

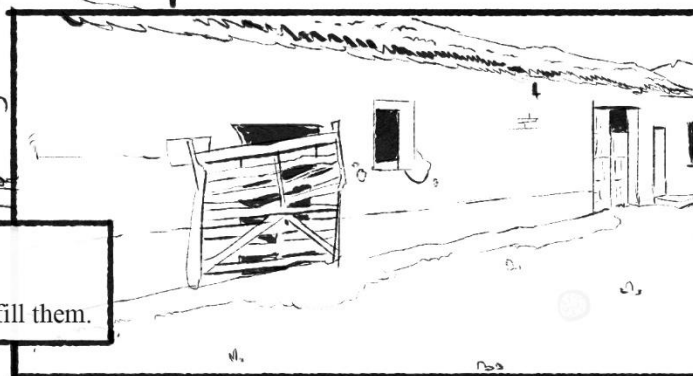
6. Representation of Defiance, an EthnoGraphic Comic

This section introduces a form of graphic ethnology in comic format, centering on the historical figure of the *matutera*.

The production of the comic was carried out through a collaborative process with the artist @caras_anim, present on Instagram. The author of this study developed the conceptual framework, selected the textual citations, and structured the narrative beats to align with the theoretical objectives. Working closely together, the author and the artist adapted these historical accounts into visual storytelling. The artist carried out the visual execution, including the layout, panel design, drawing, and coloring (as well as final rendering) of all panels without exception. There was **no generative AI** involved in the artistic process whatsoever.

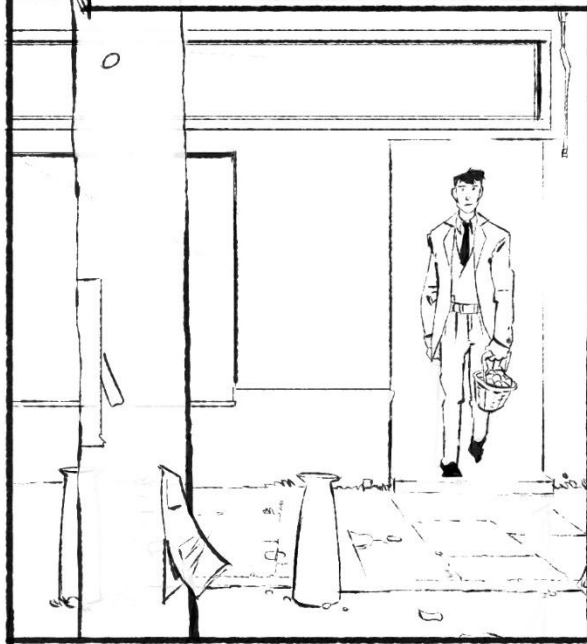
The textual narrative within the panels relies heavily on primary and secondary ethnographic sources. To maintain methodological rigor, direct quotes from real oral testimonies are explicitly enclosed in quotation marks. A minor portion of the text consists of contextual sentences written by the author to connect the narrative beats with the overarching analytical framework of this paper. All panel texts were translated from the original Spanish into English by the author. The translation process aimed not for literal word-for-word equivalence, but rather for fidelity to the emotional weight, historical mannerisms, and underlying intentions of the original voices, ensuring that the perspective remains authentic in translation.

The choice of the *matutera* as a focus point serves a twofold analytical purpose within this investigation. First, these women embody the core theoretical concepts explored in previous chapters. The confrontation between the Francoist biopolitics of hunger, the subaltern reliance on the *pequeño estraperlo*, and the preservation of a communal moral economy. Second, this visual narrative provides an opportunity to highlight the monumental, yet frequently marginalized, labor of women in rural post-war environments, who acted as the primary breadwinners and guardians of domestic survival. It must be stated that this comic does not portray the biography of a single historical individual. It operates as an exercise in ethnofiction grounded in qualitative research. By combining verified historical facts with real oral accounts, the narrative constructs a plausible, representative journey of a *matutera* procuring and distributing goods. Every scene reflects an empirically backed practice, that could very well have taken place in real life.



"Hunger was every day. It wasn't that you went hungry for a day. It was that every single day you were hungry." It was an overwhelming reality of empty guts and relentless anxieties to fill them.

The rich and the victors, living oblivious to it all, delighting in desserts... The poor and the defeated, settling, at most, for gazing through shop windows, imagining the taste only as a form of desire.



It was women who weathered the storm of hunger as best they could.

