

From essay to comic: in search of diversity in the multimodal translation of *Sapiens*

Del ensayo al cómic: en busca de la diversidad en la traducción multimodal de *Sapiens*

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of diversity projected onto prehistory in Yuval Noah Harari's comic book *Sapiens: A Graphic History, The Birth of Humankind* (2020). Through this graphic adaptation of the essay *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), the Israeli historian offers a new reading of prehistoric society, while challenging multiple stereotypes and prejudices that shape the collective imaginary about those remote times. In view of the latest trends in translation studies, which invite scholars to understand the concept of translation beyond the linguistic sphere, the graphic version of Harari's essay can be seen as a multimodal translation, a combination of intralingual and intersemiotic translation (Jakobson, 2000). In order to explore the importance of expressions related to diversity in both works, a parallel reading of them has been carried out and the model of translational and semiological analysis proposed by Pereira (2008) has been applied. The study has shown that, Harari, by means of his translation, creates an ideological message to establish parallels between prehistoric times and the contemporary world, in terms of ethno-cultural, sexual-affective, and gender diversity.

Keywords: Comic; diversity; prehistory; translation; multimodality.



Resumen

El presente artículo aborda la representación de la diversidad proyectada a la prehistoria en el cómic *Sapiens: A Graphic History, The Birth of Humankind* (2020), de Yuval Noah Harari. A través de esta adaptación gráfica del ensayo *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), el historiador israelí ofrece una nueva lectura de la sociedad prehistórica, a la vez que desafía múltiples estereotipos y prejuicios que conforman el imaginario colectivo acerca de aquellos tiempos remotos. En vista de las últimas corrientes de la traductología, que invitan a entender el concepto de traducción más allá del plano lingüístico, la versión gráfica del ensayo de Harari puede considerarse como una traducción multimodal, una combinación entre la traducción intralingüística y la intersemiótica (Jakobson, 2000). Con el fin de examinar qué lugar ocupan las expresiones de la diversidad en ambas obras, se ha realizado su lectura paralela y se ha aplicado el modelo de análisis traductológico y semiológico, propuesto por Pereira (2008). El estudio ha mostrado que, mediante la traducción, Harari confecciona un mensaje ideológico para establecer paralelismos entre la época prehistórica y el mundo contemporáneo, en términos de la diversidad étnico-cultural, afectivo-sexual y de género.

Palabras clave: Cómic; diversidad; prehistoria; traducción; multimodalidad.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, comics have moved far beyond mere entertainment and are conceived as a didactic and communicative tool, a multisemiotic space, capable of explaining complex topics. As Fernández de Arriba observes in a recent interview with Alonso-Carballés (2021), “[i]n many cases the academy has difficulties in reaching the general public and the use of comics is a very powerful resource for disseminating knowledge that [...] generally does not reach public opinion via traditional channels”¹ (p. 93). This idea has been reflected in the work of Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari, who recently translated the first chapter of his bestselling essay, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), into the multimodal comic book format and transformed it into an “excellent graphic manual of prehistory”, according to Bonet-Rosado's (2016, p. 31) definition. At the same time, it is important to take into account that comics not only disseminate knowledge, but also transmit ideologies of the era in which they were created (Bonet-Rosado, 2016; Genschow, 2018). In this sense, prehistory is no exception, since, as Ruiz-Zapatero (2016) points out, “each generation has reflected prehistoric times in comics according to their perspectives, values and prejudices” (p. 60).

This paper aims at studying how the comic book entitled *Sapiens* represents diversity, inherent to our contemporary society and in the ideologies that shape it, in the context of a prehistoric society. It also proposes to contrast these representations with those of the original essay. We will perform an analysis from the perspective of translation studies, which, in line with its latest theories (Gentzler, 2017; Bassnett and Johnston, 2019), allows us to consider the graphic adaptation of the essay as a multimodal translation (Borodo, 2015; Bennett, 2021, p. 1), where “the verbal and the visual are woven into one entity” (Oittinen, 2003, p. 130).

