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Colonial Patterns of Interpretation in Swiss Comics

Introduction to the Module

“Globi” is a Swiss comic book figure. He was invented in the 1930s and originally served as an advertising figure for a chain of large department stores called “Globus” (“the Globe”), selling – among other things – “exotic” products from the colonies (“Kolonialwaren”). The Globi stories quickly became very popular in the German-speaking part of Switzerland in particular. The series continues until today.¹

As Swiss philosopher Patricia Purtschert has pointed out, the Globi books were part of a larger series of children’s books and audio tapes in the 20th century, using colonial images to contrast some of the “Swiss” virtues of the stories’ main characters: their boldness, industriousness and smartness. As in most Western countries, the 1970s in Switzerland were also marked by the beginnings of anti-racist criticism. Social movements and social scientists thus started denouncing “Globi” and other children’s books’ blatant racism, sexism and generally chauvinistic attitudes.²

This led to heated debates continuing until today. Some of the texts within the books were altered. However, defenders of these children’s books maintain that they are a part of Swiss “tradition”, that no racism was intended and that criticism towards these characters is an example of exaggerated “political correctness”. Criticisers and victims of racism thus become perpetrators while those defending racist imaginaries fashion themselves as victims, whose right to “freedom of speech” is violated.³

As Purtschert and others argue, the seemingly harmless children’s books are only one particular manifestation of a particular Swiss “colonial amnesia”. High-ranking government officials, hosts of popular TV shows and comedians share the assumption that since Switzerland never was a colonial power it hence cannot be accused of racism and colonial culture. This is the context in which aggressive political campaigns from Switzerland’s right-wing “Swiss People’s Party” emerge, but also comedy shows in Swiss national television making fun of “political correctness”. In various ways, they use and reproduce racial and colonial stereotypes, with the responsible person typically acting surprised when being criticised by, often foreign, observers.⁴

1 <www.globi.ch>.

2 Patricia Purtschert (2012): “De Schorsch Gaggio reist uf Afrika”. Postkoloniale Konstellationen und diskursive Verschiebungen in Schweizer Kindergeschichten, in: Purtschert et al. (eds.). Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien. Bielefeld, 89–116.

3 Rohit Jain (2014): Das Lachen der “Anderen”. Anti-Political-Correctness als Hegemonie, in: *Tangram* 34, 49–56, online <http://www.ekr.admin.ch/e-paper/TANGRAM_34_de/files/assets/basic-html/page49.html>.

4 Numerous case studies in Purtschert et al. (2012) and Patricia Purtschert/Harald Fischer-Tiné (eds.) (2015): *Colonial Switzerland. Rethinking Colonialism from the Margins*. London.

Central Question:

What distinguishes older from newer forms of racist stereotyping, what are the historic causes of this change and how do we deal with racist symbols from earlier times in our contemporary everyday culture?

Sources

Source Series 1: Extracts from the 1951 children's colouring book "Globi with Foreign Peoples" (1.1) as well as the volumes "Friend Globi in the Jungle" from 1980 (1.2) and "Around the World with Globi and Captain Pum" from 1971 (1.3)

Quoted from: Waltraut Bellwald/Ingrid Tomkowiak/Christoph Burkhard/Matthias Gallati (2003): Globi. Eine Reklamefigur wird zum Mythos, in: Globi und seine Zeit. Zürich, 8–69, here 57 (1.1); Regula Renschler (1981): "Neger hat er just erblickt, und die Lage wird verzwick." Der krasse Rassismus in den Schweizer Globi-Büchern, in: id./Roy Preiswerk (eds.): Das Gift der frühen Jahre. Rassismus in der Jugendliteratur. Basle, 213–234, here 218 (1.2), 221 (1.3).

Source 1.1: "Globi with Foreign Peoples – A Colouring Book with Verses"



Source 1.2: "Jungle Life"



**Und auch hier im Urwaldleben
Wird das Jungvolk mich umgeben;
Alle lieben Negerlein
Sollen mir willkommen sein.»**

And also here in the jungle life
the young folks will surround me;
All the good little Negroes
shall be welcome to me.”

(Original text in German,
approximate translation)

Source 1.3: "Innovations in the Indian village"

Kinder Huckepack zu tragen
Macht doch allzu grosse Plagen.
Welch ein Rückstand hier im Kaff!
Globi sieht es und ist baff.

Sofort fängt er an zu sinnern,
Wie den Indianerinnen
Durch geschickte Bastelei
Gut und rasch zu helfen sei.

