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The Portrayal of the Neighbour and the Neighbourhood in Macedonian Graphic Literature and Comic Book Culture[1]

> Cartooning isn't a way of drawing. It's a way of see-ing. – Scott McCloud, "The Language of Comics"

Introduction: the ideological power of comic books and graphic literature

Comic books as pictorial narratives and an influential phenomenon in pop culture, especially in the decades following World War II, had strong ideological and political power in the processes of the legitimization of dominant social values. Their complex nature – their unique combination

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of text and image – allowed for so much flexibility in the creation, interpretation and representation of social phenomena and social groups that they effectively enabled the intertextual/interpictorial imposing of preferred ideological images and meanings. The iconography of the language of comics, with its original drawing tendency of *stripping* the image down to its essential meaning, enabled a broadening of meanings that made comics an exceptionally effective tool for narration. That is why the American art theorist Scott McCloud concludes that graphic narration is not so much a figural strategy of drawing but a discursive way of *apperception* of things (McCloud, 1993, pp. 46–58).

On the other hand, based on the semantic *vice versa* dialectic that sees graphic narration as an exposition in which the word determines the meaning of the image and vice versa, the comic established itself structurally as a polysemic *imagetext* which not only paved the way towards a great number of interpretations and the profound inclusion of the reader, but also created the possibility for an alternative comics culture that acts subversively in society (Duncan & Smith, 2009; Harvey, 1996; Munitić, 2010).

The strong social and cultural influence of comics is an indication that they are not an ideologically neutral phenomenon. The portrayals and representations of life, society, culture, family, women, war, marginal communities, heroes, and many other things almost never carry voluntary accidental symbolism and pictorial representation. On the contrary, portrayals of social problems and representations of certain social groups have always had – from the very beginnings of comic culture to this day – significant ideological elements and implications (Barker, 1989; McAllister et al., 2001).

The interference between ideological regimes of social power and the portrayal of social groups and problems in comics is best illustrated in *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (*La Misteriosa Fiamma della Regina Loana*), a 2004 novel of great literary worth by Italian philosopher and writer Umberto Eco. The title of this novel is derived from an episode in the comic *Tim Tyler's Luck*: it values comic culture as memory material of the collective spirit of the age and uses an abundance of intertextual/interpictorial references from pop culture as a way of revealing the "codes" of the ideological norming of Italian society through comics and pop culture during Benito Mussolini's fascist government (Еко, 2011).

However, the most radical example that comics are not an ideologically neutral phenomenon is the exceptionally influential book *Seduction of the Inno-*

cent (1954) by Fredric Wertham. In it, comic books are labeled as dangerous kitsch "literature" that is directly responsible for the rise of crime and juvenile delinquency in the USA of the 1950s due to the representation and portrayal of graphically disturbing images of violence, eroticism, crime, morbidity, etc. (Wertham, 1954).

Although its claims are deemed outdated now, *Seduction of the Innocent* seemed progressive at the time. Its Marxist pastiche – as well as the author's concern regarding the influence of comics' marketing propaganda in the creation of commodity fetishism and his belief that he had found sexist, racist, and fascist "values" in comic books – resulted in the acceptance of this book by the contemporary intellectual elite as yet another fierce critical observation of mass and pop culture, similar to that of the preeminent philosophers of the time, such as Theodor Adorno and Dwight Macdonald. The book caused social alarm, but it also stirred anti-comic hysteria that resulted in a radical campaign calling for censorship and prohibition of comic books. As part of this campaign, comics were ceremonially burned and publicly stigmatized as an ideologically dangerous social phenomenon. Even the highest political body, the US Senate, formed a subcommittee to investigate juvenile delinquency which held the famous 1954 hearings of comic book publishers. Under political pressure of complete prohibition, these publishers organized a voluntary body that was responsible for the self-censorship and revision of each comic book through the prism of the adopted 1954 Code criteria, which explicitly banned many portrayals and themes (Heer, 2008; Карацов, 2018).