Prehistory in comics: a breeding ground for stereotypes

Despite important archaeological discoveries in recent decades that shed light on different aspects of our ancestors' lives, the origins of human history are still full of gaps and uncertainty. Each discovery presents unknown realities, which are subject to interpretations by prehistorians and archaeologists. Just like translators, they use these sources to (re)construct their version of a prehistoric phenomenon or, in [Vidal-Claramonte's \(2018\)](#) words, translate reality. No specialist is able to define the real meaning of a ceremonial object, nor to explain with any certainty how societies functioned or families were formed in those bygone times.

The lack of data on this extensive historical period, as well as the unceasing curiosity to discover our origins, has resulted in a series of beliefs and hypotheses that usually feed on existing prejudices and interests. Thus, when representing prehistoric humanity in academic papers, art or literature—sometimes deliberately, but often unintentionally—we project the values and stereotypes that govern society at a certain stage of its development. In this sense, comics as a mass medium and an agent of “masking reality” ([Eco 1984, p. 301](#)) are an ideal space to cultivate these stereotypes. Moreover, the vast majority of comics that deal with the lives of the first human beings recreate prehistoric landscapes with the only purpose of setting up their own imaginary worlds, hence ignoring the latest archaeological findings. As a result, in many prehistoric-themed comics, the image of our ancestors is anchored to dominant ideologies that have ignored—and often continue ignoring—the importance of representing diversity. In contrast to the position of the most progressive prehistorians and other experts in areas related to prehistory ([Jablonski, 2012](#); [Soler-Mayor, 2016](#); [Patou-Mathis, 2021](#); [Fisher et al., 2021](#)), comic panels portray our ancestors as white-skinned members of nuclear, heteronormative families, in which the supposed roles of men and women are based on gender stereotypes.

Probably due to the proliferation of anachronisms and the decontextualization of the past in prehistoric-inspired comics ([Ruiz-Zapatero, 1997](#)), the analysis of their relationship with prehistory as a discipline has been very scarce in academic circles. Given the lack of such studies, the Prehistory Museum of Valencia has published a book entitled *Prehistoria y cómic* ([Bonet-Rosado and Pons-Moreno, 2016](#)), the result of collaboration between several experts in both subjects. This project is part of a pioneering exhibition in Spain, which has brought together more than a hundred examples of humour, fantasy and documentary comics that build paradigms about the remote times of human beings. The volume brings eleven pieces of research together, as well as reflections, that examine how the graphical representation of prehistory changes in comics, depending on the audience and age, throughout the existence of the genre. Despite the fact that many of the characters analysed, such as the Flintstones, Ka-Zar, and Altamiro de la Cueva, bear little relation to the world of early hominids—their “adventures in period costumes” ([Jablonka, 2021, p. 22](#)) are a mere reflection of the shifting 20th century ideologies—, the book authors emphasise there are increasingly more prehistoric-themed comics that fit into the realistic trend ([Bonet-Rosado, 2016](#); [Soler-Mayor, 2016](#)). These realistic comics are a discursive crossover between fiction and archaeological documentation, an alliance between researchers and cartoonists.² Nevertheless, this collaboration between illustrators and specialists in prehistory has not contributed noticeably to a more varied representation of prehistoric society either; looking closely at realistic comics, we notice an abundance of

gender clichés, as well as a representative shortfall in terms of multiculturalism and diversity.

***Sapiens*: an iconic-verbal turn to diversity in prehistory**

In response to the need to present a more plural and diverse image of prehistory to our globalised society, which feeds on transnational discourses and seeks to (re)construct heterogeneous realities, the comic book *Sapiens: A Graphic History, The Birth of Humankind* (2020) was born. It is an adaptation of the first chapter of *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (2014), a bestseller penned by Yuval Noah Harari, professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. In his book, Harari, a professional historian, breaks with the traditional frameworks of his discipline in order to translate knowledge into narrative, to “find in the word [...] new vessels that follow different paths” (Vidal-Claramonte, 2018, p. 129) and to share a series of philosophical reflections on the development of human history from a macrohistorical perspective.

