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MEDIA GEOPOLITICS

The Case of the Comics Media¹

GEOPOLITICAL APPROACH IN MEDIA AND IN MEDIA STUDIES

The geopolitical approach tries to make a political use of geographical expertise and vice versa: it directs attention to aspects of international politics and those of political science in geography. The connection between space and power has shaped the activities of rulers, soldiers and merchants since the ancient times, however, it has only emerged as a separate modern discipline towards the late-nineteenth century, hand in hand with colonisation and the full realisation of the European international system. Later, the German National Socialists' superpower ambitions and the related responses, the Cold War, and finally the strengthening of globalisation and the emergence of a multipolar world inspired a renaissance of geopolitical thinking.

On the one hand, in the twentieth century the geopolitical perspective has been frequently discredited by its ties with imperial ideology (one just have to think of the negative connotations associated with the concept of "Lebensraum" [living space] as the space necessary for survival, progress, and expansion, designed to legitimise conquest). On the other hand, the geopolitical approach kept resurfacing in connection with international relations,

1 This work has been supported by the Bolyai Research Fellowship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

offering explanation not only to experts but to the wider public as well. For example, through the work of geopolitical superstars like Henry Kissinger,² and Zbigniew Brzezinski,³ former National Security Advisors, or the author of a "New York Times Bestseller", political risk analyst George Friedman.⁴ Yet, as István Szilágyi highlights, the discrediting and discontinuity of geopolitical thinking is not universal. In Spain, Portugal, and Latin-America, one cannot talk about a "disruption in continuous presence", while in "East-Central Europe, the Soviet Union and in the regions dominated by socialist establishments, the first tentative steps towards the revitalization of geopolitical thinking as a science were only made after the political transformation".⁵

For example, in Hungary the previous two decades saw the launch of several journals (*Grotius*, *Geopolitika a 21. században*, *Külügyi Szemle*, *Kül-Világ*, *South-East Europe International Relations Quarterly*), and the publication of comprehensive monographs and essay collections, which have facilitated the reinvention of geopolitical thinking.⁶ However, no textbook, essay collection

- 2 Cf. Henry KISSINGER, *Diplomacy*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1994; Henry KISSINGER, *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?: Toward a Diplomacy for the 21st Century*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 2001.
- 3 Cf. Zbigniew BRZEZINSKI, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997; Zbigniew BRZEZINSKI, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, Basic Books, New York, 2012.
- 4 George FRIEDMAN, *The Next 100 Years. A Forecast for the 21st Century*, Anchor Books, New York, 2010.
- 5 SZILÁGYI István, *Geopolitika*, Publikon, Pécs, 2013, 121.
- 6 Some examples: BÁRDOS-FÉLTORONYI, Miklós, *Bevezetés a geopolitikába*, L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2006; BÁRDOS-FÉLTORONYI, Miklós, *A nagyhatalmak harca Európában. Geopolitikai esettanulmányok*, L'Harmattan, Budapest, 2015; CSIZMADIA, Sándor, *Globalizáció és mondializáció*, SZÁMALK, Budapest, 1998; CSIZMADIA, Sándor – MOLNÁR Gusztáv – PATAKI Gábor Zsolt, *Geopolitikai szöveggyűjtemény*,

or reference work dedicated to the geopolitics of media has been published in Hungarian so far. It must also be kept in mind, though, that international journalism has lost grounds in U. S. press, and probably in Hungary as well.⁷

One might ask whether now the processes have been reversed in the public sphere, due to the local significance and the juxtaposition of the international and the global as a result of migration, international terrorism, cyber war, or the emerging European transnational media.⁸ It seems that in the last one or two years, international sections of conventional media have become more interesting and important, and the internet-based popularisation of international politics seems to be growing (in places like *Kitekintő*, *DiploMaci*, *Magyar Diplo*), and a specialised organisation dedicated to the wider dissemination of knowledge was also born, the Pallas Athene Innovation and Geopolitical Foundation (PAGEO). In some places – like in Francophone areas – the change is less spectacular because

Stratégiai és Védelmi Kutatóintézet, Budapest, 1999; SZILÁGYI, *op. cit.*; FISCHER, Ferenc, *A megosztott világ. A Kelet-Nyugat, Észak-Dél nemzetközi kapcsolatok fő vonásai (1941–1991)*, IKVA, Budapest – Pécs, 1996; and the supplementary atlas: FISCHER Ferenc, *A megosztott világ történelmi-politikai atlasza (1941–1991)*, IKVA, Budapest – Pécs, 1996, also FISCHER Ferenc, *A kétpólusú világ (1945–1989). Tankönyv és atlasz*, Dialóg Campus, Budapest – Pécs, 2005. The last two books are particularly interesting from the perspective of media geopolitics as the maps and infographics used to illustrate the history of a bipolar world are complemented with sketches and caricatures from journals. In Ferenc Fischer's book *A kétpólusú világ*, cartographic representations of different origins might highlight the cartographically mediated nature of historical processes, together with the importance of maps appearing in the media, and the mental maps connected to these, for example, through the maps in airlines' published materials. *Ibid.*, 178–179.

- 7 More specifics about the U. S. state of affairs: Jean-Paul MARTHOZ, *Journalisme international*, De Boeck, Bruxelles, 2008.
- 8 For more on the latter see: Andra-Dina PANĂ, *Europeanizarea în media transnaționale*, Tritonic, București, 2014.

of the long-standing institutionalisation and mediatisation of geopolitics (exemplified by the journal *Hérodote*, published without interruption since 1976, and the television programme *Le Dessous des cartes* which has been running for more than twenty years on Arte), but even here, interesting developments occurred in the last few years: one example is the publication of *Carto*, a journal reporting on current affairs via maps, and the proliferation at newsstands of thematic atlases and cartographic-infographic publications related to different journals (*Alternatives International*, *Courrier international*, *Diplomatie*, *Le Monde*, *Le Monde diplomatique*...), as well as the institutionalisation of media geopolitics as a discipline.

