

'Hooray! Hooray! The End of the World has been Postponed!' Politics of Peace in the Adventures of Tintin?

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Author post-print (accepted) deposited in CURVE September 2015

Original citation & hyperlink:

Rösch, F. (2014) 'Hooray! Hooray! The End of the World has been Postponed!' Politics of Peace in the Adventures of Tintin?. Politics, volume 34 (3): 225-236.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12024>

Publisher statement: "This is the peer reviewed version of the following article: Rösch, F. (2014) 'Hooray! Hooray! The End of the World has been Postponed!' Politics of Peace in the Adventures of Tintin?. Politics, volume 34 (3): 225-236, which has been published in final form at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12024>. This article may be used for non-commercial purposes in accordance With Wiley Terms and Conditions for self-archiving (<http://olabout.wiley.com/WileyCDA/Section/id-820227.html#terms>).

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**“Hooray! Hooray! The end of the world has been postponed!”
Politics of Peace in The Adventures of Tintin?**

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Abstract

Tintin is a popular cultural icon whose popularity has led to critical assessments accusing the comic of perpetuating orientalist and racist images. This article presents a different Tintin-reading by asking a more fundamental question: What understanding of the political is manifested in Tintin’s Adventures? I argue that Tintin creates a political sphere that fosters an image of peace which does not eradicate conflicts, but facilitates them. *Bildung*, spatio-temporal conditionality of knowledge, spheres of elasticity, and power ensure that they not turn into violence. All these are characteristics of the comic and create a powerful visualisation of the human condition of politics.

Keywords

Peace, The Political, Power, Spheres of Elasticity, Tintin

Introduction

Tintin is an icon of twentieth-century popular culture. To date, his adventures have been translated into more than 80 languages (Bentahar, 2012, p. 41) and the recent Hollywood adaptation prolongs his popularity. This global popularity raises the question of whether this comic has political implications, particularly since Hergé depicted political events of his time. Tintin deals with war, regime change, and human and drug trafficking. Particularly, the recreation of the Mukden Incident in *The Blue Lotus* exemplifies Hergé's commitment to 'verisimilitude' (Mountfort, 2012, p. 38) in style and content. This article, however, does not intend to advance the discussion of any of these specific issues but asks a more fundamental question: What concept of the political is portrayed in Tintin's Adventures (TA)? Inquiring about the political is not only of relevance because of Tintin's popularity, but popular culture also helps perpetuate worldviews and/or delegitimise others (Doucet, 2005, p. 290). Tintin's popularity, therefore, suggests that he is a powerful agent in establishing realities, especially when we consider that comics are a major source of children's political socialisation (Strohmeier, 2005). Before discussing the political in TA, we first have to define the mode of reading this comic because this influences the scope and perspective of the following discussion.

By arguing for an aesthetic turn, Roland Bleiker (2001, p. 510) distinguishes between mimetic readings, which aim 'to capture world politics as-it-really-is', and aesthetic readings, which recognise 'that the inevitable difference between the represented and its representation is the very location of politics'. Most Tintin-interpretations are guided by a mimetic reading because they focus on an oppositional outlook, which, following Stuart Hall (2006, pp. 172-3), is a detotalisation of 'the message in the preferred code in order to retotalize the message within some alternative framework of reference'. These readings

impart disturbing knowledge about TA. Juan Medrano (2009) argues that people suffering from mental illnesses are being stigmatised in this comic, while Hugo Frey (2004) and Paul Mountfort (2012) demonstrate that Hergé's questionable work for a pro-Nazi newspaper during the German occupation of Belgium is reflected in TA.¹ Particularly, the early albums perpetuate imperialist/orientalist and xenophobic images of cultural and geographical others. In a later work, Frey (2008) even asserts that they embody anti-Semitism. This grim enumeration seems to put their addition to our bookshelves into question. Indeed, James Scorer (2008, p. 140) reports that the British Equality and Human Rights Commission urged high-street booksellers to remove some of the albums from their shelves.