As the author states, by means of the graphic novel, he aims to reach new readers and encourage them to think about our reality critically and in a global context (Harari, 2021). In the rewriting process, the historian not only introduces fictional elements into his clearly non-fictional work, but also uses humour and fills his narrative with numerous intertextualities and winks to existing comics. The author has managed to translate his essay with the help of David Vandermeulen, who adapted the original text to comic format, and Daniel Casanave, an illustrator, who interpreted and has transformed Harari’s and Vandermeulen’s words into panels. In this sense, and in line with Jakobson’s (2000) theory, Vandermeulen, like Harari himself, assumes the role of an intralingual translator, who reformulates the text within the same language, and Casanave, in turn, becomes an intersemiotic translator, who interprets verbal signs through the signs of a non-verbal system. Given the multimodal nature of comics (Borodo, 2015; Bennett, 2021), switching between verbal and visual code, and in accordance with the latest theories in translation studies (Gentzler, 2017; Bassnett and Johnston, 2019), which conceive translation as a phenomenon inherent to any communicative act, we believe it is appropriate to refer to the comic *Sapiens* as a multimodal translation of the original essay.

On studying the first volume of the multimodal translation of *Sapiens*, we soon discover the presence of another translator involved in the book rewriting process and whose name does not appear in the original essay: a diversity consultant. Slava Greenberg, a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Southern California, a specialist in trans studies, gender studies and functional diversity, has been chosen to fulfil this role. In the acknowledgments in the last pages of the comic book, Harari (apud Harari et al., 2020) highlights Greenberg’s role in providing valuable input on human diversity and in helping them all to avoid mistakes in this respect.

Regarding expressions of diversity and otherness in the case of the graphic novel, there is a notable concern for representing people of different genders, cultures, ethnicities, religions and sexual orientations. *Sapiens* presents an x-ray of our plural, hybrid and *mestizo* society, which “opts for [...] the intercommunication between paradigms and for the equality in difference” (Vidal-Claramonte, 2018, p. 73). Thus, in the pages of the comic, we meet various researchers—both women and men—from India, Brazil, Japan, Germany and England, who, together with Harari, investigate the lives of our ancestors. An inclusive approach is observed in the configuration of secondary and

circumstantial characters at the same time. Special attention should be paid to Dr. Fiction, a character whose gender does not conform to social conventions of femininity and masculinity.

As a result thereof, we wonder what place different representations of diversity in prehistoric societies—a popular topic among researchers, but barely studied outside the academy—occupy in the *Sapiens* comic book. And how, in comparison to the first chapter of the original essay, Harari's team reconstructs those realities in the multimodal translation. Our starting hypothesis is that, through the iconic-verbal format, and following the rhetorical question “[p]ower of the drawer, impotence of the historian?” (Jablonka, 2021, p. 22), Harari attempts to reshape an orthodox collective imagination view on prehistory, as well as to project this new paradigm to present-day society.

METHOD

The analysis of diversity representations presented in this research is qualitative and is conducted through the interdisciplinary lens of translation studies and semiotics. Since the inauguration of the translational turn (Bachmann-Medick, 2009) and the outward turn (Bassnett and Johnston, 2019), it has been demonstrated on numerous occasions that translation studies have much to offer to the methodology of other epistemological areas. Therefore, in the first place, we will focus on a theoretical proposal that serves as a model for the translational and semiotic analysis of comic books, and can be applied to our case. After that, we will carry out a parallel reading of the original corpus in English and its graphic adaptation in order to identify expressions of diversity in the prehistoric context. Finally, we will bring together the observed examples in order to examine them according to the chosen theoretical model.

Methodological approach: Pereira's proposal (2008)

Interest in comics and picture books within the framework of translation studies is a relatively recent phenomenon (Zanettin, 2018); nowadays, it is on the rise and has already been embodied in numerous academic works. Only in 2021, three important journals in the field of translation studies, *Panacea*, *Estudios de Traducción* and *Translation Matters*, dedicated their monographic issues to the translation of these multimodal products. Furthermore, more and more published books provide an overview on the link between comics and translation (Zanettin, 2008; Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019) and more studies are focusing on topics such as the translation of children's comic books (Oittinen, 2003; Masi, 2021), the translation of humour in comics (Kaindl, 2004), etc.

