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A Comic Approach to Politics? Political Education via Comics

Abstract

This article examines juvenile comics that deal with politics as a main topic. These comics introduce and develop politicised themes and topics in varying ways and their individual approaches to politics will be discussed and analysed. The first example, the German *Micky Maus-Magazin* series, occasionally uses political matters to create new comical stories. In the issues discussed here, democratic processes in the fictional city of Duckburg are described. The second example, *Andi*, published by the Interior Ministry of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, aims at civic education. This comic explores the very real issues of rightwing extremism and rightwing propaganda within a fictional framework. The third example, *Persepolis* treats political issues in a serious, but not primarily pedagogical, way. It offers a personal viewpoint on the Iranian revolution in 1979. By reflecting on Iranian society, the Iranian author puts forward new perspectives on the country which are quite opposite to those that are typically represented in Western countries' daily news. All three comics provide varying degrees of understanding on politics and political processes. Since each example combines elements of entertainment with political information, they will be analysed within the theoretical framework of what Dörner defines as *politainment*.

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Keywords

Comics, politics, civic education, juvenile comics

1. Introduction

Many books and articles have been written on the hidden political implications of comics and how these might influence young readers.¹ This article will have a different focus as it will not look at hidden aspects and it will not speculate about the effects comics might have on young

¹ As the most popular publication on a comic series implying political messages, see "How to Read Donald Duck – Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comics" (1976). Written by two Chilean authors, Dorfman and Mattelart it has been translated into many languages and was sold throughout the world. For a discussion of their statement that an imperialist attitude and message could be found in both the policy of the Disney Company and its stories see Barker (1989).

readers. Moreover, it will discuss juvenile comics which explore political themes and will show that this form of media can be used for young people's civic education.

Since the comics discussed throughout this article approach political issues in an entertaining way, they can be defined in terms of *politainment*. Dörner (2001) names two types of politainment: *entertaining politics* and *political entertainment*. Dörner argues that each occurrence cannot be completely separated from the other for the two often go together.

"Entertaining politics can be found whenever political players use instruments and stylistic elements of entertainment in order to actualise their political aims" (Dörner 2001, 31; translated by the author). Political entertainment on the other hand describes the work and products of mass media: "The entertainment industry intentionally uses political characters, issues and incidents as material for their fictional imagery in order to make their products interesting and attractive" (Dörner 2001, 32; translated by the author). This article will show that both types of *politainment* can be found in juvenile comics.

In this article the term *juvenile comic* will be used to refer to (a) comics that are written and published for young people and (b) those comics that focus primarily on topics which surround young people's everyday life.

Generally speaking, three approaches to politics can be identified within juvenile comics; firstly, comic series that occasionally use political concerns to generate new narratives. These series use politically-motivated themes to initiate funny or adventure stories. Secondly, several institutions like the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung* (The Federal Agency for Civic Education) use comics to convey politically-motivated lessons. Thirdly, there are those comics that deal with politics by highlighting its impact on the lives of young people. This third category of comics is not connected to a particular series and is often the individual project of one or two authors.

This article discusses all three kinds of approach and evaluates current examples. These comics represent up-to-date comic production as each comic has been published within the last few years. Given the limited space of this article, only one example of each type of political comic will be analysed. These examples represent varying levels of politicised comics and, in turn, serve to reflect the diversity of comic publications currently available on the market.

The three comics that were chosen as examples of the three categories described above were very successful in Germany. The *Micky-Maus-Magazin* is Germany's best-selling juvenile comic magazine and similar publications are found worldwide.² This series exemplifies the first category of political comics. The second text, *Persepolis*, was also a best-selling comic book in many countries and is an example of the third type of political comics. The third text, *Andi*, also was a great success as it made several new editions.

Given the success of the examples it is highly likely that these comics show ideal combinations of politics and entertainment. Do these comics provide an entertaining approach to politics for young people? And what are young readers supposed to learn in these publications? These questions will be answered throughout the following analysis. As such, a short summary of each story will be given; however, the analysis will be limited to the most important aspects of each publication.

2. Comic series and politics

The first example to be discussed is taken from one of the most popular juvenile comic magazines throughout Europe. The *Micky Maus-Magazin* (henceforth referred to as *MM-M*), as the German edition is called, is Germany's best-selling comic magazine. Thus, the comics present characters that are well known even to non-comic readers. Each issue contains a number of stories which feature Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck and their families and friends as the main characters. Additionally, each edition includes editorial sections which contain additional jokes and information.

