

Weyhe's Postcolonial Approach to the Documentary Graphic Novel

Priscilla Layne (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

Birgit Weyhe's *Madgermanes* (2016) is a documentary graphic novel that takes as its focus the experience of Mozambican guest workers during the 1980s in the former German Democratic Republic. Theirs is not a well-known story, as they were one of several groups of foreign workers and students who lost funding following German reunification and were forced to either return to their home countries or find alternative means of remaining in Germany. A large part of their stories is the day-to-day racism they experienced both before and after the Wende. Weyhe weaves a complicated story that travels back and forth throughout time and between Mozambique and Germany, covering such traumatic experiences as civil war, child soldiers, and sexually and racially motivated violence. As such, *Madgermanes* joins a long line of graphic novels that attempts to give voice to trauma that might otherwise be considered "unspeakable." In this essay, I want to consider what sets *Madgermanes* apart from more well-known documentary graphic novels like Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1993).

In *Documentary Graphic Novels and Social Realism*, Jeff Adams argues that realism is most prevalent in the documentary graphic novel. In comparison, Weyhe's text stands out due to its employment of anti-realist elements. First of all, rather than presenting the narrative without any framing, *Madgermanes* is self-referential, gesturing to the role of the artist and the artist's decision to present fictional narratives that draw on real biographies. Weyhe acknowledges her privilege as the artist, without centering her perspective in the way that Sacco does. Secondly, Weyhe sometimes uses artistic techniques to actually hinder seeing, employing scratches and distortion over images. Finally, Weyhe sometimes employs a fictional, unreadable script to convey moments in the characters' lives where they are unable to understand Germans or vice versa due to issues of language and cultural misunderstandings. In this essay, I argue that Weyhe introduces these anti-realist techniques into the heavily realist genre of documentary graphic novels in order to take a postcolonial approach to narrating the experience of these guest workers..

Kurzbiographie

Priscilla Layne is Associate Professor of German at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She received her PhD from the University of California at Berkeley in 2011. Her publications address topics like representations of blackness in German film, postwar rebellion, and Turkish German culture. She has published essays in the journals *German Studies Review*, *Colloquia Germanica* and *Women in German Yearbook* and presented at conferences such as the German Studies Association, Society for Film and Media Studies and the Collegium for African American Research. She is author of *White Rebels in Black: German Appropriation of African American Culture*, which was published in 2018 with the University of Michigan Press. In the fall she will be a fellow in residence at the American Academy in Berlin.