As for the main graphic narrative approaches reflected in research papers, Bennett (2021) highlights two trends: on the one hand, analysing translations of comics into specific languages and cultures, and, on the other, applying to the study of comics the concept of translation in its broadest sense, beyond the linguistic and cultural terms, and in line with Gentzler (2017) and Bassnett and Johnston (2019). The studies that belong to the second category understand translation as a way of transmitting information (Bennett, 2021). These are interdisciplinary researches that study illustrations as forms of translation, reflect on adaptation, reinterpretation or transmediation, explore intertextualities in comics, and examine the sequential art evolution from a translation studies perspective. In regard to these two trends, Zanettin (2018) states the following:

[T]he study of comics translation concerns not only the domain of translation studies in a more restricted sense, [...] but also the interrelations and exchanges between comics and other media since, as Mitchell (2014, 259) suggests, comics can perhaps be best defined as a trans-medium ‘moving across all boundaries of performance, representation, reproduction, and inscription to find new audiences, new subjects, and new forms of expression ... because it is translatable and transitional, mutating before our eyes into unexpected new forms’. (p. 454)

In order to define a model for our analysis, we have consulted several studies that approach the graphic narrative translation from the viewpoint described by Zanettin and consider iconic-textual adaptations as multimodal translations, discourses that construct a new meaning from an existing one (Gentzler, 2017). After reviewing the bibliographical references regarding the processes of media change from literary texts to the language of comics (Álvarez-Peña, 2021; Liu, 2021; Cossia, 2008) and failing to find a methodological proposal applicable to our corpus, we have opted to explore the investigations that focus on the intersemiotic translation from text to illustrations (Pereira, 2008; Ketola, 2016; Echaury-Galván, 2020).

Despite the fact that the subject of our study is not images, but comic panels, which bring together the visual and the verbal, we have realised that some models of text-illustration analysis are perfectly extrapolable to the text-comic case. Among these proposals, Pereira's (2008) model, based on the theoretical framework of translation studies and semiotics, stands out. This model is distinguished for being sufficiently broad and, at the same time, precise enough to interpret a complex corpus. Moreover, Pereira pays special attention to the ideological power of illustrations, also present in comics, which “translate ideologies and thoughts of each era” (Ruiz-Zapatero, 2016, p. 61) and are themselves “a powerful vehicle of ideology” (Genschow, 2018, p. 17). Thus, according to Pereira's model applied to text-comics, comic panels can translate texts in three different ways: 1) by reproducing textual elements in the panel; 2) by emphasising a specific narrative aspect and giving it more prominence in the cartoon; 3) by adapting panels to a certain ideology or artistic trend.

RESULTS

Upon examining the corpus and analysing the multimodal translation based on Pereira's (2008) proposal, we found a significant asymmetry in the representation of diversity in both the comic book and the essay. While the essay does not delve into diversity in prehistoric times, in contrast, multiple diversity expressions do appear in the pages of the graphic novel. These differences are especially noticeable in terms of ethno-cultural and sexual-affective diversity. Regarding gender diversity and the representation of women, the historian uses inclusive language in the essay when referring to the first human beings. However, in the comic book the feminist message about the role of women in prehistory is intensified. On several occasions, our female ancestors even represent the entire species *Homo sapiens*, which is something unusual for comics and, in general, for popular culture, that is used to associating the word *Sapiens* with a prehistoric man. In the following sections, we will illustrate how Harari—together with other translators, namely, Vandermeulen, Casanave and Greenberg—translates his own work to make it more inclusive, more in line with both our contemporary hybrid society and the prehistoric era.

Ethno-cultural diversity

In *Especjos: una historia casi universal*, Galeano (2015) warns that “[t]he human adventure in the world began in Africa, [...] [d]ifferent paths led [our ancestors] to different destinies, and the sun took care of the distribution of colours” (p. 1). In tune with the Uruguayan writer’s words, Harari, through his comic book, aims to show that we are part of a multicultural world, in which there should be no place for racism, discrimination or distinctions between cultures, as we all come from the same continent, Africa, and the same species, *Homo sapiens*.