Taking up an aesthetic reading, however, offers a different picture. This reading considers Hergé's *verisimilitude* not as a perfect mimesis of reality but as a representation of reality that was formed by political events and that contributes to their formation, because comics are 'important site[s] where power, ideology and identity are constituted, produced and/or materialised' (Grayson, Davies, and Philpott, 2009, pp. 155-6). Incorporating popular culture motifs into international political theory helps, therefore, to transcend the 'narrow realities' (Bleiker, 2001, p. 524) created by so-called high politics. This means that, although previous mimetic readings revealed Hergé's questionable political perceptions – and it is important to be aware of that –, an aesthetic reading allows the reader to move beyond these "narrow realities" of the twentieth-century context and reflect on the question if TA provide a critical provocation for common conceptualisations of the political. A consideration of this interplay between the representation and the represented is possible because Tintin can be read and understood through himself. He is an androgynous "man without qualities" – a 'European everyman figure' (Dunnett, 2009, p. 585; also Hunt, 2002, p. 92) – in an otherwise

¹ For a different interpretation: Peeters (2002).

extensively elaborated comic (Peeters, 1989, p. 31; Farr, 2001, p. 92), whose lack of obvious character traits allows the reader to put himself/herself into the stories and read them from the perspective of his/her specific interests.

This aesthetic reading demonstrates that TA promote political difference in the sense that it is not only a site where politics is practiced but the political is actively created within the albums themselves. The political is understood here as the realm in which people congregate in a discursive context through which they pursue their interests and establish their identities. This happens in a mutually reinforcing process that affects both – identity and interests. It is also argued that TA depict that the resulting agonism is rarely without conflicts, as they are a necessary part of the process to align interests, define a common good, and act together to attain this goal.

To elaborate on this argument, the article proceeds as follows: The first section discusses the concept of the political. This includes a critical assessment of the classical reading of Carl Schmitt by taking recourse to Hans Morgenthau's conceptualisation. The intention of this section is to identify fundamental elements of the political and to address its substantial contribution to create and maintain peace. In the following four sections the elements of the political – *Bildung*, temporality-spatiality, spheres of elasticity, and power – are elaborated on and it is demonstrated how they are depicted in TA. The concluding section argues that Tintin's insistence on political difference enables readers to critically reflect on the political in modern societies and it encourages readers to contribute to turning this world-postulate into reality.

Tintin and the Political

Tintin-albums seem to perpetuate a Schmittian understanding of the political. For Schmitt (1996, p. 26), the political distinguished itself from other social realms through the opposition of friend and enemy. Indeed, although recent Tintin-scholarship does not refer to Schmitt directly, their contributions operate with his understanding of the political. Frey (2004, p. 183), for example, concludes that *The Seven Crystal Balls* is a parable against 'the mixing of cultures and ... peoples [as this] is dangerous and unwelcome'. Furthermore, Tom McCarthy (2006, p. 48) argues that *Tintin in Tibet* is the most apolitical album, as it lacks creations of hostile difference to be found in other albums. This construction of difference in absolutist terms is epitomised in Schmitt's terminology. He used the term enemy and not foe, which indicates that otherness is experienced as a threat to one's own existence. Perceiving the other as an enemy, however, would lead into what Chantal Mouffe (2005) calls antagonism as it implies that the other is confronted violently. Examples of violence are abundant in TA. However, although Tintin does not oppose the use of violence *per se*, he never employs violence for the sake of eradicating otherness.

Frank-Olaf Radtke (2011) also reminds us that, with this conceptualisation, political conflicts can only lead to a consensus in the sense that one party imposes his/her opinion on the other and not to a compromise in which each involved party is reflected. A consensus, therefore, leads to violent impositions of equality on the other as differences are being eradicated, which are yet constitutive elements of identity (Han, 2012, pp. 6-7). In short, in a Schmittian reading of the political, the other vanishes through physical violence and/or assimilation. Tintin, however, is constantly engaging with other people in an intercultural context in which he does not impose a consensus but he aims to find compromises. In the process of achieving them, Tintin considers others' viewpoints and, in *Prisoners of the Sun*,

even 'successfully acts Latin' as he became 'subsumed into the Inca world' (Scorer, 2008, p. 151).