Besides the mediated public sphere, media studies have also been influenced by problems of space and power in earlier periods. There are precedents for an exploration into the complex relationship between media and geography, and media and politics as well. Hungarian examples for the former are delivered by Árpád Borsos in connection with film, especially in his research on “space-specific phenomena in the infrastructural background of the film industry”,⁹ focusing particularly on film distribution and the networks of festivals and multiplexes. The latter is exemplified by recent trends to think in terms of media systems. Daniell C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini explore the aggregation of media institutions into media systems, and the relationship of this process to political systems and environment, on the level of nation states and in its comparative dimensions as well. They propose three models to describe the media systems of the countries investigated: the Mediterranean or pluralist model, the North-/Central-European model, and the

9 BORSOS Árpád, *Filmföldrajz. Tanulmányok egy új diszciplína köréből*, Publikon, Pécs, 2011, 15.

North-Atlantic or liberal model.¹⁰ One definitely bolder analysis from somewhat earlier, but from a geopolitical perspective is that of Jérôme Bourdon, professor of Tel-Aviv University, who focuses on television as a medium, and analyses the spread of television in different countries. He manages to represent the proliferation of television within a historical, but also historico-geographical framework. He successfully demonstrates the interactions and transnational trends which facilitated the spread of the technology of television, its politics (institutional models and regulatory practices), its editorial processes and genres from a handful of centrally positioned countries (former colonisers, and the industrial giants of the postcolonial period) into the rest of the world. Besides, he manages to reveal the media-political aspect of neo-television built on the promise of ephemerality. The deregulatory, liberalising and privatising wave of the 1980s-1990s led to the further propagation of the North-American television model, previously in minority, which in turn resulted in the dominance of large-scale general commercial television channels on the European market, among others. Simultaneously, television, understood as the symbol, an integrative force and the representative of the nation as a community, became – at least in part – a formative power of nation itself, conceived in transnational capitalism as a “marketing space”. (It must be noted here that in the case of cultural products, not only the nation state, but the cultural nation can also become a “marketing space”. This is revealed by the popularity of Hungarian tabloid media in the Carpathian Basin, notwithstanding borders.) It is also remarkable that the author does not stop here, but in the

10 Daniel C. HALLIN – Paolo MANCINI, *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004.

closing parts of his essay, he calls attention to questions like “the deterritorialised”, “the diasporic reception” and “postnationalism”, thus his arguments are open to further deliberation from the perspective of 2010s hypertelevision and media convergence conditions.¹¹

The precedents of the historical-geographical approach utilised by media geopolitics are primarily located in those media histories which connect technological, economic, political and cultural processes and thus occasionally represent the history of mediated communication together with the developments of “physical communication”, that is, the history of traffic.¹² The same linking is also present in some older and some more recent media theories which were accused of “technological determinism”, particularly in mediology, which simultaneously examines the complex systems of transmission and traffic.¹³ (Furthermore, the founding father of mediology, Régis Debray, has shown an interest in international relations for decades, and even actively shaped them during his adventurous life, particularly in the sixties as a guerrilla, then in the eighties as an official adviser for the government.) The mediological approach has exerted a great influence since the 1990s among the Francophone representatives of communication and media studies, and it even contributed to contemporary tourism studies with its focus on processes of cultural transmission, which

11 Jérôme BOURDON, *La télévision est-elle un média global? Une perspective historique = Télévision, mémoire et identités nationales*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2003, 59–91.

12 For example: Asa BRIGGS – Peter BURKE, *A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet*, Blackwell, Malden, 2002; Frédéric BARBIER – Catherine BERTHO LAVENIR, *Histoire des médias: de Diderot à Internet*, Armand Colin, Paris, 1996.

13 Régis DEBRAY, *Cours de médiologie générale*, Gallimard, Paris, 1991; ID., *Vie et mort de l'image*, Gallimard, Paris, 1992; ID., *Manifestes médiologiques*, Gallimard, Paris, 1994; ID., *Introduction à la médiologie*, PUF, Paris, 2000.

provided models for the relation between spatial organisation and the media. Catherine Bertho Lavenir, also known for her work on media history, in her path-breaking work gave an account of the birth and the historical development of modern tourism from a mediological perspective: she focuses on the interference of developments in transportation (road, railroad, bicycle, automobile, aeronautic), social organisation and institutional systems (inns, travel agencies, associations, publishing houses, camps), and cultural representations (travel guides, travelogues, itineraries, advertisements, media texts).¹⁴ Although he is not an “official” mediologist, anthropologist Jean-Dider Urbain follows a similar approach, and reveals an open attitude towards mediology from the time when his book was published in the early 1990s:¹⁵ cultural and media texts, sometimes fictional literary narratives and touristic practices are compared, while he also considers the historical development of mediatic representations and transportation, for example, in his analysis of beach holidays,¹⁶ trips gone wrong,¹⁷ or the birth of the “summer Mediterranean.”¹⁸

However, the most important predecessors of the institutionalising geopolitical examination of media must be those analyses which discuss the globalisation (mondialisation), internationalisation and transnationalisation of media. The majority of media-geopolitical terms, for example, “deterritorialization”, “cultural imperialism”,

14 Catherine, BERTHO LAVENIR, *La roue et le stylo. Comment nous sommes devenus touristes*, Odile Jacob, Paris, 1999.

15 Jean-Dider URBAIN, *L'idiote du voyage. Histoires de touristes*, Payot, Paris, 2002 [1991].

16 Jean-Dider URBAIN, *Sur la plage. Moeurs et coutumes balnéaires*, Payot, Paris, 2002 [1994].

17 Jean-Dider URBAIN, *Le voyage était presque parfait. Essai sur les voyages ratés*, Payot, Paris, 2008.

18 Jean-Dider URBAIN, *Au Soleil. Naissance de la Méditerranée estivale*, Payot & Rivages, Paris, 2014.

or “media city” stem from these works. In the case of the third term, another tradition comes into play: the public sphere, the new communications technology, and urban studies.¹⁹ All in all, media geopolitics dwells on a wide range of traditions, from the German transcultural communications and media research, combining the perspective of British cultural studies with an emphasis on matters of interculturalism,²⁰ to studies offering a combination of media criticism and the experience of processes of globalisation. Armand Mattelart’s books belong to the latter group, which were published first in French or Spanish, but were later translated into multiple languages. Mattelart, consistently publishing from the 1960s, is among the most widely cited Francophone authors in media studies, and this is equally true of his writings on media geopolitics.²¹

A comprehensive overview of media geopolitics as an independent discipline, and its vast range of topics is provided by Philippe Boulanger’s handbook from 2014.²² Inspired by this panorama, and utilising the terminology proposed by the author, I call attention to potential subjects for interpretation and inquiry from a media geopolitical perspective in relation to the complex set of questions and problems within the comics media. The more specific focus of my paper is the shift in emphasis, the question of media cities and soft power.

19 Further details to this: KÖZ/TÉR. *Fogalmak, nézőpontok, megközelítések*, ed. SZIJÁRTÓ Zsolt, Gondolat Kiadó – PTE Kommunikáció- és Médiatudományi Tanszék, Budapest – Pécs, 2010.

20 *Grundlagentexte zur transkulturellen Kommunikation*, hrsg. Andreas HEPP – Martin LÖFFELHOLZ, UVK, Konstanz, 2002; Andreas HEPP, *Transkulturelle Kommunikation*, UVK, Konstanz, 2006.

21 An excellent overview of his life and works is provided by: Armand MATTELART, *Pour un regard-monde. Entretiens avec Michel Sénécal*, La Découverte, Paris, 2010.

22 Philippe BOULANGER, *Géopolitique des médias. Acteurs, rivalités et conflits*, Armand Colin, Paris, 2014.

CENTRES AND PERIPHERIES – SHIFTING BIASES IN THE WORLD?