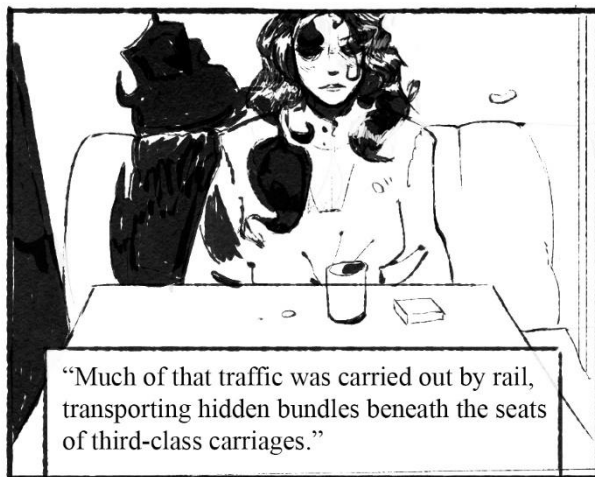


In a country devastated by the recent civil war and with many of them alone or widowed, they assumed the role not only of providing food, but also, as traditional female norms dictated, of preparing and serving it.

Along the borders of Gibraltar, the matuteras scraped by any way they could, finding no other way out. They traveled by train to Algeciras to purchase smuggled tobacco, coffee, or small saccharin tablets.

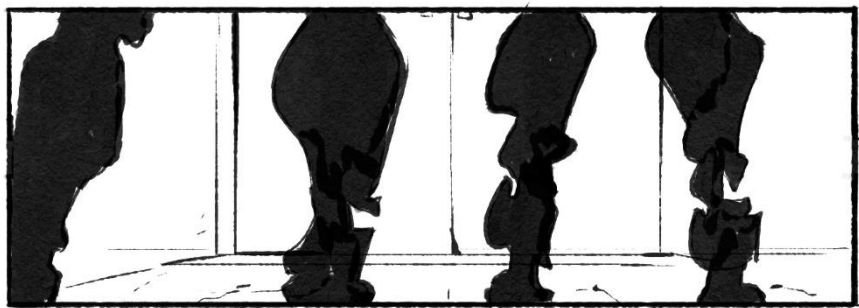


"They strapped the coffee to their thighs with elastic bands or garters so it wouldn't fall. These women were thin as sticks from so much walking, but they came back stuffed with goods, all looking very fat under their loose clothing."



"Much of that traffic was carried out by rail, transporting hidden bundles beneath the seats of third-class carriages."

The 'lechosos' had them marked and waited for them wherever they thought they might enter. The encounter meant the confiscation of the goods, severe fines, or being sent to prison for violating the Price Control Law.





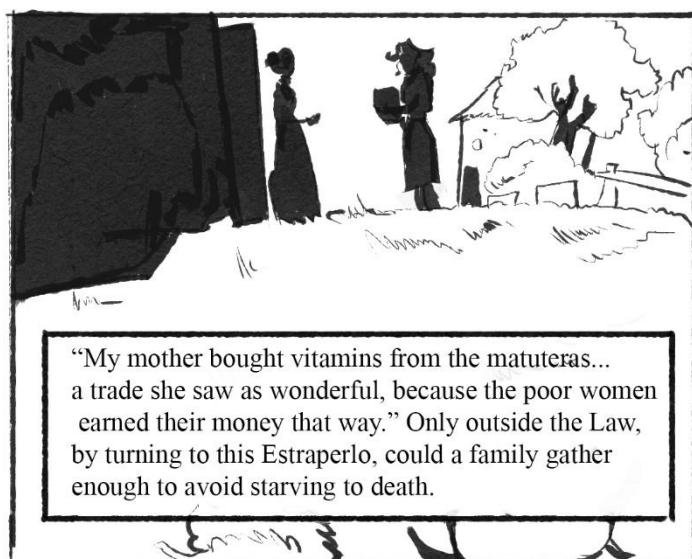
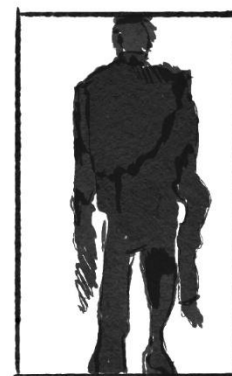
"It was striking to see some of those arrested women... emaciated, sweaty, distressed... facing the consequences of the danger to which they exposed themselves."



They knew that the encounter meant the confiscation of the goods and a fine of double the value of the merchandise.



Outsmarting surveillance demanded employing wit and overcoming fear. Those who resisted often resorted to "feigned ignorance," a strategic use of the very stereotypes that power applied to the subalterns in order to avoid direct confrontation.