This begs the question if Schmitt's concept furthers our understanding of the political in TA or if we need a different conceptualisation. It is worthwhile at this stage to return to discussions that evolved around Schmitt's concept in the 1930s.² An important contribution came from Morgenthau, who opposed Schmitt's friend-enemy dichotomy. Reconsidering Morgenthau's elaboration of the political will help to add further layers to this realm in the Tintin-albums.

Morgenthau agreed with Schmitt's distinction between politics and the political as he understood the political as a spatio-temporal precondition for political institutions and not vice-versa. For Morgenthau (2012, p. 101), however, the political is not restricted to a friend-enemy dichotomy, but the political realm is a collective affair in which people temporarily come together to pursue their interests. Hence, it does not matter if one shares an interest or not, if one is agreeing with one another or not, what mattered for Morgenthau is that agonism, to use Mouffe's taxonomy, can take place and is encouraged by society members. This agonism, which Morgenthau (2012, p. 126) termed 'discussion', is a speech-act process of gradually aligning interests in order to formulate a common good and to live in peace together. For Morgenthau (2012), four conditions were necessary to establish the political:

Bildung: The political requires educated people. Education is not only understood in its institutionalised form but also as a self-improvement, the objective of which is to achieve humanity.

² This aspect is further elaborated in the contributions to Gangl (2009).

Temporality and spatiality: History and being are not considered in essentialist terms as entities with fixed meanings and/or identities but as indeterminate processes of change and becoming.

Spheres of elasticity: The political must be established as a public sphere in which differences can be expressed and the resulting agonism can evolve peacefully, which is why it facilitates finding compromises rather than imposing consensus.

Power is not inherent to specific actors but is historically contingent. Therefore, power needs to be reconceptualised. It cannot be perceived in the Weberian understanding of the ability to dominate others but as a collective affair to achieve one particular end.

Arguing that a Morgenthauian concept of the political is a constitutive element of peace requires further investigating the determination of the political sphere through human interaction (Elden, 2000, p. 413). Particularly, sociological discourses on recognition help to demonstrate this linkage between the political and peace, as they argue that agonism is an expression of the struggle for recognition that constitutes sociation (Honneth, 1995). The ability to contribute to societal development through public expression of individual interests leads to knowledge about one's worth among society members. Following Axel Honneth, this reciprocal possibility to develop individual self-worth through the struggle for recognition is the foundation for peace. It advances solidarity and ethical norms of living together that go beyond liberal assumptions of not restricting others' abilities. Agonism helps people to establish their identity *and* to accept others. Otherness is not perceived as threatening, as we find it in Schmitt, but as a positive, constitutive element of one's own identity and for the construction of the political. Although Oliver Marchart (2010, pp. 350-61) criticises Honneth for not considering that identity is not only constituted through recognition but also through the reciprocal process of recognition itself, he agrees that

recognition through the political fosters peace. Recognition is the affirmation of being transcendently unattached and the spatio-temporal contingency of one's cognition which enables him/her to find compromises and establish solidarity with others.

Similar discussions are currently held in International Relations. Obviously, peace in this context is not to be conceived in terms of universal reason under whose imposition the causes of conflict are to be resolved. Rather, 'agonistic' (Shinko, 2008) and 'phenomenological' (Behr, 2011) conceptualisations of peace argue that it is not the absence or the abolishment of the causes of agonism, but peace is understood as being based upon a positive embracement of agonism resulting in the cultivation of their critical tension. Thus, it is not their overcoming but rather their support that is to be seen as a practice of peace.

Empirical assessments of this thesis are still due, but the following analysis of the four conditions of the political demonstrates that this relation of the political and peace is epitomised in TA, as they demonstrate to a new generation that conflicts are not to be dismissed *per se*, but are – as an open-minded, collective, and non-violent process – a constitutive element of a more durable peace.

Bildung

The political requires knowledgeable people. Aligning the agonism into a compromise that can be supported by all people – particularly as nobody can fully satisfy his/her interests – requires a basic understanding of others' positions. Without knowledge, this would be impossible, which is why education (the process of acquiring knowledge) is an important element of the political.