Geopolitics expert Philippe Boulanger identifies three centres of gravity (*centre de gravité*) in his inquiry into the chronological development of media technologies, institutions and cultures, concerning the spatial progress of communication technologies and uses. From the middle ages to the early twentieth century, the heyday of a European centre, the North-American centre prevailing in the twentieth century and in certain areas (like on the internet) still dominant today, and a newly emerging Eastern-Pacific condensation.²³ Immense data sets demonstrate that the emergence of such centres is dependent on multiple factors: scientific and technological innovation, increasing demographic weight, and different economic, social and political circumstances. In the case of Europe, the rise of capitalisation and colonisation facilitated the networking of media, and the internationalisation on the colonies.

In connection with the North-American media centre, Philippe Boulanger (focusing on the advertising industry and multiplex film distribution) suggests that its birth was fuelled by the prominent role of the freedom of speech and the consumer culture driven by liberal capitalism. While in the case of Asia, neither the economic growth of recent decades, nor the affinity between current media and traditional written cultures can be neglected (it is no coincidence that eight out of the best-selling newspapers are Asian).²⁴

Similar centres can be identified in the realm of comics, whose focal points seem to align with the contours of media at large: with some generalisation, European comics, North-American comics and Asian manga can be distinguished. Of course, demographical

23 Ibid., 33–57; represented on comprehensive maps on page 34.

24 Ibid., 54.

factors also shape the opportunities of the comics market, and technological developments also play a significant role. For example, the invention of European (proto-)comics by Rodolphe Töpffer went hand in hand with the spread of autographic lithography, a new print technology.²⁵ The demographic growth and the proliferation of literacy certainly played a role in the success of humour magazines in the nineteenth-century European, and after the turn of the century, in the American newspapers, which provided space for comics, while today, it is facilitating the institutionalisation of Sub-Saharan African comics culture.²⁶

Nonetheless, what we have seen in the last two centuries cannot be simply described as a shift or movement of centres. The intersection between the tradition of nineteenth-century (proto-)comic characterised by the work of Rodolphe Töpffer, Wilhelm Busch, Nadar, Caran d'Ache, Christophe, and the North-American press of excessive print-runs gave birth to comics culture as a journalistic genre, its start usually reckoned from Richard Felton Outcault's *Yellow Kid*. The first comic strips were created by Rudolph Dirks, who was influenced by the work of the German Wilhelm Busch (Dirks himself emigrated from Germany with his parents at the age of seven), and the work of the first great American classic, Winsor McCay (for example, *Little Nemo in Slumberland*) also shows the influence of European (proto-)comics. Later Disney comics and superhero comics played a huge role in the formation

25 André GAUDREAU – Philippe MARION, *Un média naît toujours deux fois*, S&R avril 2000, 21–36; Olivier ODAERT – Jean-Louis TILLEUIL, *Les origines européennes de la bande dessinée. Eclatement et cohérence de l'émergence de la bande dessinée européenne = Des fictions qui construisent le monde*, eds. Olivier ODAERT – Jean-Louis TILLEUIL, GRIT, Louvain-la-Neuve, 2011, 130–142.

26 For more details about this, see for example: Christophe CASSIAU-HAURIE, *Dictionnaire de la bande dessinée d'Afrique francophone*, L'Harmattan, Paris, 2013.

of the Francophone bande dessinée (for example, *Tintin*, *Spirou*, later *Asterix*, *Lucky Luck*, *Titeuf*), and the Japanese manga tradition (Osamu Tezuka's works), in a curious "anxiety of influence" nexus. Equally, Francophone, and more recently Japanese tradition also exerts an influence back on the American line. The former is most apparent in underground comics and graphic novel (Will Eisner, Art Spiegelman), whereas graphic novel is also reinforced through North-American models in Francophone territories (for example in Marjane Satrapi's and Riad Sattouf's comics). Benjamin Reiss's 2009 *Tokyoland* (and its new version, *Supertokyoland* from 2015) is a French autobiographical graphic novel published in France, which also became an award-winning manga at the Japanese comics contest organised by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Furthermore, the blending of the three major geographical-cultural variations and comics traditions can be observed in significantly earlier examples. In the early twentieth century, during the rise of American comics, Verbeek (Gustave Verbeck), who was of Belgian origins, grew up in Nagasaki, studied in Paris, and later emigrated to the United States of America, published his work using upside down technique (the narration demands the rotation of the paper during reading) in the supplements of *New York Herald* between 1903 and 1905, and his works reflect oriental and European influences within a North-American mediated context.²⁷

While thinking in terms of three centres and three major geographical-cultural variations is quite characteristic in comics studies, one should not forget about comics cultures and markets outside of the French-Belgian, US, and Japanese scenes (among others, the Italian, Korean, Spanish, German, Scandinavian and

27 Claude MOLITERNI, *30 héros de toujours. Chefs d'oeuvre de la BD 1830–1930*, Omnibus, Paris, 2005, 102–111.

South Slavic traditions are also significant). Some of these can clearly be regarded as the result of an internationalisation (for example, in the case of Malawi, former Belgian Congo, and Kenya)²⁸ or hybridisation (there are a number of south-east Asian examples, like comics in Hong Kong and Vietnam, whereas German manga is a European example of the same) evolving from a colonial background, but there are exceptions, too. For example, the Hungarian adaptation-based comics culture and market of the Kádár era is clearly something unique. Besides, the three major versions are not homogenous either, and they show huge differences in terms of genres, mediums and media-economical models.²⁹

The transcultural trends of globalisation effected a change in the typical genres and mediums in certain traditional cultures and markets: since the beginning of the new millennium, France has grown into the second largest market of manga (after Japan), and the reinvention of Hungarian comics also seems to be fuelled by the oriental type of comics (this will be discussed in more details later, in connection with soft power). The spatial organisation of comics production and consumption also found new ways which could be described, somewhat inaccurately, as a process of “deterritorialization” (but then it could also be conceived of as a “reterritorialization”, a spatial kind of reorganisation). The translocal communities organised predominantly via the internet contributed to the popularisation of certain genres (e.g., the Japanese yaoi) and cultural variants (e.g., the Francophone African comics), while the different phases of production are also taking place in various locations. As a consequence,

28 Christophe CASSIAU-HAURIE, *La bande dessinée en Afrique francophone. Un média sous influence*, *Bibliothèque(s)* 51 (2010), 42–45.

29 Xavier GUILBERT, *Tour de marché. France, Japon, États-Unis = La bande dessinée: une médiaculture*, eds. Éric MAIGRET – Matteo STEFANELLI, Armand Colin – INA, Paris, 2012, 93–116.

