

## CULTURAL PROPAGANDA & STEREOTYPING IN CHILDREN'S COMIC MAGAZINES\*

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An investigation of children's comic book literature in Greece

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### ABSTRACT

The introductory part the thesis examines some aspects of mass communication and popular culture. Mass communication is described as a special kind of communication, an endless process, of constant exchange of messages. It involves distinctive operating conditions primary among which are the nature of the audience, of the communication experience and the communicator. The rapid development of mass media and their potential influence has led many to wonder about the actual role they play in social life and their contribution to the popular culture. It is suggested that the function of the media is responsible for certain socio-political implications either at national or global context. The structure and organization of the modern mass media communication and the influences on the mass audience have been the focus of the first chapter.

The comics industry has been part of the U.S. media network and its development and function is of particular interest. The comic industry is seen as 'the advertising sector' of a powerful complex of multinational enterprises of the western capitalist world. Comics, together with other mass media, developed, as a substitute for genuine folklore and culture, into a self-perpetuating institution, an integral part of the American way of life. They reflect American archetypes but most importantly they promote and advertise certain economic interests. The comic industry is a very profitable economic enterprise, with comic characters playing the role of sales promoting agents..

A content analysis of children's comic magazines, published in Greece in mid 1980s, attempted to provide the evidence that the themes these comics are preoccupied with, reflect values and attitudes of the dominant Anglo-American capitalist structure. The main concern of the thesis is the analysis of the message conveyed through comics and its origin. The results indicate that, comic culture can be seen as one of the forms of modern neo-colonialist attempts to affect and form human opinion and consciousness therefore, comics can be characterized as powerful cultural invaders.

A qualitative approach attempted to indicate elements of explicit socio-political and historical themes, and implicit themes of cultural propaganda, in the Anglo-American cultural context. The distinctive idealized image of society comics portray has certain characteristics which are indicative of the social structure and organization of the western capitalist societies.

The results of the analysis indicate that each of the three categories of comic magazines examined (humor, adventure and human interest) provides a distinctive socialization pattern of ideas and attitudes, addressed to specific age or sex. In general, a pattern of basic stereotypes of traditional societal values of authoritarian and strongly disciplined societies is presented through all the comics. Comics for boys stress on themes of power, menace and war, with political and national issues more prevalent. Fashion, gossip, household activities and romance, are mainly favored in comics addressed to girls.

A quantitative content analysis examined the racist, sexist and violent aspects of children's comic magazines. Any ethnic minority has been found to be negatively stereotyped. Women and girls are also the targets of a traditional sex-role stereotyping pattern, which places them in a subordinate and inferior role towards men in the social system. Violence, is explicitly glorified in these comics, and surely provides the material means to express these ideas in more significant and realistic ways in social life.

In summary, pointing out that the mass media network, the structure of the comic industry, or the cultural pattern in children's comics, all are either in control or close association with American values and attitudes, creates social-political and philosophical implications. The thesis successfully attempted to provide the evidence of the cultural invasion, in operation through children's comic magazines, and to the foreign cultural context of Greece. The thesis suggests that children's comic magazines provide a case of cultural propaganda and stereotyping in favour of socio-political and economic interests developed within the Anglo-American culture.

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\* MEd dissertation submitted to the University of Wales, the University College of Cardiff (1986)