Mit dem Hammer und dem Beile
Wird mit Eifer und in Eile
Nun ein Fahrgestell gemacht,
Das ein Kleinzelt überdacht.

Seht die Mutter mit dem Wagen,
Wie sie schmunzelt voll Behagen!
Ja, das Globische System
Ist modern und sehr bequem.



Title: Innovations in the Indian village

Carrying children piggy-back / can really be a nuisance. / How undeveloped this backwater is! / Globi sees it and is astounded.

Instantly he starts to think / how the Indian women / by means of skilled handcraft / can be helped well and quickly.

With a hammer and an axe / keenly and in haste / a carriage is built, / covered by a little tent.

See the mother with the cart, / how she smiles with content! / Yes, the Globic system / is modern and very comfortable.

(Original text in German, approximate translation)

Source Series 2: Debates on Globi

Regula Renschler (1981): “Neger hat er just erblickt, und die Lage wird verzwick’t.” Der krasse Rassismus in den Schweizer Globi-Büchern, in: id./Roy Preiswerk (eds.): *Das Gift der frühen Jahre. Rassismus in der Jugendliteratur*. Basle, 213–234, here 230–233 (2.1), *ibid.*, 333 f. (2.2); Patricia Purtschert (2012): “De Schorsch Gaggo reist uf Afrika”. Postkoloniale Konstellationen und diskursive Verschiebungen in Schweizer Kindergeschichten, in: id./Barbara Lüthi/Francesca Falk (eds.). *Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien*. Bielefeld, 89–116, here 105 (2.3).

Preliminary remarks: From the 1970s onwards some Globi episodes were criticised harshly by parts of the Swiss public because of the stereotypical depiction of foreign cultures and the often arrogant behaviour of Globi, the “Super Swiss”.

One of these voices belonged to Romance Languages and Literature scholar and journalist Regula Renschler (2.1). The anthology in which her accusation was published contains an appendix with criteria for the assessment and the handling of racism in children’s books (2.2). This first phase of critical debate about Globi as a figure was scientifically classified and evaluated in a paper by philosopher Patricia Purtschert in 2012 (2.3).

Source 2.1: Regula Renschler

Globi has many features of the “authoritarian character” described by Horkheimer and Adorno [two of the most important German philosophers of the 20th century]: He is conservative, provides for discipline, for law and order, he fights his way through at the expense of others, he is full of schadenfreude and prejudice, he is in charge. [...] And he is also hot-tempered, likes to throw a punch and is not hesitant about it. Over and over, conflicts are solved violently. All in all, the world of Globi is a paternalist, chauvinist, racist, sexist and quite violent world.

Of course one may argue that these books were written 30 or more years ago. However, they were all republished in the 1970s in the same form or with only slight alterations. The downright horrible book covers of some early Globi books were not changed either. In Globi’s journey around the world, he is surrounded by animals and a little Negro, the latter wearing a hula skirt, with a face hardly human. On the back of that cover people from four continents are present: Globi, the European, in the middle. To the left there is a hook-nosed “Redskin” and a yellow grinning Chinese, to the right we find a man from the Wild West wearing a Colt and a Negro with a banana skirt, bangles around his foot and neck with a face resembling a gorilla’s rather than that of a human being.

And also in the new Globi book, *Globi in the Wild West*, published in 1980, people of other races are drawn according to old stereotypes: Globi remains the great guy who, with his cunning, his good heart and the help of animals, is on top in the end. There is still a lot of shooting and still the characters “are at each other’s throat”. Women are still “weak and soft”, may do the cooking or stand next to the men, but generally remain in the background.

Should we take away Globi books from children? Certainly not. Forbidden books are the most intriguing. Children growing up in a tolerant environment being raised by friendly people cannot be harmed even by bad books. In the best case such a book can trigger a great conversation. But how many parents do talk to their children about their reading? Some of the depiction of other cultures and ethnically different people may stick. Stereotypes are created or enforced.

It wouldn't have to stay that way. Comic strips need not insult people of other races and other cultures, or women or weak people in order to be funny. Humour at the expense of others is not the only way to be funny and one could think of better answers than coming to blows when disagreements arise. And above all, there is a reality completely different from what is shown in the Globi books.

Source 2.2: "Guidelines for the production of non- or anti-racist books"

What makes a good book?

