# Stereotyping Africa in '*Tintin Au Congo*'

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**Abstrac**t: This article aims to read Hergé's *Tintin Au Congo*within a multifaceted visual/textual discourse that represents and asseverates the colonial ideology of Belgium (Europe), characterizing The Congo (Africa) as lethargic, ugly, retardedand uneducated. The article also aims to position the comic book as a rich text that can be highly influenced by culture and influential not only on children but on adults as well. The literary and entertaining value of the comic book does not prevent it to be a medium to inculcate false and exaggerated ideas about the other and prolong pre-existing stereotypes about Him.

**Key Words**: *comics*, *Tintin*, *Colonial Discourse*, *Post-colonialism*, *Ethnocentricity*.

## Introduction

> "All comics are political"
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> —Alan Moore, comic book writer[2]

There is unquestionably no agreed starting point of comics[3]. Some of the scholars very radically consider the *Bayeux Tapestry* or *Bayeux Embroidery*[4], an embroidered cloth nearly 70 meters long and 50 centimeters tall, produced in 1077, depicting the Norman conquest of Anglo-Saxon England ten years earlier, as the origin of comics. other scholars credit the illustrated books of the Swiss painter, cartoonist and caricaturist Rodolphe Töpffer(1799—1846)as the earliest comics, while some others either consider the famous English painter, editorial cartoonist and satirist William Hogarth (1697—1764)or the British cartoonist George Cruikshank (1792—1878)as the

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[2]Qtdin: RogerSabin, *Adult Comics: An Introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) 89.
[3]Comics is an umbrella term covering comic strips, comic books, cover painting, tapestries, and more.
[4]The Bayeux Tapestry was embroidered by Norman noblewomen commissioned by Norman authorities.

fathers of comics. The Nineteenth Century witnessed the establishment of comics as an art, and the appearance of weeklies that serialized comics for mass audience. Comics became widely spread in Europe, America, Asia, and other territories and with different languages. There appeared *Manga* and *Dōjinshi*in Japan like *Meiroku Zasshi*, which was published in the Meiji period since 1874, *Manhwa* and *web toons* comics in Korea like *Ddakji* and *Tower of God*, *Manhua* comics in China like *Sealed Divine Throne or Shen Yin Wang Zuo*, *Franco-Belgian* comics like *The Adventures of Tintin*, *British* comics like *The Beano* and *The Dandy*, *Spanish* comics like *Capitán Trueno*, *Fumetti* in Italy like *Bilbolbul*, and more.

Comic strips preceded comic books in America but it did not take publishers too much time to realize that reprinting comic strips and turning them into comic books was profitable. There appeared different types of comics: Romance comics like Michael Bendis's *Jessica Jones and Luke Cage*, horror comics like Donny Gates' *Babyteeth*, crime comics like Charles Biro's *Crime Does Not Pay*, fantasy comics like Gary Gygax's *Dungeons and Dragons*, superhero comics like Tom De Falco and Paul Ryan's *Fantastic Four*, to name but these few.

The beginning of the Twentieth Century saw further booms within this industry that gained popularity not only among children but among adults as well. The impact included not only printing but also the cinema and television. In a nutshell, whether comics appeared as early as 1077, or later in the Nineteenth Century, it is an art that still needs further study, considering the discourses embedded within it.

Will Eisner defines Comics as "the printed arrangement of art and balloons in sequence, particularly in comic books"[5]. In another instance, Eisner says that comics are "the arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea."[6] Scott McCloud argues that comics are "Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and / or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer".[7]

Comics as a popular medium, with all its different types, have never been meant for entertainment only. It has always been a medium that is enmeshed in ideology, either dissipating it or challenging it. The synthesis of *Tintin Au Congo* does not only clear up the principal idea that comics are a medium of the colonial Belgian agenda, but also sheds light on how ideology operates in textual / visual forms of representation, and how it is well manipulated to issue 'naturalized' judgments on cultures and others.