Yugoslavia saw an almost identical ideological and aesthetic stigmatization of comic books. The 1971 Congress of cultural action in Kragujevac radically condemned all categories of pop culture as trash and kitsch and asked the government to introduce a law against trash culture. As a sign of support in the struggle against "bad" literary taste, the "people" gathered in Kragujevac – ritually, in a kind of Maoist exaltation – burned all comics and *pulp* copies of "light" and inadequate literature in front of the building where the congress was taking place (Paunović, 2017; Zupan, 2006).

Comics are not an ideologically neutral phenomenon, as was confirmed by a recent controversial event in Canada. As part of the renewed Maoist *woke* cancel culture and due to the ideological and stereotypical portrayal of native populations, at the beginning of the 2019 school year around 30 school boards in the Francophone region near Ontario ritually burnt and

destroyed thousands of French-Belgian comic books of *Tintin*, *Asterix and Obelix*, and *Lucky Luke* as a sign of reconciliation with the first peoples of Canada (Gerbet, 2021).

There are two approaches to discussing the ideological power of comics. The first is the *conformist* approach, according to which comic books serve to propagate the official ideological values of the culture in which they are (re)created. The second is the *artivist* approach, according to which comics are still a medium for questioning ideological values and for social engagement and politically subversive action (*l'art comme acte de resistance*) to advocate for socially responsible and morally justified causes. Therefore, the scientific approach to comics is inseparable from our understanding of them as a complex ideological phenomenon in popular culture.

The *Nikad robom* edition (*Never a Slave*)

One of the most significant moments in Yugoslav (and partly Macedonian) comic book culture was the appearance of the magazine *Dečja politika* (*Children's Politics*). This magazine was launched by a group of educators for educative purposes in the Serbian town of Gornji Milanovac. The magazine changed its name to *Dečje novine* (*Children's newspaper*) from the second issue onwards. It was a monthly publication, edited by Srećko Jovanović (1930–2008) and Aleksandar Lazarević (1929–1999). What started as school newspaper soon became a major comic book publisher, and the most influential one in Yugoslavia. The reason for this sudden amazing boom of *Dečje novine* was its editors' recognition of the power of graphic narration and young people's open fascination with this medium and pop-cultural phenomenon. In the first issues of the magazine, the editors introduced Yugoslav graphic short stories inspired by the legends of the peoples of Yugoslavia. From the 23rd issue onwards, at the beginning of the 1960s, by popular demand from the reading public, the editors started a special comic book edition of this magazine entitled *Nikad robom* (*Never a Slave*) (*Nikad robom*, 1963–1970). They employed painter and comic book author Desimir Žižović Buin, who, for the purposes of this edition, created the most iconic characters in Yugoslav comics and pop culture: Mirko and Slavko, the young Partisan couriers.

Il. 1. The cover page of the first issue of Never a Slave

These comic book heroes quickly became a widespread and popular phenomenon in society and culture: they appeared as logographic motifs on clothing, school kits, postcards, posters, popular youth novels, etc. In 1973, Mirko and Slavko appeared in a feature film produced by the same publishing house and directed by Branislav Tori Janković. The edition has been translated into several languages and – like many other Yugoslav pop culture phenomena – it even became popular in China. Up to 1976, around 800 comic book stories were published in the regular series as well as in different sub-editions and special issues. Certain episodes even reached a print run of 200,000 copies, which is why studies of Yugoslav pop culture refer to this edition as the first Communist blockbuster in the world (Baćković, 2013, p. 4).

From an ideological standpoint, the tolerant nomenclature of the day not only sees this comic book series as illustrated short stories that continue and spread the truth about the National Liberation War and graphically honor the joy of victory and the pride of the revolutionary feat and the values it carries, but also as something more than just an educative comic book. More precisely, it was seen as a kind of scientific propaedeutic in the field of so-called ideological popular defense or the theory of so-called war pedagogy (Trifunović, 1975). Although it was in line with the political party propaganda of the time, the edition ended its run in 1976 after the Yugoslav bureaucracy's Maoist attack on comic book publishers in the 1970s, which introduced a so-called tax on trash culture due to financial difficulties (Zupan, 2006; Богичевић, 2012; Трајков, 2016, pp. 4–10).