In educational institutions, one acquires the factual knowledge and cognitive competence necessary to develop the potential to understand other positions. There is no evidence to what extent Tintin received schooling, but his profession (journalism) and attitude suggest that he received institutionalised education. Tintin is knowledgeable, as evidenced in *Cigars of the Pharaoh*; while visiting a British district commissioner in India, he recognises a Nepalese dagger on the wall (p. 38). In addition, when lacking information, Tintin is always eager to increase his knowledge in his efforts to understand a new situation. After hearing the news that a South American fetish was stolen from a local museum in *The Broken Ear* (p. 3), Tintin takes a reference book from his extensive book collection in order to read about the Arumbaya-tribe, from which the fetish originated.

A further aspect of knowledge is evidenced in TA. The political not only requires factual knowledge but it is also based upon critical self-education. This was a characteristic paradigm of the German middle-class from the eighteenth to the early twentieth-century, which is why the term *Bildung* is used here (Ringer, 1989, pp. 194-5). The objective of *Bildung* is to become a full member of society by constantly educating oneself in a quest for humanity (Fuhrmann, 2002, pp. 49-50). Citizenship was not demonstrated in material or financial means but one's awareness of his/her abilities and interests by developing and using them for the benefit of society at large. *Bildung* was considered to liberate one from religious or political authorities because it developed people's awareness of themselves, provided a common ground to accept the other, and fostered a critical stance towards ideologies (Vierhaus, 1972, pp. 519-28), making it the foundation of the political. People must know their interests, have the ability to formulate them in the political arena for agonism to evolve, and remain emphatic at the same time, too.

This latter aspect is evidenced in *King Ottokar's Sceptre*. Before joining a scientist to Syldavia, Tintin acquires extensive knowledge about their destination (p. 7; pp. 18-21), enabling him to support Syldavia after realising that neighbouring Borduria is attempting to seize power. Pierre Skilling (2002, p. 188-91) asserts that this album demonstrates Hergé's monarchism, as Tintin supports the Syldavian king. Be that as it may, it argues in favour of the political. Muskar XII is presented as a just and wise ruler who encourages the political by enforcing free speech (p. 40). This is illustrated even further in authoritarian Borduria, to which Tintin travels to rescue the abducted Professor Calculus in *The Calculus Affair*. There, Tintin faces an Orwellian state in which the ruling Marshal Kûrvi-Tasch is a mystical figure who appears in speech, action, and monuments but never personally. Kûrvi-Tasch epitomises this regime as suppressing any political activities (de la Grange, 2004, pp. 48-9) through an omnipresent secret police.

Following this, Tintin has the *Bildung* to develop cultural sensitivity in an international context, whereas Thomson and Thompson are in this sense his antipode. The detectives attempt to demonstrate their cultural sensitivity by wearing traditional costumes in their foreign deployments. However, their attempts are egalitarian, rather than a promotion of equality, as they intend to eradicate differences that exist between people (Peeters, 1989, p. 59; Bentahar, 2012, p. 48). Consequently, these attempts are depicted as disrespectful because they often wear outdated/inappropriate costumes which raises suspicion among and/or stultifies them to locals. This is the case in *The Blue Lotus*, *Red Rackham's Treasure*, *The Calculus Affair*, and *The Land of Black Gold*.³ In *Destination Moon*, their masquerade even endangers them after they are caught near a Syldavian atomic research centre wearing

³ Exceptions are *Cigars of the Pharaoh* and *The Crab with the Golden Claws*, in which their costumes are not presented as a source of cultural insensitivity.

Greek costumes (pp. 18-9). This scene is particularly interesting because the detectives acknowledge that they had to rely on a costumier in their choice of an outfit.

Temporality and Spatiality of Knowledge

The spatio-temporal conditionality of knowledge is a further condition for the political to evolve. For Karl Mannheim (1985, pp. 74-8), this meant that knowledge depends upon and only has significance in the historical, cultural, and socio-political context in which it was created and operates. Within this context, characteristic thought-styles evolve that determine the process and direction of knowledge-construction, which epistemologically exert influence on the political in two ways.

