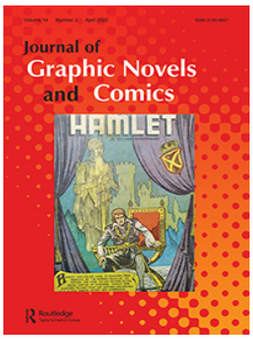

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Semi-naked revolutionary: native Americans, colourblind anti-racism and the Pillaging of Latin America in *Tumac*

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ABSTRACT

The eponymous protagonist of *Tumac*, a comic book published monthly in Sweden between 1978 and 1980, is a young indigenous boy who in contemporary times becomes emperor of a hidden Inca empire. After attempting to create a society where all social hierarchies have ceased to exist, Tumac leaves this hidden location in the jungle to help bring about a revolution in Latin America. This essay argues that *Tumac* is a prime example of what can be classified in broad terms as a wave of international solidarity in Sweden infused with New Left politics. During this period, colourblindness was elevated to a governing norm and antiracist vision, symbolised here by an indigenous hero fighting for social justice in a part of the world that increasingly took centre stage in the national political debate. In short, *Tumac* is a leading example of how Sweden wanted to be seen and saw others.

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The inaugural issue of *Tumac*, a comic book published monthly in Sweden between 1978 and 1980,[1] – written by the Swede Mats Larsson under his pseudonym 'Manila' and with the Spaniard Jesús Blasco as lead artist[2] – opens with a greeting, a lofty promise, and an itinerary: 'Hello reader! Now you are going on an adventure. A different, fascinating adventure. You are going with us to South America.'[3] Although it is set in a dense jungle environment, there are few things beyond the milieu of *Tumac* to align it with the genre of 'jungle comics', a genre that was especially popular during the years roughly preceding and following World War II (Aman 2018a; Savage 1990). Similar to colonial fiction, the jungle has served as a prominent stage décor for European exploration, due to its unfamiliarity, dangers (savage beasts, ferocious animals, starving cannibals), and difficult terrain. Several jungle comics – for example, *Jungle Jim, Tarzan*, and *The Phantom* – each championed the idea of a white man imposing order by taming a landscape as wild as its environment and creatures (Aman 2018b; Savage 1990). By extension, such adventures provided a 'justification for Western colonial domination and white supremacy enforced through violence' (Wright 2003, 36–37).

In *Tumac*, however, the main protagonist is not a white male who single-handedly embodies righteous law and order in a chaotic environment unprotected by the restraining constructs of advanced civilisation and modernity. And, unlike the contemporary and commercially successful album series *Johan Vilde* in Sweden, it is not another

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example demonstrating the popularity of the captivity genre, in which a non-indigenous person ends up living in an indigenous community (Aman 2016). Such a character, in a textbook example of sidestepping all the complexities of intercultural contact, picks up the language, grows accustomed to the local customs, and learns the rituals (e.g. Aman 2022), eventually becoming, to paraphrase Jacquelyn Kilpatrick (1999), a better Indian than the Indians themselves. This trope, familiar from James Fenimore Cooper's 2010 *The Last of the Mohicans*, also extends itself to comics. Renowned examples from American books also published in Sweden include *Tomahawk, White Indian*, and *Scalphunter*, which all share the trope of a white hero pretending to be a native American, having absorbed everything that is seemingly positive about a certain indigenous way of life (e.g. Chireau 2020; Sheyahshe 2008).

Instead, Tumac is an indigenous boy, a descendent of Incas, who grows up among monks and missionaries in a repressive monastery somewhere in the Andean region. As part of narrating the story from the perspective of a native American, great care has been taken to present the indigenous characters in *Tumac* seriously, in a way that is far from common in popular culture. Albeit often limited to representations of indigenous communities in North America, much ink has been spilt on portraits of native Americans in children's fictional literature, stressing that they have reflected and reinforced reductionist stereotypes about indigenous people (e.g. FitzGerald 2014; Hirschfelder, Molin, and Wakim 1999; King 2009). Cornell Pewewardy (2002) asserts that this popular genre perpetuates dehumanising images and anti-Indian racism.

Similar stereotypes are prevalent in the comics industry. In his meticulously researched study of stereotypes surrounding native American characters in comics, Michael A. Sheyahshe (2016) uncovers the ways in which indigenous people have slowly evolved from the despised and faceless enemy to a simple-minded helper. Much like Robinson Crusoe's companion Friday, or the Phantom's sidekick Guran, indigenous characters are predictably and paternalistically reduced to being the junior partner to the white hero. Even in the rare cases when an indigenous character becomes popular enough to warrant their own comic title, Sheyahshe contends, this is always under the guise of their dutiful subservience to the white man. Nevertheless, there are significant exceptions – or at least one, *Tumac*. Given Sheyahshe's primary focus on comics published within the North American market, he is forgiven for not being aware of a Swedish comic from the late 1970s distributed around Scandinavia and a few other European countries (Spain, France, Hungary, and Russia).

The protagonist of *Tumac* does not play second fiddle to a white hero. Quite the opposite. And, although a few of the rival titles published simultaneously in and around Sweden during the 1960s and 1970s – *Apache, Westernserier, Silverpilen* to mention but a few – occasionally include indigenous characters in leading roles, *Tumac* openly distinguishes itself from the competition due to the comic's political framing. Every adventure sees the young indigenous hero fighting against colonial structures and racial injustices in his corner of the world.

For Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1992, 10), a question that needs to be posed in relation to white representations of Others is:

> what interests of whites are being served by these representations? [. . .] Generally, in examining images of 'others', one has first to ask, who are the producers and consumers of these images, and only then to question who are the objects of representations.

The key that unlocks these images, Nederveen Pieterse explains, is what whites have made of Others and why. Where Nederveen Pieterse predominately concerns himself with a history of racist portrayals of non-whites created to legitimise European domination, the images of indigenous people in *Tumac* serve another purpose. What I propose here is that *Tumac* needs to be understood against the ideological climate in which the comic circulated, because the story arc is a prime example of what can be classified in broad terms as a wave of international solidarity in Sweden infused with New Left politics.

