

Perilous Mobilities and Immobilities: Visualising Refugee Detention in Europe

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Case-Study: 'A Perilous Journey'

- Opportunities to use arts and humanities to cut through some of the most damaging, dehumanising messages and tropes
- Example – **PositiveNegatives** – creation of 'A Perilous Journey', graphic narratives of the 'refugee crisis' (Burrell & Hörschelmann, 2018)
- Trilogy of 3 comics based on testimonies taken from Syrian refugees seeking asylum in Scandinavia in July 2015
- Serialised in *The Guardian* and *Aftenposten* (11-13 Nov 2015) and an exhibition launched at the Nobel Peace Centre, Oslo (12 Nov 2015)
- Funded by Norwegian People's Aid.
- Illustration by Lindsay Pollock, animation by Wael Toubaji
- <http://positivenegatives.org/>
- <http://positivenegatives.org/comics-animations/a-perilous-journey/a-perilous-journey-comics/>

Visualising the 'Refugee Crisis'

- Opportunity to create new decolonial archives of Fortress Europe? (Burrell & Hörschelmann, 2018)
- Graphics work in particular ways to reach audience – embodied experiences, facial expression
- Enough personalisation to invoke compassion (Arendt, 1963, 74-6)
- Holding back and use of frames - engages imagination, viewer cannot be passive (Ditmer, 2010; Reichman,
- Showing different situations subverts racialised tropes

POSITIVE
NEGATIVES

Depicting Asylum Reception

- Asylum centre experiences bookend two of the three narratives – Khalid and Mohammad
- Assumption they are resident in an asylum reception centre in Oslo – not the Trandum Detention Centre– but not clear
- Series of rights and access to services
- But also restrictions- UDI – Norwegian Directorate of Immigration
- Function of internal border control (Øien, 2012)

“It is the UDI that decides where you will live.”

<https://www.udi.no/en/have-applied/protection-asylum/ordinary-asylum-reception-centre/living-at-or-moving-from-a-reception-centre/#link-4068>

Im/mobility and Agency

- Ongoing debates about detention and agency (Jewkes, 2013)
- Narratives present juxtaposition of active, ambitious journey with enforced immobility
- Allow us to think about both together
- Greater understanding of frustration of 'detention' in this context
- Depictions of the passivity and dependency of reception living – documented in Oslo (Øien, 2012)
- But balances image of detained refugees as passive, dependent – see different aspects of more obvious agency, personality, backstory

Inscribing Emotional and Physical Presence

- Narratives use time in reception as time for reflection, emotional toll, missing family
- Key passages to connect to those relationships – not the usual depictions of angry ‘invasive’ Muslim men
- Stress the sense of limbo and unresolved temporality (Conlon, 2011; Conlon et al. 2017) - no ‘happy ending’ resolution for Mohammad
- Emotional difficulties of living in an institution with strangers (Øien, 2012)
- Also assert physical presence of refugees in these ‘western’ spaces (Darling, 2017)

Borders and Boundaries

- Physical – and social – borders and experiences of detention depicted very clearly
- Significance of forest setting in these narratives – Norwegian landscape, importance of nature
- Limited porosity of boundary - some freedoms to come and go, but restricted
- Narratives highlight this very well
- But also geographical isolation of location – something literature has explored (Conlon et al. 2017, 3)

- A benign Norwegian experience of reception?
- Hierarchy of reception experiences in Norway, still a controlled environment (Øien, 2012)

Overview

- Powerful intervention in current representations of refugees – consciously doing political work
- Visuality especially is key to connecting with potential audience/viewers
- Able to show reception experiences as part of wider experience of migration
- Allows a deeper appreciation for frustration and pain of limbo and institutionalisation after such perilous journeys

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