"My mother bought vitamins from the matuteras... a trade she saw as wonderful, because the poor women earned their money that way." Only outside the Law, by turning to this Estraperlo, could a family gather enough to avoid starving to death.

"You cannot call the work of the matuteras a profession, trade, art, or employment... it was fortitude to overcome and carry on with the same toil". To feed their loved ones, many widows had to assume this role of "breadwinner" to guarantee the survival of the family unit.

"If necessary, we would gladly say: we had no bread, but we had struggle, resistance, and dignity, which is something worth far more than anything else." — Serrano Suñer (Francisco Franco's brother-in-law)

"The story of those who inhabited that house must be remembered. Not with shame, but with pride... there we endured, there we survived."

The comic itself comprises 29 panels of varying dimensions distributed across 3 pages. The graphic narrative synthesizes empirical data and primary oral testimonies to depict the representative journey of a widowed *matutera*. Driven by the imperative to feed her children, the protagonist undertakes a perilous journey to Algeciras to acquire black-market goods, evading state surveillance mechanisms such as the *Fiscalía de Tasas* and the *Guardia Civil*, before returning to her village to distribute the provisions.

The opening scene establishes the stark socioeconomic dichotomy of rural Francoism. Outside an official *tienda de ultramarinos* (grocery store), a wealthy, well-dressed man, who represents local elites such as doctors or high-ranking officials who were granted higher-category rationing cards, exits carrying a basket filled with eggs. The protagonist, a impoverished widowed mother dressed in mourning, observes him silently from the shadows, visually symbolizing subaltern exclusion. Transitioning to her impoverished home, she prepares for her journey. Hanging on the door is a crude family drawing made by her children on weathered paper, serving as a visual reminder that her dangerous undertaking is rooted in family survival.

The narrative shifts to the border zone of Algeciras. The protagonist exchanges her meager savings with a shadowy contact for smuggled goods, including coffee, tobacco, and saccharin. In a private space, she meticulously straps these items to her thighs with elastic bands before covering them with a wide skirt. Through this physical transformation, she deliberately alters her posture to appear heavier, effectively using her own body as a vessel for illicit trade. The bottom of the page heightens narrative tension through two panels depicting her inside a third-class train carriage while the heavy boots of the "*lechosos*" (inspectors from the *Fiscalía de Tasas*) approach along the train tracks.

The final page captures the climax of the comic. A three-panel sequence illustrates the violent arrest of another *matutera*, symbolically depicted as her hands and offered goods fade and get destroyed. As an inspector approaches the protagonist, she strategically deploys her "weapon of the weak", a performance of feigned ignorance, adopting a naive, submissive, and foolish rural persona. The agent dismisses her as harmless and passes by, proving how subalterns utilized state stereotypes to avoid direct confrontation. The comic resolves at morning in her village, where she delivers part of the goods to a neighbor in exchange for coins.

One of the last quotes of the comic is the following:

“If necessary, we would gladly say: we had no bread, but we had struggle, resistance, and dignity, which is something worth far more than anything else.”

This statement carries profound weight due to its historical authorship, who was Ramón Serrano Suñer, Franco’s brother-in-law and a high-ranking minister who experienced no material deprivation under autarky. In its original political context, this phrase functions as cynical regime propaganda designed to pacify the starving population by glorifying forced misery as a noble patriotic sacrifice.

However, this investigation grants a resignification of the quote. While hypocritical in the mouth of a totalitarian official, the phrase becomes empowering when reclaimed by the defeated lower classes; the *matuteras*, widows, and impoverished parents who fought daily against starvation. For these individuals, survival was not granted through expiation of sin or passive suffering. For them it was an active, illegal, and dangerous struggle. By defying the state's biopolitical control to keep their families alive, the rural subalterns reclaimed true human dignity, turning the dictatorship's rhetoric into an instrument of their own unspoken triumph.

While graphic ethnography serves as an extraordinary visual medium for conveying embodied experiences, emotional nuances, and implicit power dynamics, synthesizing a phenomenon as multifaceted as *estraperlo* presents inherent limitations. Condensing complex macroeconomic structures, state corruption, and widespread social survival into 29 panels requires significant narrative condensation, omitting broader structural aspects of the black market.

Furthermore, this visual project was conceived and executed within a constrained timeframe of one month. Had additional time been available, the narrative could have been expanded to incorporate further character development, broader secondary storylines, and additional historical contexts. Nevertheless, within the scope of this Investigation, the graphic narrative successfully achieves its objective. Providing an empirically grounded, visually compelling synthesis of everyday resistance and social dignity in post-war rural Spain.