

Female empowerment in Portuguese comics: a manifesto for gender equality

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Abstract

Starting from the definition of gender equality as a social construct and the idea of the ninth art as a socialising and educational vehicle, this study presents the following research question: how does the representation of gender appear in comics of Portuguese authorship published and exhibited in Portugal in the transition from the second to the third decade of the 21st century? The objective of the research is to analyse gender representations in Portuguese-authored comics. This research is based on a qualitative approach, through the use of qualitative analysis of the selected corpus; We opted for content analysis and chose analysis categories that are broken down into recording units. The results obtained demonstrate that comics offer a varied analysis of gender representations, giving greater visibility and expression to the female gender. They narrate the daily life and roles of women in today's society, allowing the reader to reflect on stereotypes, gender (in)equality and discrimination, as well as emancipation and empowerment.

Keywords: Comic; gender issues; gender discrimination; women studies; content analysis; Portuguese culture.

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Empoderamiento femenino en el cómic portugués: un manifiesto por la igualdad de género

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Resumen

Partiendo de la definición de igualdad de género como construcción social y de la idea del noveno arte como un vehículo socializador y educativo, este estudio presenta la siguiente pregunta de investigación: ¿cómo aparece la representación del género en los cómics de autoría portuguesa publicados y expuestos en Portugal en la transición de la segunda a la tercera década del siglo XXI? El objetivo de la investigación es analizar las representaciones de género en los cómics de autoría portuguesa. La presente investigación se basa en un enfoque cualitativo, mediante el uso del análisis cualitativo del *corpus* seleccionado; nos decantamos por análisis de contenido y elegimos categorías de análisis que se desglosan en unidades de registro. Los resultados obtenidos demuestran que los cómics ofrecen un análisis variado de las representaciones de género, dando mayor visibilidad y expresión al género femenino. Narran la vida cotidiana y los papeles de la mujer en la sociedad actual, lo que permite al lector reflexionar sobre los estereotipos, la (des)igualdad y discriminación de género, así como sobre la emancipación y el empoderamiento.

Palabras clave: Cómic; cuestiones de género; discriminación de género; estudios sobre mujeres; análisis de contenido; cultura portuguesa.

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INTRODUCTION

Women's role in promoting equality, at different times and in different contexts and mobilising different forms of expression, is far from passive. Art, in its expressive plurality, has served as a stage for women to express themselves, break stereotypes and fight vehemently for equality. Comics are an example of this. It is hard to define. In the Cambridge Dictionary (n. d.), it is. "a magazine or book that contains a set of stories told in pictures with a small amount of writing" ([Cambridge Dictionary, s. f.](#)).

Groensteen argues that it is not necessary to define it only from a narratological perspective, saying that although we should not exclude the hypothesis that an isolated image can be intrinsically narrative, we can, correlatively, be certain that the juxtaposition of two images does not necessarily produce a narrative ([Groensteen, 2021](#)).

According to this researcher, comics do not always have a linear reading, they have a polyvalent, hybrid language and [Trabado-Cabado \(2023\)](#) believes they had the opportunity to free themselves from formulas and restrictions imposed by external formats, coming from the market, from the industry. These instances referred to the dimensions comics have to tell the stories. The space, its emancipation and all its possible articulations are very important, since every drawn image is embodied, exists, unfolds in a space ([Groensteen, 2021](#)).

Maldonado-Lozano and Gutiérrez-Zornoza defend this genre as an art form, a

a means of expression and communication, with its own language that writes through images, supported by texts or not, with the intention of telling stories where the feelings, thoughts and discourses of the main characters of the action are shown ([Maldonado-Lozano & Gutiérrez-Zornoza, 2022, p. 3](#)).

The comic as it is understood today is not a natural phenomenon, without borders, but the result of certain colonial, political, economic and cultural hegemonies ([McCaulsand & Salgado, 2024](#)), also when it was intended to be placed at the margin of the system - or especially in that location, since it has been defined by opposition to the mainstream ([McCaulsand & Salgado, 2024](#)).

