From metaphor to allegory

The Japanese manga *Afuganisu-tan*

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Afuganisu-tan is an online manga by Timaking, published in English online in 2005, that presents selected historical events of modern Afghanistan in a series of 29 episodes plus an appendix. An episode consists of a four-panel micro-narrative in which Afghanistan and the countries with which its history is intertwined are consistently personified as young girls. Each manga episode is accompanied by a short, textual 'memo' describing historical events in a neutral, factual way. In this paper, we (1) propose that the extended personification of Afghanistan and other countries in this manga can be understood in terms of 'allegory'; (2) sketch and evaluate how the manga part affects the construal of the country's history; (3) consider some of the consequences of combining the manga part with memo text for the informative and educational value of *Afuganisu-tan*.

Keywords: manga, word & image relations, personification, extended metaphor, allegory, narrativization of history

1. Introduction

Manga, Japanese comics, are hugely popular in their native country, where they are read by people of all ages. They have always been much more part of mainstream culture than comics have been in the Western world, and constitute a substantial part of the publishing industry in Japan (Choo, 2008, p. 277). Manga are increasingly enjoyed outside Japan as well. They comprise many different genres, ranging from science fiction to comedy, from historical drama to pornography. A major subdivision in manga pertains to whether they are aimed at boys (*shōnen* manga) or at girls (*shōjo* manga), the latter portraying protagonists in a cute manner, and often with a focus on romantic relationships and emotions. Typical of manga is the so-called 'super-deformed' technique, in which characters are depicted in a highly

stylized, simplified form, such as being depicted with "big eyes, big hair, small mouths, and pointed chins" (Cohn, 2013, p. 154). Other aspects of the super-de-formed technique are a hyperbolic rendering of emotions. For instance, mouths of angry characters temporarily transform into big squares or rectangles, eyes lose their pupils or turn into slits, and foreheads are heavily shaded to suggest frowns. Lines surrounding characters suggest emotional explosions (see also Cohn, 2010; Abbott & Forceville, 2011).

Afuganisu-tan[1] (あふがにすタン) is a manga by Timaking presenting se-lected historical events of modern Afghanistan in a series of 29 episodes plus an appendix. First published as a Japanese webcomic online, it subsequently appeared as a single-volume manga published between 2003 and 2005 by Sansai Books. The original Japanese version was translated into English by fans (https://sites.google.com/site/rubbersoul1967/afghan-tan); it is this version that is analysed in this paper.

Little transpires about *Afuganisu-tan*'s background and genesis. The "Wikipedia" entry states that

> as it makes it easy for readers to learn about the history and geography of Central Asia, topics which Japanese people are not very familiar with, it could be thought of as an educational text. Around the time when the book was published by Sansai Books, again, part of the intention was to provide information about the current state of Afghanistan.
>
> (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afghanis-tan, last accessed 6 January 2017)

Afuganisu-tan was written as a yonkoma, in which an episode consists of a four-panel manga strip that allows for the development of brief stories: the first panel sets the scene, the second and third develop the adventure, and the fourth brings it to a conclusion. In *Afuganisu-tan* each yonkoma is accompanied by a 'memo' that relates historical facts which are presumably to be read in conjunction with the manga. The style of the language in the memos is that of a history textbook: it is descriptive, mentioning facts and figures, and aims for objectivity. Emotional and evaluative expressions are avoided.

All protagonists in the manga are young girls (in *shōjo* style), all personifying countries. Each protagonist has various characteristics supposedly typical of the cultural and historical aspects of the country represented. In this paper, we intend to do the following: (1) propose that the extended personification of Afghanistan and other countries can be understood in terms of allegory, thereby contributing

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1. To avoid confusion, the name of the main character will be spelled Afuganisu-tan (as in the book, following Japanese spelling); when the title of manga is at stake, we will use the itali-cized form *Afuganisu-tan*. When what matters is the country itself, we adopt the conventional Western spelling, Afghanistan.

to a cognitivist approach to tropes (see Forceville, 2011, for more discussion); (2) sketch and evaluate how the manga part affects the construal of the country's history; (3) consider some of the consequences of combining the manga proper with memo text for the informative and educational value of *Afuganisu-tan*.