First, the political depends on a perspectivist understanding of objectivity (Behr and Rösch, 2013). This kind of objectivity is different to positivistic conceptualisations or to our everyday usage of the word because perspectivist objectivity does not operate under the assumption of a given reality. Reality does not consist of everlasting components that can be described by scientific laws or that can be comprehended through empirical observations. Rather, objectivity is unveiled through a hermeneutical process in which the object to be studied is analysed through clearly defined concepts. These concepts not only help to distinguish the features of an object, but these features can only be recognised as such through concepts. For this reason, concepts cannot have a fixed meaning but are epistemological tools that help us to approach reality by analysing and categorising its elements; the meaning of these concepts, however, has to consider the specific historical, cultural, and socio-political contexts of the object to be analysed (Behr and Rösch, 2010).

In an intercultural context, this requires open-mindedness for and empathy to others' positions. This helps people not to become supercilious, as it hinders them in considering

their own position as universally valid. In TA, this aspect of spatio-temporal conditionality of knowledge is most obvious in *The Blue Lotus* (Farr, 2001, p. 50). On his way to a Chinese town, Tintin saves a boy, Chang, from drowning. Tintin befriends Chang and helps him to overcome prejudices about Western culture by stressing that they result from a lack of knowledge and are based on asymmetrical judgements that render Chinese culture inferior to Western culture (p. 43). In addition, Tintin is self-critical enough to admit that people in Europe are ill-informed about China as well. His perspectivist objectivity is further evidenced if we consider the orientalist stance of his foes in this album (Mountfour, 2012, pp. 38-9). Gibbons, a businessman, and the police chief of the International Settlement in Shanghai, Dawson, demonstrate their hubris while ranting about 'our superb western civilisation' (p. 7) as a universal fact during their meeting in a Western club.

Second, the spatio-temporal conditionality of knowledge also stresses that knowledge-power relations that shape social life-worlds and the resulting political order are historically contingent and of a provisional nature. However, to raise awareness about humans' ability to change these relations in the political arena was not Mannheim's concern. Rather, Mannheim (1985, p. 143) entrusted intellectuals to influence these relations because the "free-floating intelligentsia" would have more profound knowledge and wider experience than the ordinary public. This would allow them to improve the ruling thought-style by incorporating various perspectives. Certainly, Tintin would fit into a Mannheimian intelligentsia and recent scholarship argues in a similar vein. Frey (2008, p. 40) reads *Flight 714* as Hergé's legitimation for an epistocratic regime and Dunnett (2009, p. 592) contends that Hergé favoured European values as its normative framework.

However, relying on a small group of people with easier access to knowledge than the majority would endanger the political, rather than establishing it if we consider the previous

argument that it requires knowledgeable people. Mannheim provides no answer as to why intellectuals, who are also interest-driven, would act for a common good and would not use their ability to affect knowledge-power relations to maintain the *status quo*. Rather, the political requires people similar to what Morgenthau (1955, pp. 446-7) had in mind for scholars. They would provide a critical corrective to the current knowledge-power relations by contextualising their origins, developments, and involved interests. Unveiling this to the public helps people realise their provisional nature and focus on alternative ways to construct social life-worlds. They also support people in formulating their own interests by holding discussions with them. This is not to be conceived as telling people the truth; rather, it happens by asking questions. This maieutical process enables people to formulate their own interests. The resulting discussions are an expression of agonism, and Tintin recurrently engages in such discussions as evidenced in *The Blue Lotus*, *The Red Sea Sharks*, *Prisoners of the Sun*, or *The Land of the Black Gold*.

Spheres of Elasticity

The essential element of the political is spheres of elasticity. For Morgenthau (2012, pp. 123-6), these are public spheres in which people who possess the ability to critically view current knowledge-power relations bring in their ideas and interests regarding alternative constructions of life-worlds. Expressing them while considering the positions of others helps to establish discussions that peacefully align those interests towards a common good. This is the case because each society member participates in this process with equal rights as the evolving common good incorporates each interest according to its support among other society members.