Focusing on our study, the ninth art is productive in the representation of the female figure, sometimes as a submissive woman and other times as a female heroine, who fights for equal rights, for her autonomy and independence, for the conquest of a place that belongs to her. Examples include *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi (2007), *Season of the Roses* by Chloé Wary (2020), published in Portugal by Planeta Tangerina, and the iconic *Wonder Woman*, published since 1941 by DC Comics.

If in the past the representation of gender in Portuguese comics was residual or limited to the figure of the subordinate woman, now the representation of the role of women has been gaining expression, as a result of the freedom achieved and all the rights conquered. According to [Felizardo \(2018\)](#), female main characters and other characters are highly visible, lending the reader strips that sometimes express moments of emancipation, breaking female servitude and gender stereotypes and fighting for equality, and sometimes situations of gender inequality and discrimination that, unfortunately, are still felt.

The results of [Felizardo's \(2018\)](#) study show the relevance of Portuguese publishers continuing to bet on the publication of comics with this theme. In this sense, it is certainly no coincidence that we are currently witnessing a boom in their publication in the Portuguese and international market.

Many of these works are written by women, either in Portugal or in other geographies ([Felizardo, 2018](#); [McCaulsand & Salgado, 2024](#); [Trabado-Cabado, 2023](#)). According to [McCaulsand and Salgado \(2024\)](#), the contributions of women authors have not only been and are attractive: they have been decisive in altering in recent years -in an irreversible way?- the traditional conception of the environment. According to these researchers, the work of female artists was also undervalued and supplanted by a male comic canon. The ninth art was an almost exclusively male world until recently. Today we have the voices of the

authors in this universe. These women artists are today recognised and their work awarded, leaving behind the unstable balance between acceptance and marginality.

Therefore, we believe that in such a complex world, to think of comics, which address the issues of gender (in)equality and gender representation, is to see the ninth art as a socialising vehicle, as a manifesto that gives voice to women and promotes the value of equality. [Ballester-Roca and Ibarra-Rius \(2023\)](#) talk about this genre and the “recognition of comic’s communicative function and ability to lead complex issues and question to an adult reader” ([Ballester-Roca & Ibarra-Rius, 2023, p. 1](#)). These researchers state that comics promote reflection on a topic of vital importance from their pages and its discovery in the surrounding reality in a comparative strategy of both textual reading and the contemporary environment and critical argumentation both discursive and the pillars of the exercise of citizenship ([Ibarra-Rius & Ballester-Roca, 2015](#)).

However, the ninth art as a set of narratives that dynamically interconnect texts and images, is a privileged artistic territory for reflection on gender injustices and stereotypes. Thanks to the decoding of textual and iconic languages, in their attribution of meanings, resulting in a multimodal reading, the reader unconsciously absorbs a new gender ideology ([Ibarra-Rius & Ballester-Roca, 2022](#)), capable of being a catalyst for a paradigm shift, driving female empowerment and the desired social transformation.

This study has thus the following research question: How does the representation of gender appear in Portuguese-authored comics published and exhibited in Portugal in the transition from the second to the third decade of the 21st century? Its corpus is a set of comics by Portuguese authors, published between 2018 and 2022, where gender representations are present. The objective of the research is to analyse the representations of gender in Portuguese comic books, where the female main characters and the roles they play in the graphic narratives of the corpus will be the main objects of analysis. The present research is based on a qualitative approach methodology, through the use of content analysis of the selected corpus.

METHODOLOGY

Based on our research objective - to analyse gender representations in Portuguese authored comics - and our starting question - how does gender representation appear in Portuguese authored comics published and exhibited in Portugal in the transition from the second to the third decade of the 21st century - we elaborated a set of questions that allowed us to orient this study ([Campenhoudt et al., 2019](#)):

1. How does the representation of gender appear in Portuguese-authored comics published and exhibited in Portugal in the transition from the second to the third decade of the 21st century?
2. Is the Portuguese comic a vehicle for socialising gender equality?
3. Have gender representations in the Portuguese ninth art evolved in line with the social and cultural context?
4. Can comics be seen as a manifesto that gives women a voice, promotes the value of equality and reflects on gender injustices and stereotypes?

