stare, which continues for two more panels on the following page, provides an ironic dimension to their father's speech bubble entering from outside the panel: "Tudo melhora depois de uma Guerra." While ostensibly referencing Brazil's involvement in the war, these words inadvertently prophecy the internal war that is to entangle the entire family.

Shortly thereafter, the comic gives verbal confirmation of their oppositional pulls in captions, for "[o]s gêmeos eram dois opostos, habitando o mesmo corpo e dormindo sob o mesmo teto. Mas isso estava prestes a mudar." During their final year of high school in 1949, Omar is expelled from school for assaulting his math teacher and is taken under the wing of Laval, a countercultural French teacher and poet. Yaqub, by contrast, requests a military uniform for his birthday and is shown marching in Manaus' parade to celebrate Brazil's Day of Independence, both associations that take on importance when the dictatorship leads to the occupation of the city. Yaqub soon moves to São Paulo, where he pursues a career in engineering and becomes financially successful. He also, we later learn, clandestinely marries the woman he and his brother first fought over, which further antagonizes Omar, who projects his feelings for



Figure 6. The sharp contrast in colors marks the irony of their father's statement when the brothers' first see each other since Yaqub was sent into exile in Lebanon.

her onto a series of short-lived romances with women whose ethnicity and lower-class status Zana does not welcome. When Yaqub visits Manaus in Chapter Five, he takes Nael on a tour of his memories of childhood, visiting residents of the city's floating city homes built on stilts over the river, an important location given that Omar will soon abandon his home and hide out with a mistress in the district until Nael is able to find him. After such visits, he also begins sending money for the house to be remodeled and to revive Halim's once-flourishing business. As such, the older brother attempts to bring models of development to the peripheral Amazonian city in a way that anticipates the military regime's focus upon constructing infrastructure in the region, particularly its creation of a special economic zone in 1967.

In Chapter Seven, Omar's relationship with the poet Laval takes a turn after several years when the mentor becomes involved in resistance

against the dictatorship. Hatoum mentions his capture in passing, but Moon and Bá make the violence far more visceral and graphic. A box showing Laval fleeing from soldiers frames two subsequent events. First, an embedded panel shows military police mercilessly beating an unshown individual, with blood flying through the air. Underneath that, the artists subtly force readers to identify with the subversive by adopting his point of view from inside a military van as the soldiers prepare to slam the trunk shut, accompanied by a caption revealing his confirmed death two days later. This shift from an omnipotent focal point to Laval's perspective—the only time this happens in the text—is a subtle, yet clever means of encouraging identification. The process is mirrored interdiegetically as well. When Nael discovers a collection of poems Omar has dedicated to the memory of Laval, the narrator for the first time is able to imagine a human side to the brother he has long detested.



Figure 7. The comic powerfully adopts the perspective of Omar's revolutionary mentor as he is captured and executed.

Shortly thereafter, when Nael witnesses the military's occupation of the city, the view cuts from a long line of trucks filled with soldiers to a close-up of their stockpile of weapons, symbols of repressive power. Yet Nael's perspective then evokes the chaos of the soldiers' violence through nature again, jumping to close-ups of frightened birds and bloodied protestors' faces before Nael's own horrified expression leads him to black out. When Yaqub visits the house as Nael, he is unperturbed by the military vehicles. Hatoum has Yaqub explain that he was once a soldier—a conversation the comic glosses over—but the implicit association is once again that the elder brother represents values sympathetic to the dictatorship. Just as Omar's veneration of Laval softens Nael's perception of him, this moment in the city creates the first crack in Nael's image of his other potential father, and he becomes increasingly neutral towards each sibling. When Yaqub returns again with plans for the construction of a modern building on the site of their property, Omar brutally assaults him and destroys the plans, for his older brother had secretly cut him out of negotiations to create a familial construction company as a quiet act of vengeance. After the attack, Omar is quickly apprehended by military police in a central park, beaten, interrogated, and imprisoned for two and a half years, ostensibly for his connections to Laval, but, in the context of the narrative, also in retribution for his brawl against a proponent of the state. While Yaqub increasingly disappears from the narrative, the images of Omar's violent arrest again invite empathy with an ambiguous character associated with political resistance, a subtle hint about the visual storytellers' politics in the comic.

Two final scenes illustrate the more graphic relationship between memory and space that the comic impressively establishes. The first involves the military's demolition of the floating city on the banks of the river in the eighth chapter. The site is of course an archive of family memories, but it is also emblematic of old Manaus, which is destroyed in the process of its occupation. This two-page scene, witnessed by Halim, appears to quicken the patriarch's death alone in his sitting room, which visually echoes Zana's own demise in the prologue. Here Moon and Bá begin to

destroy the various spatial memories the graphic adaptation has artfully constructed. Halim's loss is externalized via an expansive shot of the black river reclaiming wood fragments that exaggerates the width of the channel so that it stretches into the horizon. The neighborhood, so vital for Halim's identity, becomes a collective metonymy for the nation's rejection of its past in the push for modernization, of its previous connection to nature.