2. *Afuganisu-tan*: Layout and style

The manga 'album' as presented online consists of a one-page introduction of various characters, all of them countries personified as young girls, beginning with Afuganisu-tan. The introduction consists of a coloured picture of each character, her name, her birthday (i.e., date of national celebration), and a brief verbal description of her character (see Figure 1). The other major characters verbo-visually introduced in this way are Meriken (America), Pakisu-tan (Pakistan), Kyrgyz-tan (Kyrgyzstan), Tajikis-tan (Tajikistan), Turkmenis-tan (Turkmenistan), and Uzbekis-tan (Uzbekistan).

> **Afuganisu-tan**
>
> Birthday: August 19th
>
> She gets picked on alot, and has bad luck.
> She trips and falls alot.
> Perhaps due to being short, she tends to drag things when she carries them.

Figure 1. Fragment of introductory page *Afuganisu-tan*. The country Afghanistan is personified as Afuganisu-tan. She is recognizable by her clothing and the invariably present band-aid on her head. © Timaking.

The introductory page is followed by 29 four-panel episodes. In an episode the following elements can be distinguished, some of them optional (see Figure 2):

(1) Four black-and white panels, to be read from top to bottom.
(2) Panel-internal texts emanating from a non-diegetic, external narrator, i.e., a narrator describing but not participating in story events (see Bal, 2009, p. 21).
(3) Panel-internal texts (like the visuals themselves: to be read from right to left) that emanate from the characters, in text balloons.
(4) The abbreviation "SFX" next to a panel glosses the Japanese 'sound effects.'

(5) In episode 1 alone, the external narrator also provides two side-notes outside the panels.

(6) *Afuganisu-tan* and its Japanese original title (in red), and the number of the episode (in black).

(7) A heading, a repetition of the number of the episode, and its title (all white letters against a blue background).

(8) The contents of the memo, ranging from 46 to 122 words. In this paper, we will take these contents for granted, without committing ourselves to their correctness or adopting an evaluative stance towards them.[2]

3.   Personification in *Afuganisu-tan*

We will begin by exploring some pertinent consequences of the decision to personify countries as young girls in *Afuganisu-tan*. The recurrent personification, triggered by the fact that the girls bear the name of the country they personify (see Figure 1), can be phrased in the terminology of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) as COUNTRY IS YOUNG GIRL. To be sure, different verbalizations of this metaphor are possible, such as COUNTRY IS LIVING SPECIES, COUNTRY IS FEMALE HUMAN BEING, or COUNTRY IS CHILD. Each of these verbalizations makes salient different aspects of the source domain. It is to be noted that the stable target domain COUNTRY is not only cued by a name (e.g., Afuganisu-tan, Pakisu-tan, Meriken), but also by aspects of supposedly typical clothing in each country. Both names and clothing thus help distinguish the girls (and thus the countries) from each other. Yet other characteristics of the various countries are suggested by their age and size (in Figure 2 the girls personifying Britain and Russia are taller and older than Afuganisu-tan, cueing the conceptual metaphor POWERFULNESS IS SIZE, a variant of IMPORTANCE IS SIZE: see Ortiz, 2011, 2015). The COUNTRY IS FEMALE HUMAN BEING verbalization of the metaphor may encourage the viewer to activate the related metaphor NATION IS MOTHER (captured in the English word *motherland*), since the mother is a figure of protection and care, a nurturing entity. Such a version of the personification would not be innocent, given that within a military context, the nation is sometimes considered to be a female body for which the bodies of individuals can be sacrificed (Elshtain, 1991). Interestingly, the mapping of 'sexual aggression' or 'sexual objectification' does not seem pertinent, given that all protagonists are innocent *girls* (and any violators, as we will see, are *cats*).

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2. The source material used to conduct this analysis is a scanlated translation to English made by volunteers, since no legal version is available in Europe. This explains why some texts contain mistakes.

Figure 2. *Afuganisu-tan*, episode 1. 1a–1d: four black-and-white panels; 2: within-panel comments by external narrator; 4: explanation of Japanese SFX (special effects); 5: outside-panel comments by external narrator; 6: title in Japanese and English (in red) and episode + number; 7: "Afghan Memo Ep. X" + title of episode (white letters against blue background); 8. Verbal contents of memo. No direct speech (3) by characters appears in this episode, unless "Afu!" in the fourth panel is counted as such. © Timaking.