According to [Bardin \(2019\)](#), by taking as the object of analysis data of a textual and visual nature from a reduced corpus, to establish more discriminating categories founded on the characters, and in order to seek possible answers to our research questions, the study was assumed, in terms of methodological design, as a qualitative matrix, along the lines of [Mayring \(2021\)](#). According to this researcher “qualitative content analysis defines itself as an approach of empirical, methodological and controlled analysis of texts within (...) their communication context, following content analytical rules and step-by-step models” ([Mayring, 2000, p. 2](#)). A qualitative methodology, which prioritises content analysis, makes it possible to describe the systematic procedures of text analysis, leading to the development of qualitative procedures. This methodology makes it possible, if necessary, to link up with quantitative steps ([Mayring, 2000](#)).

Data collection techniques and tools

In order to objectively analyse the representations of gender in the selected comics and to obtain valid data, we opted for content analysis. We chose this technique because it allows for analysing the content of messages in various forms of communication (Bardin, 2019), so it was applied to the documentary sources under study.

In the analysis process, we chose categories of analysis that are broken down into recording units (Bardin, 2019); they allowed us to compile a set of data, present in the core of the works, and their subsequent organisation and interpretation: to identify and analyse the representations of the genre contained in the visual and textual messages and/or the interaction of both, as well as the way in which they are transmitted.

The selected technique allowed for the cross-referencing of data and a personal and subjective interpretation, which responds to the literature review, as we will see later in the discussion and conclusions of this research. Three major units of analysis therefore emerged from the objects analysed: I Iconic message, II Textual message and III Multimodal message.

Within the iconic and textual message we delimited categories of analysis, which frame the units of registration and are identified in the different works, allowing us to study and quantify the data according to our objective.

For the analysis of the iconic message, the categories of analysis related to the visual appearance of the main character (excepting *S/Título* by Joana Mosi, whose analysis of the visual appearance also focused on the other character in the story), gender, age, nationality/ethnicity, clothing used; location of the action (spaces/environments); relationship between the main character and the other characters; predominant roles played by the main character; relevant objects and devices, which may or may not be used by the main character; gestures.

In terms of the textual message, we assigned the following categories of analysis: gender of the main character, and of the characters in the case of *S/Título*; location of the action (spaces/environments); kinship relationship between the main character and the other characters; roles played by the main character; expressions of imprisonment versus emancipation.

From the reading and analysis of the aforementioned units of analysis, a third one emerged, the multimodal message, which is the result of the interactive link between the two. It is the interaction between the iconic and linguistic sign categories of verbal language, the complementarity that one category offers to the other, that allows us to decipher the message (Joly, 2019), to create interpersonal meaning and to reflect on the topic in question, in particular on the following: gender stereotypes, feminism, gender inequalities and the different roles played by women and men today.

Analysis corpus

Our analysis corpus brings together four titles by Portuguese female authors, which mark the last four years of Portuguese comics, in the field of gender representations and gender (in)equality present in today's society. The first two are published and the last two, yet to be published, are on loan from the authors. All the works were exhibited in Amadora BD1, in the *4 Quartos (e são nossos!) exhibition*, in October 2022: *Bons costumes*, by Silvia Rodrigues (2018) (figure 1); *Rolhas*, by Patrícia Guimarães (2022) (figure 2); *Quotidiano de Luxo*, by Júlia Barata (2019) (figure 3); and *S/Título*, by Joana Mosi (2022) (figure 4).

Figure 1

Cover of Nódoa Negra, where the title Bons Costumes is inserted.

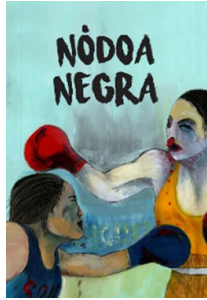


Figure 2

Cover of Rolhas

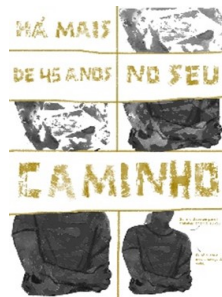


Figure 3

Cover of Quotidiano de luxo



Figure 4

Cover and first page of *S/Título*



The first two works belong to smaller publishers with a more alternative character, different from the big publishing groups. These works were well received by comic readers, and are currently out of print. *Nódoa negra*, which contains the work *Bons costumes*, won the *Toma lá 500 paus e faz uma BD* prize, promoted by the publishing house Chili com Carne. Both works were the subject of very positive literary reviews in the national press, attesting to their high aesthetic and literary quality.