These spheres are also evidenced in TA. An album that has so far attracted limited academic interest, *The Castafiore Emerald*, is, for this matter, most elucidating. At its beginning, Tintin and Captain Haddock encounter 'gipsies' (pp. 1-4), and a dispute evolves between them and Haddock; it is resolved because both sides develop an understanding of the other side and eventually are able to compromise. Haddock offers them a place on his private ground, enabling them to leave the city dump. This scene also demonstrates that the creation of the political in spheres of elasticity requires the efforts of all people, regardless of age, cultural background, and gender. There is a virtual absence of female main characters in TA (except for Bianca Castafiore), which is caused, following Serge Tisseron (2002, pp. 150-3), by the representation of Hergé's complex family structure involving the main characters. Castafiore's conflicting character represents Hergé's official grandmother, a chambermaid, and his assumed, aristocratic grandmother. The absence of women is, therefore, not to be understood as a perpetuation of male dominance. Rather, the incorporation of marginalised groups (gipsies), in which gender equality is manifested, into the main spheres of elasticity demonstrates – through the depiction of a different reality – that the political requires the equal treatment of people and their interests. Further evidence is to be found in *The Red Sea Sharks* (pp. 46-51). Tintin and Haddock are rescued from a shipwreck by a vessel that transports sub-Saharan African pilgrims to Arabia, but the crew intends to sell them as slaves. The vessel is owned by Tintin's archrival, Rastapopoulos, who orders the crew to abandon it during the night after setting it afire. Tintin and Haddock can free themselves, and, after a dispute with the Africans, they cooperate in extinguishing the fire and restarting the engine to escape from the returning human traffickers.

These and other episodes, however, resulted in comments stating the comic would promote orientalism and xenophobia (e.g. Frey, 2008; Jones, 2011; Mountfort, 2012). However, their

conceptualisations of the political are too narrow because they assume that a consensus must be established to achieve peace. Prejudices and stereotypes are recognised as causes of conflict and, consequently, must be criticised and eradicated. Such universalistic conceptualisations of peace, however, omit the fact that conflicts have non-rational and emotional components and that they perceive humans in essentialist terms. People's identities are considered to be determined and fixed. In the case of the Tintin-critics, ethnicity and religion are the decisive factors. In such a context, the other remains an absolute other (Radtke, 2011). Despite good intentions, attempting to eradicate the conflict-potential by establishing a peaceful consensus potentially leads to their violent escalation. A consensus is a unanimous decision that is enforced by the more powerful party to which the other party cannot agree because the different groups are characterised through irrevocable, essentialist we-they-dichotomies.

Tintin, by contrast, promotes agonistic/phenomenological peace. The above-mentioned scenes show that Tintin does not have an essentialist understanding of humans but considers the spatio-temporal character of identities, which allows for developments and/or alterations (Behr, 2011). This understanding enables Tintin to establish compromises in his quest for peace. In *The Castafiore Emerald*, they ensure a decent living for the gipsies in the meadows of Marlinspike Hall and all work together to escape slavery in *The Red Sea Sharks*. Compromises are made possible by encouraging disputes with others. Tintin realises that ethnic or religious differences influence each other's interests, but he does not consider them to be the source of a fixed identity (Apostolidès, 2010, p. 25). This makes it possible to gain an understanding of the motives for each other's interests and to align these interests through public conflicts. Establishing spheres of elasticity helps to accept, but also move beyond otherness and establish a temporal togetherness to achieve compromise.

If these spheres do not exist because agonisms are suppressed, Morgenthau anticipated violent reactions because people do not have the option to contribute to the creation of reality. It is telling that *Tintin and the Picaros* begins and ends with practically the same drawing. Despite a coup in which General Alcazar seizes power from General Tapioca in the fictive South American country of San Theodoros, the socio-political situation for the general public does not change. This demonstrates that they do not have the power to alter their situation because spheres of elasticity are suppressed.

Power

In everyday usage, power is often understood following Weber (1978, p. 53). He defined power as 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests.' This definition treats domination synonymously with power and also positivistic. International Relations measure power in material, technological, or financial means of domination. Empirically, this understanding of power is evidenced in TA. In *The Crab with the Golden Claws*, Haddock is captain of a freighter, but his first mate Allan takes advantage of his alcoholism (p. 14). Keeping Haddock drunk allows Allan to take control of the ship and use it for drug trafficking.