² See a list of Disney magazines in other countries on <http://outducks.org/>.

Political issues or themes are not normally the main focus of this publication, neither in the comic sections nor in the editorials, but in some cases the reader is introduced to politically-motivated characters, like the mayor of Duckburg, or institutions, like the Duckburg city parliament. Furthermore, on their regular trips around the world, the Duck family meets various foreign politicians. Most of the political characters they meet are not democratic leaders but typically tribal chiefs, sheiks or royals reigning over non-democratic states. The underlying reason for this might be that the plot requires exotic settings, which are a main element of most of the Ducks' journeys. Exploring foreign countries and undiscovered valleys, the Ducks learn about societies and customs that differ greatly from those that are familiar to them and often the readers themselves.

Although a lot can be discussed on the depiction of foreign politicians in the Disney stories, e.g. about common stereotypes they represent, this article will focus primarily on domestic politics in Duckburg. My hypothesis is that Duckburg politics is described in generic terms so that it resembles a political reality familiar to that of the readers.

2.1 Mayoral elections in Duckburg

MM-M devoted several issues to political topics during the autumn of 2002, when the general election for the German *Bundestag* (parliament) took place.³ The magazine not only features stories concerning elections and political processes, but even goes a step further and holds its own election for the readers: The readers are invited to vote for the Duckburg mayor. In *MM-M* several well-known characters stand as candidates; Donald, Mickey, Uncle Scrooge, Goofy, Grandma Duck and Beagle Boy number 176-671. The readers are encouraged to elect a mayor candidate, by casting their votes via Internet or mail. The entire process is dealt with over three issues: Number 38 of the magazine presents the candidates, number 39 provides the ballot paper and number 45 announces the results.

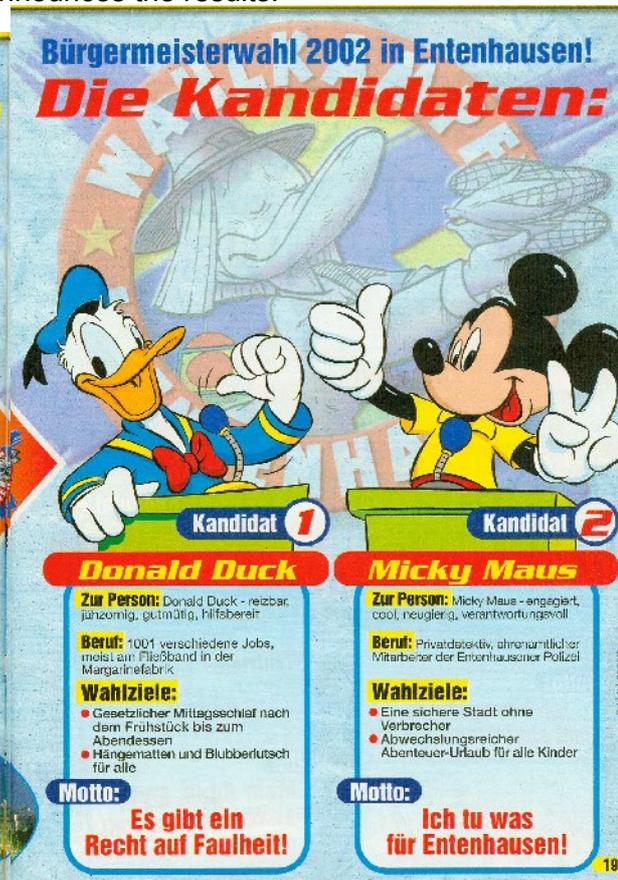


Fig. 1: aus Micky Maus-Magazin 38 (2002) Fig. 2: aus Micky Maus-Magazin 38 (2002)

³ These issues perform Disney stories that were produced by American and Spanish authors for the Danish publishing house Gutenberghus / Egmont.

Issue number 38 provides certain information on current politics in order to link the Duckburg election to the real-life political events taking place in Germany. The candidates for *Bundeskanzler's* office (federal chancellor) are presented in a short text. A second text outlines the function of the *Bundestag* as a political institution and the parties it consists of. One page of this issue is devoted to the real political election taking place (see figure 1) whereas the following three pages present in detail the six candidates for the mayor of Duckburg. Each Disney candidate is named, a personal description and some central statements are provided. The presentation of two candidates can be seen in figure 2. The publication, however, chooses to use by far more editorial space to provide information on the Duckburg candidates than on the politicians for the real election.