1. It features strong characters that Third World children can identify with positively.
2. People in the Third World are depicted as able to make decisions about important questions that may influence their lives. [...]
4. People considered heroes in the Third World are depicted accordingly and their influence on the life of the peoples there is explained in detail. [...]
6. Liberation struggles of people in the Third World are accepted as valid and legitimate rather than condemned as illegal acts that are to be subdued.
7. The self-esteem of the child in the Third World is supported by the presentation of the material.
8. The material is presented in a way which eliminates harmful feelings of superiority in the European child based on race.
9. The illustrations are not stereotypical but show people in the Third World in active and leading roles. [...]
11. The role of women in the development of peoples in the Third World and their influence on history is told appropriately.
12. The history of the population in the Third World and their role in developing their own societies and institutions are depicted accurately and from their own perspective. [...]
14. The content is free of expressions that insult and degrade people from the Third World.
15. The people's language is treated with respect and communicated in its own rhythm.
16. The material is processed by an author who is equipped with an acknowledged education and enough experience, skill and tactfulness.

Source 2.3: Patricia Purtschert

By trying to leave behind the racist flood of images in order to authenticate the presentation of "Indians", Renschler postulates the possibility of representing other cultures in a correct way. This effort shows, for example, in her criticism of the story about the "American Indian woman" [...] who obtains a children's push chair from Globi: "Native American women, who carry their babies on their backs, which is very good for

little children because they have permanent physical contact with their mothers, are talked out of this ‘un-modern’ child care by Globi.” On the one hand [...] this criticism points out a colonial pattern: Traditional practices are labeled “old-fashioned” from a modern and Western point of view and thus neglected, without taking their particular rationality seriously or examining it. [...] On the other hand, Renschler’s analysis differs from a postcolonial criticism when she claims that she can defend the “Indian woman’s” correct way of treating her baby against Globi. The idea that she knew the best way to keep physical contact with the child activates the images of a woman (not yet spoiled by civilization) who knows what is good for her child by nature. This eliminates the possibility that she already knows and uses modern technologies like the children’s push chair. A postcolonial point of view would press the deconstruction of Globi’s view of the “Indian” further: Not only the “Indian” with feather trim, tomahawk and wigwam relates to a European myth, but the conception of the “Indians” as a clearly defined group that lives in their own world, encounters modernity only subsequently and marginally and – in spite of some interior differences – has a common and traditional culture does so as well. Not least should it be considered that such a reconstruction of the “Indian culture” falls back on a canon of knowledge (such as ethnology) that was formed in the context of colonial knowledge systems.

Source 3: “De Schorsch Gaggo reist uf Afrika”

Patricia Purtschert (2012) “De Schorsch Gaggo reist uf Afrika” [“Cocoa-Schorsch travels to Africa”]. Postkoloniale Konstellationen und diskursive Verschiebungen in Schweizer Kindergeschichten, in: Patricia Purtschert/Barbara Lüthi/Francesca Falk (eds.). Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien. Bielefeld, 89–116, here 89f.

Preliminary remarks: In January 2010 the actor Jörg Schneider was a guest on a broadcast by the Swiss public radio. Since the 1960s Schneider has written and spoken a large number of children’s audio plays about the character “Kasperli”, the Swiss version of the comic hero of the “Kaspertheater” [a puppet show, similar to Punch and Judy] widespread in the German-speaking area. The audio plays are still very popular with the Swiss children. However, in the 1970s the episode “De Schorsch Gaggo reist uf Afrika” (“Kakao-Schorsch reist nach Afrika”) [“Cocoa-Schorsch travels to Africa”] came under suspicion of racism because of expressions like “Negerhäuptling” [“Negro chief”]. As a consequence a politically correct new edition has been sold since the 1990s. In the broadcast Schneider and the radio host talk about issues of political correctness and freedom of expression.

Host: “In the 90s, in the heyday of political correctness, the record company received more and more outraged complaints from mothers: Kasperli and his friends made racist remarks.”

Schneider: “It’s not the case that we’ve received a large number of reactions, but once in a while there have been complaints: Gaggo-Neger [Cacao-Negro], you just shouldn’t say that. And then there is the Negerprinzesschen [Little Negro Princess].”

H: “The Chruselnegerli [Kraushaarnegerlein; little Negro with frizzy hair].”

S: “The Chruselnegerli. Quite often it was mothers who who ...well who had children who somehow had a black father or so or vice-versa. But when we wrote and recorded that, the word Negro [Negro] was far from being disrespectful.”