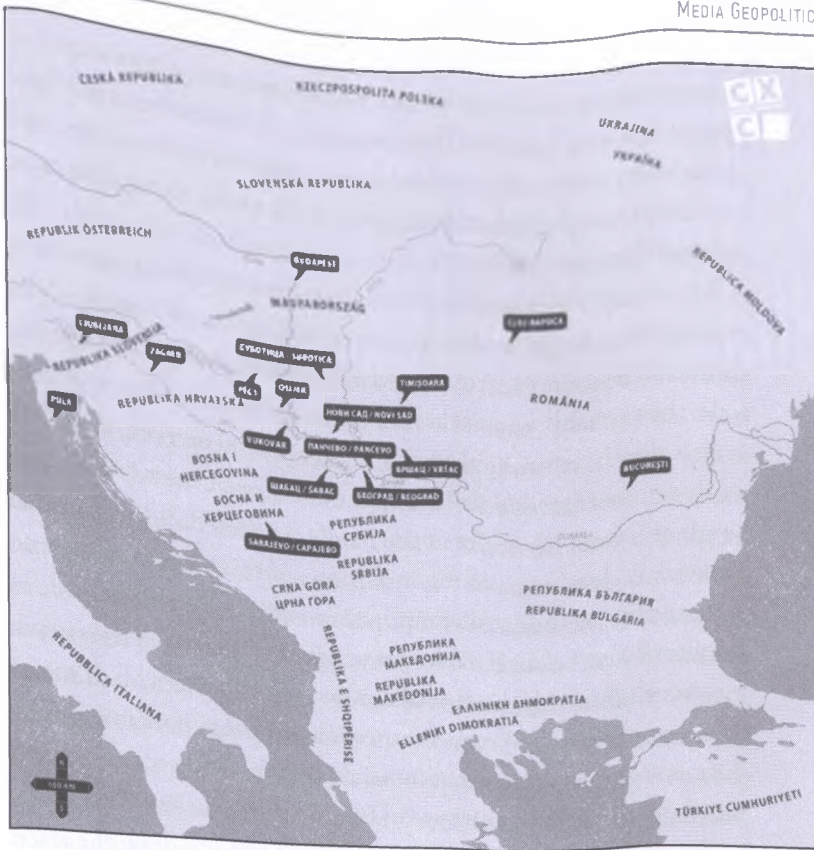
Hungarian authors could also enter the mainstream of world comics production: Attila Futaki, working for *New York Times*, Roland Pilcz, doing colouring work for an American enterprise from Szeged, or Judit Tondora, who works for American and Australian publishers, to name but a few.

There are arguments for using nation states as the distinctive basis for the discussion of media cultures, media markets, and the centres of comics world production. Some of these arguments are the unity of media regulation, the way the media market adapts to this, the use of one or more official languages, and the homogenising effect of an educational system organised on the level of the nation state. On the other hand, the production of media, and, more specifically, comics, as well as its impact frequently transgresses national borders. This applies to Hungary, particularly with respect to manga and comics, while the term *bande dessinée* establishes two nation states already with its name. Belgium is a unique case for several reasons. Probably this is where – outside Japan – the institutionalisation of comics culture was the most diverse, but the process shows significant differences within the French and the Flemish linguistic communities, precisely in international and intercultural matters. During the revival of comics after World War II, Flemish comics was primarily intended for the audience in Flanders, and preserved its local cultural references even when the Francophone Belgian *bande dessinée*, in a bid to open up to a larger, mostly French market, was trying to avoid them. The respective comics cultures of the two linguistic communities are marked by different mediums, subjects, characters, genres and mediatic arrangements, the Flemish being more of a journalistic genre often promoting female protagonists, while the French school prefers the hardcover book format, and has for a long time been rather

male-centred. As far as the French bande dessinée is concerned, part of a region which was from a (media) geopolitical perspective semi-peripheral (Brussels and Wallonia) became a centre with publishing houses founded around major press enterprises, and journals connected to them, canonical genres and styles. In the 1950s, 1960s, thus, Belgium became a comics “Eldorado”, reflected by the high number of foreign artists: among others, the Swiss Derib (Claude de Ribaupierre), the Italian Dino Attanasio, the French Tibet (Gilbert Gascard) and Jean Graton could be mentioned.³⁰

A revaluation of centre-periphery relations is encouraged by the travelling exhibition *comiXconnection – strip, bandă desenată, strip, képregény, cmpun*, organised and fine-tuned by a member of the Museum of European Cultures in Berlin, Beate Wild, and the participation at this event itself shaped these relations. As the full title of the exhibition suggests, this was an exhibition with multilingual material. More than fifty artists were on display here between June 2013 and October 2015, in a region spanning from Sarajevo in the south to Budapest in the north, and from Bucharest in the east to Pula in the west. The exhibition was re-adjusted for each exhibition space, with changing emphases and different support programmes. In Hungary, besides the capital, the exhibition was also on display in Pécs in the spring of 2014, coming from Cluj-Napoca. On the map on the *comiXconnection* website, there are no national borders, and only the cities are marked within an unnamed region that could be regarded as south-eastern European (but one must be careful with the wording, as it is a question of perspective).

30 Pascal LEFÈVRE, *La bande dessinée belge au XXe siècle = Le Centre de la Bande Dessinée*, ed. Charles DIERICK, Dexia Banque – La Renaissance du Livre, Bruxelles – Tournai, 2000, 168–195.



comiXconnection – strip, bandă desenată, strip, képregény, стрип
(Source: comixconnection.eu/locations)

The multilingual nature of the exhibition and the support material is remarkable,³¹ revealing how the organisers try to preserve the linguistic and cultural differences which are characteristic of the individual comics traditions of these countries and linguistic communities. Whether we approach it from the perspective of “countries as nation state” or that of “linguistic-cultural communities

³¹ The website, for example, is available in eight languages: comixconnection.eu.

as nations”, *comiXconnection* is a transcultural and transnational project crossing borders. The project itself represents dynamism, formation, process, change, interaction, and only offers a temporal stability of positions, therefore, the “trans-” prefix seems to be more justified than the “inter-”.³²

The exhibition is also important because it provides an account of artists who live outside of the world’s major comics-publishing centres like Japan, North-America, Belgium, France, not even in Italy, the probably nearest centre of the “comics industry”, which is also closely connected to the Francophone market, and their work can be regarded as “independent” (or at least “semi-independent”) from the shifts of the media market. Building a spatial network is clearly one of the intentions of this project. This is no coincidence, as the most exciting innovations often take place in the alternative cultural networks which the exhibition tries to put into spotlight, with the aim of connecting them as well. It seems that the organisers of *comiXconnection* saw an opportunity in the different comics-based mediums, as they provide various examples from the comics museum of Bucharest to the street comics of Ljubjana. During the tour, the organisers tried to draw the attention of the artists, critics and audience coming from different traditions of comics and from different media cultures to each other’s work and cultural achievements, even if they are already open to the Western European, North American and more recently Far Eastern regions. Members of the audience could even contribute to the exhibition in different cities, forming a “dialogue” through their own drawings.