The coverage of both real-life events and fictional elections forms part of the magazine's editorial sections. In addition to the presentation of the candidates and the ballot itself, two comic stories shed light on the election process as well: Each story plots a Disney character running for mayoral office. In issue number 38, Donald Duck and his cousin Gladstone Gander compete for office.⁴ The comic's exposition outlines their initial desire to impress Daisy and the story concludes with one of the typical fights between them. The plot primarily focuses on the competitive relationship between Donald and Gladstone and highlights their attempts to gain the press' attention by pretending to do good deeds. The two candidates do not promote political messages, but instead compete to perform heroic deeds to gain media attention and each character covertly tries to play dirty tricks on the opponent. Naturally it should come as no surprise that everything ends up in disaster and the reader feels a sense of relief when the governing mayor is finally re-elected. Thus a sense of political order is restored.

In issue 39, Mickey Mouse competes for the office of mayor,⁵ but his motivation is quite different from that of Donald and Gladstone. A group of criminals have kidnapped the governing mayor in the hopes that one of them will be elected as a subsequent mayor. The only course of action for Mickey is to compete with the gangster for office. In contrast to Donald and Gladstone, Mickey does not choose to focus on a political campaign, but instead focuses on finding the abducted mayor. In the end, he is able to solve the case by locating the kidnapped politician, who, as a result is able to stay in office. Here, too, the narrative ends in re-establishing the original political order.

In both narratives it would seem that the best outcome of the electoral campaigns results is the re-election of the present mayor. As such, the legitimate mayor's status is never questioned for one main reason: The narrative mainly focuses on the opponents, who are clearly not good candidates to run for office. Both narratives hint at how the political system in Duckburg functions but neither accurately portrays the roles and function of politicians themselves.

Unlike the first story, the second narrative does not convey many references to political processes but rather uses an election as the background for what is essentially a detective story. The gangsters are eager to gain power in Duckburg; yet it is not made clear what it is they are really aiming for. No further reference is made to the gangsters' motivation to run for office or how they would use mayor status for their own purposes. The reader is asked to infer that an election victory for the gangsters would have overt negative effects. Since the story does not focus primarily on political issues but on using political tools (an election) to solve a criminal case, Mickey is not required to seriously prepare for office and no clear picture of a mayor's duties is drawn. Consequently there is no real reason to inform the readers about politics.

This single factor clearly differentiates the first narrative from the second. Despite the use of comical elements, such as slapstick fight scenes between the characters Donald and Gander to heighten tension in the plot, the cartoon nevertheless reveals a certain understanding of politics. In their electoral campaigns, Donald and Gladstone do not really concern

⁴ The story *Election Madness* (German title: *Mit List und Tücke*) was first published in 1988. The comic appeared in many countries. See list of publications on <http://coa.inducks.org/s.php?c=D++8934>.

⁵ The comic *Mickey for Mayor* (German title: *Der verschwundene Bürgermeister*) was first published in 2002. See list of international publications on <http://coa.inducks.org/story.php?c=D+99163>.

themselves with politics; their main motivation to run for office is not to take over responsibility as mayor but to compete with each other in a new field. And yet in their fight to win votes their perceptions on politics are revealed to the reader. The main goal is to gain the media's attention and subsequently the good will of the voting public. In reality, what they practice is, as Zaller puts it, media politics.

"By media politics, I mean a system of politics in which individual politicians seek to gain office, and to conduct politics while in office, through communication that reaches citizens through the mass media. Thus defined, media politics stands in contrast to the older system of 'party politics,' in which, by conventional definition, politicians seek to win elections and to govern as members of party teams.

Although party politics is by no means defunct, it now shares the political stage with media politics, an emerging system whose properties are only beginning to be understood" (Zaller 1999, 2).

Donald and Gladstone do not care about the tasks they might have to face should they succeed in the election. For both characters, media politics is completely detached from any other political concern.

Given that the electoral campaign in Germany was very present in public discourse in 2002, the juvenile readers of *MM-M* could easily see parallels between Donald's and Gladstone's media politics and what they saw on television or read in the media at that time.

"[In the 2002 election] political issues that can be found in large amounts in party programs were mostly ignored by the media. Instead, their focus had shifted to the campaigning as such" (Schlipper 2002; translated by the author).