The perspective of neighbouring countries as sisters is a noteworthy one. For example, Pakisu-tan is sad because she is separated from Kashmir, her younger sister. The emphasis on inimical/bonding relationships and contested ownership of territories on the level of international relationships between countries is plausibly structured on the girlfriend/sister relationship domain in terms of jealousy, rivalry and friendship. For example, Uzbekis-tan is in awe when facing Roshian-nee sama (literally 'big sister Russia') and thereby neglects Afuganisu-tan. According to the same cognitive mappings, the manga suggests a parallel between physical distance and emotional/political distance. Afghanistan and Pakistan share the longest border and are thus, unsurprisingly, often depicted together as characters in the manga. Kyrgyz-tan, Uzbekis-tan and Tajikis-tan, personifying three neighbour nations, work as a team.

4.   From personification to allegory

According to Ricoeur, personification is "turning an inanimate, non-sentient, abstract, or ideal entity into a living and feeling being, into a person" (Ricoeur, 1978, p. 59). Personification is one of the most pervasive varieties of metaphor. There is a good reason for this, as personifications "allow us to make sense of phenomena in the world in human terms – terms that we can understand on the basis of our own motivations, goals, actions, and characteristics" (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 34). A similar point is made by Delbaere et al, who explain that personification "taps into the deeply embedded human cognitive bias referred to as anthropomorphism – the tendency to attribute human qualities to things" (2011, p. 121). Studying the phenomenon in its visual manifestation in the genre of advertising, they conclude that "when consumers engage in anthropomorphism, they process the ad that triggered this response more easily. […] The pleasure and ease associated with fluency then lends a positive cast to the emotional responses and brand personality attributions that follow from anthropomorphism" (p. 123). Political cartoons, too, often draw on personification to make complex issues more easily comprehensible, and evoke emotions and attitudes toward them (Bounegru & Forceville, 2011, p. 221). Hence the choice to make use of personification is undoubtedly a strategic one; the intention is to attract the attention of, and appeal to, the reader, enhancing understanding, interest and empathy. Presumably, the artistic choice of the author to represent countries as young girls in *Afuganisu-tan* was governed by the desire to make a history lesson that would, in purely verbal, academic form have been a fairly dry affair more easily and pleasurably accessible.

The sustained personification of COUNTRIES AS YOUNG GIRLS in turn activates an entire network of features in the source domain that invite systematic mapping

onto the target. It is worth emphasizing here that the conventional A IS B format for labelling metaphors should not blind us to their dynamic nature (better captured in the phrasing A-ING IS B-ING, Forceville, 2016, p. 19; see also Cameron et al., 2009). What is crucial, after all, is the actions and behaviours of agents in the source domain that are to be mapped onto the target domain. In fact, these mappings are so consistent and pervasive that, we claim, the manga part of *Afuganisu-tan* constitutes a full-blown 'allegory.'[3] Before exploring the implications of understanding the manga in this way, we first need to take a closer look at this trope. Beckson and Ganz define allegory as "an extended narrative that carries a second meaning along with the surface story. The continuity of the second meaning involves an analogous structure of ideas or events (frequently historical or political)" (1975, p. 8). Wales characterises it as "a narrative […] which has a level of meaning other than the superficial one, whether political, historical, ethical, religious, etc. […] It can be seen to be a kind of extended metaphor" (2001, p. 14). Peter Crisp has devoted a number of papers to allegory, which he postulates as being distinct from extended metaphor. As an example of the latter, Crisp discusses William Blake's "A poison tree," arguing that its first two stanzas feature words from the EMOTION as well as the PLANT domains ("I was angry with my foe:/I told it not, my wrath did grow./And I water'd it in fears,/Night and morning with my tears"), giving rise to the extended metaphor EMOTIONS ARE PLANTS (Crisp, 2008, pp. 298–303). But whereas an extended metaphor uses words from *both* the source domain and the target domain, in allegory "the references are *solely* to the source domain" (Crisp, 2005, p. 326, emphasis added). As a result, in allegory "a fictional world is created that exists ultimately only for the sake of its function as a metaphorical source domain" (Crisp, 2005, p. 333).[4] Characters' names are often highly significant in allegorical texts – think of Christian, Evangelist, Obstinate, and Pliable in John Bunyan's "The Pilgrim's Progress" (1678), and Napoleon and Moses in George Orwell's "Animal Farm" (1945). Importantly, although such telling names actually refer to the target, not the source, domain, Crisp insists that this feature does not detract from the allegorical character of a text (Crisp, 2005, p. 292) – indeed the names are usually essential hints that a text should be read allegorically in the first place.