32 JABLONCZAY Tímea, *Transznacionalizmus a gyakorlatban: migrációs praxisok a könyvek, az írásmódok, a műfajok és a fordítási stratégiák geográfiájában*, Helikon 2015/2, 137–141.

The *comiXconnection* exhibition featuring contemporary work might also help us in our reassessment of the individual countries' comics history from the perspective of the mutual present generated within this network. It seems that despite many differences – like the longer North-American influence and the more diversified reception of Western European influences in the Balkan region, or the unique situation of historical and sci-fi genres in Romanian comics history, the domination of adaptation for more than three decades within Hungarian comics culture, or the importance of manga in contemporary Hungarian popular media culture – there are striking similarities as well. Proto-comics in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century, North American influence, captioned narratives in the interwar period (with the text often in verse in both Hungarian and Romanian), prohibition and strict control in the end of the forties, beginning of the fifties, the influence of *bande dessinée* in all the regions, and the emergence of the cultural stratification of contemporary comics, and the novel impact of the transcultural trends of globalisation.³³ Composing a history of the differing media systems of the region, and a historical and transcultural comparison of comics publication would be profitable for Hungarian media history because it could clear the path for the history (histories) of not only comics in Hungary but comics in the Hungarian language as well.

33 Cf. KERTÉSZ Sándor, *Comics szocialista álmukában*, Kertész Nyomda és Kiadó, Nyíregyháza, 2007; Claude MOLITERNI – Philippe MELLOTT – Laurent TURPIN – Michel DENNI – Nathalie MICHEL-SZELECHOWSKA, *BD Guide 2005. Encyclopédie de la bande dessinée internationale*, Omnibus, Paris, 2004, 243–246, 364–369, 375–383; Dodo NITA – Alexandru CIUBOTARIU, *Istoria benzii desenate românești (1891–2010)*, Vellant, București, 2010.

MEDIA CITIES – COMICS CITIES?

As far as media is concerned, the “cross-borderness”, the translocal organisation, the “deterritorialization”, the networked nature, and the transcultural trends and processes of cultural hybridisation do not exclude spatial concentrations reflecting certain preferences in terms of power, economics and culture. Research related to the transcultural trends of globalisation and the geopolitical approach to media both address this phenomena, which they refer to as media cities. The term “media city” is conventionally used in two different but interrelated senses.

The narrower sense is used to describe administrative areas or parts of such areas which are specialised in media production and activities related to media economics.³⁴ In the western world, such places traditionally emerged within the film industry, while in the twenty-first century, a process of clustering resulted in an economical and spatial concentration that gave rise to media cities. The appearance of such new areas was particularly characteristic in Asia, where such places saw a simultaneous concentration of media, IT, and telecommunication companies. One such geopolitically significant media city was created in the United Arab Emirates under the label Dubai Media City. More than 1300 companies involved in conventional or new media operate here in the same place. Dubai Media City tries to fill the role of a centre for media economics in the Gulf Area, similar to the role Hongkong plays in South-East Asia and the Chinese world.³⁵

According to the broader sense of the term, media cities are administrative areas functioning as cities or metropolises even if

³⁴ BOULANGER, *op.cit.*, 70–74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 70–71.

their population does not warrant the status of a genuine metropolis. On one hand, they show a concentration in terms of production: just like media cities in the narrower sense, they often host media, IT and marketing companies, but they are also intellectual and cultural centres. Sites of development and experimentation are also connected to their status as preferred destinations of migration, and their media economics and media culture exploit the migration processes of globalisation, the concentration of highly qualified professionals. This is further supported by the presence of universities and training facilities of the highest standards. Such institutions are not only important for the training of experts but the informal networks developing among them are also significant. The culturally diverse environment and the transcultural experience which can be acquired here is inspiring for content creators and audiences, media users as well. In his works concerning global media cities, Andreas Hepp sticks to this broader sense of the term "media city".³⁶ His book suggests that the majority of the global media cities of the new millennium are almost exclusively European or North-American, with a few notable exceptions like Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Melbourne, Sidney, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, and Mexico City. Remarkably, in a study relying on ten years older data, Philippe Boulanger suggested that media cities are more characteristic outside the North-Atlantic world.³⁷

Without exaggeration some of the global media cities are also comics cities. Partly because they feature an advanced level of institutionalisation and spatial concentration of the comics form, partly because they illustrate the diversity of local comics culture, and the power of the medium to shape collective identity. Thinking

36 HEPP, *Transkulturelle Kommunikation*, 165–177.

37 BOULANGER, *op.cit.*

of bande dessinée, Paris no doubt belongs to this category, but some of the traits of global media cities can be observed in Brussels and Geneva as well. An encyclopaedia of comics from 2005 contained contact information for one hundred and thirty-six important Francophone publishing houses.³⁸ Forty-seven of these are based in Paris (and a few others in the vicinity of Paris), fourteen in Brussels, and only four in Geneva. Paris and Brussels are not only centres of comics publishing, but with the numerous specialised bookshops, they are also centres of distribution. Besides publishing houses and shops, Brussels is also eligible for the label “comics city” due to its comics museum and archive (Centre Belge de la Bande Dessinée),³⁹ its comics murals, the unique graphical style of the Brussels School, and the concentration of comics experts.⁴⁰ Geneva can be regarded as another comics city because of its public collections, the comics culture intertwining the daily life of its citizens (the tradition of the comics poster usually traced back to Geneva, comics-based communication campaigns), and again, the intense presence of comics experts.⁴¹

Some smaller towns would also be marked on an imaginary map of Francophone comics, even though they are far from becoming global media cities, and their identity as “comics city” is closer to the narrower meaning of media city. A small town in the West of France, Angoulême hosts the prominent Francophone comics festival, and as part of the Cité internationale de la bande dessinée et de l'image, the town also houses a major collection of the French

38 *BD Guide 2005*, 1761–1768.

39 For more details see: *Le Centre de la Bande Dessinée*, ed. Charles DIERICK, Dexia Banque – La Renaissance du Livre, Bruxelles – Tournai, 2000.

40 MAKSA Gyula, *Változatok képregényre*, Gondolat Kiadó – PTE Kommunikációs és Médiatudományi Tanszék, Budapest – Pécs, 2010, 66–87.