Il. 2. Title pages of the first issues in the *Never a Slave* comic books edition

The Macedonian comic books in the *Never a Slave* edition

What is most significant for us, besides the illustrated stories of Mirko and Slavko and their Partisan themes from the National Liberation War, the *Never a Slave* edition saw the publication of the following comic book stories, with themes, events, characters and heroes from Macedonian national history, Macedonian legends, and the Macedonian cultural and revolutionary tradition:

Date of publication	Nº in edition	Title	Author of text	Illustrator
3.6.1966	no. 47	*Крале Марко и татковата сабја* [*King Marko and the Father's sword*]	*Based on motifs from epic poems about King Marko*	*Nikola Mitrović – Kokan*
22.7.1966	no. 54	*Таинствениот витез и Крале Марко* [*King Marko and the Mysterious Knight*]	*Petar Radičević*	*Petar Radičević*
2.9.1966	no. 60	*Слепиот цар Дељан* [*Delyan, the Blind Tsar*]	*Milorad Janković*	*Živorad Atanacković*
9.9.1966	no. 61	*Мегдан под сидините* [*A Duel beneath the Walls*]	*Based on folk legends about Sick Doytchin and Momir Found*	*Nikola Mitrović – Kokan*
16.9.1966	no. 62	*Пожар во полето со памук* [*Fire in the Cotton Field*]	*Dobrica Erić*	*Miodrag Đurđić*
4.11.1966	no. 69	*Одмаздата на еднооките* [*Revenge of the One-Eyed*]	*Ljubomir Filipovski*	*Ljubomir Filipovski*
23.12.1966	no. 76	*Одмазникот од деволските шуми* [*The Revenger from Devoll Woods*]	*Milorad Janković*	*Ljubomir Filipovski*
5.5.1967	no. 95	*Стапици* [*Traps*]	*B. Čolić*	*Ljubomir Filipovski*
30.6.1967	no. 103	*Драма во Ѓуровдол* [*Drama in Gjurovdol*]	*Milorad Janković*	*Stanislav Spalajković*
14.7.1967	no. 105	*Сирма војвода* [*Sirma Voyvoda*]	*Ilija Jordanovski*	*Ljubomir Filipovski*
4.8.1967	no. 108	*Суверниот господар* [*The Superstitious Master*]	*Petar Radičević*	*Petar Radičević*
11.8.1967	no. 109	*Хацон* [*Chatzon*]	*Dragan Taškovski*	*Mile Topuz*
1.9.1967	no. 112	*Кралот Пребонд* [*King Perbundos*]	*Dragan Taškovski*	*Mile Topuz*
3.11.1967	no. 121	*Доброволно во смрт* [*Voluntarily to Death*]	*Ilija Jordanovski*	*Ljubomir Filipovski*
8.12.1967	no. 126	*Цар Самуил* [*Tsar Samuil*]	*Dragan Taškovski*	*Mile Topuz*
26.1.1968	no. 133	*Во непријателското осило* [*In the Enemy's Hive*]	*Ilija Jordanovski*	*Ljubomir Filipovski*
2.2.1968	no. 134	*Климент Охридски* [*Clement of Ohrid*]	*Dragan Taškovski*	*Mile Topuz*

Date of publication	Nº in edition	Title	Author of text	Illustrator
29.3.1968	no. 142	*Цар Гаврил Радомир* [*Tsar Gavril Radomir*]	*Dragan Taškovski*	*Mile Topuz*
26.4.1968	no. 146	*Јунаците од Куманово* [*The Heroes of Kumanovo*]	*Milorad Janković*	*Živorad Atanacković*
2.8.1968	no. 160	*Ѓорѓи Војтех* [*Georgi Voyteh*]	*Dragan Taškovski*	*Mile Topuz*
6.9.1968	no. 165	*Приказна за Мармај* [*The Story of Marmay*]	*V. Velić*	*Ljubomir Fili-povski*
22.11.1968	no. 176	*Во обрач* [*The Siege*]	*Ilija Jordanovski*	*Ljubomir Fili-povski*
13.12.1968	no. 179	*Карпош – македонскиот селски крал* [*Karposh – the Macedonian Peas-ant King*]	*Dragan Taškovski*	*Mile Topuz*