How does the historian introduce the book’s main characters: the Sapiens? In the essay, Harari (2014) points out that the first humans were not anything special: “The most important thing about prehistoric humans is that they were insignificant animals with no more impact on their environment than gorillas, fireflies or jellyfish” (p. 4). He then adds a tinge of irony: “Presumably, everyone reading this book is a *Homo sapiens*” (Harari, 2014, p. 5). This same fragment changes perspective completely in the comic. While the first part, accompanied by an image of Harari in the jungle, remains largely intact: “The truth is there was nothing special about these early humans. There were still regular animals with no more impact on their environment than baboons, fireflies or jellyfish”, significant modifications are coming in the second part: “One very important thing about ancient humans is that they didn’t all belong to the same species. Nowadays, people around the world may look different and speak different languages, but we’re all the same species—*Homo sapiens*” (Harari et al., 2020, pp. 12, 14). These speech balloons are placed next to a drawing of eight representatives of different cultures: an Inuit woman, an Indian man, an African man, etc. (Figure 1). Harari himself is among the characters, he is one person more among all these representations of diversity.

Figure 1. Representation of ethno-cultural diversity (Harari et al., 2020, p. 14)

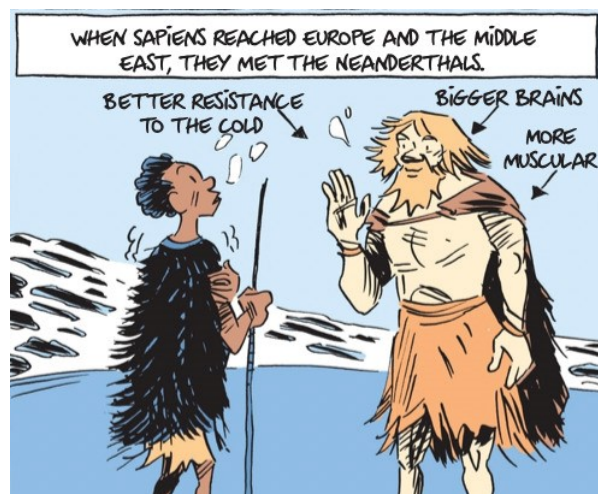


The historian highlights multiculturalism is an important characteristic of the present day in more comic panels. For example, he emphasises that “[a]ll the distinctions that seem so important today—French and German, Christian and Muslim, black and white—are very recent inventions, and they don’t have much influence on human evolution” (Harari et al., 2020, p. 20). This statement has a corresponding illustration: three people of different nationalities are listening attentively to a lecture. However, the quoted passage does not appear in the original work. In the case of the essay, Harari (2014) highlights religious diversity, “today we can educate our children to become Christian or Buddhist” (p.

11), but he does not contrast concepts such as French/German or black/white. In fact, one of the statements in the original work contradicts his view of the black/white relationship as a recent invention: “Between blacks and whites there are some objective biological differences, such as skin colour and hair type, but there is no evidence that the differences extend to intelligence or morality” (Harari, 2014, p. 152). Therefore, we understand that, when mentioning the black/white antithesis in the graphic novel, he refers to race rather than to biological reality, following the approach of the renowned anthropologist Jablonski (2012). After applying the translation analysis model proposed by Pereira (2008) to these specific cases, we can observe that, in comparison to the original text, Harari chooses to expand the iconic-verbal translation and adapt it to the current ideology, which endorses plurality.

In the comic book, Harari not only reaffirms the multiculturalism of our contemporary society, but he also places emphasis on the skin colour of Sapiens and Neanderthals. *Homo sapiens* came from Africa and needed protection from the harmful effects of ultraviolet rays; hence, according to several scientists (Jablonski, 2012), the colour of their skin was dark. In turn, it has been proven that *Homo neanderthalensis* individuals lived in Europe and Asia, and were red-haired and light-skinned. So, while the essay once indicated what the Neanderthals looked like—“[g]enetic evidence hints that at least some Neanderthals may have had fair skin and hair” (Harari, 2014, p. 18)—, in the multimodal translation the difference between Neanderthals and Sapiens, clearly seen in their skin colour, is constantly referred to. Thus, Sapiens have the physical characteristics of the current representatives of the African continent, whereas Neanderthals are illustrated with white skin and orange-coloured hair (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Representation of Sapiens and Neanderthals (Harari et al., 2020, p. 42)