As Jan Jämte (2013) describes it, the 1960s and 1970s saw the emergence of antiracist ideas more broadly in Swedish society as part of a national discourse of a Sweden characterised by equality, solidarity, and tolerance. This was repeated with such frequency that democracy and antiracism were transformed into Swedish national brands. Indeed, on the international arena, the country became a leading Western voice for antiracism and a political, economic, and moral supporter of anticolonial movements around the world (Hübinette and Lundström 2014). These factors, Allan Pred (2000, 6) contends, contributed to successfully launching Sweden 'as the world's capital of good intentions and civilised behaviour towards others.'

During this period, colourblindness was elevated to a governing norm and antiracist vision, shaped around the hope that visible bodily differences would have no importance in a future antiracist Sweden (Lundström 2021). Several scholars contend that colourblindess, in combination with the strong repudiation of racial thinking and any form of involvement with colonial enterprises in faraway regions, has become a central feature of Swedish self-understanding (Hübinette and Lundström 2011; Hübinette and Tigervall 2009; Osanami Törngren 2015). All of this is symbolised here by an indigenous hero fighting for social justice in a part of the world that was increasingly taking centre stage in the national political debate. In short, *Tumac* is a leading example of how Sweden wanted to be seen and saw others.

Solidarity with the other

Tumac made its first appearance in the midst of this changed Swedish political landscape, with its increased focus on international solidarity in general and the Global South in particular. As elsewhere in Europe, this radicalisation of the public sphere in Sweden was carried forward by several heterogeneous movements which, despite their internal differences, shared certain fundamental values: socialism as a common frame of reference, solidarity with the so-called Third World, demands for equality between genders and classes, and strengthened democracy (Hobsbawm 2011).

The common denominator of the New Left in a Swedish context, Kjell Östberg (2002) asserts, was international solidarity. This was expressed through support for people in the Third World and progressive liberation movements, in combination with a critique of how imperial forces in the industrialised parts of the world were contributing to the oppression of countries in the Global South that were deemed underdeveloped. This also translated

into foreign policy, at least according to Douglas Brommesson (2007), who contends that Swedish foreign policy during the 1970s was characterised by a Marxist view of morality: the peripheries' dependence on the centre was emphasised and considered in need of disruption; support for liberation movements in the Global South was deemed legitimate; a feeling of solidarity with the oppressed was expressed, and these activities were predominately located in faraway regions. This was not merely rhetoric. Sweden became the world's largest donor of development aid and dispatcher of aid workers to the postcolonial world (Eriksson Baaz 2002), including Latin America (Tornbjer 2008).

An increasing commitment to, and solidarity with, the struggles of the wretched and exploited for fairer living conditions in Europe's former colonies was mirrored in the field of literature. The travelogue became a significant form of expression during the 1950s and 1960s among leftist writers in Sweden, often for the purpose of clarifying and actualising international issues (Salomon 1996). Several researchers explain the sudden success of this literary genre as being partly a consequence of the fact that many of the authors were excellent writers – for example, Sara Lidman, Jan Myrdal and Per Wästberg – but predominantly due to the ever-increasing commitment in Swedish society to Third World independence and the ensuing economic and political challenges posed by decolonisation (Edman 2017; Lönnroth, Delblanc, and Göransson 1990). Equipped with journalistic prose and often Marxist analytical tools, these writers portrayed what they saw, read, and experienced before sharing their words with an interested audience. As in the case of *Tumac*, which combines the trope of jungle adventures with attempts at historical and geographical realism, these works are characterised by the intermixture of footnotes and extensive reference lists, with the literary ambition of establishing a sense of proximity between the implied reader and the subject, with an almost exclusively international scope (Östberg 2002).

Annika Olsson (2002) writes that a characteristic of the travelogue is the author's ambition to give the Other a voice, to allow the poor and disenfranchised to speak. This was achieved by including personal testimonies from people living under repressive conditions. Instead of a narrative in which a western man or woman travels to faraway regions to report home about the people and places they encounter, the Other was allowed to describe in their own words the reality of the society in which they lived. However, other academic commentators have pointed out that providing the Other with a microphone does not exclude the possibility of fictionalised descriptions. Rather, what counts is that the content carries factual elements and mirrors their reality (Thygesen 1971). This also taps into the work of Johan Svedjedal (2014). In his study on the ways in which literature was impacted by the leftist radicalisation of the 1960s and 1970s, he demonstrates that popularised fiction became an effective and frequently employed format at this time, used to spread the political messages that various writers wanted to convey. Although none of the above explicitly mention comics, *Tumac* draws upon events that are recognisable from the world outside the comic and uses them as a foundation for fictional adventures filled with facts and testimonies from people whose lives are impacted by the oppressive systems under which they live.

New Emperor

The influence of travelogues and the creators' quest for a realistic framing in *Tumac* is apparent from the outset. What stands out in the first issue is that the story does not begin by introducing the characters, nor does it jump straight into an actionpacked chain

of events. It does not even contain any panels. Instead, the first few pages comprise an essay in which the reader is informed about the ways in which life in the Andes changed radically with the arrival of Europeans as the Incas had to flee to Machu Picchu, often referred to as 'the lost city of the Incas'. This also provides the historical backdrop to the story itself as Tumac's distant ancestors, the introductory text explains, sought shelter in the dense South American jungle to escape the Spanish *conquistadors*. Once hidden and safe, they made a new life for themselves away from European interference and violence.

This peaceful life, however, would not last long. As an infant, Tumac is captured and taken to a Catholic monastery under the terms of an *encomienda* – a Spanish legal system implemented in the colonies that rewarded the conquerors with the labour of the indigenous people inhabiting a certain region, while being required to protect them and instruct them in the Christian faith (Lindqvist 1973; Parry 1965). Here, he learns to read and write and is educated in Spanish. As the reader enters the story, Tumac and his sick mother are fleeing the monastery in the middle of the night, afraid of either being hit by bullets or mauled by ferocious dogs. They evade these dangers and return to the jungle. From here on, the comic explains, we readers will follow Tumac as he strives to make his kin aware of their heritage and bring them together to fight to regain their status and influence.[4] Above all, he attempts to form an alliance with other indigenous groups, farmworkers, and the urban underclass in order to trigger a revolution to bring about a fairer society.