The following Macedonian graphic stories were published in a sub-edition of the comic book edition entitled *Never a Slave* (*Nikada robom – Crtana škola*):

Date of publication	Nº in sub-edition	Title	Author of text	Illustrator
10.10.1969	no. 5	*Крушевската република* [*The Krushevo Republic*]	*Nikola Mitrović – Kokan*	*Nikola Mitrović – Kokan*
28.11.1969	no. 12	*Стрез – господарот на Просек* [*Strez – the Ruler of Prosek*]	*Dragan Taškovski*	*Mile Topuz*
9.1.1970	no. 18	*Хероите на ножот* [*Heroes of the Knife*]	*Ilija Jordanovski*	*Ljubomir Fili-povski*
13.3.1970	no. 24	*Некрунисаниот крал на Куманово* [*The King of Kumanovo with-out a Throne*]	*Ilija Jordanovski*	*Ljubomir Fili-povski*
3.4.1970	no. 27	*Добромир Хрс* [*Dobromir Chrysos*]	*Dragan Taškovski*	*Mile Topuz*

*Portrayals of the neighbour and the neighbourhood in the Macedonian comic books in the **Never a Slave** edition*

In the Macedonian comic books of the *Never a Slave* edition, we have located three key portrayals that have ideological meanings and images:

1. *Portrait no. 1: "The evil Turk", or an image of the neighbour as an antago-nistic Other;*
2. *Portrait no. 2: The neighbour as a Slavic brother, or a portrayal of Yugoslav-ism as an ideological and identity construct;*
3. *Portrait no. 3: An image of evil, or the neighbour as a fascist collaborationist.*

   1. **"The evil Turk", or an image of the neighbour as an antagonistic Other.** In the Macedonian graphic stories of the *Never a Slave* edition (for example in *King Marko and the Father's Sword*, *Fire in the Cotton Field*, *Traps*, *Drama in Gjurovdol*, *Sirma Voyvoda*, *The Superstitious Master*, *Voluntary to Death*, *Karposh – the Mace-donian peasant king*, *The Krushevo Republic*, *Heroes of the Knife*, and others) we see an artistic portrayal of themes, events, legends and characters from Macedonian popular and historical epic poems. Here too we find similar motifs: exaltation of the hero/heroine's bravery, their love for the homeland, and exaltation of righteous rebelliousness. Comic books that depict the themes, events, characters and heroes of Macedonian popular history, legends, culture and tradition are to be expected, but they also participate in the portrayal of the neighbour or the Other as an antago-nist – a *villain*, as they are called in comics. Metaphorically speaking, the righteous fight of the people is symbolized by portraits of epic and historical characters (King Marko, Sick Doytchin, the Gemidzii, Sirma Voyvoda, etc.). On the opposite side is the portrayal of the villain, which is symbolized by the stereotypical characters of the Black Arab, the Janissary Turk, etc.

   These graphic stories, in accordance with the historical context of the Turk-ish oppression of the people living here, have narratives and compositional and structural elements that are recognizable from and identical to heroic epics: for example, condemnation of the enemy, idealization of the superhero and their supernatural force, the divine characteristics of the superhero, the antago-nist who is always doomed to fail, the Manichaean moral conflict, etc. These unique narrative elements stem, in essence, from the unbearable position of the people and are a type of *politics of resistance*.

   To be more precise, the role of the enemy, antagonist, villain, is played by the image of the "evil Turk" as the absolute Other in the neighbourhood.