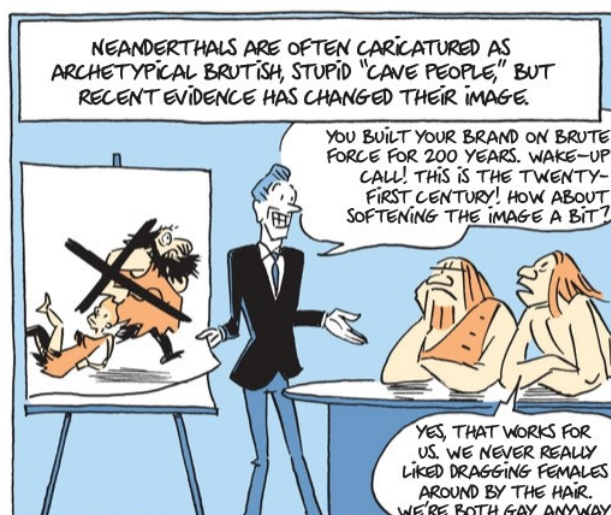
Using this visual resource, Harari emphasises our African origin. On the other hand, when we look at other prehistoric-themed comics (including those of the realistic trend), we realise that no attention has been paid to this aspect at any time: Sapiens' appearance is usually represented by a present-day white person.

Sexual-affective diversity

Although no archaeological evidence of sexual-affective diversity in prehistoric societies has been detected to date, neither is there evidence that early humans were exclusively heterosexual. In fact, in his book *Homosexuality in History*, [Spencer \(1996\)](#) highlights the results of a series of anthropological investigations which, after studying some tribes existing today, suggest the presence of homosexual relations in prehistoric times. On the other hand, a group of psychologists ([Fisher et al., 2021](#)) states that, in those distant times, sexuality was probably not understood in binary terms.

As for *Sapiens*, Harari chooses two very different contexts to introduce representations of sexual-affective diversity. On the one hand, in the comic book he creates a couple of Neanderthal men who, when accused of being aggressive and dragging women by their hair, declare themselves to be gay ([Figure 3](#)). Through this comic resource, the historian, together with his collaborators, shows our orthodox understanding of prehistory. Given the influence of mass media or museum images that depict early humans, we assume their relationships were heteronormative, but this is an assumption actually.

Figure 3. Representation of sexual-affective diversity ([Harari et al., 2020, p. 42](#))



On the other hand, in the essay [Harari \(2014\)](#) tackles the conception of homosexuality as unnatural: "There is little sense, then, in arguing that [...] homosexuality is unnatural" (p. 166). The author explains how, over the course of history, different cultures, religions and political structures, in pursuit of their own interests, have tried to construct discourses around homosexuality as an unnatural and even destructive phenomenon. In the comic book, this passage is translated multimodally into a symbolic confrontation between the scientific community, formed by Harari and other scholars, and a father of a large family who attends a conference on the origin of human beings and is outraged to hear about family diversity in prehistory ([Harari et al., 2020](#)). One of this character's main arguments is that heteronormative nuclear families are natural and homosexuality is not. Harari responds to these claims through another fictional character, biologist Saraswati, who provides numerous examples of relationships beyond heteronormativity in different species of apes, our closest relatives. According to [Pereira's \(2008\)](#) approach, when translating sex-affective diversity in the comic book, Harari applies two strategies. In the case of the representation of the gay Neanderthals, he is guided by ideology and leaves the original

framework. And in the second example, in comparison with the essay, he emphasises the idea that homosexuality is natural and intrinsic to human beings.