The comic story therefore confirms the reader's experience of the real-life campaign and at the same time the narrative perpetuates negative stereotypes and exaggerates them to increase comic tension.



Fig. 3: aus Micky Maus-Magazin 26 (1988)



Fig. 4: aus Micky Maus-Magazin 38 (2002)

In an attempt to further mirror the then current political events, the comic was modified as shown in the comparison of figures 3 and 4: The pictures show two publications of the same story. Figure 3 depicts the first print of the story in *MM-M* in 1988, figure 4 is taken from the issue discussed. To resemble the current events, the 2002 edition bears changes as the other candidates running for mayoral office in the comic were given names similar to those of real politicians, e.g. G. Ströder and F. Jischer.

2.2 Politics as a topic for young people

In conclusion, the story about Donald and Gladstone and the editorial passages figuratively reference to current German politics. However, the editorial texts in the *MM-M* rarely inform its readers about politics. The magazine does not openly set out to connect any of the political realities Germany faces to the comic's plot; any connection drawn is abstract and

subject to the reader's own personal knowledge, experience and background. The mayoral election held among the comic readers mirrors the process of the *Bundestagswahl*, but the comic neglects to reflect the reality of the process itself; unlike what transpires in the comic the German *Bundeskanzler* is not elected directly by the people. Like other forms of media, the comic presents the German candidates in such a way that suggests the voting public has the power to decide which candidate will take up office as chancellor.

It is therefore obvious that the *MM-M* issues outlined above are not aimed at political education but rather use political themes to entertain its readers. This leads to the question as to why the Duckburg mayoral election is held at the same time as the *Bundestagswahl* in Germany. One reason could be that the editors expected the readers to have a relatively high level of interest in politics during this time. In the fall of 2002, it was almost impossible for the inhabitants of Germany to ignore the general election, as it was an important subject covered by all media sources. The general target age group of *MM-M* is, however, too young to vote so I believe the fictional election of the Duckburg mayor attempted to involve juvenile readers in current political events. For this reason, the three issues of *MM-M* confirm what Dörner (2001) describes as political entertainment for "political characters, issues and incidents [are used] as material for their fictional imagery in order to make their products interesting and attractive" (Dörner 2001, 32; translated by the author).

The reader is left to question why *MM-M* provides only very superficial information on politics. Three reasons for this can be suggested: Firstly, the editors did not expect its readers to have a high level of interest in political topics given the publication's target age group. Secondly, the editors were most-likely cautious when it came to shedding light on political issues and disseminating politically-themed content for they did not intend to make a political statement. Thirdly, there may have been a lack of interest among the editors given that the magazine is geared more towards entertainment and fun rather than education. For these three reasons the editors may not have considered it in their best interests to provide detailed information to help their juvenile readers understand current politics.

Instead, only short and brief informative texts are printed. Both the texts and the comics support the notion that electoral campaigns concentrate on candidates rather than political issues and that politics in general functions primarily as theatre or entertainment. To answer the questions posed in the introduction, it has clearly been proven that political education is therefore not prominent within these cited examples from *MM-M*. The editors have chosen to focus on entertaining their reading public rather than using their publication to provide informative political information. If they had instead chosen to use the editorial sections as a vehicle to deliver reliable political information, the publication could have served as a good resource to inform young readers on important news issues.