   In Macedonian folk and literary tradition (*Kalesh Angja* [*Swarthy Angja*], *Makedonska krvava svadba* [*Macedonian Bloody Wedding*], *Krpen zivot* [*Hard Life*], *Krvava kosula* [*Bloody Shirt*], etc.), as well as in the graphic literature that we are discussing here, we witness a condemnatory portrayal of the *Turk in the neighbourhood* as a stereotypical embodiment of the evils perpetrated

on the Macedonian population by the Ottoman tax collectors, the Janissary Turks, the Krdzalii Turks, cruel beys, whipper Aghas, etc.

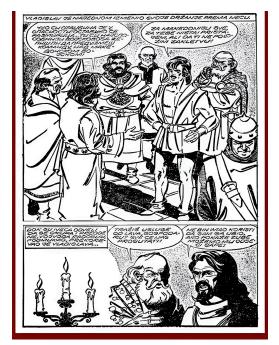Il. 3. Fragment of p. 29 of the graphic story "Fire in the Cotton Field"

Il. 4. Fragment of the graphic story "Fire in the Cotton Field", in which the furious Turkish Agha gives orders to butcher the body of the protagonist Volche

On the one hand, it is indisputable that such simplified narrative canons in popular written and graphic literature create generalized images of the Other; however, regardless of social implications, this concept of portrayal has a hidden yet essential nation-building function. Namely, social, linguistic and cultural groups are recognized as "us" always against the Others, or "they". The recognition of "us" or the (re)creation of identity must necessarily suppose and stereotype the Other and the neighbour not only as different but also as opposite, i.e., a historical antagonist, enemy, oppressor. The creation of a national identity is fundamentally linked to the existence of the *Other* as the enemy. The historical-literary antagonism with *the neighbour as Other* functions as a mytho-historical ethnogony of political and natural engendering or the awakening of the nation, just as the binary logic of identity unequivocally suggests that day could not be day without the presupposed existence of night. Simply put, the image of the *evil Turk* is a constitutive element in the symbolic and narrative context of Macedonian nation-building. It is undoubtedly stereotypical; it carries unfounded generalized ethnic, religious and identity representations; it emphasizes exceptionally negative elements; it is politically (ab)used and used to disable the possibility of understanding, dialogue and acceptance of the Other in the neighbourhood. However, because of the nature of the national awakening process, based on the logic of the *law of identity and noncontradiction* $[\neg(A \wedge \neg A)]$, this *portrayal of the Turk* – theoretically and analytically, as the creation of images and ideological representations of the Other around us – is a necessary condition for all collective identification. Understanding oneself as part of a certain "we" is achieved through an antagonist "they". That is why this portrayal is, at the same time, a self-portrayal.

2. **The neighbour as a Slavic brother, or portrayal of Yugoslavism as an ideological and identity construct.** In the whole *Never a Slave* edition, especially in the Macedonian graphic stories, the portrayal of the neighbour and the neighbourhood with the aim of (re)creating, maintaining and legitimizing South Slavism and Yugoslavism as a specific type of collective (supra)identity is most striking and also ideologically most discernible. In this context, Yugoslavism is an ideal and ideological construct that is based on the ethnic, linguistic and cultural affinity of the South Slavs and their political-ideological vision of supranational unification. This construct had a strong integrative and regulative social function in the Yugoslav federation. That is why the portrayal of the neighbour and the neighbourhood, i.e., the other peoples in the federation,

as part of so-called integral or socialist Yugoslavism was not only a portrayal of the substance of political awareness of a higher type of community – a (re)creation of an imagined meta-community – but also a portrayal of a form of identification for accepting, relativizing or controlling the separate Yugoslav nationalities and nationalisms. In other words, this internal portrayal of the neighbour and the neighbourhood as a (re)creation of the Yugoslav tradition and political-mythological foundation meant imposing historical-mythological narratives and narrative ingredients from the separate national mythologies in the common Yugoslav (supra)identity paradigm. The ideological function in this process is seen in the mobilizational and emancipatory ability of the idea because it is within it – as a form of *self-portrayal* – that the parallel of recreating and consolidating the Macedonian national identity takes place.