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3. At the RaAM 2016 conference in Berlin, Iju Hsu, National Taiwan University, pointed out that the manga *Axis Powers/Hetalia* by Himarayu Hidekazu draws on the same allegory.

4. In the latter part of the poem, Crisp argues, the text exclusively focuses on the PLANT domain, thereby shifting from an extended metaphor to an allegory.

5.   *Afuganisu-tan* as allegory: implications

In this section, we elaborate on the consequences of understanding *Afuganisu-tan* not just as drawing on sustained personification, but as a full-blown allegory. This involves the activation of a number of metaphors that are consonant with the central COUNTRIES ARE YOUNG GIRLS personification. Here are some of these metaphors:

(1) COUNTRIES ARE (POTENTIAL) FRIENDS/ENEMIES. The intricate relationships — both friendly and hostile, stable and changing, heavily fraught with emotions — among young girls encourages mappings from source to target. In episode 8, Pakisu-tan tries to be friends with Afuganisu-tan but, hoping to simulate a coincidental meeting, suddenly appears from around a corner and unfortunately crashes into Afuganisu-tan.

(2) WORLD IS PLAYGROUND. Since children like playing with each other out of doors, it is natural to map features from the realm of play onto regional and global politics. The main feature projected is the idea of a limited space with territorial rights and duties. The WORLD is where the conflicts and the games happen and the countries collide. In Episode 20, for instance, Afuganisu-tan and Pakisu-tan are playing a rough game, and Afuganisu-tan inadvertently hurts Tajikisu-tan, who is passing by.

(3) LAND IS HOUSE/HOME. Young girls typically live at home, and the metaphor thus triggers understanding a country as a home. This also activates conventions of privacy, hospitality and safety pertaining to the home (see Forceville, 2013). In Episode 13, the house of Afuganisu-tan is ablaze to signify internal conflicts and civil war. In Episode 14, she seeks refuge in Pakisu-tan's house.

(4) POLITICS IS A GAME. In this metaphor various features such as rules and opposing teams, as well as gains and losses, invite mapping from source to target. In Episode 21, the setting is introduced as "Today, they are all going to play together," and the opposition between the characters results in two teams. This perspective echoes a widely used metaphor, especially when it comes to media coverage: the framing of politics as a strategic game.

(5) TERRORISTS ARE STRAY CATS. The presence of (stray) cats is plausible, or at least acceptable, in the scenario of young girls, and Timaking has chosen stray cats as a source domain of which features are to be mapped onto terrorists. This metaphor proves to be efficient in many ways since the features projected are obvious and telling: stray cats are wild and hard to tame, and popular belief has them cruel but also manipulative.

Undoubtedly, the allegorical nature of *Afuganisu-tan* — triggered first and foremost by the names of the characters — makes for an accessible and attractive

way of presenting the recent history of Afghanistan. Drawing on the scenarios (Musolff, 2006) of young girls' relations, friendships and conflicts, a series of mini-narratives is created that is easily grasped as well as being emotionally appealing. As a consequence, complex problems have been made fairly easily intelligible. Moreover, the behaviour of the girls appears to be metaphorically consistent with the relations between the countries they personify. However, the choice for an allegorical version of historiography also comes with serious problems. We will now turn to some of these.