In addition to providing a personal backstory to Tumac himself, these pages contextualise the situation for many indigenous people on the *encomiendas*. To his grandfather, Tumac recounts a life of imprisonment that demanded hard unpaid labour from their bodies and confessions to a foreign God.[5] In the aftermath of the conquest, serfhood became an essential phenomenon in the colonial economy and characteristic of social life under Spanish rule (Galeano 1997; Parry 1965). Promises of salvation concealed a reality of brutal violence: the crucifix was accompanied by the sword (Azar 2015). Back in the jungle, Tumac, under the educational guidance of his grandfather, pieces together his experiences at the monastery and what he learnt there with his knowledge of the life of indigenous populations before the Spanish arrival. The conclusion he draws is that the cruelties of conquest and exploitation continue to haunt his people. With one foot in each world, Tumac sees it as his responsibility to fight for insurgence against the white landowning elite, multinational companies, and fascist governments.

As Tumac picks up the bits and pieces of his heritage as an Inca, combined with learning the realities of life for the indigenous population of Latin America, so does the reader. A certain lack of knowledge, of not being aware of your backstory, is a popular trope in fiction because it is a useful way to advance a narrative. As Tumac discovers who he is, his belonging in the world and the injustices he needs to combat, the reader simultaneously gets to discover the same things. The implicit reader is a white Swede who does not know much about Latin America in general, and its indigenous communities in particular. And the series aims to raise our awareness about life in the region. Speech bubbles contain local terminology that is translated for the reader in footnotes or captions. Every issue contains written essays from Georg Dahl, professor of ichthyology, who spent most of his scholarly career in Colombia during the decades preceding and following World War II, which anecdotally accounts for his different experiences and lessons learnt from the years living among different indigenous communities in that part

of the world. Additionally, each issue contains at least one page with the title 'Did you know . . . ' which outlines certain facts regarding fauna and flora – the Amazon river, anaconda snakes, ceiba trees, to mention but a few – on the South American continent.

As early as the sixth issue, Tumac finds his way back to the Inca's hidden city to discover that he can rightfully claim the throne.[6] After passing several brutal physical tests to prove that he is cut from the right (aristocratic) cloth, Tumac is crowned as the new emperor. This includes winning a long-distance running race against other Inca warriors and wrestling a starving puma. In addition to enduring the physical pain involved in these activities, Tumac is forced to be constantly looking over his shoulder to avoid assassins sent out by the high priests.

Despite its quest for authenticity and realism, the comic is far from immune to the prevalent trope in jungle comics of the hero spending almost as much time dealing with bandits and fortune hunters as trying to escape the deadly jaws of a predator (Dyer 1997; Torgovnick 1990). After all, he can hardly set foot in the Amazonian jungle before being attacked by a gigantic anaconda or bloodthirsty piranhas, or almost falling prey to hungry caimans (cf. Aman 2020). These descriptions bring to life the imagery of South American wilderness and danger. The effect is a representation of an impenetrable, disordered, and intimidating South America full of creature-infested jungles – in essence, the topical exoticism of nineteenth-century travel novels (Schutte 2003). Differently put, antiracist politics is paradoxically packaged with a heavy dose of exoticism.

Tumac wrestling a crocodile. Manila and Blasco, 'Jakten på Moya!', Tumac 4/1980, p. 11. © Semic Press

Dissatisfaction starts to grow within Tumac the more he learns about the society he is predestined to rule. The core of his discomfort is the division of labour, which is simply a mirror image of the life he knew outside this hidden stretch of jungle. He discloses his inner thoughts to his grandfather: 'The people sow, struggle, and harvest to feed warriors, clergy, and nobility.'[7] This statement is followed by panels that reveal striking similarities between these images and those from life on the *encomienda*, drawing parallels between the two and creating a shared narrative of suffering among the oppressed.[8] Or, as Tumac himself concludes, 'For ordinary people, Ayacuzco is the same as the monks' missionary plantation where I was once a serf and from which I escaped!'[9] In contrast to narratives

where non-western lifestyles are idealised, often emphasising manual labour, the conservation of nature, and other activities that can be associated with a pre-capitalist past, this comic affirms the universality of class conflict, feudalism, and technocratic rule (Fraser 2014; Nederveen Pieterse 1992; cf. Aman 2017).

Tumac draws parallels between the situation for the farmers in the Inca empire and his own at the oppressive monastery. Manila and Pinto, 'Den allenarådande inkan', Tumac 8/1978, p. 9. © Semic Press

One cultural practice that causes a rift between Tumac and the ruling classes of the Inca empire reveals itself the next morning, when the hero is about to be named emperor.[10] Tumac's feelings of discomfort for the veneration he is shown ('I'm no different from anyone else . . . No human deserves such worship!')[11] is nothing compared to the revulsion flowing through him when he is informed that a young female virgin is going to be sacrificed in his honour ('He's going to kill her! Stop! Don't!').[12] Although the story is set in contemporary times (i.e. the 1970s), the Incas' hidden location in the jungle, the comic suggests, has not merely meant survival for the kingdom's inhabitants over centuries, it also implies that cultural practices such as that of sacrificing humans to appease the gods has persisted. For Sheyahshe (2016), freezing indigenous people in time, trapping them either in the past or in a floating ahistorical present, is another troubling theme in comic books aimed at a predominately white audience. While Sheyahshe reads this as an inability on the part of the creators to reconcile the survival and vitality of indigenous people with their narrative, this particular scene relies on a vital narrative trope in the great European eighteenth- and nineteenth-century adventure novel: the fantasy of fear. This often manifests itself through the risk of being imprisoned or ritually

slaughtered by remote and strange brutes. The persistent popularity of this theme in literature, however, does little to dispel the fact that it remains, as Nederveen Pieterse (1992, 114) contends, 'the most worn-out cliché about non-Western peoples.'