## 1. Comics and Ideological Discourse

It is true that comics may have lost their attraction because of the prevalence of TV and film industry, but comics certainly play a fundamental role not only in replicating reality but constructing it as well. Comics as an art have always intersected with the political, economic, cultural and social forces of its time. In her book *Reading Comics*, Mila Bongco says that "[comics]are seen both as (a) constitutive of and (b) rebelling against the ideas of the people and the nation. At any one time, readers are cognizant of a hegemonic or dominant mentality and, accordingly, comics are perceived as either rebelling against or catering to this mentality."[8]

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[5] Will Eisner, *Graphic Storytelling*(New York and London: Norton, 1996) 6.
[6] WillEisner,*ComicsandSequentialArt*(New York and London: Norton, 1985) 5.
[7] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (Illinois: Perma-Bound Books, 1994) 9.
[8] Mila Bongco, *Reading Comics: Language, Culture, and the Concept of the Superhero in Comic Books*(London and New York: Routledge, 2013) 26.

Much research has been so far done on comics, and most of it focused on varied topics but not sufficiently on ideology. In fact, academic research on comics—strips, comic books and editorial cartoons—has always had diverse opinions and perspectives. Studies have focused on the educational and literary tools of comics, the rhetoric of comics, communication in comics, the psychological impact of comics on children, its history, its language, and its audience, to name but these few topics. But, ideology and its relation with comics has always been a persistent question.

Before undertaking the interconnection between ideology and comics, I must shed some light on ideology. Despite its frequent use in recent literary and cultural criticism, the term 'ideology' has always been slippery and liable to no fixity. As Terry Eagleton points out, "It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that there are almost as many theories of ideology as there are theorists of it"[9]. He adds that "[nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology […] because the term 'ideology' has a whole range of useful meanings, not all of which are compatible with each other."[10] Hence, it is by no means here to comprehend all theories which defined ideology. I shall be using some of them to settle a logical relation between comics and ideology.

Marx and Engels define ideology as a system of ideas through which people receive and understand the world. They relate the dominant ideas to the dominant classes. It is the reigning class in a society which produces the dominant ideas. Then, it must be understood, according to Marx, that the reigning class controls the production of the dominant ideas in order to secure its continuity and neutralize any completion over the appropriation of sources of

[9]Terry Eagleton, ed., *Ideology* (London: Longman, 1994) 14.
[10]Terry Eagleton, *Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1991) 1.

production. This is quite similar to David Hawkes's premise that ideology is "a system of thoughts which propagates systematic falsehood in the selfish interest of the powerful and malign forces dominating a particular era."[11]

Ideology cannot be understood in isolation from György Lukács' *false consciousness*. For Lukács, false consciousness is intimately linked with class consciousness. Class consciousness enables the dominated classes to recognize their position in society, their history, and necessitates transformation of society. However, false consciousness shows a failure in recognizing social position and so a revolution and transformation to the better.

In the 1940s, the Frankfurt School strongly forwarded that culture was a manipulative machine which molded people in almost complete consent with capitalist ideas and conceptions. This strongly continued in the theories of the American sociologist Herbert Schiller (1919—2000) who thought that culture and entertainment deliberately promoted mainstream philosophy and modes of life. Hence, if ideology briefly means the dominant ideas of any society, comics, in a way or another, reflect these ideas or their rivals.

In this context, it can be safely said that comics, the mirror of popular culture, are so dangerous in the sense that they are laden with ideas that are predestined to influence not only children but adult readers as well. In his book *Understanding Popular Culture*, John Fiske argues that "popular culture is always part of power relations; it always bears traces of the constant struggle between domination and subordination, between power and various forms of resistance to it or evasions of it"[12].Since earlier days of the 1930s, comic books were

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[11]David Hawkes, *Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1996) 12.
[12]John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004) 19.

regarded as dangerous contraband. Most people doubted them, and were seen as disrespectful nonsense which turned ordinary readers into juvenile delinquents. In the golden age of the comic book between the 1930s and the 1950s, pressure was at its height in order to exercise censorship on its content. In 1954, the Comics Code Authority was created to regulate the content of comics and continued until 1980. The code simply restricted the distribution of sexual, violent or immoral conduct. The code remained powerful until a direct market distribution channel opened in 1970, which led to the cancellation of the code later.

Comics combine printed words and pictures in a very unique way. This combination gives way to a very flexible manipulation of meaning, in spite of the tiny space given to it. Comics industry may well be a fertile space for ideology as it is first taken as a funny space, and second because it is very highly consumed by children and adults as well. It has become as a daily routine since its beginning. This art is highly regarded in Europe, America and Asia. Consequently, even in the colonies, this art flourished and thrived widely, if not in production then in consumption. Martin Baker says: "from the beginning, then, comics were produced within an environment in which they were counter posed to everything dangerous. They were guaranteed to be non-serious literature, especially suited to children."[13] However, critics have always accused comics of violence, outrageousness, audacity, sexuality, nudity, indoctrination and many other negative things that influence children. In fact, it is almost impossible to find a comic book in the beginning and middle of the Twentieth Century without any act of aggression.