Bons costumes is the story of a woman who was taught from an early age to do housework, stereotyping the different roles of men and women. When she married and moved to the city, the loneliness and lack of freedom she felt before remained, but now under her husband's authority.

Quotidiano de Luxo brings together a selection of drawings from 2016 to 2019 that reflect the everyday life of an empowered and emancipated woman in her different roles as mother, architect, wife and friend.

S/Título reflects on what it means to be a woman in 2022 by comparing the personal, social and political experiences of the main character, specifically the question of marriage and children, with those of her previous generations, mother and grandmother, who lived, unlike her, under a dictatorship.

Finally, *Rolhas* is based on the media story of Cristina Tavares, an employee of Corticeira Fernando Couto S.A., in Santa Maria da Feira, to narrate the moral harassment she suffered as a woman who stayed at home to take care of her sick son. After her dismissal, she was reinstated in the factory, but was forced to stack and unstack the same cork sacks all day long.

Thus, the socio-historical context in which the four stories take place is set in the 21st century, in the Portuguese reality, reflecting on the roles assumed by women, as wives, mothers, workers, in today's society.

RESULTS

The analysis of the corpus includes separate categories of analysis and units of analysis for both the iconic message and the textual message of each work. The recording units identified were those that we considered to be of greatest relevance and expression in each graphic narrative, some because they occurred more frequently and others, despite their low frequency, because they are of great importance for the purpose of this study. This analysis therefore contributes to a greater appreciation of the qualitative approach favoured in this research. After collecting the data and organising them into categories of analysis and recording units, using indicators drawn from the iconic and textual messages inside the books, we checked the frequency with which the recording units occurred in each comic. The analysis of the corpus data was recorded in tables created by us, an example of which is given below (tables 1 and 2).

Table 1*Table of analysis of the iconic message of Rolhas*

Category framework 1		
Title: <i>Rolhas</i> . Patrícia Guimarães		
Unit of Analysis I - Iconic Message		
Analysis categories	Registration units	Frequency
1.1. Main character's gender	Not specified.	0
1.2. Main character's age	Adult (pp. 1, 4).	4
1.3. Main character's nationality, ethnicity	Not specified.	0
1.4. Location of the action (spaces/environments)	Cork factory (pp. 2-3, 5).	3
1.5. Relationship between the main character and the other characters	Co-workers (pp. 3, 5).	2
1.6. Roles played by the main character	Factory worker (all pages).	7
1.7. Clothes worn by the main character	T-shirt, without neckline (pp. 1, 4).	3
1.8. Relevant objects and/or devices	Cork stopper (pp. 2-5).	6
1.9. Gesture	Crossed arms (pp. 1, 4).	4