Nevertheless, the clichéd nature of the motif is possibly of minor comfort to the young woman who is chained to an altar, ready to be sacrificed as a gift to pagan gods. Just in the nick of time before the dagger penetrates her heart, Tumac intervenes to save her life by surging through the crowd and pushing aside the high priest who is about to perform his sacred duty, causing him to miss his target. With the poise that comes with his elevated status, Tumac informs the high priests that 'this ritual ends now!'[13] (Figure 3)

Tumac saves a young woman from being sacrificed to the gods. Manila and Pinto, 'Den allenarådande inkan', Tumac 8/1978, p. 15. © Semic Press

In one way, Tumac's act of rescuing the young girl cannot be separated from what Gayatri Spivak (1988), with customary sharpness, has formulated as 'white men saving brown women from brown men'; that is, a narrative in which privileged white subjects enter another cultural context and rescue non-whites from their plight. The trope of the 'white saviour' is so deeply entrenched in Western popular culture, Matthew Hughey (2014) claims, that various intercultural contacts have often been guided by a racial logic that separates people into those who are redeemers (whites) and those in need of redemption (non-whites). In this scene, however, Tumac's actual skin colour is of minor importance. He may not pass as white, but the reader can rest assured that his actions are identified as white; embodying the enlightened, secular, and modern position with which a Swedish audience of the time identified (cf. Hübinette 2017). This manifests itself through his unwavering understanding of what is 'right' and morally 'correct' in any given situation as he constantly identifies with those in need. In short, Tumac is the 'white' man saving a brown woman from other brown men.

Apart from having made a new set of enemies, because the authority of the high priests rests on their power to govern through rituals, Tumac has mixed feelings about what he has done ('I don't have the priests' or the Inca castes' confidence . . . On my first day as emperor I've dashed their hopes!').[14] Nonetheless, these ambivalent emotions are not strong enough to prevent Tumac from implementing new progressive policies in order to radically transform the Inca empire to its foundations.[15] Loyal to his Marxist outlook, Tumac is fuelled by a hatred of despotism and a yearning for a society where all social hierarchies have ceased to exist. If demanding that everyone should work the fields is not enough to spark the wrath of the upper classes, Tumac's order that the whole population

should learn how to read and write has their (blue) blood boiling. Priests who are afraid of losing their privileges protest loudly ('Imagine . . . Even the masses would possess the same knowledge as us')[16] while Tumac's close associates defend his actions ('The honour lies in performing one's job well . . . Not in limiting knowledge to only a few!').[17]

Running the constant risk of lapsing into didacticism, the comic persistently presents supporting characters engaging in dialogue amongst themselves that excessively signals the ideological message the storyline seeks to convey. In addition to Tumac himself speaking up

Tumac works on the fields as a farmer. Manila and Pinto, 'Tumacs död', Tumac 9/1978, p. 3. © Semic Press

against a social system built on the economic exploitation of peasants and workers, which is as prevalent within the Inca empire as it is in the outside world, the captions confirm that the working class supports the radical changes enforced by the new emperor: 'Never before has the Inca worked in the fields like us regular people!'[18] Others chip in with what Tumac has told them in order to explain his policy changes ('Our harvest and animals are the foundation to our prosperity, says Inka Tumac!')[19] and provide justification for them ('He's right … Everyone eats the fruits of our labour') (Figure 4).[20]

Regardless of where in the world we find ourselves, the storylines suggest, surplus value is created by the working class while power over the means of production remains in the hands of a governing elite. In short, all societies, except a socialist one, are class societies (Marx and Engels 1967). To ensure the correct reception of this message, a caption informs the reader that Tumac has 'won the confidence of the people, but his behaviour shocks the old society.'[21] Seen in the wider context of the ideological framing of the storyline, Tumac takes the means of production out of the hands of a few capitalists (the high priests) and puts them into the hands of the proletariat (farmers and workers). Due to his overhaul, a forgotten civilisation frozen in time with the characteristics of a feudal society provides the positive glimpses of a classless future that others have identified in Marx's *Capital* (e.g. Freedman 2009). More importantly, Tumac's actions form a basis for his forthcoming adventures, and offer a blueprint for the changes he wants to implement in the world outside the confined walls of the Inca empire. He soon leaves the hidden location in the jungle to tackle questions of inequality around South America and singlehandedly embodies those values that were defined as key to the New Left in Sweden during the late 1960s and 1970s. For Tumac, solidarity, international justice and decolonisation become guiding principles (e.g. Salomon 1996; Östberg 2002).

Land and power

In the opening pages of his seminal *The Open Veins of Latin America* published in 1971 – translated into Swedish in 1976 – Eduardo Galeano (1997, 1) states that, as a result of the division of labour among nations, Latin America has specialised in losing ever since Christopher Columbus anchored his ship and Europeans 'buried their teeth in the throats of the Indian civilisation.' Although centuries have passed, the region continues to exist at the service for others. Once a source for the trophies of conquest – the lodes of gold, the mountains of silver – Latin America today, Galeano (1997, 1) writes, is a 'reserve of oil and iron, of copper and meat, of fruit and coffee, the raw materials and foods destined for rich countries which profit more from consuming them than Latin America does from producing them.'

Following in Galeano's footsteps, *Tumac* uncovers the ways in which a history of pillaging continues to inform the present in a region where everything – the soil and its fruits, the people and their capacity to work – is meshed into the universal gearbox of capitalism. Moreover, the choice of villains in *Tumac* – landowners, right-wing politicians, fascist military organisations, multinational companies, etc. – is pivotal in grappling with the political commitment of the arcs. According to Richard Reynolds (1992), the characteristics, backgrounds, and desires of foes in a given period are more important to the political and cultural meaning of a story arc than the actual hero, because the

villains present the threats against which the hero needs to react. Equally important to the political commitment of *Tumac* are the victims whom the villains target: exclusively peasants of various ethnicities in the countryside.

Furthermore, Tumac has a rare knack of finding himself, in each issue, in the midst of a conflict that can easily be addressed in terms of race and class, and in which he never thinks twice about risking his life to help those in need.