However, the discussion of the political so far demonstrates that this kind of power would not establish the political but it is a source for depoliticisation. To achieve a positive concept, Hannah Arendt (1970, p. 44) is considered here. For her, '[p]ower corresponds to the human ability not just to act, but act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual; it belongs to a group and remains in existence only so long as the group keeps together.' Power is a collective affair of speech and action in which people congregate temporarily to

contribute to the creation of their life-worlds (Owens, 2009, p. 107). As soon as they have achieved their ambitions and have dissolved as a group, their power vanishes. These spheres, therefore, empower people because it is this realm in which they act as a plurality of equals by expressing diverse interests and aligning them by carrying out conflicts. Important in this context is the notion of a plurality of equals. As power is a collective affair, no domination within a group is possible because power cannot be exerted by an individual. Only when they are treated as equals is power created. This obviates perceiving people in essentialist terms because it would establish insurmountable otherness and thereby hinder equality. It also eliminates pursuing an understanding of objectivity in absolute terms. Empowering a group by getting together with other people, recognising the spatio-temporal context of their interests, and collaborating to alter their and one's own interests to find a compromise cannot rest on the assumption that there is a given reality that can be discerned through scientific laws. Rather, it is this collective exchange of interests that establishes objectivity as different perspectives of reality are incorporated.

Such a concept of power is evidenced in TA. This article concentrates on *Tintin in Tibet* in order to demonstrate that, although McCarthy (2006, p. 48) considers it to be the most apolitical album, epitomising the empowerment of people makes it one of Hergé's most political albums. Chang is reported missing after his plane crashes in the Himalayas. Before embarking to Tibet, Tintin and Haddock seriously discuss if and how to proceed. Eventually, however, they agree to rescue Chang. After arriving, Tintin, Haddock, Sherpas, and temporarily even Buddhist monks form a rescue party, making their effort a symbol of empowerment because they act together despite official representations of reality, which include the announcement that no one has survived the plane crash (p. 10). Thus, by rescuing Chang, Tintin and his fellows establish the political because they bring their

interests into a sphere of elasticity, question absolute representations of reality, and contribute to the construction of their life-worlds. Furthermore, following this reading of the political, *Tintin and the Picaros*, commonly perceived to be one of Hergé's most political albums, is the most apolitical one. In this album, Alcazar seizes power from Tapioca. As it is a custom in the coup d'états stricken San Theodoros, the previous ruler would have to be shot, but Tintin takes action against this act of violence (p. 57). It is this one scene where the political is established as violence is suppressed through the alignment of interests to pursue a compromise by sending Tapioca into exile.

Conclusion

This article provided a different reading of TA. Following mimetic readings, TA perpetuate orientalist and xenophobic assumptions. These criticisms usually refer to the early albums. Charges are brought forward against *Tintin in the Congo* for justifying Western chauvinism and racism (e.g. Hunt 2002; Dunnett, 2009; Joseph 2011). Although we should not forget that the early albums were not originally drafted to be published in book-form and were produced in the context of an imperialistic, fundamentally catholic, and anti-communist Belgium, TA's British publisher, Egmont, was well advised to include a critical introduction in *Tintin in the Congo*. Also its revised colour-version does not promote the kind of the political and cultural sensibility we find in later albums.

However, in contrast to mimetic readings, this article argued that Tintin-albums are still a useful addition to our bookshelves; rather than banning them and/or making them only available upon request in public libraries. Considering Marc Doucet's (2005, p. 291) argument that comics help 'to craft and restore certain perspectives for each new generation of young minds during the crucial years when children are "acquiring the ability

to understand stories”, reading Tintin-albums enables children, but also adolescents and adults to gain a feeling for and an understanding of the elements of the political. In a mutually guided maieutical process, as depicted in TA, people can discern these elements and realise that differences and conflicts that exist throughout the albums are not a sign of orientalism, but of the political. People can learn that conflicts do not have to end in violence, but can contribute to peace in the sense that, through agonism, people develop understanding for others, rather than enforcing egalitarianism. This is important because, globally, we face post-democratic tendencies through which elements of the political are gradually reduced or abolished altogether.

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