Table 2*Table of analysis of the textual message of Rolhas*

Category framework 2		
Title: <i>Rolhas</i> . Patrícia Guimarães		
Unit of Analysis II - Textual Message		
Analysis categories	Registration units	Frequency
1.1. Main character's gender	Female ("Ela", pp. 3, 5; "Os patrões puseram-na lá fora.", "Coitada...", p. 4).	6
1.2. Location of the action (spaces/environments)	Enterprise (pp. 3, 5); Outdoor cubicle (p. 4).	Enterprise – 2; Outdoor cubicle - 1
1.3. Relationship between the main character and the other characters	• Co-worker (conversation between characters, pp. 3-5); • Factory worker / menial ("Os patrões puseram-na lá fora. 'Tá há dias a empilhar sacos (...)", p. 4).	Co-worker – 2; Factory worker - 1
1.4. Roles played by the main character	• Mother ("Ouvi dizer que isto tudo começou por causa da baixa que ela pôs por causa do filho que 'tava doente...", "... ela não tinha mais ninguém para ajudar o filho, caramba!", p. 5); • Factory worker ("'Tá há dias a empilhar sacos, quando chega ao fim, torna a tirar e a empilhar novamente." p. 4; "Se me disserem para ir trabalhar amanhã, eu vou." "Eu só quero o meu emprego de volta.", p. 1; "Não a puderam despedir...", p. 3; "Os patrões puseram-na lá fora." "'Tá há dias a empilhar sacos...", p. 4; "Há tantos anos na empresa...", p. 5).	Mother – 4; Factory worker - 7
1.5. Expressions of imprisonment versus emancipation	• "Eu só quero o meu emprego de volta." (p. 1); • "'Tá há dias a empilhar sacos..." (p. 4); • "Cubículo exterior" (p. 4).	3

The first fact confirmed in the four works analysed is that in all of them the main character is female, of Caucasian appearance. In *Rolhas* and in *Quotidiano de Luxo*, an adult woman, according to the roles she plays. *S/Título* presents a young girl through the use of her mobile phone and her conversation with her

grandmother. *Bons Costumes* also offers a reading through three of the key stages of human life: childhood, adolescence and adulthood, which are evident throughout the story.

As for where action is located, it is mainly located in the home - especially in the kitchen, bedroom, living room and bathroom -; in the work space - work, office, cork factory -; and in leisure places such as the beach and the countryside. In *Bons costumes* it is the space of the house that has the greatest expression, in particular the kitchen and the living room, and a dovecote by the beach. In *Quotidiano de Luxo*, the story takes place in different relevant locations: the home “Ai que bom trabalhar um bocado em casa!” (Barata, 2009, p. 9); the work space “obra” (Barata, 2009, pp. 9-11, 30, 71) and leisure places “Esta praia é perfeita...”. (Barata, 2009, p. 81) (figure 5).

Figure 5

Quotidiano de Luxo: The main character on the beach



In *Rolhas*, the entire narrative space is within the workplace, in a cork factory; and *S/Título* is divided between the place of the house, specifically the kitchen, and the beach.

All the graphic narratives lead us, at some point, to a geography that we would tend to identify as city/urban, whose coordinates lead us to Portugal, as we can see in the works *Bons costumes* - “Lisbon”- (Rodrigues, 2018, p. 79); *S/Título* - “Guide”, “Lisbon”- (Mosi, 2022, p. 1) and *Rolhas*, as the action takes place in a factory (figure 6).

Figure 6

Rolhas: Working in the factory



By analysing the kinship relationship that each main character has with the other characters, it was possible to clarify the most significant roles that these women play in each narrative. In this sense, we find that the roles of mother, wife and employee are the most predominant, although with very different readings in the different comics, as we will see below. However, in *S/Título*, a differentiating reading of the role of women is offered, a free and emancipated young woman who questions the traditional roles of

women: “A mãe casou exactamente com a minha idade. | Consegues imaginar-me a casar? | Imaginas-me a ter filhos? Não seria super esquisito?” (Mosi, 2022, p. 2).

Therefore, the main and most dominant roles played by the main characters are maternal, professional, domestic, marital and social. In *Bons costumes*, domestic roles are reflected: “A verdade é que o responder a todas as mais pequenas necessidades da família e da casa, o pouco tempo que lhe restava era para dormir” (Rodrigues, 2018, p. 71); and matrimonial: “olhar para o marido enquanto este se distrai com o telemóvel” (Rodrigues, 2018, p. 77).

In *Quotidiano de luxo*, all the above-mentioned roles are discussed in a multitasking perspective: “Tenho tempo para fazer pães com chouriço! | E para desenhar... | E para os amigos e pá família... | E para os meus 800 projectos, e trabalhos mais...” (Barata, 2019, p. 43) (figure 7).