Faithful to the form of the travelogue, before taking action, Tumac always listens carefully as members of the disenfranchised group he has encountered describe the violence and hardship to which they are subjected (cf. Olsson 2002). Together, they educate Tumac – and by extension the reader – about a history of oppression. 'We Indians don't have the right to own anything,' says an elderly man whom Tumac seeks to help, 'besides our endless poverty.'[22] Others add that 'the root of our problems is multinational companies,'[23] and that 'they've made sure that we don't have any other value than as labour.'[24] All of these statements could have been taken directly from a bulletin published by *Solidarity Sweden–Latin America*, the largest organisation devoted to solidarity with the region.[25]

Readers agree. In the letters section of issue 11/78, one reader says that 'Tumac is a very good comic due to its realistic content',[26] while another praises the comic for being so authentic that the reader is drawn 'into the events to such an extent that at times one can feel Tumac's pain'.[27] A third draws parallels with their own life writing, stating that they are originally from Peru and like to 'pretend that Tumac is my big brother who's still in South America and I enjoy reading about his destiny and adventures.'[28] This is also mirrored in the episodes' titles: 'The Disenfranchised',

'Struggle for Freedom', 'The Oppressed', all of which are variants on the title of the story from 7/78: 'Tumac: Friend of the Poor'. 'Everywhere I go,' says Tumac in a sentence that summarises the series, 'my brothers stand witness to how they're being oppressed!'[29] (Figure 5)

Everywhere Tumac goes there are poor people who inform him about how they are being oppressed. Manila and Pinto, 'De rättslösa', Tumac 1/1979, p. 30. © Semic Press

A case in point is issue 8/79, which begins with Tumac arriving at a coffee plantation where frost has destroyed the harvest.[30] Tumac is invited to a cup of coffee as two elderly workers dialectically explain a division of labour where the increase in profit at one end ('coffee prices rise . . . plantation owners only get richer')[31] is a consequence of exploitation at the other ('But we who have cleared the jungle . . . we who have planted the

crops … we only survive at the verge of starvation!').[32] This is an acute restating of Marx's 1981, 646) affirmation that 'accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole'. Or as one of the farm workers pedagogically pronounces to Tumac as he hands him a hot cup of coffee: 'Drink this with contemplation young man … because here we say that every cup of coffee corresponds to the same amount of our blood!'[33] Here, he is also addressing the reader, informing all of us of our complicity in the exploitation of the people in the Global South, whose hard labour underpins the products we consume (Figure 6).

A farm worker informs Tumac that a cup of corresponds to the same amount of their blood. Manila and Amador, 'Kaffeplantagen', Tumac 8/1979, p. 8. © Semic Press

The question of guilt has been discussed extensively among leftist writers in Sweden since the beginning of the 1960s and is repeatedly described as the New Left's most successful contribution to public opinion and its intellectual debate: a shift in perspective on Sweden and Europe (Ljunggren 2009; Salomon 1996). In one of the most influential debate books of the time, Göran Palm (1968) urges the people of Sweden and Europe to look at themselves in a new way, this time from the point of view of the oppressed. Instead of wearing blinkers and averting their eyes, the Swede and the European must be confronted with a world out there that is marked by hunger, poverty, and misery. It was no longer possible to live under the safe protection of the welfare state and pretend that Sweden and its prosperity were not part of a European debt burden, Palm claimed. We all have blood on our hands, wrote Sara Lidman in the same spirit as Palm, and guilt for what is occurring in the Global South (Granqvist 2009).

Despite life on the plantation being characterised as serfdom, the workers look frightened when Tumac instructs them to demand fairer treatment, to get a slice of what their bodies have worked for. This is true even now, when they are on the brink of starvation, as the caption informs us that frost has destroyed the harvest, which means that they will not get paid, despite having done the work. 'But the estate owner will do fine … ', one of the workers explains, pointing towards a luxurious estate, 'he only gets richer.'[34] In Tumac's mind, the way forward is

direct confrontation, to hammer on the door of the landowner and demand what is rightfully theirs. This method adds reference points to the politically minded reader. The question of who owns the land and its natural resources in the former colonies' open pantries is treated diligently in travelogues from the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Ehnmark 1962; Wästberg 1962). What for millions of people is a road to work and bread is for a few others a source of wealth and influence. Collectively, these texts from different corners of the map remind the reader that some of the most affluent families live in the most impoverished parts of the world.

In his two volumes on the relationship between land and power in Latin America – published, respectively, four and five years prior to 1978 when the comic reached kiosks and newsstands around Sweden – Sven Lindqvist (1973, 1974) went knocking on the doors of the estates of some of the most influential landowners all over the region. When they opened up, Lindqvist confronted them with reports of pillaging, exploitation, and serfdom. On hundreds of thousands of estates around South America today sit gentlemen who feel completely secure, writes Lindqvist (1973, 22–23). 'This sense of security is part of their power. No one will ever find out what they do with their farmers and workers. They'll never have to answer for what they've done.'

Nevertheless, where a white European academic such as Lindqvist is greeted with house tours followed by a torrent of excuses, an indigenous boy such as Tumac is met with violence. Race seems to determine the degrees of hospitality. In other issues, or almost every time Tumac enters an urban setting, he is met with racial abuse. In a restaurant, where he goes to dine with a white female journalist 'from a major daily in a European country',[35] the waiter refuses to even address Tumac, directing his complaints to his pale-skinned companion: 'You must understand that a dirty Indian can't eat here.'[36] In addition to revealing the ways in which indigenous populations are at constant risk of being subjected to raced assumptions about their inferiority and backwardness, illustrating racist practices in other parts of the world can also serve another purpose. During the 1970s and onwards, intellectuals and activists consciously located antiracist struggles abroad, claim Hübinette and Lundström (2011, 429), which not only helped to transform 'Sweden [in]to the world's most radical proponent of antiracism', but it also, almost overnight, converted 'racism into a non-Swedish issue.' In other words, displaying how racism enables oppression and exploitation of the indigenous populations in Latin America encourages a shared investment in antiracist politics among Swedish readers, while at the same time creating an illusion that this is not a problem among us – or at least not to the same extent (Hübinette and Lundström 2011). This is implicitly reaffirmed by the fact that a Swedish couple whom Tumac helps are among the few white people in the comic who do not hold any prejudices about the indigenous communities (Figure 7).[37]

Tumac is informed that the restaurant doesn't serve 'dirty Indians' Manila and Pinto, I catsibureres våld', Tumac 2/1979, p. 5. © Semic Press

However, Tumac has no intention of allowing the plantation owner to sit peacefully and undisturbed on his estate. Despite a supreme demonstration of power when both the police and the military are brought in to intervene and eliminate Tumac, the young hero manages to outmanoeuvre the opposition by using a skillset of sneak attacks worthy of a guerrilla fighter. In the end, the landowner gives in, and the workers are compensated financially for their labour. Tumac bids them farewell with words of encouragement to continue the struggle and claim their right to the land ('Don't give in now! Continue to make demands so that the plantation will one day return to belonging to you').[38] Both words and actions are recognisable. In *Guerrilla Warfare*, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara's military handbook, he writes 'in these places the struggle of the people for reforms is aimed primarily and almost exclusively at changing the social form of land ownership, the guerrilla fighter is above all an agrarian revolutionary' (Guevara 1969, 16).