Il. 5. Fragment of the graphic story "The Revenger from Devoll Woods", which depicts Ivec as a Macedonian noble and an eminent commander telling king Jovan Vladislav "I'll do anything for Macedonia, but nothing for you".

The main line of this internal portrayal of the neighbour consists of the following elements: stories about the origin of the South Slavs (their ethnogenesis), South Slavs' ancient fatherland, the heroism and ordeals of the migration of

the South Slavs, the clash between South Slavs and Byzantines as the Other in the neighbourhood. Also, there are questions regarding the description of the collective character of the Yugoslav peoples.

Although there is no scientific consensus in the academic community over the massive migration of Slavs to the Balkan peninsula in the VI and VII centuries CE (Curta, 2004; Nikolić, 2018; Obšust, 2013), the mythical images and ideological meanings, for the purposes of their integrative and regulatory role in society, were a key component in the portrayal of the neighbour in the community of the South Slavs. However, this ideological portrayal of the neighbour as a *South Slavic* or *Yugoslav brother* meant that all Yugoslavs in the federation should have an open, incorporative ethnogenetic attitude towards the common South Slavic origin, fatherland, original language, migration, political history, as well as political future.
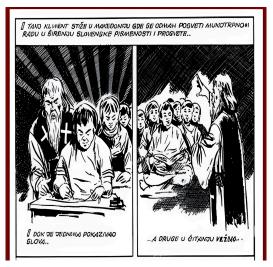
This key ideological portrait determined the process of the national identification of the Macedonians with the idea (an ideological-historical notion) of the Macedonian Slavs (Slavini/Sclaveni) as Slavic people that inhabited the territory of Macedonia and are an ethnogenetic demographic basis for contemporary Macedonian people.

Il. 6. Fragment of the "Tsar Samuil" comic and a depiction of the meeting of Tsar Samuil and his blinded army after the Battle of Belasitsa.

Il. 7. Fragment of "Saint Clement" and a depiction of his arrival in Ohrid.

Il. 8. Panel of the graphic story "Saint Clement" and a depiction of his enlightening mission in the Ohrid School as an important place for Slavic literacy and the beginning of Saint Clement University.

With the Macedonian people forming part of the community of Yugoslav peoples, *Yugoslavism*, as a specific type of ideologically preferred collective

(supra)identity, had to create an identity portrait for accepting the Macedonian national consciousness in the Yugoslav political idea. The process of accepting meant portrayal and self-portrayal, which would emphasize, (re)create and impose the special Macedonian line of Slavdom. In other words, the Macedonian trace as an identity marker is composed of the stories of the origin of the Slavs (the Macedonian Slavs), their fatherland, their heroism and migration near Ohrid, Thessaloniki, and the Vardar and the Struma rivers, their clash with the Byzantines, their attempt at creating a state and, of course, the heroes and historical characters as carriers of these historical processes. Hence, the illustrated narrations in many Macedonian graphic stories in the *Nikad robom* edition – especially in *Chatzon*, *Delyan, the Blind Tsar*, *Revenge of the One-Eyed*, *The Revenger from Devoll Woods*, *Dobromir Chrysos*, *King Perbundos*, *Tsar Samuil*, *Clement of Ohrid*, *Tsar Gavril Radomir*, *Georgi Voyteh*, *The Story of Marmay*, and *Strez, the Ruler of Prosek*, of the Macedonian Slavic tribes (Drougoubitai, Berziti, Smolyani, Strymonites, Mijaks, and others), their alliances, their strong resistance of the Byzantines, the legendary army and religious leaders, tsars – created a recognizable, implicit, ideologically usable self-portrait to maintain/support the official Yugoslav portrayal of the neighbour as a Slavic brother, the so-called *idea of the brotherhood and unity* of the Yugoslav peoples.