H: "That was just the way people were speaking in the 70s. How did you feel when you were suddenly told that Kasperli should no longer speak like that?"

S: "I was a bit dumbfounded. Of course I noted immediately, if that really offends, and if people really are upset, and don't agree with it, in that case we'll change it." [...]

H: "Do you talk in a different way today? Because you were told you should no longer talk that way?"

S: "In private I wouldn't say Neger anymore. That's for sure."

H: "But the Mohrenkopf [literally: Negro Head; a cream cake] has, I think, been officially prohibited; in the Migros [biggest Swiss supermarket chain] they're called Party Kiss now."

S: "I don't like them anyway, so I don't happen to buy them."

H: "And people continue to say Mohrenkopf, I think."

S: "I think so. Sometimes it even gets worse. If you may not use the words Mohr and Neger and try to avoid them, then people notice: I see, you just tried not to say Neger. I find that even worse."

H: "In this context Martin Walser once said, if you don't let the people say 'Neger', you must not be surprised if they beat up the Negro tomorrow. If people are forbidden to talk about delicate issues, taboos are repressed, and then they can sometimes erupt uncontrollably."

(Original text in German)

Embedding the Module in a Sequence

Even though the material suggests otherwise, this module is very demanding. It compels the students to reconstruct and comprehend two levels of reception: The first accusations of Swiss children's comics of being racist in the 1970s and early 1980s were followed by a discourse-analytically well-founded "criticism of criticism" a generation later. Therefore, this module is designed for students of higher levels of secondary education. After completing this module students can be encouraged to conduct research on the existence of postcolonial patterns of interpretation in other areas of today's society. Doing so could facilitate further engagement with questions touched on within the module, such as how to deal with such latently present patterns of thought: Do they, like the phenomenon of racism itself, pose a threat to peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society and should they thus be counteracted with concrete measures up to the possibility of legal sanctions? Do postcolonial traces, for example in comics or brand names, have to be censored? Or is it sufficient to provide educational work to foster sensitization on the assumption that, as a consequence of migration and globalization, postcolonial phenomena and attitudes will automatically disappear over time?

Learning Aims and Competences

This module is designed to be taught in two 45-minute lessons. In a first step, the students are confronted with selected extracts from Globi books. Many of them will have encountered these or similar excerpts from the books, which are still very common in many Swiss children's bedrooms, so the material is familiar to the students from their everyday living environment. They may realize that they encountered similar

contents non-judgmentally as younger children. In order to be fair to those children who grew up without Globi, it makes sense for the teacher to give a short introductory overview of the topic. Using image and text interpretation, the students will then work out the biased depiction of both Globi and the people from other cultures he meets, which is very contrastive and characterized by stereotypes and one-sided role allocations. The following analysis of Regula Renschler's texts enables students to draw a comparison to their own observations and evaluations and should trigger assumptions concerning the social context in which such a fundamental criticism was deemed necessary. It is important to point out that Renschler's text in parts, but not entirely, refers to the previously analyzed extracts from the comic books. The excerpt from Patricia Purtschert's article refers to Renschler's Globi-criticism, reflects and differentiates it and indicates weak points and soft spots via a discourse-analytic approach. This step is thought to show students that criticism and debate are dynamic processes and therefore never ultimately resolved, but rather subject to development, continually or in spurts. The interview with the author and performer of "Kasperli" [a very popular Swiss series of audio plays], Jörg Schneider, serves as an inspiration for a concluding reflection on the reciprocal relationship between racism and political correctness in our society: Common, "obviously" racist terms and allocations are no longer utterable in the public mainstream, but precisely this taboo leads to a reaction in the form of criticism of the perceived omnipotence of political correctness, an omnipotence that – according to the critics – might have consequences as harmful as those of racist thinking.

Tasks

1. (Sources 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3)
 - a) Study carefully the depiction of the characters in the comic extracts and make assumptions as to which emotions the faces are supposed to express graphically.
 - b) Which characteristics are assigned to the people from foreign cultures?
 - c) Which values and character traits – also taking the further source texts into account – does Globi represent?
2.
 - a) Sum up the crucial points of Regula Renschler's argument (source 2.1) in your own words.
 - b) Compare your analysis with the collection of guidelines for the production of non-racist children's books (source 2.2) which is found in the same publication.
 - c) From a) and b), draw conclusions concerning the contemporary context in which the book was published.
 - d) Interpret the debate over Renschler's text (source 2.3), which originated in 2012, three decades after its original publication.
3.
 - a) Analyse the attitudes of the radio moderator and Jörg Schneider towards the racism-accusations against the "Kasperli" audio plays and the connection between racism, political correctness and violence (source 3).
 - b) Give your own personal view on the matter.
 - c) Form assumptions about how to deal with occurrences of racism in children's and youth literature which was written in the past but is still widely read.