The US smuggles modern weapons to paramilitary forces in the region Manila and Amador, 'Banditernas land', Tumac 11/1979, p. 17. © Semic Press

In the case of Sweden, Guevara's role in the Cuban revolution is said to have played a part in enhancing public interest in Latin America (Tornbjer 2008). Moreover, the 'put your body on the line' tradition was strong among New Left activists, where Guevara's subsequent efforts to bring revolution to other parts of Latin America were admired as an example of theory and practice in perfect harmony (Elbaum 2018); a conviction shared not least by key authors of the New Left in Sweden, such as Jan Myrdal and Göran Palm (Berntson and Nordin 2017). In our comic book, instead of the cigar-smoking, beret-wearing Argentinean, it is a semi-naked, headband-wearing young Tumac who in practice performs the task of the guerrilla soldier in the hope of achieving social reform. As will be seen, the comic's positive view of revolutionary struggle is a theme that is overtly present throughout the series. Eventually, Tumac ends up leading a guerrilla army.

America's backyard

If the majority of the comic's storylines reveal the ways in which colonial structures are perpetuated such that there are now, to quote Slavoj Žižek (1997), 'only colonies, no colonising countries', the United States is a notable exception. Tumac learns the hard lesson that demands for social rights – by unions, leftist parties, peasants' movements etc. – often provoke violent reactions, political closure, and the abrogation of rights previously enjoyed. Around Latin America during the 1960s and 1970s, civilian rule was regularly interrupted by military coups; and elections were repeatedly compromised by force and fraud (Knight 2001). In *Tumac*, there is no hesitation in suggesting that Washington is acting in the shadows. Issue 11/79 even contains a panel showing a map of the northern parts of South America next to a US flag.[39] A frightened worker explains to Tumac that weapons are being smuggled into the country to arm paramilitary movements. By including the star-spangled banner as a way to confirm the United States' military interference in Latin America, the comic book underlines the same Cold War suspicion about the superpowers' quest for domination over the countries

in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as that being articulated by movements and organisations devoted to international solidarity, as well as the Swedish government, at the time (Berntson and Nordin 2017; Östberg 2002) (Figure 8).

The intense waves of protest against the war in Vietnam is described in a Swedish context as a catalyst for stern anti-US sentiments within the New Left because the United States, through its economic dominance and military might, symbolised imperial greed and arrogance (Berntson and Nordin 2017; Ljunggren 1999; Salomon 1996). Images of US atrocities – carpet bombings, napalm attacks, and gruesome civilian massacres – appeared on the nightly news worldwide, which led Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme to famously condemn the US bombing of Hanoi by comparing it to other historical human rights abuses, including the Holocaust (Wolin 2010). Behind the napalm, left-wing sympathisers saw US imperialism; behind this poisonous weapon, they saw capitalist greed (Svedjedal 2014). Similar insights guided interpretations of the United States' interference in Latin America. According to Grace Livingstone (2009), the US regards Latin America – or 'America's backyard' as the region is often called to illustrate their hierarchical relationship – as a source of labour, raw materials, and markets. In order to maintain political influence and protect its economic interests, Washington also supported local coups d'état or resorted to direct military intervention (Livingstone 2009).

In issue 2/1980, Tumac finds himself on the streets of an unnamed capital city, where he witnesses a protest rally demanding democracy and equality before the law. The panels show protestors with their fists raised to the sky chanting 'Justice for the Indians!' and 'Death to the fascists!'[40] This image is familiar. During the 1970s and 1980s, Sweden became a refuge for tens of thousands of Chileans who were forced to flee from political prosecution after the military coup (Gradskova and Quirico 2016). The Swedish ambassador to Chile during the coup d'état, Harald Edelstam, became a national hero for helping people to escape the death patrols of the military dictatorship (Therborn 1989). For many Swedes, faith in Chile became part of their own struggle as several committees expressing solidarity with the fallen regime were founded around the country (Tornbjer 2008). They unified under the slogan: 'Support the Chilean people's struggle against fascism – for socialism!' But they also employed the same model for the protests as in the panel from *Tumac*: 'Free the political prisoners', 'Fight against imperialism!'

The military responds with bullets. Tumac and his friend, Jorge Prado, a union leader, intervene and manage through their actions to prevent further bloodletting. In the process, however, they are captured and taken by force to the military headquarters. They are not alone there. 'The whole house echoes', the caption informs us, 'with tortured people's screams'.[41] The next few panels zoom in on another floor in the building where a general, who looks suspiciously like Augusto Pinochet, is informed by a soldier that 'there's not enough space in the prisons for the prisoners', to which the general instructs the soldier to 'use military camps, hangars, and sports grounds!' He adds that 'the clean-up must continue.'[42] The transformation of a sports ground into a torture chamber in the pages of the comic strongly resembles events taking place beyond them. The panels repeat heavily mediated events from the military coup in Chile in 1973, which ousted socialist president Salvador Allende and put fascist dictator Pinochet in power, where the Estado Nacional became a synonym for the cruelty of the Pinochet regime. As Valentina Rozas-

Tumac witness a demonstration against the fascist authorities. Manila and Unacknowledged, 'Kamp för frihet', Tumac 2/1980, p. 3. © Semic Press

The general instructs his officer to 'release the death squad'. Manila and Unacknowledged, 'Kamp för frihet', Tumac 2/1980, p. 12. © Semic Press

Krause (2015) points out, the military dictatorship was never concerned with hiding human rights violations; on the contrary, the aim was to instil fear in the population by exhibiting what was going on inside the stadium. The country's principal sports centre was transformed, as Antonio Traverso (2010) reminds us, into a 'concentration camp' in which 'approximately 7000 were tortured and an undetermined number summarily executed.' Tumac becomes another entry in these statistics as he is subjected to torture.