3. **Image of evil, or the neighbour as a fascist collaborationist.** Considering the fact that the social federation of Yugoslavia was founded on the people's struggle against fascism, as well as the fact that *Never a Slave* is primarily a comic book edition about the anti-fascist struggle and the values of the socialist revolution, the comics of this edition that talk about the Partisan feat in World War II are, quite expectedly, characterized by obvious portrayals of fascism and fascist soldiers as a phenomenology of evil. The comic books featuring the Partisans in the *Never a Slave* edition do not directly speak of the Macedonian events in World War II. However, the structural narrative principles in the portrayal of fascism and fascism as a phenomenology of evil have an exceptional influence on shaping the awareness of the neighbour in the Macedonian identity context, especially towards the neighbour from the east who was part of the Tripartrite Pact in the Second World War. The characteristic portrayal of fascism and fascist soldiers as absolute villains consists of two lines. The first: a demonizing portrayal, in various ways, of pure evil without reason. The second: in the burlesque tradition of caricaturing serious

subjects and works by joking or mockery, their portrayal as clumsy, naïve, and intellectually inferior in comparison with Partisan cleverness is in the sense of the humorous works which predominated in early comic strip era.

Il. 9. Title page of number 13 of the *Never a Slave* edition

What is more significant, however, is that this characteristic, expected and typical condemnatory portrayal of fascism and fascists, although not explicitly narratively related to the Macedonian events depicted in the edition, still leads – on the basis of the Macedonian symptomatic "reading" of the war as memory, revealing that which is hidden within itself and the suppressed violence – to a *transposition* of that typical portrayal to the creation of images (*representation*) of the eastern neighbour. This transposition only intensifies the process of the Macedonian quest for its own discourse, its own geopolitical positioning, the revelation of its own stories, and the transition from object to political subject, which makes the eastern neighbour a stronger epitome of that

same fascist phenomenology of evil. This *portrayal of the Bulgarian neighbour* as "they" – as stereotypical as it is, as much as it does not take into account the positive circumstances after the September 9th coup d'état in 1944[2], as much as the representation is politically and ideologically unfounded and generalized – helped the formation of the Macedonian "we". The same antagonism of the portrayal of the Turk enables the creation of images and ideological representations of the neighbour as an element of collective self-recognition of the Macedonians as a distinct political entity. In other words, such a portrayal of the neighbour is, at the same time, a self-portrayal – an articulation of the desire for decolonization from imposed narratives of self-recognition and of a political program for national self-determination.

Conclusion: the portrayal of the neighbour and the neighbourhood as self-portrait

This type of *reading* of the Macedonian and other comic books of the *Never a Slave* edition reveals that, in our case, the portrayal of the neighbour and the neighbourhood is much more than a process of creating ideological legitimacy and order. More precisely, the portrayal of the Turk neighbour as an antagonistic Other, portrayals of the Yugoslav neighbour as a Slavic brother and of the Bulgarian neighbour as a fascist collaborator – as constitutive perceptions, representations, feelings for the neighbour – are, at the same time, articulations of oneself, *self-portraits* for the recognition of one's identity, self-awareness as a distinct political, linguistic and cultural identity. All political subjectivity begins to identify itself, to build its identity (awareness of itself, of a distinct identity) through the so-called *mirror phenomenon*. This means that identification begins with the reflection in the mirror of the past of the images of oneself, the legends, the stories, and with the images of the OTHERS surrounding us. It is the images of the neighbour and the neighbourhood that are an intrinsic, supplemental semiurgy of the Macedonian contemporary identity.

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[2] The 1944 Bulgarian coup d'état, also known as the 9 September coup d'état, was the forcible change of the pro-fascist government of Kingdom of Bulgaria. The 9 September coup d'état was led by the Fatherland Front (Bulgarian: Отечествен фронт), a Bulgarian pro-communist political resistance movement during World War II.

These processes of portrayal and self-portrayal are parallel to the process of national awakening of small nations such as the Macedonian one.