Expected Student Answers

1. First picture: Globi is painting; he is the agent who objectifies people from other cultures. These people are obviously willing to make themselves available for this. All of the painted figures – this is also valid for the next picture and the concluding series of pictures – have in common a stereotyped portrayal. The joyful cowboy and the two Inuit, who seem to show some affection for Globi, are depicted positively. The African seems likeable, but also somewhat naïve and simple-minded, whereas the indigenous American looks grim. The Asian, finally, is the embodiment of mysterious exoticism. It is striking that in the second picture, the African human and the monkey are depicted coequally, with Globi leading both of them by the hand. The ape seems livelier and more active than the dull-looking child. In the comic strip Globi ultimately embodies an openly expressed cultural arrogance of the Western world, which is paired here with the selfless, hard-working and pragmatic Swiss helper mentality.
2. According to Renschler several Globi books show a clearly racist depiction and additionally a culturally arrogant signature relating to non-European peoples. This result is described in detail and in an accusing manner. Renschler appears more moderate in the bottom part by stating that under certain circumstances these books can be read by children without having a long-term negative effect; furthermore it would be counterproductive to ban Globi books. However, this argumentation is ultimately abandoned in the latter part of the book she co-edited: A detailed list containing guidelines for the publication of children's books, a list which brings censorship to mind, is supposed to assure that the message of the volume is not only understood, but will also be implemented in the future. Simultaneously it becomes apparent how concerned the authors are about their results and how necessary they deem it that such contents, to date obviously unquestioned by society, are no longer inoffensively passed on to children through books. Purtschert's text prizes the core meaning of Renschler's statement, reveals however, that she, too – without noticing it – is linguistically trapped in a colonial semantic: By defending the "Indians" and protecting them from Globi's arrogance, she victimizes and therefore degrades them.
3. The radio show host and Jörg Schneider both (the latter only hesitant at first, later effectively incited by the former to reveal his inner feelings) represent the view that the "Kasperli" audio play, created in the 1970s, shows a neutral handling of terms like "Negro" which was characteristic for the time and which was not connected to racist mindsets. External pressure, represented by people whose way of life is strange to Schneider and makes him falter, leads to the audio play being changed reluctantly but with demonstrative generosity. Both men however consider this forced process an expression of political correctness' rampant dictatorship. The roles of victim and perpetrator are interchanged therein: It is not the people targeted by racist prejudice who are the victims, but those who are no longer allowed to articulate it. According to very low level argumentative logic, seemingly backed with normative credibility through a reference to writer Martin Walser, this finding must lead to the conclusion that it is better to use racist terms rather than stifle them and later let them eruptively break out in the form of physical violence. A debate on the pros and cons of a change in children's books offers an opportunity to discuss the question of how to deal with racist reminiscences in them: Are they generally to be changed or should they be retained as contemporary documentation to offer opportunity for problematization and sensitization?

Design of the Learning Process

Steps/ Phases/ Methods	Factual aspects	Learning aims/ Competences	Commentary/ Explanation
Introduction and activation: First approximation to the topic	Racist and culturally arrogant depictions in Swiss youth literature using the example of Globi	To recognize characteristics of common racism by means of material from our everyday- and historical culture; this aim can be classified as a part of political education.	The Globi books as a shared “lieux de memoire”; encounter and enquiry in the group Task 1
Elaboration phase 1	Early racism-criticism by Regula Renschler, which sought to raise awareness and effect change; discourse analytical classification and reflection on Renschler’s depiction	To comprehend several steps of development of dealing with racism theoretically and publicly and to locate these in a (post)colonial context	Individual, focused examination of the texts Task 2
Elaboration phase 2 and evaluation	Racism, political correctness and violence in today’s society on the basis of an audio play which was changed due to social pressure	To recognize the change from common, “obvious” racism with colonial characteristics to new forms of racist stereotyping; to comprehend how the early antiracist criticism of the 1970s itself became a reason for a change in racist stereotyping; to be able to render a well-founded judgement of how old and new forms of racist imagery should be dealt with	Option: Dividing the discussion in two stages, and having the students moderate it in the first part Task 3