41 *Ibid.*, 90–110.

comics museum. The city of Grenoble (population 160,000) is the seat of the pioneer and prominent player of French manga publication, the Glénat publishing house, which is also the owner of the most popular contemporary series, the *Titeuf*, which sometimes reaches print runs of one, one and a half million copies. The headquarters of the Belgian Dupuis publishing house resides in a suburb of Charleroi, Marcinelle. Dupuis, Charleroi, and Marcinelle are associated with popular series printed in hundreds of thousands of copies, the oldest serial comics weekly, the *Spirou* magazine, and a popular comics drawing style. Another small town in Wallonia, Louvain-la-Neuve also shows some signs of comics cities. As a university city, not only is it one of the centres of comics research, but it also hosts different events, and the Musée Hergé devoted to the creator of *Tintin* and other series also make it an important site of European comics. The comics encyclopaedia from 2005 mentioned above features only three African Francophone festivals and one major publishing house (the only publishing place on the authors' imaginary map is Abidjan),⁴² the institutionalisation of comics in recent years directs attention to other African cities as well (like Kinshasa, and Yaoundé), as a comics dictionary published more recently shows.⁴³

SOFT POWER AND THE MEDIATISED USE OF COMICS

In recent decades, the area of international relations experienced important changes, and in an age where total diplomacy affecting not only the specialists but a wider public, media diplomacy and

42 *BD Guide* 2005, 1755–1771.

43 CASSIAU-HAURIE, *Dictionnaire de la bande dessinée d'Afrique francophone*.

public diplomacy⁴⁴ become increasingly important, while diplomats must deliver their messages not only to their colleagues but they also have to convince a more general audience, either through traditional forms of mass media, like television,⁴⁵ or through more recent mediatised channels⁴⁶ of communication like Twitter.⁴⁷ Probably this is the root of the spread of a “soft power” (to use the term of Joseph Nye) approach in international politics, which emphasises the media-cultural, artistic and scientific dimension besides the significance of military and economic power. In their writings, Nye, an expert on North-American foreign policy, and his followers make a distinction between the commanding power (“hard power”) based on economic and military power and “soft power” which arouses attraction from a cultural and ideological source.⁴⁸ The term started to spread with the coming of theories explaining international relations and conflicts from cultural (or “civilizational”) points of view,⁴⁹ and with other theories which explored the significance of popular media cultures in international relations – these started to

44 BOULANGER, *Géopolitique des médias*, 96–200; DÉVAI Dóra, *American Outlook on Public Diplomacy*, *Délkelet-Európa – South-East Europe International Relations Quarterly* 1 (2010/4), 1–4.

45 Ralph George FELTHAM, *Diplomatic Handbook*, Pearson, Harlow, 1998, 151–160.

46 BOULANGER, *Géopolitique des médias*, 208–223; Shawn POWERS, *Media, Diplomacy and Geopolitics* = Andrew F. COOPER – Jorge HEINE – Ramesh THAKUR, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, 202–228.

47 Andreas SANDRE, *Twitter for Diplomats*, DiploFoundation – Istituto Diplomatico, Genève–Roma, 2013.

48 Some examples: Joseph S. Jr. NYE, *Hard, Soft, and Smart Power* = Andrew F. COOPER – Jorge HEINE – Ramesh THAKUR, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, 559–576; Su CHANGHE, *Soft Power* = Andrew F. COOPER – Jorge HEINE – Ramesh THAKUR, *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, 544–558.

49 For example: Samuel P. HUNTINGTON, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996.

proliferate in recent years.⁵⁰ In what follows I join this latter trend by discussing the questions of soft power and the mediated use of comics, while I simultaneously outline a potential media-geopolitical interpretative framework for specific media-cultural phenomena, focussing on the European, and more closely, Hungarian transmission of a part of Japanese popular culture, the manga.

All three centres of the world's comics production, and thus all three major cultural variants of the comics media – North-American comics, French-Belgian bande dessinée and Japanese manga – produced certain works which were placed into the dynamics of political communication, making them able to shape certain countries' "soft power". As far as European cases are concerned, cultural diplomacy has spectacularly favoured comics exhibitions in recent times. This must be based on the generally accepted assumption that comics is a likeable section of the sending country's popular culture, and the opening celebrations provide opportunity for personal exchange and acquaintance with a group of the recipient country's citizens, who are not diplomats but are presumably open to the sending country's culture. European embassies and cultural institutions organised several exhibitions in

50 Some examples: BOULANGER, *Géopolitique des médias*; Beng Huat CHUA, *Structure, Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture*, Hong Kong University Press, Aberdeen (Hong Kong), 2012; Stefanie LAYER, *An exploration of Japan's soft power. A case study about Japan's use of manga and anime as a means of cultural diplomacy with reference to Germany*, Culturaldiplomacy.org 2010. 09. 16., <http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/pdf/case-studies/manga-and-anime-an-exploration-of-japans-soft-power.pdf>; Seiko YASUMOTO, *Impact on Soft Power of Cultural Mobility: Japan to East Asia*, Mediascape 2011/Winter, <http://www.tft.ucla.edu/mediascape/Winter2011/SoftPower.html>; Jean TARDIF – Joëlle FARCHY, *Les enjeux de la mondialisation culturelle*, Le bord de l'eau, Lormont, 2011; Peng Er LAM, *Le Japon en quête de „soft power”: attraction et limitation*, East Asia 24 (2007), 349–363; Nissim OTMAZGIN – Eval BEN-ANRI, *Popular Culture and the State in East and Southeast Asia*, Routledge, New York, 2012.

the last couple of years. Most of these were travelling exhibitions. Among others, the Spanish Instituto Cervantes (e.g. *Comics in Spanish Democracy 1975–2007*, 2007), the German Goethe-Institut (e.g. *Comics aus Deutschland*, 2007), the Belgian, French and Swiss embassies (*La BD suisse. Un sommet d'images*, 2013), as well as the Hungarian Balassi Institute (*Hungarocomics*, 2013) were involved in the organisation of comics exhibitions. The soft power approach contributes to these events. Two of the leading countries in terms of comics production worldwide, France and Japan also celebrated the hundred-and-fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of their official bilateral diplomatic relations with a comics exhibition: the collection showcased the Japan-representation of BD, and the Europe-representation of manga, from the earliest comics up to contemporary works. The material of the exhibition was published in a bilingual comics anthology which also featured ambassadorial prefaces.⁵¹ Besides governmental cultural diplomacy, there are other examples for the coupling of soft power and comics-based cultural transmission even in Europe. This is particularly relevant in the case of the French-Belgian bande dessinée, which can be regarded as a substantial cultural industry with its more than four thousand annually published new titles,⁵² its more than fifty regular festivals,⁵³ and the bestsellers reaching runs of 1.5–2 million copies. Remarkably, the most popular Francophone series, like *Asterix*, renowned

51 Paul HERMAN, *Europe – Japon. Regards croisés en bandes dessinées*, Glénat, Grenoble, 2009.

52 Jean-Paul GABILLIET, *BD, mangas et comics: différences et influences*, Hermès 54 (2009), 35–40; Xavier GUILBERT, *Tour de marché. France, Japon, États-Unis = La bande dessinée: une médiaculture*, eds. Éric MAIGRET – Matteo STEFANELLI, Armand Colin – INA, Paris, 2012, 93–116.

53 *BD Guide 2005*, 1755–1760

for its parody of identities,⁵⁴ the Swiss kids comics *Titeuf*, and the Belgian adventure comics, *Tintin*,⁵⁵ about the pan-European hero coming from the Brusselsque boy-scout culture, became eligible for the fostering of a potential European “soft power”.