3. Political comics aiming at civic education

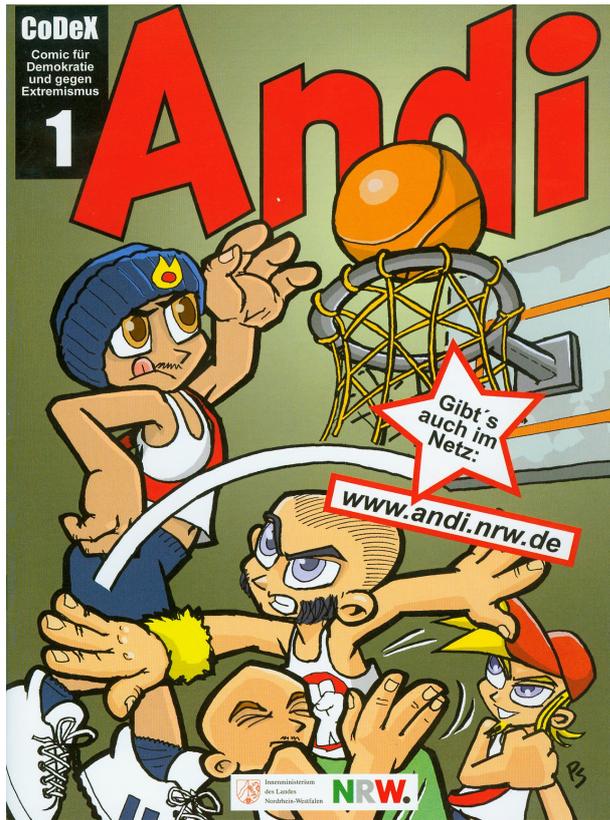


Fig. 5: aus Andi

A publication by the Interior Ministry of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia serves as an example for the second type of political juvenile comics. *Andi – Tage wie dieser* (henceforth referred to as *Andi* - see cover in figure 5) was aimed at civic education and attempts to prevent young people from adopting rightwing political opinions. This comic was first published in 2005 and was primarily distributed in schools or via web-mail order. Similar to the first comic discussed, *Andi* features both editorial sections as well as the actual comic. Due to the resounding success of the first edition of *Andi*, several reprints have since been made. In addition to this the reader can access the full comic online via the website: www.andi.nrw.de.

3.1 Rightwing propaganda at schools

The comic focuses on a group of young people who come into contact with rightwing propaganda. One morning before school, Andi and his friends are introduced to some young people distributing free CDs to the

pupils. The CDs contain rightwing propaganda to an issue that was discussed extensively by the German media in 2005. During this time rightwing extremist groups would visit schools and attempt to give away free CDs containing music and nationalist or xenophobic texts.

In the story, the incident itself leads to a controversial discussion among the pupils. The opinions expressed in the comic range considerably and put forward arguments from both the rightwing and leftwing factions. This heated debate continues through to the children's first class, as the first lesson scheduled in the school day is political education. The teacher tries to reason with the opinions of the right-wing pupils by referring to values like democracy and human rights. In addition to that, she tries to bring the pupils' prejudices into perspective within a broader historic context. As the xenophobic students claim to be legitimate inhabitants of Germany, the teacher questions their prejudices by citing historic facts. She argues that most people in North Rhine-Westphalia have a



Fig. 6: aus Andi

multicultural background due to the fact that certain industrial regions in the area have attracted migrants for more than 100 years.

The discussion comes to an abrupt end as the lesson draws to a close. Throughout the school-day, however, new conflicts continue to arise between the pupils as a result of varying political opinions. The comic then concludes with a basketball game which is the last lesson of the day. Eisenheinrich, the representative rightwing leader in Andi's class, refuses to play with classmates that have a foreign background. Due to his entrenched prejudice, Eisenheinrich fails to play together with his team and as a result, they lose the game. Consequently, the other students are able to understand the concept that playing together leads to success, whereas Eisenheinrich isolates himself with his own prejudices.

The editorial sections in this comic give background information on the topics discussed among the class. Political terms such as "Freiheitliche demokratische Grundordnung", "Volksgemeinschaft" and "Migration im Ruhrgebiet" are defined and explained. Moreover, substantial information is provided on rightwing extremist groups, their attitudes and arguments as they appear in the comic. As you can see in figure 6 the comic is interrupted by small text fields. If the reader is not interested in reading additional information, he or she can simply continue with the comic. In addition to this, an appendix provides further information including texts about symbols that rightwing extremist groups use and often wear on their clothes. The appendix explains the origins of the symbols in order to give the readers the opportunity to recognise rightist extremists using these symbols. The appendix also includes a list of sources for further information on the topics presented in the publication.

3.2 Comics as reliable sources of information

It is immediately obvious to the reader that this comic was designed for pedagogical reasons. The logo for the Interior Ministry is printed on the cover, and the minister himself has written the foreword. The fictional plot is connected to facts and real-life events and is thus linked to the reality of its young readers. The story obviously was designed to cover a lot of issues around rightwing extremism. Thus the editorial sections can provide a lot of background information connected to the story. Rightwing opinions and arguments are presented and refuted. Since it is clear that the comic aims to educate its readers rather than entertain them, the readers can rely on the information given by the Ministry. In contrast to *MM-M*, which provides only limited political information, *Andi* contains succinct but detailed texts on many aspects connected to the topic.

