

Graphic Narratives: Representations of Refugeehood in the Form of Illustration

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Abstract : In a world where images are a prominent part of our daily lives and a way of absorbing information, the analysis of the representation of migration narratives is vital. This thesis raises questions concerning the power of illustrations, drawings and visual culture in order to represent the migration narratives in the age of Instagram. The rise of graphic novels and comics has come about in the last fifteen years, specifically regarding contemporary authors engaging with complex social issues such as migration and refugeehood. Due to this, refugee subjects are often in these narratives, whether they are autobiographical stories or whether the subject is included in the creative process. Growth in discourse around migration has been present in other art forms; in 2018, there has been dedicated exhibitions around migration such as Tania Bruguera at the TATE (2018-2019), 'Journeys Drawn' at the House of Illustration (2018-2019) and dedicated film festivals (2018; the Migration Film Festival), which have shown the recent considerations of using the arts as a medium of expression regarding themes of refugeehood and migration. Graphic visuals are fast becoming a key instrument when representing migration, and the central thesis of this paper is to show the strength and limitations of this form as well the methodology used by the actors in the production process. Recent works which have been released in the last ten years have not being analysed in the same context as previous graphic novels such as Palestine and Persepolis. While a lot of research has been done on the mass media portrayals of refugees in photography and journalism, there is a lack of literature on the representation with illustrations. There is little research about the accessibility of graphic novels such as where they can be found and what the intentions are when writing the novels. It is interesting to see why these authors, NGOs, and curators have decided to highlight these migrant narratives in a time when the mainstream media has done extensive coverage on the 'refugee crisis'. Using primary data by doing one on one interviews with artists, curators, and NGOs, this paper investigates the efficiency of graphic novels for depicting refugee stories as a viable alternative to other mass medium forms. The paper has been divided into two distinct sections. The first part is concerned with the form of the comic itself and how it either limits or strengthens the representation of migrant narratives. This will involve analysing the layered and complex forms that comics allow such as multimedia pieces, use of photography and forms of symbolism. It will also show how the illustration allows for anonymity of refugees, the empathetic aspect of the form and how the history of the graphic novel form has allowed space for positive representations of women in the last decade. The second section will analyse the creative and methodological process which takes place by the actors and their involvement with the production of the works.

Keywords : graphic novel, refugee, communication, media, migration

Conference Title : ICMRM 2019 : International Conference on Migration and Residential Mobility

Conference Location : Venice, Italy

Conference Dates : August 13-14, 2019