As far as popular media and comics is concerned, in North-America soft power was not predominantly shaped by the actions of governmental institutions in the last century. Two genres merit special mention. First, one might consider the ideological connotations of *Disney* comics – one of the most frequently cited social studies was written about this phenomena in the Latin America of the seventies by Ariel Dorfman, and the author of the above-mentioned expert on media geopolitics, Armand Mattelart.⁵⁶ Second, the political use of the superhero genre, intertwined with the cinema and the television industry,⁵⁷ sometimes as a supplement to or justification of hard power (propaganda) in different war situations. There are several examples in the history of twentieth-century North-American comics for comics narratives designed to legitimise hard power, like the famous work connected to the military action in Grenada in 1983, the *Grenada*.⁵⁸ Propaganda comics were

54 Nicolas ROUVIÈRE, *Astérix ou la parodie des identités*, Flammarion, Paris, 2008.

55 More about this: Lev GROSSMAN, *European Son. Steven Spielberg and Peter Jackson bring Tintin to the big screen*, *Time* 31 October 2011, 32–38.

56 Ariel DORFMAN – Armand MATTELART, *Donald l'imposteur ou l'impérialisme raconté aux enfants*, Alain Moreau, Paris, 1976.

57 A detailed discussion of the soft power connotations of this phenomenon, discussed from a media critical perspective, is available in: Ignacio RAMONET, *Propagandes silencieuses. Masses, télévision, cinéma*, Gallimard, Paris, 2003; the same is discussed in the context of economic-political-cultural globalising processes in Jean TARDIF – Joëlle FARCHY, *Les enjeux de la mondialisation culturelle*, Le bord de l'eau, Lormont, 2011.

58 Antonio LANGDON, *Grenada. Rescued from Rape and Slavery*, Victims of International Communist Emissaries Press, New York, 1983; Fredrik STRÖMBERG, *La propagande dans la BD. Un siècle de manipulation en images*, Eyrolles, Paris, 2010,

published outside the United States as well, sometimes in connection with the Cold War, sometimes related to the political factions in the Middle East region, or World War II.⁵⁹ Propaganda comics have been used in many different places, from Western democracies to the North Korean communist regime.⁶⁰ Besides works with an openly political agenda (for example, mobilisation), comics, like other media texts, can get entangled in soft power relations, as the patterns, value preferences, lifestyle opportunities they transmit may influence the attitude of their audience, too.

With respect to soft power, the rise of Eastern comics is another remarkable trend. Since after the World War II, the constitutional pacifism of Japan imposed strict controls on how hard power could be exercised, there was no chance to use comics or other soft power tools for the purposes of legitimising armed conflicts, but the limitations of “hard power” made soft power all the more important for Japanese foreign policy. After realising the soft power potential of Japanese popular media culture, by the second half of the 2000s, Japan’s Foreign Ministry cooperated with the private sector, and tried to propagate the image of the cultural superpower as “Cool Japan”,⁶¹ either with the help of the offices of the Japan Foundation aimed at the international distribution of culture, or by appointing “anime ambassadors”.⁶² In some cases, Japanese authorities – admittedly on behalf of public diplomacy – provide

77–78. (Original edition: *Comic Art Propaganda: A Graphic History*, Ilex, Lewes – East Sussex, 2010)

59 The richest repository of examples: *ib.*

60 On the North Korean examples: Heinz Insu FENKL, *Kim Jong-il sait faire des bulles*, *Alternatives Internationales* 51 (2011), 72–75.

61 LAM, *op.cit.*

62 Justin McCURRY, *Japan enlists cartoon cat as ambassador*, *The Guardian*, 20 March 2008, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/20/japan>.

organisational framework for the “participatory transmission of culture”: since 2007 the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has organised an annual international manga drawing contest, and the president of the organising committee is the Foreign Minister. In 2013, entries were submitted from fifty-three different countries.

However, “Cool Japan” is not only shaped by such planned initiatives of public diplomacy. It seems that manga and anime, the Japanese comics and cartoon emerge as part of a lifestyle choice which influences eating and dressing habits, the material world, pastime activities etc. For example, in Hungary the same lifestyle choice is essentially documented by the *Mondo* magazine, launched in 2007 with the motto “Japan is here.” The subjects covered in *Mondo* also suggest that manga is part of a media universe that is, both in terms of genres and target audiences, much more refined than western comics. The lifestyle choice and this media universe are clearly manifest in specialised events like anime- and manga-cons, which are regularly organised around the world, including Hungary, too. These are typically not officially sanctioned Japanese events, but they shape a positive image of Japan through the active contribution of the fans. Besides the ambitious *MondoCons* connected to the above-mentioned magazine, organised in smaller and larger cities in Hungary, mention must be made about another event where I conducted participatory observation: the *Animecon*, celebrating the tenth anniversary of the Hungarian Anime Society in August 2013, was held in the Petőfi Hall in Budapest, and it involved much more than watching cartoons and trading comics.

Animes and mangas are part of a more complex offer here. Sushi lunch, lectures on calligraphy, Japanese pop videos, cosplay activities, video games together with traditional Japanese board games. On one hand, a wide range of Japanese cultural references were

offered at the event, often with the aim of exchange across geographical-cultural spaces, on the other hand, it also provided a “framework” within which the thousands of visitors could actively appropriate and shape their own experience. Among others, karaoke, anime-dubbing game, cosplay, drawing contest, Japanese candy-making contest, and many other quizzes provided a chance to participate.⁶³ In contrast with the exhibitions supported by European embassies and cultural institutes, Japanese authorities were not represented at the 2013 national *Animecon*, but a “participatory” cultural transmission affecting several thousands of visitors was happening, which probably contributed to a heavily idealised image of Japan, the attractive “Cool Japan”, a cultural superpower. Similar events took place later in 2013 and 2014 in other conventions of Hungarian fans of Japanese pop culture (*MondoCon*, *Nippon Expo*).