The age and gender of the protagonists

All the human protagonists are schoolgirls with features suggesting an age of youth and innocence. While this choice was probably motivated by the existence of the popular *shōjo* type of Japanese manga specifically about, and aimed at, young girls in this age group, an inevitable consequence of this is that the interpretation of history throughout this manga is led by the implication that political actions are reducible to accidents and typically girlish happenings and conflicts, the world being their playground. Significantly, the manga does not emphasize the idea of winners and losers, thereby downplaying the harsh target domain realities of international relationships and wars. For instance, a whole arc of Afuganisu-tan's development is her being depicted as an *ingénue*. Throughout the many episodes, she is clumsy and victimized, and repeatedly harassed by other girls. In episodes 2–4, Pakisu-tan bullies Afuganisu-tan, but the narrative implies this happens only because Pakisu-tan is shy and socially inadequate: in essence, she means well. Afuganisu-tan is a figure of persecuted femininity needing care and protection. In fact, none of the protagonists shows salient prototypical masculine characteristics. This is highly revealing, considering that nations and their political decisions tend stereotypically to be associated with masculine features (partly because of the predominance of male politicians). In the manga, when it comes to conflicts and war, the actual conflicts are headed by masculine surrogates such as Tayariban and Masu-sama, the heroic incarnations of the Taliban and the Mujahedeen. Tellingly, in Episodes 19 and 21, the girls are *impersonating* men; they need a masculine surrogate to be empowered and indulge in violence. Those heroic figures are thus presented as distinct from the *feminine* political body, and the girls are gasping and blushing in admiring postures, a behaviour that once again is connoted as feminine. In this respect, that is, the need to preserve the credibility of the characters on the source domain level awkwardly reinforces gender stereotypes: women play and men fight. Incidentally, this masculine enactment by women may echo Afhanistan's tradition of "Basha Posh" (Dari for a girl "dressed like a boy," Nordberg, 2014). In highly patriarchal cultures, having only daughters is perceived as a shame and an

inconvenience to the family. When this happens, the parents often choose to have one of their daughters dressed as a boy until the age of puberty and marriage. Boys are socially better accepted: they can work when women cannot and have liberties such as walking alone, expressing an opinion, and carrying a weapon (we thank Anna Szlavi for alerting us to this).

Terrorists as stray cats

Something similar holds for the metaphorical mappings from the stray cat to the terrorist domain. In a series of episodes, the memos relate the invasion of Afghanistan by Al-Qaida and Bin Laden. Al-Qaida is represented by stray cats who invade the house of Afuganisu-tan: their leader is a white cat with a turban who steals the sword of Afuganisu-tan, thereby taking over her fighting power. In episode 23 the white Bin Laden cat hurts and angers Meriken by scratching her – but the fierceness of her reaction seems disproportionate. The accompanying memo text makes clear that we here see an allegorical version of 9/11. Again, the image of a cat-scratching-Meriken trivializes the destruction of the Twin Towers at Bin Laden's behest. The mini-narrative appears more critical of the United States than of the terrorists, while it also negates any complex reasoning that might be attributed to the terrorist organization. Indeed, the metaphor suggests that the cats, being animals (and therefore not, like the girls, personifying a country), do not have a human's intelligence and conscience, which might seem to exonerate their culpability.

Politics as a game

This metaphor has both its attractions and its dangers, as the political scientists Aalberg, Strömbäck, and de Vreese, discussing its popularity in media coverage of political events, point out: "this particular framing of politics […] has a negative effect on citizens' knowledge acquisitions, although there are also studies suggesting that this type of framing may boost public interest in politics" (Aalberg et al., 2011, p. 163). Its use in an educational manga such as *Afuganisu-tan* suggests the same combination of benefits and problems. Traditional educational texts are often considered rather boring because they usually focus on descriptive and factual details, while *Afuganisu-tan* makes history come alive by dramatizing it. But this comes at a price: the POLITICS IS GAME metaphor results in superficiality and simplification. It furthermore introduces a dramatic dimension to fit the need for narration. This representation again presents reality as more appealing by toning down its harsh dimensions. Even if background information is delivered (here via the written memos), the oversimplification of matters may have

consequences for what viewers absorb and remember. Aalberg, Strömbäck, and de Vreese observe that

> strategic news frames predispose the audience to attend to and recall strategic rather than substantive information. Even if some substantive information is offered, people are purportedly less likely to absorb it […]. This happens because strategic game frames distract readers from the substance of the story. In other words, it is argued that strategic game frames have negative implications for democracy as they depress and reduce a politically informed citizenry.   (p. 165)

In short, the game frame, Aalberg et al. claim, induces voters to disengage with the mediated content because their attention is drawn to its entertaining form.

Lack of specificity of the allegorical form

While we might think that interpreting an allegory is simply a matter of systematically 'translating' the given source text into the absent target text, Crisp warns that "those who have believed that allegorical meanings are fixed and definite have mistaken the specification of such starting points for the whole process of realizing a metaphorical mapping" (2005, pp. 332–333). For one thing, an element that is not present in the allegorical source by definition does not enable a mapping onto the target. In Episode 5, for example, the importance of illicit opium crops for the Afghan economy in the course of the 1990s, replacing the cultivation of indigenous carrots, is only mentioned in the memo text, and has no counterpart in the manga, which only states and shows that "Afuganisu-tan is making her living by farming. Working is truly hard." For another, lack of specificity may result in ambiguity pertaining to what element in the source maps onto what element in the target. An example of such ambiguity occurs in "The Pilgrim's Progress." Crisp notes that

> if Christian maps onto the set of all Christians, and Faithful onto some sub-set of Christians, then Faithful should form a part of Christian. But he does not. He is a quite separate person. Christian must therefore map onto another sub-set of Christians, one not intersecting with that which Faithful maps onto.