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[13]Martin Baker, *Comics: Ideology, Power, and the Critics* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1989) 8.

Some other fervent critics even went to link comics with juvenile delinquency. Moreover, comics introduce children to many of our societies' illnesses and problems too early, making children grow too fast. One of these conservative and fervent critics who considered comics as extremely violent and dangerous on both children and adults is the American psychiatrist Fredric Wertham (1895—1981) who cited overt and covert depictions of violence, sex, drug use, and other adult problems and called them crimes of comics. In fact, Wertham led an international fever against comics in the 1950s. Wertham caused the death of half the entire industry of comics, and so many consider him as the most outspoken crusader against comics. In his book *Seduction of the Innocent* (or SOTI as it is called among comic book collectors), Wertham considers comic books, especially crime comic books, as negative forms of popular literature and a serious cause of juvenile delinquency. Presenting interviews with children and teenagers, he highlights the dire impact on teenagers and children because they cannot judge which is real and which is not and so they are easily affected and seem to take everything in comics for granted. He accuses comic books of falsifying history, perpetuating racial stereotypes, and creating a collective repertoire about 'every imaginable crime'. One of the other serious problems Wertham warns of is sex. Heroes and heroines are usually represented half-clad and this introduces children and teenagers to a topic parents may not yet want their children to know. He alludes to Batman and Robin as a couple, accusing them of homosexuality. He also warns of the possible lesbian implications in Wonder Woman's relation with Holliday Girls and in Black Cat's character. "For boys, Wonder Woman is a frightening image. For girls she is a morbid ideal. Where

Batman is anti-feminine, the attractive Wonder Woman and her counterparts are definitely anti-masculine"[14]. Although critics took his ideas as very conservative, Wertham dug in the tiniest details, words, implications, and aspects that really conveyed crime, sex, and delinquency, and which may waste children and teenagers' present and future. It may be said that much of Wertham thought in the book is accepted as well as much is refuted, but he really showed up in the exact moment to highlight to what extent comics can be ideological.

Likewise, Jason Dittmer highlights the role of comics in inculcating ideological ideas of race, class, gender and sexuality in the collective unconsciousness of the masses. "Superhero comics books" he says, "like all popular culture, serve as political texts, shaping geopolitical (and other) identities and constructing geographical imaginations. This is done through language, both visual and textual, that connects representations of the "reality" as understood by the reader"[15]. Dittmer adds that "Comic books, a medium that many forecast is doomed as a major source of entertainment, may nevertheless provide insight into the political structuring inherent to new trends in media."[16]

Umberto Eco, on his turn, contributed significantly to the debate on ideology and its close relationship with comics. His critical/Marxist perspective was very influential on later studies on comics. Unlike those who considered comics as mere entertaining and innocent books that may not seriously orient or disorient its readers, Eco puts them in the middle of political capitalist propaganda. He believes that comics are manipulated by systematic capitalist ideas

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[14]Fredric Wertham, *SeductionoftheInnocent*(New York: Rinehart and Company, 1954) 192-3.

[15]Jason Dittmer, "The Tyranny of the Serial: Popular Geopolitics, the Nation, and Comic Book Discourse", *Antipode*, Vol. 39, N° 2, 2007: 251.

[16]Ibid., 265.

above the reach of readers. Comics for him are fields where the reproduction of dominant ideology in society is very fertile. "The comic strip is commissioned from above, it operates according to all the mechanisms of hidden persuasion, it presupposes in the consumer an attitude of escape that immediately stimulates the paternalistic aspirations of the producers. […] the comic strip, in most cases, reflects the implicit pedagogy of a system and acts as hidden reinforcement of the dominant myths and values."[17]

All in all, although comics are basically meant for entertainment, this does not prevent them from being overloaded with stereotypical and baggy ideas on race, sex, class and gender.