CONCLUSION AND FURTHER PERSPECTIVES

In this paper I explored three different questions following the lead of Philippe Boulanger’s book, cited above several times. Based on the observations regarding how soft power operates through comics, for example, in connection with “Cool Japan”, it seems promising to discuss the subject that is probably the most popular

63 It was striking that the event was attended almost exclusively by members of the Z generation. According to a survey exploring the media use of high school and university students conducted in 2013, if reading of comics was mentioned by the recipients, only manga was in their minds, and they typically used electronic mediums, tablets or laptops to access the comics. See: GULD Ádám – MAKSA Gyula, *Fiatalok kommunikációjának és médiahasználatának vizsgálata*, research report, completed as a part of the project TÁMOP-4.2.3.-12/1/KONV-2012-0016 Tudománykommunikáció a Z generációnak, PTE, Pécs, 2013. www.zgeneracio.hu/tanulmányok

when it comes to the geopolitical relevance of comics. In fact, this is a sort of popular geopolitics produced with the help of narratives within popular media, that is, a geopolitical knowledge shaped by the everyday practices of media audiences and users.⁶⁴ In recent years, scholarly journals and other works devoted to critical geography and geopolitics examined various aspects of comics, from the aesthetics of war comics,⁶⁵ Joe Sacco's comics journals (developed from the tradition of graphic novels),⁶⁶ through the relationship between geography and the representation of cities in comics,⁶⁷ to the European *Tintin*.⁶⁸ The richest body of critical and promotional literature probably surrounds the series *Tintin* by the Belgian artist, Hergé. The almost global prevalence, the popularity in Anglophone and Francophone territories, the corpus which has relatively solidified with the death of the author (it was published between 1929 and 1976), and the wide diffusion through quotations, references, pastiches, and parodies must have encouraged scholarly approaches as well. The titular hero's adventures lead him to countries with invented geographical names only created for this fictional world, which can be largely placed on a world atlas, and show similarities

64 JASON DITTMER, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, 2010; *Popular Geopolitics: Plotting an Evolving Interdiscipline*, edited by Robert A. Saunders and Vlad Strukov, Routledge, Abingdon – New York, 2018.

65 Matthew F. RECH, *Be Part of the Story: A popular geopolitics of war comics aesthetics and Royal Air Force recruitment*, *Political Geography* 39 (2014), 36–47.

66 Edward C. HOLLAND, "To Think and Imagine and See Differently": *Popular Geopolitics, Graphic Narrative, and Joe Sacco's "Chechen War, Chechen Women"*, *Geopolitics* 17 (2012), 105–129.

67 Aymeric LANDOT – Olivier MILHAUD – Bénédicte TRATNJEK, *Représenter l'espace urbain dans la bande dessinée*, *Cafés Géographiques de Paris*, 28 January 2014, 1–69.

68 Oliver DUNNETT, *Identity and geopolitics in Hergé's Adventures of Tintin*, *Social & Cultural Geography* 5 (2009), 383–398.

with the countries featured in news on international politics.⁶⁹ Colonisation, Cold War, power shifts, attempts at conquest, espionage, smuggling, international crime, oil politics – since the 1929 story set in the Soviet Union, *Tintin* always reflected on current geopolitical issues.⁷⁰ The canonical, authentic, “official” stories, and the “alternative” *Tintins* unacknowledged by the author’s studio (like fan fiction). The scholarly relevance of the subject is attested by the 2017 conference *Les géographies de Tintin*,⁷¹ organised by the Paris-based Société de Géographie, while Louvain-la-Neuve, which also hosts the Hergé museum, held the event *Tintin au XXI^e siècle: territoires et temporalités*.⁷²

Popular geopolitics should not only be sought in classic comics and traditional printed mediums. Although the subject of migration, for example, as part of the information strategy of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), was discussed in an instructive adventure comics that stayed within the boundaries of classical crime and adventure comics, and gave insight into the reasons, dangers, and consequences of African-European migration involving illegal border-crossing (Sunjic 2010), and a selection of canonising and classicising comics on migration history was

69 Jérôme GAUTHERET, *Des pays imaginaires assez réalistes*, *Le Monde hors série* 2009/December–2010/January, 26–29.

70 DUNNETT, *op. cit.*; Jean-François FIORINA, *Une géopolitique par la bande... dessinée. Lignes claires et situations complexes*, CLES Comprendre Les Enjeux Stratégiques 147 (2014), 1–3; Hubert VÉDRINE, „Hergé annonce les européens actuels”, preface Jérôme GAUTHERET – Yves-Marie LABÉ, *Le Monde hors série* 2009/December–2010/January, 23–25.

71 Bénédicte TRATNJEK, *Appel à communications: Les géographies de Tintin*, *Sciences Dessinées* 2016. 04. 20., <http://labojrsd.hypotheses.org/2821>.

72 Marc ESCOLA, *Tintin au XXI^e siècle : territoires et temporalités* (Louvain-la-Neuve), Fabula, 9 June 2016, <http://www.fabula.org/actualites/tintin-au-xxie-siecle-territoires-et-temporalitesappel-communication.74578.php>

also published, still, when it comes to popular geopolitics, works like a certain blog post by Zep (Philippe Chapuis) should also be taken into account.

This is exactly what one of the information sites of the French government⁷³ did when, with a short lead, republished the comics from the website of *Le Monde* (where Zep has been running his own blog for a few years) in its *Infographie* section.⁷⁴ The comics was set in the world of the most popular contemporary Franco-phone series (fourteen albums between 1992 and 2015, millions of copies sold), Zep's *Titeuf*, which this time faces a war. The titular hero, a Western-European boy, roughly ten years old, has to flee after losing his father, then most of his friends and his teacher as well in an unexpected bomb attack on a hasty weekday morning. With his only surviving friend they flee to a forest, and then head to the border, which they cannot cross, though. Titeuf becomes entangled in the barbed wire, cries for help through three panels, then everything fades to black. So, there is a solid black panel in place of the panel conventionally devoted to the punchline of the one-page *Titeuf* features. The invocation of the widely known characters and sites of *bande dessinée*, and the transformation of the genre into a vertical-scrolling comics blog must have been an effective choice. The recurring situations in the printed *Titeuf* albums represent the hero's struggle to make sense of everyday events, often related to the infiltration of social problems into the simple world of the child.⁷⁵ Here, the homogeneous darkness of the final panel also documents the failure of comprehension. The

73 „Mi petit, mi grand”. *Titeuf, réfugié*, Gouvernement.fr 2015. septembre 11., <http://www.gouvernement.fr/partage/5234-mi-petit-mi-grand-titeuf-refugie>

74 See: zepworld.blog.lemonde.fr/2015/09/08/mi-petit-mi-grand.

75 MAKSA, *op. cit.*, 119–120.

figure of the refugee child is present in earlier Titeuf episodes as well, in connection with new classmates. The first album features the Croatian Milos, and in the thirteenth, Ramatou appears (to become a recurring figure later), who is fleeing from genocide. In Zep's blog entry from 2015, Titeuf gains direct experience with war and fleeing, and this is how he brings the subject even closer to his Western-European audience, this is how the artist can lend a further layer of personality to the topic at hand.

Thus, it seems that a geopolitical approach to media is beneficial in connection with the comics medium as well. Even if certain previous generalisations regarding media geopolitics can only be partially applied to the comics medium – like the shift of media historical emphases. And this is true even if there are currently popular media geopolitical topics which have not yet seemed (properly) relevant for the study of comics-related phenomena: one might mention cyberwar, Twitter diplomacy, and the relationship between media and terrorism, although the latter can be connected by the Charlie Hebdo case from January 2015, which should be the subject of another paper.

Translated by Csaba Maczelka