In a sequence that draws further parallels with this dark chapter in South American history, the General, with a vicious smile, instructs his soldiers that 'trials take too long . . . instead let them disappear discreetly!' before screaming a final order: 'Release the death squad!'[43] Similar to events both under Pinochet's regime and during the so-called 'Dirty War' in Argentina under the military junta of 1978–1983, when statesanctioned right-wing death squads hunted down political dissidents (Robben 2005), the method employed to carry out the task of eliminating prisoners is *vuelos de la muerte* – death flights. Victims are dropped from airplanes. Back in a prison cell after having been tortured, Tumac is joined by Jorge, who explains what has happened to the other inmates in their cell: in one corner lies a man who has been beaten to death, in another is a woman who has been raped and beaten unconscious, others have been drugged, burned, and starved. Those who are still alive are gathered by soldiers and ordered to board their death flight, a helicopter, and are informed that they are going to be sent to a concentration camp (Figure 10).

With tears in his eyes, Tumac cries out that he is 'going to crush this damn system![44]' Tumac's emotional outburst against the ruthlessness of fascism serves a particular purpose as part of the political message the comic is seeking to convey. In his study *Solidarity* (Featherstone 2012), David Featherstone contends that practices of solidarity can bind people together by bridging geographical distances and cultural differences. They are connected to the shared mobilisation of emotions such as anger and disgust, love and compassion. The

Tumac with the guerrilla. Tumac teams up the guerrilla. Manila and Unacknowledged, 'Kamp för frihet', Tumac 2/1980, p. 23. © Semic Press © Semic Press

activation of emotions in their political work is deemed key for solidarity movements (Featherstone 2012). This taps into Charlotte Tornbjer's (2008) thesis that public engagement and solidarity with Chile among the Swedish public was nourished by a register of emotions. Akin to Tumac's lived experiences, the ruthlessness of the military junta – personified by Pinochet – sparked strong reactions among a large part of the Swedish population.

In order to retaliate against the military, Tumac teams up with a revolutionary army hiding in the jungle. Their leader, a carbon copy of Fidel Castro, saves Tumac from the water after the young Inca boy has jumped out of the helicopter to escape the death patrol. The fact that it is a revolutionary army or that its leader shares physical traits with Castro – including the beard, cap and, of course, a cigar – is not necessarily surprising. Support for revolutionary movements fighting for liberation was strong in Sweden during the 1970s, at least on the left of the political spectrum. Where Marx had previously identified the proletariat as the defining actor of history, the New Left embraced the people of the former colonies as the primary driving force behind revolutionary struggle (Berntson and Nordin 2017). Radical leftists celebrated social and political movements in the Third World as a renewal of the socialist tradition and as a forceful impetus for their own projects of transforming First World societies (Elbaum 2018; Kalter 2017) (Figure 11).

The comic's positive view of liberation movements in the Global South is confirmed in another issue, where Tumac sees in the distance a guerrilla army stopping a caravan. As they start looting the passengers, Tumac declares with distaste that 'they are not acting like revolutionaries,'[45] while at the same time passing on to the reader his more idealised conception of a Latin American revolutionary.[46] Tumac is far from alone. In the mid-1970s, a considerable proportion of the Swedish population saw Cuba as a hopeful alternative to the reactionary military regimes that dominated other parts of Latin America (Berggren 2010). Several leftist writers in Sweden at the time described Castro's Cuba in enthusiastic terms. For Staffan Seeberg, Cuba represents the dream of

a better life; for Olof Moberg, the Caribbean Island with its socialist experiment is an ideal society (Svedjedal 2014). And the previously mentioned Lindqvist (1970), in his award-winning book published in 1970, *The shadow: Latin America faces the seventies*, finds a glimpse of hope in Cuba, grains of progress in a region where the dominant classes, supported by the US, kept the masses at starvation level. Hence, Cuba became a positive example of defiant opposition to US imperialism for the Swedish left (Mattsson 2010; Svedjedal 2014).

Readers soon learn that Tumac can be added to this list. With a guerrilla army at his side, Tumac storms the presidential palace, intending to force the dictator to resign. They have hardly managed to set foot inside the luxurious building before military forces arrives. Outnumbered, Tumac and his fellow *guerrilleros* escape in a helicopter. From high up in the air, they witness the palace exploding into pieces. The military has decided to sacrifice the country's highest official. 'With the president dead,' summarises the guerrilla leader, 'the dictatorship has also experienced cracks.'[47] He then turns to Tumac and pleads with the young hero to continue to help them. Tumac needs no time to think, his answer is immediate: 'Of course, but in my own way!'[48]

It is noteworthy that the storylines never become more optimistic than this. The comic never generates a collective triumph for Tumac and his kin. As readers, we are constantly assured that the fight against capital is a battle that it is almost impossible for the hero to win alone. Every victory is nothing but a temporary victory as the storylines share Frederic Jameson's (2003) pessimistic view that it is almost easier to visualise the end of the world than the end of capitalism and its continuous economic and cultural exploitation of the poor. Tumac himself is consciously aware of this. 'Whenever I win, someone new always comes along!'[49]

Conclusion

In the third instalment of the edited collection *Svensk seriehistoria* [*Swedish Comics History: Tome three from the Swedish Comics archive*], Ebbe Zetterstrand (2019) – editor at Semic Press which published *Tumac* – describes the comic as aiming for realism in both time and environment but filled with conventional adventure stories. After a promising start, Zetterstrand writes, the plots 'received a political bias that negatively impacted on the storytelling.' Initially, *Tumac* sold a healthy 26,000 copies of each of the first couple of issues in a country of roughly eight million inhabitants, before sales figures started to crumble. The comic book was cancelled in 1980, after 30 issues. Three years later, it was relaunched with a British head writer, Donne Avenell, who explains in an interview that he was approached by an editor from Semic Press who wanted him to come up with plots that were 'traditional, strictly adventure ones'. The reason for this was to counter the way in which