## 2. The Story

*Tintin Au Congo* is the second volume of *The Adventures of Tintin*, the comics series by Belgian cartoonist Georges Remi (1907—1983), best known under the pen name Hergé. The series is considered as one of the most popular comics in the Twentieth Century. It has been published in more than seventy languages and sold more than two hundred million copies. It has also been adapted for film, radio, theatre and television. *Tintin Au Congo* first appeared in *Le Petit Vingtième,* the weekly supplement of the Catholic Belgian newspaper *Le Vingtième Siècle*, and it was serialized from May 1930 to June 1931.

Now that his popularity is established following his adventures in *Tintin Au Pays des Soviets*[18], Tintin, the Belgian reporter, heads towards Africa. On June 5th, 1930, *Le Petit Vingtième* informed its

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[17]Umberto Eco,*Apocalypse Postponed* (London and Oxford: Bloomsbury Academic, 1994) 37-38.

[18]*Tintin Au Pays des Soviets* or *Tintin in the Land of the Soviets*, is the first volume of the Adventures of Tintin.

readers that Tintin and Milou [19], who barely returned from the Soviet Union, were heading towards the Belgian Congo. The announcement had been made and
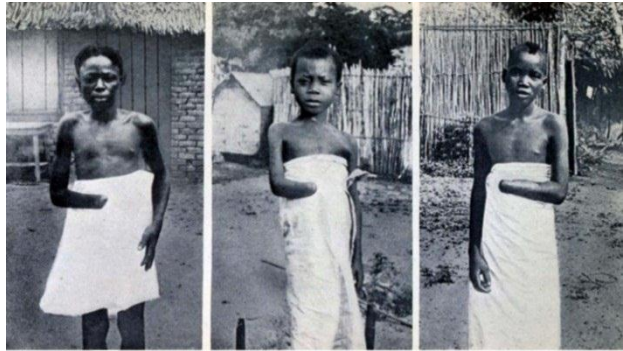


*Figure 1*: Congolese children who failed the daily rubber quota had their hands severed by The Force Publique (FB) which king Leopold II used to control work in the rubber fields (source: rarehistoricalphotos.com)

Tintin was shown choosing what he would take with him from the "Congo" section of the *Bon Marché* department store[20].In fact, it was the priest Abbé Norbert Wallez (1882—1952) who recommended Tintin for the job and so pushed him towards the Congo. The Belgian minister for colonies got in contact with Wallez in order to propose a series of positive articles and reports about the presence of Belgium in the Congo. This was very necessary for the Belgian government as the period of King Leopold II in the Congo marred the image that the Belgians wanted the world to know about them. King Leopold II of Belgium took control of the Congo at the end of the Nineteenth Century, turning it into his own personal fiefdom.He impoverished this nation, indorsed genocide and stoleitsriches with the help of the Welsh journalist and explorer Henry Morton Stanley (1841—1904). His reign knew well-documented atrocities related to the labor policies in collecting and transporting natural rubber in the Congo. Forced labor and violent coercion were exercised to extract and collect

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[19]I shall be using the French names *Tintin* and *Milou*instead of the English versions*Tintin* and *Snowy*.

[20]Le *Bon Marché*, literally 'the good market', or 'the good deal' in French, is a department store in Paris. Founded in 1838 and renovated almost completely by the French entrepreneur Aristide Boucicaut (1810—1877) in 1852, it was the first ever modern department store.

rubber cheaply in order to maximize profit. Any individual who refused to participate in this transaction was killed, and reports talked of villages which were wrecked because of their refusal. It was also reported that those who failed to make the daily rubber quota had their hands severed, the fact which raised international notoriety.

An international campaign against the Congo Free State began in 1890 and reached its peak after 1900 under the leadership of the British activist Edmund Dene Morel (1873—1924). As a result, under international pressure, the Belgian parliament forced the King to cede the Congo to the Belgian government in 1908. This never meant that atrocities on Belgian Congo ceased.