It could be argued that many young readers would dislike such an obvious pedagogical attempt at education and therefore the comic's educational effectiveness could be brought into question. I, on the other hand, would argue that the comic can be effective in disseminating political information: The format of the comic enables the information to be read and interpreted quickly and the comic's structure does not require intense concentration from the reader. The reader quickly becomes immersed in the narrative and can identify with the main characters. For many young readers the topic itself might be relatively appealing, too, as the comic is not about party politics or a political system per se (for these topics might be perceived as tedious) but about juvenile subculture.

The Inner Ministry uses the comic form in order to generate political learning and civic education. Since *Andi* presents political concerns in an entertaining way it can be defined in terms of entertaining politics (see introduction and Dörner 2001, 31). It is clear that readers can learn a lot from this comic. Still, there are arguments which cast doubt on its effectiveness as all issues surrounding rightwing propaganda are deliberately inserted into the narrative. It is such an open pedagogical attempt to civic education that juvenile readers might disapprove of the comic. At least it is quite unlikely that young people would find its story really entertaining. I therefore concede that a more subtle approach to the topic and plot development would have been more successful.

4. Politics and young people's life

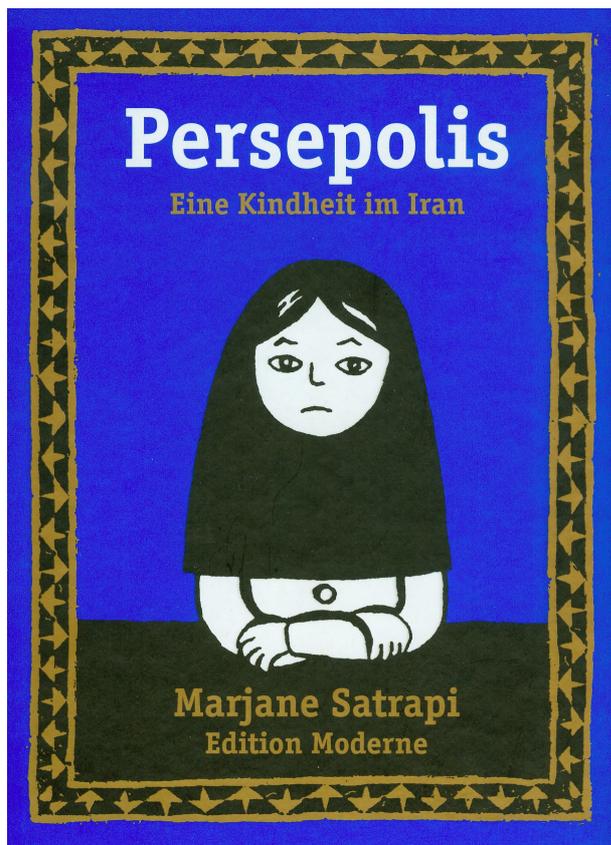


Fig. 7: aus Persepolis

Persepolis represents the third type of political juvenile comics to be examined in this article. It was first published in France and given its great success in many countries, was adapted into an animated film in 2007.⁶ *Persepolis* is the autobiography of an Iranian artist, Marjane Satrapi, who was born in 1969 and grew up in Tehran. As a child she witnessed first-hand the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the beginning of the Iraci-Irani war in 1980. Facing an enduring war, in 1984 her parents decided to send Marjane to Europe giving her the opportunity to grow up in safety. The story of the protagonist's childhood is covered in the comic's first volume (see cover in figure 7); the second volume follows her first years in Europe, her return to Iran and her resulting emigration to France. This article, however, will only concentrate on the first volume.

4.1 A personal view on politics

For those who are familiar with the publication, to define *Persepolis* as a juvenile comic might provoke protest.

Nevertheless, I would like to categorise the comic accordingly for the two following reasons: The comic highlights the impact of an intense political situation on the life of a child and it is narrated from a child's perspective. Even though it is not written for children, teenagers can read and understand the narrative. Furthermore, I consider it a good book to introduce the topic of life in Iran to young people, for it explains many aspects of the current and historic situation in Iran and at the same time has the potential to affect young readers through the personal viewpoint of the story.⁷

The first two panels of the comic depict Marjane's class of 1980 with all the girls wearing veils (see figure 8). The story then steps back a few months, into a time when she and her classmates did not have to wear a veil when going out. By way of introduction, Marjane talks about her family, her dreams and wishes at the age of ten just before the revolution. She understands that some of the things she learns at school contradict her parents' political view, as the family is critical of the Shah. Her parents take part in frequent public protests. As the story continues, Marjane's family is naturally relieved and happy to learn that the revolution overthrowing the Shah's regime is successful. Unfortunately, they are unable to anticipate what events are about to transpire. With the rise of the Islamic regime, the hope for a democratic state is immediately and irrevocably destroyed.