Larsson's manuscripts had developed into 'a political Che Guevara story', claims Avenell (Lundström 1982, 9). Nevertheless, the interviewer cannot refrain from adding in passing that Avenell's storylines unfortunately contained all the stereotypical ingredients grounded in ignorance that Larsson had avoided. He also comments that critics were not impressed with these new storylines, stating that they had declared that it was 'shameful' and 'scandalous' of the publisher to make these changes (Lundström 1982, 9). If the publisher considered the comic 'too left-wing', readers, for their part, seem to have

shared the series' investment in antiracism, international solidarity, and class politics; at least after being exposed to the circumstances of the people at the bottom of the racial pyramid in Latin America – a region that, in Galeano's (1997) words, has been subjected to five centuries of pillaging. As one reader writes in issue 4/80, 'If there existed some sort of time machine, I'd like to go back in time and sink Columbus' ship.'[50]

Notes

1. The comic book was revived in 1983 and another 21 issues were published before cancellation. During this run, writing duties were assigned to Donne Walsh
2. Other artists who collaborated on the run were José Maria Bellalta, Aurelio Bevia, Amador García Cabrera, Kari Leppänen, Luis Roca, Abel Romero, and Demetrio Sánchez Gómez
3. '*Hej läsare! Nu ska du ut på äventyr. På annorlunda, fascinerande äventyr. Du ska följa med oss till Sydamerika*.' All translations from Swedish to English are done by the author unless otherwise indicated.
4. *Tumac*, #1/1978, script: Manila; art: Blasco
5. *Tumac*, #1/1978, script: Manila; art: Blasco
6. *Tumac*, #1/1978, script: Manila; art: Blasco
7. *Tumac*, #6/1978, script: Manila; art: Bevia
8. '*Folket sår, sliter och skördar för att föda krigare, prästerskap och adel!*
9. *Tumac*, #4/1978, script: Manila; art: Blasco
10. '*För vanligt folk är Ayacuzco som munkarnas missionsplantage där jag en gång var livegen och som jag flydde ifrån!*'
11. *Tumac*, #8/1978, script: Manila; art: Pinto
12. '*Jag är inte annorlunda än nån annan människa . . .ingen människa förtjänar en sån här vördnad!*'
13. '*Han tänker döda henne! Stopp! Låt bli!*'
14. '*Denna sed upphör nu!*'
15. '*Jag har inte prästernas och inkakastens förtroende . . . På min första dag som härskare har jag svikit deras förhoppningar!*'
16. *Tumac*, #9/1978, script: Manila; art: Pinto
17. '*Tänk er . . . till och med den stora hopen skulle ha samma kunskap som vi . . .* '
18. '*Äran ligger i att sköta sitt arbete väl . . . inte att begränsa kunskapen till några få!*'
19. '*Aldrig förr har inkan arbetat på fälten som vi vanliga människor!*'
20. '*Våra skördar och våra djur är grunden för vårt välstånd, säger inka Tumac!*'
21. '*Han har rätt . . . Alla äter ju frukten av vårt arbete!*'
22. '*Tumac har krönts till Inka över Ayacuzco och vunnit folkets förtroende, men hans beteende chockar det gamla samhället . . .* '
23. *Tumac*, #2/1979, script: Manila; art: Amador.
24. *Tumac*, #5/1980, script: Manila; art: Blasco.
25. *Tumac*, #6/1980, script: Manila; art: Pinto
26. In Swedish: *Latinamerikagrupperna*
27. '*Tumac är en mycket bra serietidning på grund av dess verklighetstrogna innehåll.*'
28. '*Tumac är en så autentisk tidning att man lever sig in i händelserna till den milda grad att man ibland känner Tumacs smärta!*'
29. '*Jag låtsas att Tumac är min storebror som är kvar i Sydamerika och jag tycker om att läsa om hans öden och äventyr.*'
30. *Tumac*, #1/1979, script: Manila; art: Roca. '*Vart jag än vänder mig vittnar mina bröder om hur de förtrycks.*'
31. *Tumac*, #8/1979, script: Manila; art: Amador
32. '*Kaffepriset stiger . . . plantageägarna blir allt rikare . . .* '

33. '*Men vi som röjt djungeln . . . vi som planterat buskarna . . . vi bara överlever på gränsen till svält!*'
34. '*Drick med eftertänksamhet unge man . . . för här säger vi att varje kopp kaffe som dricks motsvarar samma mängd av vårt blod!*'
35. '*Men patron han klarar sej . . . han behöver inte svälta . . . han blir bara allt rikare!*'
36. *Tumac – Guldjakten* (1984) script: Manila; art: Oscar. Stockholm: Semic Press, 39
37. *Tumac*, #2/1979, script: Manila; art: Amador. '*Ni måste väl ändå inse att en smutsig indian inte kan äta här!*'
38. *Tumac*, #2/1979, script: Manila; art: Amador
39. '*Släpp inte efter nu bara! Utan fortsätt att ställa krav, så att plantagen en dag tillhör er som brukar den!*'
40. *Tumac*, #11/1979, script: Manila; art: Amador
41. *Tumac*, #2/1980, script: Manila; art: Unacknowledged
42. '*Hela huset ekar av torterade människors skrik!*'
43. '*Upprensningen måste fortsätta! Utnyttja militärförläggningar, hangarer och idrottsplatser*'
44. '*Rättegångar tar för lång tid . . . låt dem istället diskret försvinna. [. . .] Släpp loss dödspatrullen!*'
45. '*Jag ska krossa det här förbannade systemet!*
46. '*Dom bär sej inte åt som revolutionärer!*'
47. *Tumac*, #11/1979, script: Manila; art: Amador.
48. '*Med presidenten död har också diktaturen fått sina sprickor!*'
49. '*Självklart, men på mitt sätt!*'
50. *Tumac*, #3/1979, script: Manila; art: Romero

'*Ifall det fanns någon slags tidsmaskin så skulle jag vilja åka tillbaks i tiden och skjuta Columbus skepp i sank!*'

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