> (2012, p. 338)

Although invoking a broader context helps resolve this ambiguity, it nonetheless reveals where the allegorical mapping locally becomes awkward. An example of this situation in *Afuganisu-tan* occurs in Episode 14, where the manga tells us that "While her house was being fixed, Afuganisu-tan went to stay at Pakisu-tan's house." The memo text mentions 200,000 Afghan refugees fleeing to Pakistan. Here, too, the allegory breaks down, since while in the manga we see Afuganisu-tan

taking her temporary lodgings with Pakanisu-tan, in fact, of course, only *part* of the Afghan population sought refuge in its neighbour country. In addition, the "significant economic and civil problems" this caused as mentioned in the memo text are belittled by the manga scene depicting the girls in the fourth panel as peacefully embracing in their sleep.

6.   Interactions between manga and memo

Hitherto we have mainly focused on the manga part of *Afuganisu-tan*, drawing on its 'memo' part only in passing. The juxtaposed presentation of the two suggests they form a unity, together making up *Afuganisu-tan*, but this is not always unproblematic. Therefore we will in this section make a few observations on their possible interactions. To begin with, we might postulate that 'manga' and 'memo' should be read as completely separate strands, with the manga as a narrative allegory of Afghanistan, and the memo as a supposedly accurate description of the country's recent history. But since clicking on an episode yields the manga and memo together, the viewer/reader expects them to be correlated. The nature of this correlation, however, varies per episode. In episode 1 (Figure 2), it seems clear that the first panel illustrates the 'tug of war' between Russia and England mentioned in the memo, while the memo text's mention of Afghanistan's desire for independence is illustrated by Afuganisu-tan carrying a Kalashnikov (incidentally: a very rare specimen of an object belonging in the *target* domain of the allegory). In some episodes, however, whereas establishing connections between manga and memo seems inevitable, their exact nature remains puzzling. The memo in Episode 6, "Glitzy," focuses on the fact that in Pakistan it is customary to elaborately decorate buses and trucks, sometimes costing as much as $10,000 a year, for the benefit of tourists. The manga shows Pakisu-tan as having a "richly decorated" tricycle with which she hopes to impress Afuganisu-tan. She pedals fast behind Afuganisu-tan, but "couldn't catch up." The link between the glitzy vehicles in memo and manga seems inescapable, but what is the precise point here? The memo itself does not refer in any way to the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Should we take the manga, then, as allegorically hinting that Pakistan is trying to make Afghanistan jealous of its riches, but that Afghanistan is unimpressed? Doesn't care? Isn't even aware of Pakistan's riches? We can only speculate. A similar problem arises in the next episode, number 7 ("Carrots"), where the memo informs the reader that carrots hail from Afghanistan. The manga shows Afuganisu-tan working the land and shooing away crows that try to steal the carrots. This stealing is narratively significant, but there is nothing in the memo that corresponds to it. The concept of 'carrots' is the only linking factor between manga and memo.

A third example of a somewhat mystifying manga-memo relationship occurs in episode 8 ("The Kashmir problem"). As mentioned above, the manga shows Pakisu-tan trying to befriend Afuganisu-tan, but coincidentally running her over. The memo refers to Pakistan-Indian conflicts about Kashmir, which borders on Afghanistan – so it is odd that no personification of India appears in this episode of the manga. Surely, the clash should have been between Pakisu-tan and a personification of India, perhaps Afganisu-tan being crushed between them.