This context leads to two conclusions. First, the need for understanding, sensitivity, dialogue, tolerance, and acceptance of the Other in contemporary society, and the need for social efforts to surpass the oppression and depreciation of the Other in the neighbourhood which are neither mutually exclusive nor contradictory, in light of the theory that this generalized and antagonistic *portrayal as self-portrayal* is a constitutive and structural basis of the nation building process. Second, this type of generalized and antagonistic Macedonian *self-portrayal and portrayal* has become a fated basis of the current sharpened, implacable, deplorable neighbourly politics of repudiating Macedonian distinctiveness and national self-awareness.

Now that the repudiations of the Macedonian self-portrait and the *politics of repudiation* are renewed and restituted, the 21st century Macedonian identity cultural politics, as self-portraits of the politics of resistance, must be in the direction of linguistic resistance and narrating defiance. This means that we must insist on telling our story with the language of the deniers; this may not solve the problem [that they have with us] but it will teach them to live with it. In the struggle for identity representation which has been imposed on us in recent decades, if we want to make our (self)recognition visible and legitimate as it has been presented in the legends, then every *self-portrait* as a *cultural politics of resistance* which demarginalizes and propagates our distinctiveness is more than necessary.

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Obraz sąsiada i sąsiedztwa w macedońskiej literaturze graficznej i kulturze komiksowej

W artykule analizie poddany został obraz sąsiada i sąsiedztwa w macedońskich opowieściach graficznych *Nikad robom* (*Nigdy niewolnikiem*). Komiks nie tylko był jednym z najbardziej wpływowych zjawisk masowych i popkulturowych w byłej Jugosławii, lecz także uczestniczył w kształtowaniu wizerunku sąsiada i sąsiedztwa jako szczególnego typu przemyśleń społeczno-politycznych i tożsamościowych. Komiks – jako opowieść graficzna i dominujący fenomen w popkulturze lat 50. i 60. XX wieku – miał silną ideologiczną i polityczną władzę

w procesach legitymizacji dominujących wartości społecznych. W ramach wspomnianych procesów ulokowano kilka kluczowych przedstawień sąsiada w tej edycji komiksowej, które nie tylko ujawniają wpływ czynników politycznych i ideologicznych na kształtowanie tożsamości narodowych, lecz także uczestniczą w procesie (od)tworzenia i konsolidacji macedońskiej samoświadomości różnej od samoświadomości sąsiadów. Budowanie macedońskiej tożsamości jako wyartykułowanej opowieści o sobie w dużej mierze opiera się na wyobrażeniach i uczuciach odnoszących się do sąsiadów. W tekście dochodzi się więc do wniosku, że portret sąsiada jest rodzajem autoportretu.

Słowa kluczowe: komiks, sąsiad, 'Inny', obraz, *Nigdy niewolnikiem*, Macedońska literatura graficzna, ideologia, tożsamość

The portrayal of the neighbour and the neighbourhood in Macedonian graphic literature and comic book culture

In this article we analyze the portrayal of the neighbour and the neighbourhood in the Macedonian graphic stories of the *Nikad robom* (*Never a Slave*) comic book edition. It was not only one of the most influential mass and pop culture phenomena in ex-Yugoslavia, but it also participated in the ideological shaping of images and depictions of the neighbour and the neighbourhood as special types of sociopolitical and identity cogitations. The comic book, as a graphic story and a dominant pop culture phenomenon in the 1950s and 1960s, had strong ideological and political power in the processes of legitimizing the dominant social values. Within said processes, we have located several key representations and images of the neighbour in this edition which not only reveal the influence of the political and ideological factors in the shaping of national identities but also participate in the process of (re)creation and consolidation of Macedonian self-awareness as distinct from that of its neighbours. The building of the Macedonian identity, as an articulated story of itself, is largely based on perceptions and representations of and feelings for the neighbour. Hence, we come to the assumption that the portrayal of the neighbour is a type of self-portrait.

Keywords: comic books, neighbour, 'Other', portrayal, *Never a Slave*, Macedonian graphic literature, ideology, identity

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