The reader follows Marjane's efforts to find out more information about the political situation. She witnesses great changes, learns about contradictions, hopes and fears of her relatives and her parents' friends. The political changes puzzle Marjane, e.g. political prisoners are freed as a result of the revolution, and later have to flee from the newly-established regime.

⁶ See trailers on the official homepage <http://www.sonyclassics.com/persepolis/main.html>.

⁷ The *Institut für Kino und Filmkultur* supposes to use the film *Persepolis* at school from ninth grade on. See Anonymous (2007, 1).

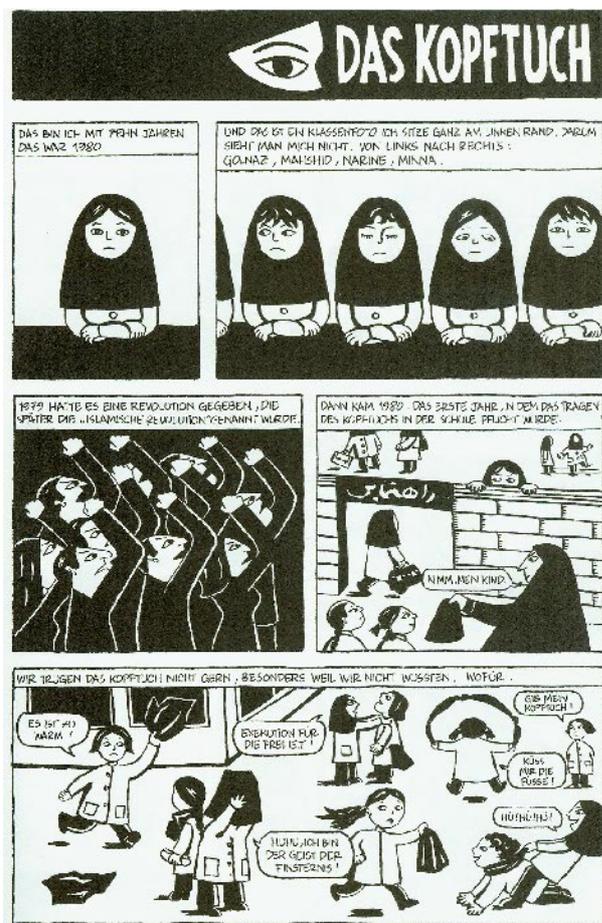


Fig. 8: aus *Persepolis*

fragmented view of the revolution. Through this very personal perspective the reader is able to empathise with the girl.

The book itself is published and circulated outside of Iran, mainly among a reading public that has never visited Iran, and therefore offers readers a new perspective on the country and its inhabitants. The region of Iran has appeared, and continually reappears in recent news; in most newspapers or news sources, there is currently extensive news coverage on the Iranian nuclear program. The comic therefore invites the Western reader to take a different look at the country and to gain new insights into its society and history.

Young readers around the world are able to identify similar characteristics between themselves and the protagonist. Just like other girls Marjane is interested in pop music and fashion, friendship and love are important aspects of her story. By showing the somewhat universal aspects of young people's life, the author is able to incite a sympathetic relationship, one of understanding, between the reader and the protagonist.

4.2 Comic, fiction and reality

Among the examples of this article, *Persepolis* is the only comic that employs documentary elements as it claims not to be a fictional story. At the same time the comic does not suggest that the events happened exactly in the way it is told and illustrated in the story. Like most autobiographical texts it combines fictional and non-fictional elements.

The illustrations found throughout the comic are simple, rough and resemble the basic drawings of a child. These illustrations do not claim to show or in any way prove political events. They only serve to present the story from Marjane's unique viewpoint. Thus, many panels not only provide factual data, at the same time they illustrate the child's individual view and ideas (see figures 9 and 10). The pictures Marjane conjures up in her mind play an

The reader understands the protagonist's confusion as the narration is limited to Marjane's perspective and her fragmented account of the unfolding events as well as her limited understanding of the political events taking place. With every new bit of information the reader learns more and can gauge the reactions of Marjane and her friends. Apart from the explanations her parents give to her, Marjane is also interested in the stories of friends and family members.