The relations between the images in the manga part (accompanied by various types of language, such as spoken utterances and the comments of an external narrator) and the purely verbal information in the memo are thus problematic. The memos provide presumably factual information, but if we read them partly to make sense of the manga, we are often bound to be puzzled by how we are to relate them. We can moreover suspect that at least a part of the readership accessing *Afuganisu-tan* online will not be that interested in political history to begin with, and only read/view the manga track. These readers/viewers are then bound to get a highly skewed view of Afghanistan's recent history. The problem of how to make sense of *Afuganisu-tan* is thus further complicated by the circumstance that we do not know very well what the precise intentions of its author are. Each communicator tries to be optimally relevant to his/her audience, and relevance is always relevance to an individual (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 142), but in the case of mass-communication this is complicated by the fact that the audience consists of numerous individuals, each of whom achieves relevance in the context of his/her own sum total of knowledge, beliefs and attitudes (Forceville, 2014). Here we may wonder at which audience Timaking did direct *Afuganisu-tan*. The original was in Japanese, and thus presumably intended for a Japanese audience; the version we examine here was translated into English and thus presumably aimed at an audience of Westerners interested in manga. This latter audience, to be sure, might recruit different assumptions and expectations than the original, Asian audience.

7. Conclusion

Afuganisu-tan is an original and innovative discourse that attempts to cross genres, in order to build a manga that appears to aim at educating its readers about the recent history of Afghanistan in an entertaining way. In this paper, we have argued that the manga part deserves to be called an allegory: a source domain – here that of young girls and their relationships – is consistently mined to build up a target domain – here that of Afghanistan and its recent historical and political relationships with other countries in the region. As is typical for allegory, the source domain is ultimately merely an excuse for this building up of the target domain. That

being said, to the extent that the network of relationships in the source domain fits its counterpart in the target domain, the allegory has some historiographical value. The asset of the manga is that it manages to present complex issues in an attractive, emotionally appealing manner. This very same characteristic, however, also makes it controversial as an educational or pedagogical tool. The allegory, after all, is a narrative, which means that it needs to conform to expectations of character recognizability and continuity, as well as draw on story motors such as curiosity, surprise, and suspense (Sternberg, 1978). This inevitably results in huge simplifications and distortions of the allegory's target domain. In *Afuganisu-tan* the choice of source domain results in an emphasis on characters' emotions and their *empathetic abilities at the expense of factual information, and thereby inevitably* trivializes the target domain.

We have furthermore argued that while the memo text in each episode provides useful information about Afghanistan's history that could be seen to complement the manga, the relation between manga and memo is not stable and sometimes confusing. This probably also has to do with the fact that manga and memo belong to different text types: the manga is narrative, while the memo is descriptive. While descriptions can support narratives (Chatman, 1990, Chapter 1), in this case, it is often unclear exactly which correlations readers/viewers are supposed to establish between the two text types. This issue is further complicated by the fact that it is not clear who is the target audience of *Afuganisu-tan*, not least because it was published online, open to whoever might be interested. The manga part of *Afuganisu-tan* is thus evoking a political context without sufficiently referring to political realities. The allegorical manga may thus be seen as reducing international politics to a form of entertainment (Dörner, 2001; see also Mahrt, 2011).

In fact, the use of *Afuganisu-tan* as an educational tool reveals a broader dilemma. Clearly, we should not be blind to how dramatization and entertainment can enhance educational texts. Hayden White, discussing the issue of historical realism within fictionalization, uses the example of Holocaust writing and literature, and argues that "art can complement, rather than undermine, science" (2014, p. 18): art, going beyond mere aestheticism, can bestow a certain quality on the representation of events through the "reflexivity, intertextuality, the self-consciously [sic] anti-narrativity of the discourse, the dramatism, the display of a complex cultural code, the resistance to any kind of bathos" (pp. 31–32). According to White, the effect of those specific artistic aspects is a testimony to the legitimacy of the representation of history. However, the choice of treatment of *Afuganisu-tan* strongly resorts precisely to the kinds of excess he denounces; and we thus have to conclude that here informative value is too much sacrificed to entertainment value to serve any serious educational goals.

Acknowledgements

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Charles Forceville an expert on visual and multimodal metaphor in various genres and media, Charles Forceville has over the past years regularly written on comics. The question how visuals, alone or in combination with written language, can convey meaning has been a key source of research throughout his publications. Committed to cognitive, socio-biological, and relevance-theoretical approaches, he works on multimodality in metaphor, argumentation, and narrative discourse. With Assimakis Tseronis Forceville has edited a volume on multimodal argumentation for Benjamins (forthc. 2017), and working on a monograph applying Relevance Theory to mass-communication involving pictures. For more information, see his Researchgate.com or Academia.edu profiles.