Figure 7

Quotidiano de Luxo: The main character's leisure time



In *Rolhas*, the author to highlight the relationship between professional and maternal roles: “Ouvi dizer que isto tudo começou por causa da baixa que ela pôs por causa do filho que ‘tava doente...” (Guimarães, 2022, p. 5). Joana Mosi, in *S/Título*'s vignettes, puts social roles - trips to the beach, playing cards - before domestic ones, in a harmonious discourse between two generations: granddaughter and grandmother.

We also think it is interesting to know the choice of clothing for the main characters. If, on the one hand, in *Bons costumes* we find the use of the apron and clothes without cleavage, on the other hand, in *Quotidiano de Luxo* we find the use of shorts, bikinis and high heels, and nails and painted lips. Likewise, in *S/Título*, the iconic message presents us with old portraits of the characters, which exhibit a neckline-free clothing that covers the whole body, as is visible in the nuptial photograph of the grandmother, and which contrasts with the use of her bathing suit, but in a present tense when she is talking to her granddaughter. In *Rolhas*, the main character is presented in a shirt without cleavage, which we assume to be work clothes.

There are also other register units, from the iconic message and the textual message, which stood out during our analysis and reception of the message and that helped us to formulate our interpretation, as well as to draw the final conclusions. As for the first one, we highlight the presence of the cactus and the main character of *Bons costumes*, who pricks herself with it and with the beak of a pigeon, and the cage; the main character of *Quotidiano de Luxo* wears lipstick and goes in top-less; the strong presence of cork stoppers and the gesture of crossed arms of the main character of *Rolhas*; the granddaughter who drives, the main character of *S/Título*, the existence of the wedding ring and the gesture of the grandmother taking it off her finger. As for the textual message, there is a set of expressions that we have called incarceration versus emancipation and that deserve special attention: “Uma mulher é o coração da família...”, “Enquanto houver mulheres não se cansam os homens...” (Rodrigues, 2018, p. 73); “E ainda por cima no fim de semana vais viajar sozinha! Que má mãe e companhia!” (Barata, 2019, p. 59); “Eu só quero o meu emprego de volta” (Guimarães, 2022, p. 1); “Não tenho nenhum dos nomes da minha avó no meu, mas ambas acordamos cedo, à hora certa, sem precisar de programar o despertador.” (Mosi, 2022, pp. 2-5).

DISCUSSION

In view of the results obtained in our study, it seems clear that the corpus offers a wide range analysis of gender representations in Portuguese-authored comics between 2018 and 2022, which illustrate a faithful portrayal of everyday life and the place of women in today's Western society, as the historical evolution towards a more just and egalitarian society, resulting from feminist demands, has also been reflected in the world of comics (Rovira et al., 2018).

The corpus allows the reader to reflect on gender (in)equality in the 21st century, in different sociocultural, professional and family contexts, becoming aware of how much has already been achieved and the long road ahead in terms of female emancipation and empowerment, the fight against patriarchy and equality of political, economic and social rights between women and men (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2013).

Each work, especially through the interaction of its main characters and other characters, depicts the different roles played by contemporary women living in democratic states. We can thus affirm that female main characters and characters have a high visibility (Felizardo, 2018), lending the reader strips that sometimes express moments of emancipation, which break female servitude and gender stereotypes and fight for equality, and sometimes situations of gender inequality and discrimination that, unfortunately, are still felt. The characters and, therefore, the reading experience that this corpus entrusts us with, thus help us to know the world and to build our own universe of social and personal values, allowing us to build basic life models (Yubero & Larrañaga, 2017) that excel in equality, freedom and respect.

In *Bons costumes and in Rolhas*, the burden of being a woman, considered by many to be the weaker sex, characterised by moral and social inferiority. This fits with the feminist theory of De-Beauvoir (2015a; 2015b) and in the theoretical perspective of Tavares (2018). Rodrigues' (2018) graphic narrative confines the contemporary woman to the private space of the family and the husband's authority (Tavares, 2018), limiting her to domestic and marital roles and depriving her of her identity and freedom of expression, thus granting her the gender stereotypes that have constructed her as a woman throughout her life (Beauvoir, 2015b) and that suffocate her. Guimarães (2022) vignettes accentuate sex discrimination in the workplace, extolling gender stereotypes as an obstacle to equality (CIG, 2022), and one of the most perverse effects of the gender ideology (Amâncio, 2017). Despite this, they explain the misogyny experienced in the 21st century, the mediocre relationship between professional and maternal roles, and the long road ahead in the fight against patriarchy and equal labour and wage rights. In *Rolhas* we experience with anguish inequalities that show slavery (Brasão & Biscaia, 2019), humiliation (De-Beauvoir, 2015b) and psychological violence against women.