After a train journey from Brussels to Antwerp in the North, Tintin and his dog Milou embarked on The Thysville[21], the boat that sailed from Antwerp to Matadi, the main port and entrance point to the Belgian Congo. He travelled to the Belgian Congo with Milou to report about events in the Belgian Congo. When they arrived, they were joyfully welcomed by a crowd of native Congolese people. While in the Congo, Tintin hired a Congolese boy named Cocoto assist him in his journey throughout the country. The colony was in dire need of administration and good governance, but because the natives were not educated enough, the only people who were taking control in the country were Catholic and Protestant missionaries. Even civilian Belgians, at least many of them were not interested in taking up administrative roles in the Congo. There was also a lack of people willing to do certain jobs that are rudimentary in a tropical country: teachers, doctors, geologists, civil engineers, road and bridge engineers, miners, architects, drivers, and so on. The country was

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[21]The *Thysville* boat was built in 1922 for the *Compagnie maritime belge* by the SA Cockerill Yards, the company which belonged to the British businessman and entrepreneur John Cockerill, in the city of Hoboken in Belgium.

thriving with raw materials and this was a golden opportunity for businessmen from all over the world. The rich Congolese subsoil, particularly in the region of Katanga, was highly sought-after. Copper, gold and diamonds are in plentiful supply. The Congo is also rich in uranium which Belgium sold to the United States during the Second World War, helping the construction of the two first atomic bombs which were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in August 1945.There was an influx of American, Portuguese, Chinese and Greek traders into the country. Adventurers from all over the world paid visits to the Congo. Traffickers of all kinds and corrupt explorers were also part of the colonial adventure. Amid this onrush on the country and the scarcity of administrators and workers, the Belgian government was seeking ways to interest its people in colonial careers. When the priest Wallez suggested Tintin as a promoter, the idea seemed very striking but surprising for Hergé who found himself wondering how he could learn more about the Congo. He received help from Wallez and from an old friend with whom he worked in Le *Boy Scout* magazine, who furnished him with a copy of *Notre Colonie* by Albert Michiels and Norbert Laude, the first edition of which appeared in 1922. Knowledge of the Belgian Congo started to Flow to Hergé from his entourage. Monseigneur Schyrgens, literary columnist for *Le Vingtième Siècle*, provided him with two books: René Vauthier's *Le Congo Belge*and a collective book called *Miroir du Congo Belge*. Hergé also made enquiries via the Compagnie maritime belge, which monopolized navigation between Belgium and the Congo. His recurrent visits of African Museums in Belgium widened his imagination about the Congo.

Propaganda for *Tintin Au Congo* reached its peak. Congolese citizens were represented as impatiently eager to see Tintin. Philippe Goddin cites a young Congolese called Kyola Kongo expressing his

utmost happiness because of the arrival of Tintin: "Moi pitit noir est content baucou li mien petit amitintin bonne santé. Moi contan li tintin venir ici. […]C'est li avoir baucou manger ici. Moi fini. Kyola"[22].The translation of this statement may read as follows: "Me, little black boy is very happy to read that little friend Tintin is in good health. I'm happy to read that Tintin is coming here. He will have a lot to eat here. I finished. Kyola".

From the very beginning, Tintin and Milou face hardships in the Congo. Tintin rescues Milou from a crocodile. Another incident is when a criminal stowaway attempts to kill Tintin but monkeys throw coconuts at the criminal knocking him unconscious. Another instance is when a monkey kidnaps Milou, pushing Tintin to disguise as a monkey to save Milou. Later, Tintin, Milou, and Coco crash their car into a train. Tintin was lifted on shoulders to the Babaoro'm village. There, Tintin meets the king who later invited him on a hunt trip the next day. During the hunt, a lion knocks Tintin unconscious but Milou rescues him by biting off the lion's tail. Tintin becomes admired by the natives, and this angers the Babaoro'm witch doctor Muganga. When Tintin cures a man, he is hailed as a Boula Matari (breaker of rocks). With the help of the stowaway criminal, Muganga decided to accuse Tintin of destroying the tribe's sacred idol. Villagers got very furious at hearing the news and so imprison Tintin. However, when Coco showed them footage Tintin registered with his phonograph to show Muganga and the stowaway's conspiracy to break the idol, they turn against Muganga. Then, Tintin becomes a hero in the village. He cures a man suffering fever by giving him quinine. So, his wife bows to Tintin: "Li Blanc est bon! … Li grand sorcier! … Li guéri mon

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[22]Philippe Goddin, *Hergé,Lignes de Vie* (Brussels:Molinsart, 2007) 23.