Figure 8. The destruction of the floating city becomes a metonymy for the concomitant loss of old Brazil in the push towards modernization

The final scene of both novel and comic adaptation expands on this theme through Nael's initial hesitant attempts to begin writing his memoirs, constructing an account of the family's past. Now living alone on the property after his mother's death, Nael has largely cut ties with any remaining family members.

The night of Omar's release from prison, the city—appropriately—is beset by a particularly violent storm. In Hatoum's words, "Olhava com assombro e tristeza a cidade que se mutilava e crescia ao mesmo tempo, fastada de porto e do rio, irreconciliável som o seu passado... Desde a partida de Zana eu havia deixado ao furor do sol e da chuva o pouco que restara da árvores e trepadeiras. Zelar por essa natureza significava uma submissão ao passado, a um tempo que morria dentro de mim" (264-5). Nael notes how the grizzled Omar has aged when he enters the property in the darkness through a broken section of fencing. It is the final time the narrator sees him. Nael waits for Omar to say something that will approach an apology, as the comic caption notes on the penultimate page: "Uma palavra bastava, uma só. O perdão." Skipping Hatoum's final paragraph, the last page of the comic is "silent", providing a close-up of Omar's hardened eyes before he slowly moves backward and exits through the same gap in the dilapidated fence through which he entered, all without a single word. The progression of the panels from Nael's perspective leads the reader to imagine Omar's slow retreat in the gutters between the boxes. Dialoguing with the dawn-setting of the prologue, in the darkness of the epilogue's last panel the inexorable force of nature again frames an empty lot abandoned to a wilderness of sprouting trees—a literal post-human vacuum. Like his mother and father, Omar ends up alone, but his departure marks a finality in terms of his decision to cut ties with the house and its memories. In the final act of symbolism, it is not important whether Nael is Omar's or Yaqub's son. He is the next generation of Brazilians, thus the lack of resolution to the war's end points to the disjuncture between the regime, the resistance, and the amnesiac nation it produced during the "years of lead."

## Conclusion

The categorical nature of Omar and Yaqub's war serves as a convenient metaphor for questions of fidelity in remediation or transcoding practices, as media are both in contact and in conflict. This is not to say that hypertext and hypertext are diametrically opposed, but

rather that the same tensions take on greater significance under new conditions of production and politics of reception. Henry Jenkins labels the increasing difficulty of confining any work to a single medium "convergence culture," and this is particularly important for understanding how comic scholarship can enhance the field of adaptation studies. In this sense, contemporary adaptation is less about transposing a story or its characters from one medium to another but instead follows "a practice in which the work seems to migrate in order to adapt and survive within changing production and reception contexts" (Mitaine et al. 22). In the case of Moon and Bá's remediation of a modern classic, the duo's transnational and digital presence grows networks of peripheral national circulation into a globalized context, expanding upon the process that Hatoum's novel began in terms of inserting the Amazonian region into larger national sociocultural discourses.

The openness of prosthetic memory models to new technologies that globalize experiences of history has made it a particularly fertile reference point for scholars of comics. Edward King suggests two main reactions to prosthetic memory, reterritorialization and deterritorialization, both of which influence marketing strategies within Latin America's fledgling comic industry. As a prime example, King notes how Moon and Bá use social media (and Reddit discussions) to include fans as participants through interactive interviews and commentary on the progress of their ongoing projects (225). Precisely because comics already force engagement, since readers must make connections across or within the panels to create meaning, King believes it is no accident that "graphic novels have become the most visible platform on which to stage these tensions between reaffirming the individual and national ownership of memory and the dissolution of the individual in the ever-more visible global networks of memory discourses" (226).

But there is an additional development within the convergence of media through new technologies such that comics and other experiential sites, ranging from festivals and art exhibits to street art and subway graffiti, provide evidence of the *collective* forms of circulation

that Latin American visual culture is increasingly experiencing in addition to paper-based formats (Scorer 1). The transnational dimension of comics across the region has traditionally been determined by the importation of US genres and traditions, although examples like Moon and Bá's demonstrate the increasing agency of Inter-American production in both critical and popular terms. By straddling the line between history and speculative fiction, the cartoonists also make visible valuable Brazilian contributions to larger Latin American generic tendencies involving both memory discourses and the posthuman.

## Endnotes

[1] In addition to numerous articles, recent monographs and collections include Grant and Scott Henderson's *Comics and Pop Culture* (2019), Liam Burke's *The Comic Book Film Adaptation* (2015), and Matthew McEniry et al.'s *Marvel Comics into Film* (2016).

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## Author's Biography

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Frans Weiser is joint-Associate Professor in Comparative Literature and the Latin American and Caribbean Studies Institute at the University of Georgia. His first book, *False Documents: Inter-American Cultural History, Literature and the Lost Decade (1975-1992) (2020)* charts the concurrent hemispheric rise of cultural history and journalists and writers' turn in the United States, Brazil, and Argentina to recent political history, both to criticize governments and advocate for (re)democratization. He is currently completing a second manuscript revising the history of Brazil's film industry's revival known as the *Retomada* (1994-2002) by examining the emergence of new, neoliberal models of literary adaptations based on urban crime fiction.