However, both the iconic and the textual message, as well as the interplay of the two, are imbued with the virile heritage that women carry: being heirs of a heavy past, they strive to forge a new future (De-Beauvoir, 2015b). Although today it may still be felt that the destiny that society traditionally proposes to women is marriage (De-Beauvoir, 2015b), the works chosen for this study demonstrate that there is a range of possibilities, which are accepted and lived with ease in Western democratic societies.

More specifically, in view of the results, we found that this corpus is moving because of the reality explained: it is crucial in the representation of women and the values linked thereto, manifesting the social and cultural context experienced in recent years, sometimes as a submissive woman who continues to be subjected to the entrenched patriarchal regime and other times as a heroine woman, fighting for equal rights, through the fight against psychological harassment and for equality at work, for her autonomy and independence, enjoying a place that belongs to her.

In the graphic narratives under analysis we find a stage, an expressive space where Portuguese artists freely communicate their opinion on the female condition and the role of women in contemporary society, breaking with stereotypes, fighting in each cartoon for gender equality and human development.

Therefore, we corroborate the ninth art as a socialising and educational vehicle, a manifesto that gives women a voice, promotes equality, reflects on gender injustices and stereotypes, allowing us to make judgements about our lives and the human condition. Therefore, "El mundo del cómic no ha permanecido

ajeno a este necesario movimiento (...) los personajes femeninos han logrado ocupar nuevos espacios y roles en la narración gráfica” (Rovira et al., 2018).

Readers unconsciously absorb a new gender ideology (Ibarra-Rius & Ballester-Roca, 2022), capable of being a catalyst for a paradigm shift, driving female empowerment and the desired social transformation. Therefore, involvement and responsibility in the construction of a freer, more democratic, fairer and egalitarian society are contemplated, participating actively, critically and consciously in gender equality as a social construction.

CONCLUSIONS

From the central figures of each graphic story, which materialises in verbal and iconic form, we find an intimate and compelling portrait of a contemporary society still struggling between patriarchal servitude and female empowerment. Nevertheless, there is an evolution in the conquest of a place that rightfully belongs to women who fight for better living and working conditions.

The results obtained certify that the authors recreate the world through their art, giving greater visibility and expression to the female gender in the comic universe, clarifying gender stereotypes and sharing values. A promising vision of Portuguese comics in the field of gender (in)equality and feminism, which does not let misogyny, violence and discrimination against girls, young women and women go unnoticed, in a narrative tone of sisterhood.

The comic thus fulfils its role as a socio-educational and cultural agent, very important in the formation of ideas and the transmission of messages, capable of contributing to the reading of the different roles played by women in society, as well as its mediating function in the construction of gender equality, fundamental for humanisation.

The main limitation of the study arises from the small size of the corpus. While this is a powerful corpus, from the point of view of the message, a larger corpus could allow for greater depth in the analyses presented. We should therefore be cautious in attempting any interpretative approach to generalisation. As for future lines of research, it will be important to follow some directions: to continue researching the role of comics in the promotion of gender equality and female empowerment; to study the production of comics by women and to analyse, from a comparative perspective, works produced in other contexts and realities.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Ana-Luísia Oliveira: Conceptualisation; Data curation; Writing - original draft; Research; Methodology; Resources; Software.

Ângela Balça: Project management; Formal analysis; Conceptualisation; Data curation; Writing - review and editing; Research; Supervision; Validation; Visualisation.

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NOTES

¹ Created in 1990, Amadora BD is an initiative of the Amadora City Council, aimed at promoting comics. Organised continuously since its creation, Amadora BD is the most important comic festival in Portugal.

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