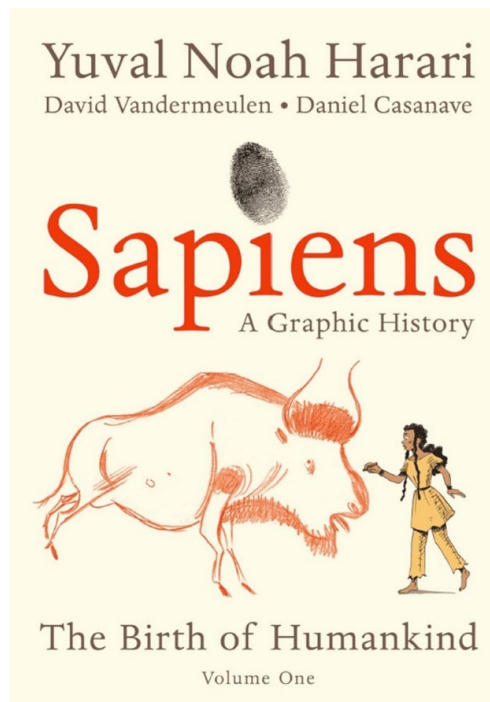
Gender diversity

“No! Prehistoric women did not spend their days sweeping the cave! What if it turns out that they also painted Lascaux, hunted bison, carved utensils and devised innovations and social advances?”: this is how the book by the renowned French prehistorian [Patou-Mathis \(2021\)](#) begins. The author draws on the latest discoveries of human fossils and new techniques for analysing archaeological discoveries to challenge the representation of prehistoric women as inferior and submissive beings. We are referring to the beliefs and stereotypes—existing in the collective imagination and embodied in comics, as well as other media—, which make our female ancestors invisible and represent them as subordinate figures, sexual objects, or mothers who take care of their children, sustain families and dedicate themselves to cooking. As [Soler-Mayor \(2016\)](#) observes, “the comic has taken to the extreme all the clichés about prehistory that have been reproduced over the last centuries” (p. 169), and one of the most repeated clichés is the patriarchal character of prehistoric society.

What is the position of Harari and the other creators of *Sapiens* regarding the role of prehistoric women? It is noteworthy that, in the essay, the historian usually refers to early humans as *Sapiens* or simply *humans*, terms that include both men and women. At the same time, we found that, when using words such as *men* or *man* to refer to our species, [Harari \(2014\)](#) adds *women* or *woman*: “[a]n ivory figurine of a 'lion-man' (or 'lioness-woman')” (p. 25); “[i]t is not enough for individual men and women to know [...]” (p. 26); “[a] skilled craftsman (or craftswoman) probably needed [...]” (p. 64); etc.

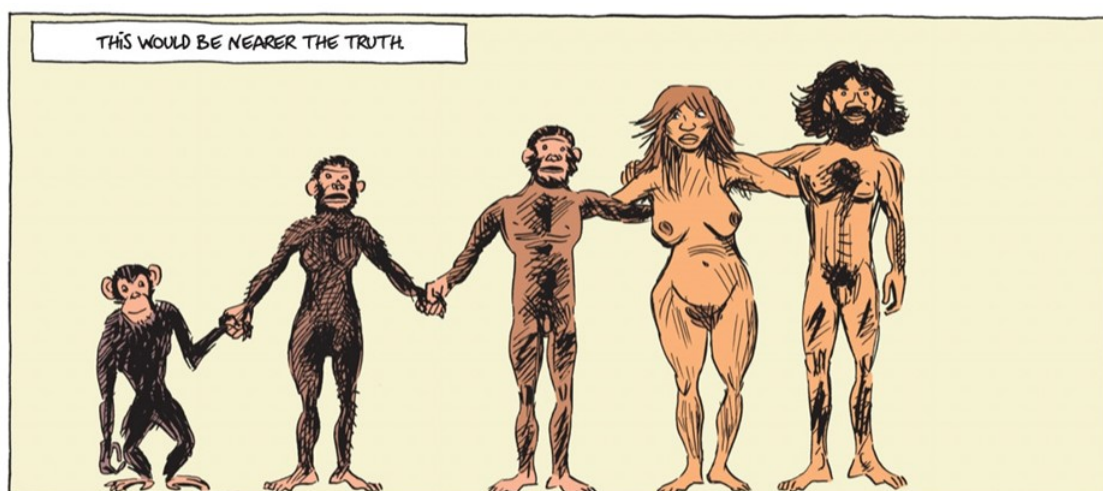
In the comic book, the inclusive language of the essay is translated into images that represent both genders cooperating in different activities such as hunting, harvesting or armed conflicts. In the graphic novel, both men and women become references of the *Homo sapiens* species. Meanwhile, we would like to highlight that Harari gives protagonism to prehistoric women through one of the most important paratextual elements of any publication: he chooses a young female cave art painter as the central character on the comic book cover ([Figure 4](#)). Thus, he seems to start an imaginary conversation with [Galeano \(2015\)](#), who wondered the following: “How could our ancestor of long ago paint so delicately? [...] How could he? Or was it she?” (p. 3).