Marjane adopts her parents' critical attitudes towards the Shah and the upcoming new regime. At the same time, she is even more radical in her views than her parents and she becomes almost fanatic about having the Shah's supporters punished. She always begs her parents to take her along to protests with them and when Iraq starts to bomb Tehran she wishes to become a soldier and fight the enemy. These examples illustrate that even as a very young girl, Marjane is highly politically motivated.

Marjane Satrapi's perspective does not provide an accurate account on the history of Iran at the time around 1980. Instead, she puts forward a very personal view of the political changes of that period. Telling the story of her childhood she gives a

integral role in the narrative. Politics is not treated as an isolated phenomenon; it is intrinsically linked to human beings and other human qualities. The author thematises politics to reveal the impact of certain events on the lives of the individuals. This remains a central theme throughout the comic. The author's choice of illustration style manages to serve several purposes quite well: The distinction between imagination and reality blurs inside a single panel; the story can focus on the important parts by leaving out detailed background illustrations; the Iranian tradition can be symbolised by using typical ornamental elements. *Persepolis* is thus a multi-faceted comic, not only through the topics it covers but also in the way these are presented.



Fig. 9: aus *Persepolis*



Fig. 10: aus *Persepolis*

Since comics are more often than not perceived as mass media entertainment, *Persepolis* could be defined under the term *political entertainment*. However, this comic does not function on a purely entertaining level; it has a strong political message to convey to its readers. Marjane Satrapi is clearly not a political player according to Dörner's definition. Still, as an individual and as an Iranian migrant, her attempt to show her personal view of Iran is nevertheless politically motivated. Therefore this narrative can as well be categorised as *entertaining politics*. It may not be for party politics or the aims of a political institution but for her individual wish to give a statement on the political situation in her home country: As a refugee from the war and the Islamist regime she invites inhabitants of the Western world to adopt her perspective on Iran.

Reading *Persepolis*, young readers from around the world, can learn a lot about the country, its politics and about topics that interest young people, irrespective of their cultural background. Still, *Persepolis* deliberately selects its limited content leaving many topics unclear for the reader. In order to draw their own conclusions, the reader has to look to other resources. As such, *Persepolis* encourages the reader to research into the political topics surrounding Iran in other resources. After reading the comic the readers should look beyond Marjane's perspective in order to find out more about the country's political background.

5. Conclusion

This article has discussed three different ways in which juvenile comics approach political topics. Following its authors' or editors' intentions, political issues can be employed to heighten comic tension or be used as the vehicle to convey a more serious message through what is normally considered to be an entertaining fiction genre. All three comics make at least some references to current political processes and events. As shown in the article,

some comics choose to focus on the entertaining aspect of the comic form whereas others reveal serious interest in a political message. Despite their different political intentions, all three comics can be categorised under the term of *politainment*. Comics apparently can serve a variety of interests. They can provide a fragmented overview on a given political theme, as shown in *Persepolis*, or they can also give reliable political information, as illustrated in *Andi*.

The analysis of *MM-M*, on the other hand, has revealed that this publication makes no attempt at civic education. Still, politics was chosen as an interesting topic for juvenile readers. By figurately referring to political themes the production is meant to match the political reality familiar to the one known to the German readers. The comic's political stance can be easily linked to real-world politics but is an unreliable source for gleaning political information.

As demonstrated with *Andi*, the comic could be the medium of choice for pedagogical reasons if an author or institution wishes to address a particularly young audience. Here, the comic's success could be further investigated to ascertain if it is due to real popularity among its target audience or whether it is due to its use as a teaching resource for young children by teachers. Thus, a comic which tries to incorporate all aspects on a political issue, (i.e. rightist extremism as in this example) might not be as effective as one might hope in order to convey political messages.

In conclusion, *Persepolis* is a good example of a comic which attempts to portray a political issue in a serious light. Here the graphic nature of the comic is employed to strengthen the message intended by the author, making it more of an artistic, and not so much a pedagogical, choice. *Persepolis'* success could be attributed to the fact that the comic appeals to both adults and young readers alike. As a result, the comic provides not only a form of entertainment for its (younger) readers but also increases their political understanding. In contrast to *Andi*, the narration is interesting and appealing but it only provides fragmented information on a political topic. The original comic could be easily put in a good context for eclectic civic education. A teacher could give additional information in the same way that *Andi* uses its editorial sections.

To sum up, comics can be used as media for civic education, as there are lots of publications that approach political issues in various ways. Thus it should be well considered which publication can be used to serve which purpose.

References

Comics

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