mari! … Li missié blanc li Boula-matari[23]!" which roughly means: "white man is good! … He is a great magician! He cured my husband! Mr. Whiteman is a Boula-matari!". Muganga does not surrender. He wages war between Babaoro'm and their neighbors, the M'Hatouvou, whose king leads an attack on the Babaoro'm village and wants to kill Tintin. Again, Tintin shows courage and outfits the M'Hatouvou by hiding an electromagnet that catches all their arrows. As a result, they cease their attacks and hostilities and start idolizing Tintin. Muganga thinks of another way to eliminate Tintin. He plots with the stowaway to kill Tintin and make it look like a leopard attack. Yet, Tintin survives and saves Muganga from a bad constrictor. Muganga surrenders, pleads mercy and ends his conspiracies. The stowaway continues his hostilities to Tintin, captures him and hangs him to the crocodiles to eat him. However, a Catholic missionary saves him. The stowaway fights with Tintin again across a waterfall, and eventually the stowaway falls and is eaten by crocodiles. Reading a message in the stowaway pocket, Tintin discovers that Al Capone, the American gangster, who is trying to gain control of African Diamond production, wants to eliminate Tintin. Tintin helps the colonial police to arrest Al Capone and the rest of the smuggling gang. Then, Tintin returns home.

## 3. Stereotyping Africa in Tintin Au Congo

> "*Tintin ne lutte pas pour le bonheur de tous les hommes, mais chaque fois que les hasards de ses aventures l'ont mis en présence d'un homme victime*

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[23]In Kikongo, a Bantu language spoken in Angola and in the Republic of Congo, a *Boula-matari*, or *Bulamatari*, means a breaker of rocks, figuratively, a creator of miracles.

*de la misère, de l'injustice, de la violence, c'est pour cet homme-là que Tintin a pris parti.*" — Hergé[24]

No matter how much support and circulation *Tintin au Congo* got in Europe and America, it remains a text which reinforces Western racist stereotypes. Just as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* used Congo as a setting for colonial greed and Kurtz's madness, Hergé used Congo to prove superiority of Tintin and inferiority of Africans.

In *Tintin Au Congo*, Africans are depicted as stupid clowns or as duplicitous tricksters, draped in leopard skins and gaudy loincloths, carrying shields and spears. A monkey which appears shortly in the story is depicted far more intelligent than Africans. Africans show very vulnerable and easily influenced by Tintin who is after all a mere European boy.
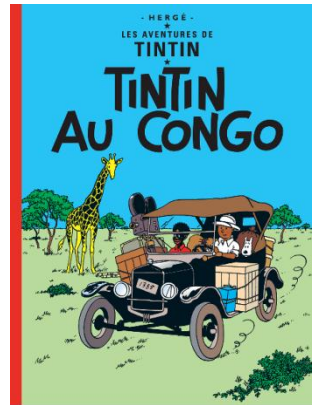


*Figure 2*: Tintin Au Congo, Edition of 1974 *(Source: tintin.com)*

Egmont, the publishers of the English version of Tintin (1991) included the statement: "In his portrayal of the Belgian Congo, the young Hergé reflects the colonial attitudes of the times … he depicted the African people according to the bourgeois, paternalist stereotypes of the period …" admitting the culpability of the story. Similarly, Britain's Commission for Racial Equality declared the book 'hideous racial prejudice', recommending that it should never be sold in British book stores henceforth. Under recurrent criticism, Hergé himself admitted that he represented the ideas and attitudes of the time. He responded to the criticism saying that he knew nothing about the Congo except what people told about

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[24]Qtd in:Ludwig Schuurman, *L'Ultime Album d'Hergé*(Maine-et-Loire : Cheminements, 2001) 87.

them in 1930s. He continued that it was famous at the time that Black people were immature, and that it was lucky for them the Belgians were there to care for them. This image, Hergé affirms, was the prevalent spirit in Belgium at that time[25]. That's why he undertook several changes to the original text of 1931, and the subsequent texts of 1937, 1941, and 1946.

The first striking derogation against Congolese people is the way they speak. They are almost incapable of speaking a foreign language the way it should be. Moreover, they are sluggish, incompetent and brutal. Through *Tintin au Congo*, you hardly find a correct French sentence uttered by Africans, displaying a funny African accent. The text is full of distorted French sentences, lacking verbs or linking words, like: '*ça y en a beaucoup requins par ici! | coco li avoir peur ... et missié blanc parti avec tomobile ... | missié ! ... missié ! ... li prisonnier li parti! ...| moi y en a fatigué*'. Furthermore, Africans in the story hardly speak, especially Coco. He never says no to Tintin, and listens more than he participates in conversations. It is usually Tintin who speaks to Milou and Coco listens to them and finally agrees. "His "boy" Coco teaches him nothing about the country. Faced with his master's raised finger, Coco always responds: "Yes, Master!" The little African is assigned only menial tasks: watching the car, preparing the meals, and carrying their equipment."[26]Even animals like Milou, the parrots, or others dogs