Figure 4. Book cover (Harari et al., 2020)



In our opinion, the best comic book representation of the anti-patriarchal vision of prehistoric women is a creative adaptation of the famous human evolution illustration (from ape to man), hierarchically organised and inspired by Darwin's research. This new version of the classic image includes a Neanderthal woman in the process of evolution (Figure 5). We believe that the comic panel represents a translation of the following sentence from the essay: "Not only do we possess an abundance of uncivilised cousins, once upon a time we had quite a few brothers and sisters as well" (Harari, 2014, p. 5). In summary, in accordance with Pereira's (2008) framework, Harari, together with his team, translates the essay by emphasising the role of both genders in the early stages of human life.

Figure 5. Representation of gender diversity (Harari et al., 2020, p. 25)



CONCLUSIONS

Upon studying the dialogue established between both versions of *Sapiens*, the textual and the multimodal ones, we have observed similarities as well as differences in the approach to diversity representation in prehistoric times. Thus, we have realised that gender diversity is preserved in both works: through inclusive language in the case of the essay and through images of women dissociated from the dominant stereotypes in the comic book. We can say, in line with [Pereira \(2008\)](#), that Harari translates inclusive language into images and gives an important role to the prehistoric woman in his graphic novel, by intensifying the feminist message of the essay. On the other hand, the sexual-affective diversity is more present in the comic book than in the essay: it is expressed both through the ironic characters, two gay Neanderthals, and through an intense debate on the supposedly unnatural basis of homosexual relationships. In this way, Harari rewrites the original content in order to expand and adapt it to his ideological vision and that of his collaborators. As for the representation of ethno-cultural diversity, the author's ideological position is more pronounced in the comic book. Harari tries to show that, no matter how different we are, we share the same origin: the African continent. Moreover, although sexual-affective, ethno-cultural, and gender diversity in prehistoric times are represented in the comic, we have not found examples of other expressions of diversity such as functional or age diversity. Probably, this is due to the lack of scientific knowledge about these aspects in regards to prehistoric times.

What might have led Harari to pay so much attention to diversity in the comic book and why has he paid less attention to diversity in the essay? Firstly, we believe that the paradigm shift may be due to the unexpected success of the essay, which had to be transformed in order to keep gaining more readers. As [Vidal-Claramonte \(2018\)](#) points out, "the original is never static but must always be in the process of composition and revision" (p. 126). Harari's book, initially created for his university students, has become a global phenomenon and, by being translated intersemiotically, needed to find a new audience. The multimodal translation of *Sapiens* stresses the need to make prehistory accessible to a wider public. Due to the growing interest of the readership, the book seeks to focus more on the problems of today's society and relate them to prehistoric society.

Secondly, it is important to take into account the communicative potential of comics. As [Harari \(2021\)](#) states, "[w]hile words can be abstract, images must be concrete". Thus, when it comes to writing an essay, it is possible to say *Sapiens*, without specifying whether we are talking about men or women, while in the graphic format it is essential to decide if we are going to illustrate men, women, or people of both genders. The same situation occurs with skin colour: in the case of images, it is necessary to decide which colour we will attribute to *Sapiens*, Neanderthals, etc.

Finally, we cannot forget that we are dealing with a translation, which not only contains Harari's perspective, but also that of the adaptor, the illustrator and, of course, the diversity consultant. The translation analysis, carried out according to [Pereira's \(2008\)](#) model, has shown that ideology played a key role in the transfer of the essay to the comic book.

Therefore, the Israeli historian, assisted by his team, creates a multimodal product that establishes a relationship between prehistory and the present, seeks to break down stereotypes about the life of our ancestors, and highlights the strong connection between today's humans and humans in the past. By challenging ethnocentric, patriarchal and heterosexist ideas about the early stages of human life, Harari, through his comic book,

not only seeks to shape alternative ways of interpreting those bygone times, but also to raise awareness about the pluralism that constitutes our current society, since, as Ruiz-Zapatero (2016) states, “prehistory is exciting because [...] therein lies the basis of what configures us as human beings” (p. 63).

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Notes

¹ All the original Spanish quotations that appear in this paper have been translated into English by the author.

² One of the best examples of this type of comics is *Lucy: l'espoir* (2007), created with the assistance of one of those who discovered the "Lucy" skeleton, an australopithecine that lived more than three million years ago.