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[25]Hergé says:*"Toutes les opinions sont libres, y compris celle de prétendre que je suis raciste... Mais enfin, soit! Il y a eu Tintin au Congo, je le reconnais. C'était en 1930. Je ne connaissais de ce pays que ce que les gens en racontaient à l'époque:"Les nègres sont de grands enfants... Heureusement pour eux que nous sommes là! etc."Et je les ai dessinés, ces Africains, d'après ces critères-là, dans le pur esprit paternaliste qui était celui de l'époque, en Belgique."* Qtd in: Numa Sadoul, *Entretiens avec HergéTintin et Moi* (Brussels: Casterman, 1989) 74.

[26]Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *The Metamorphoses of Tintin, Or, Tintin for Adults*, trans. by Jocelyn Hoy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) 13.

speak correct language than the Africans, which is an appalling insult to the Africans.

Violence in the dialogues of Tintin with Africans is typical. He often insults Africans showing authority, superiority, knowledge and contempt. First, he orders Coco to accompany him during his stay in the Congo: "*Alors, c'estentendu, Coco? … Tu m'accompagneras Durant tout mon voyage …*". While heading on in his car, he gets stuck in a twisting railway. They hear the sound of something coming and it is a Train. If Tintin and Coco have not time to escape, then they are expected to be smashed by the train. Ironically, the train hits Tintin's car and it derails and turns over. While the Africans start shouting, Tintin authoritatively silences them, mocking their train and railway: "*Silence! … On va la réparer, votre vieille tchouk-tchouk!*" the fact that a single car overcomes a locomotive and its wagons highlights robust European industry against the inferiority and unpromising old African industry. Then, he orders them to start repairing the tchouk-tchouk: "*Allons, au travail!*" The scene delineates the Africans as 'lazy' and 'lethargic'. The dog Milou starts helping, while the Africans, the ones concerned with the breakdown of their train as they have no other means of transportation, pretend fatigue and fear for getting dirty. This needs another tone of severity: "*Au travail, vite! … Vous n'avez pas honte de laisser ce chien travailler tout seul ?...*" Even the dog Milou makes fun of their 'laziness': "*Alons, tas de paresseux, à l'ouvrage!*" Ironically, the scene ends by Tintin dragging the broken-down train by his car right to its final destination. Generally, Tintin is so contemptuous and violent to the Africans in his dialogues especially the stubborn ones. "The foreigners he [Tintin] comes into contact with are of two sorts:

the Good whom he can convert to his values, and the incorrigibles whom he has to punish."[27]

There is an outrageous contradiction in the story. While Tintin shows an unforgiving aggressivity in butchering a monkey, exploding a rhinoceros, killing fifteen free antelopes, enjoying while Milou cuts a lion's tail, torturing a crocodile, using an elephant's ivory canines after being killed by his rifle, hitting a buffalo dead with a rock, he appears as a purely humanist. He lives an illogical series of ups and downs which culminates with the imprisonment of the American gangster, Al Capone, who wants to lay hand on the diamond mines of the Congo. This in fact uncovers more about Tintin the humanist. Tintin fights any competitors that might exclusively usurp the Congo than the Belgians. Dashing Al Capone, who represents America, is a defense of Belgium's expansionist intentions. Treating Animals harshly and ridiculously by Tintin foreshadows the heinous exploitation of the Congo's natural and mineral resources by King Leopold II and later by the Belgian government.

The African culture is ridiculed in comparison with the Western culture. Tintin represents the young, energetic, heroic and intelligent Western boy in comparison with a lazy, cowardly and stupid people. Even the wisest of this people, the Babaoro'm witch doctor Muganga, is beaten by this boy. Through the Congo, Africa is depicted as a vast paradise, land of opportunities, full of unlimited resources, but populated by rude black people. They are caricatured, having very dark skin, flat red lips, tiny shape, and dressed in ridiculous outfits. Even when dressed like Europeans, Africans are easily distinguished from Europeans by their darker skin and exaggerated lips. Most of those wearing European clothes are barefoot and ugly. Some of them

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[27]Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *The Metamorphoses of Tin, Or, Tintin for Adults*, trans. by Jocelyn Hoy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) 13.

are wearing fur in hot weather, covering their necks, or a tie to the topless. No matter how much they try to assimilate into the European style of life, they remain Africans. Coco is depicted as a wholly dark boy, except for his exaggerated rosy lips. he is dressed almost like Tintin but he is disheveled and barefoot.  Generally, Africans in *Tintin au Congo* are mere big children, lazy, fearful, superstitious, helpless, and naive.

Although Hergé was forced to reduce the first edition album to 62 pages instead 109, altering or removing many details to meet contemporary agendas or avoid criticism, which does not change the course of history. He omitted all references to Belgium's colonialism of the Congo, or the atrocities
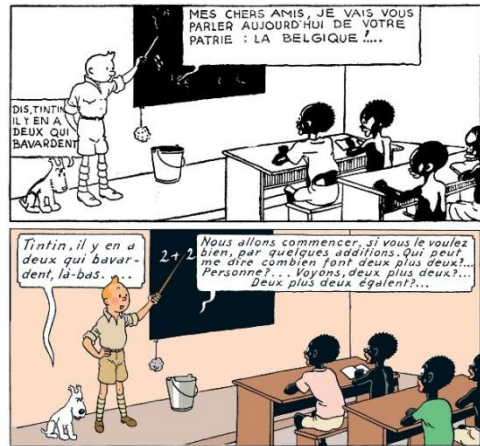


**Figure 3:** Tintin teaching Congolese kids history / maths. (source: tintin.com)

Leopold II committed there. for instance, in the first album, as shown in figure 3, Tintin takes the place of Father Sebastien who was ill and teaches math. He wants to inculcate in the minds of a group of Congolese students that their home country is Belgium not The Congo. This is an unmistakably imperial invasion done by Tintin on behalf of the Belgian regime. The English translation is very connotative: "My dear friends, I will talk today about your fatherland Belgium! ..."[28] if the Congo is a motherland to the Congolese people, then Belgium is their fatherland, a term that uncovers masculine /

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[28]Hergé, *The Adventures of Tintin Reported for "Le Petit Vingtième" in the Congo*, trans. by Leslie Longsdale-Cooper and Michael Turner (Brussels: Casterman, 1962) 67.

feminine struggles that have always triggered issues of power, virility, control and violence. In later albums, Hergé changed this statement with another bitter one. He teaches those students math, and it seems that they do not even know addition. This connotes their 'stupidity' and 'illiteracy'. "Tintin's main task is to educate. He follows the missionaries who wanted to Christianize Africa. Without questioning his own competence, he takes on their curious duties and sets out for the Congo"[29].Tintin and Milou take it upon their shoulders to rid the locals of the superstitious and fetishistic witch doctor Muganga, bringing rational thought and religious educational practices to the Congo. No matter how Hergé tried to change his discourse, he falls in the same intonation of ridiculing, manipulating and underestimating the Africans. It is true that the term 'Negro' that appeared twice in the first edition disappeared in later editions, and it is also true that the authoritarian discourse of Tintin towards the Africans lessened, but this does not change Tintin's attitude towards the culture of Africans. He is still considered superior to Africans, carried on shoulders, knelt to as head of the village.

On the whole, the later edition of Tintin Au Congo (1974) hardly differs from the edition of 1946 as it fortifies expansionist intention of Belgium in the Congo. It exaggerates binary oppositions of order / chaos, civilization / savageness, and development / backwardness to legitimize colonial settlement and formulate Belgian archives and memories in which the Belgians (Europeans) will always appear superior and the Congolese (Africans) inferior. "Embarking on his trip to The Congo, Tintin carries with him all the stereotypes of Africa that his experience will confirm. Far from being affected by his

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[29]Jean-Marie Apostolidès, *The Metamorphoses of Tintin, Or, Tintin for Adults*, trans. by Jocelyn Hoy (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010) 14.

contact with reality, he imposes on the natives his own point of view, which they reflect in a somewhat caricatured fashion."[30]

## Conclusion

If *Tintin Au Congo* was a reflection on the European imperial campaign in the beginning of the Twentieth Century, then the comic book in general can not only be a rich and entertaining method of expression but a text bursting with colonial discourse. Comics have always been influenced by culture, and can also be influential on readers.  The comic book can be a means of explicit colonial propaganda.

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