Captain America and Iron Man: American Imperialism in the Cold War

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Introduction

"We need to be put in check. Whatever form that takes, I'm game. If we can't accept

limitations, we're boundary-less, we're no better than the bad guys".

Tony Stark, *Captain America: Civil War* (2016)

In his speech concerning the Sokovia Accords, the fictional legislation aimed at regulating the actions of superheroes, Tony Stark, who is Iron Man, argues in favour of limitations on the Avengers' actions. In short, the American government and the United Nations decide that superheroes should be regulated, since their actions endanger the public. The Sokovia Accords, also known as the Registration Act, requires the registration of superheroes' real identity and their compliance with the orders of the American government. Immediately, the superheroes are divided into two camps: those who want to sign the act and those who criticise it and refuse to sign (Figure 1). The Registration Act, as well as the division of superheroes, is inspired by the Patriot Act of the Bush government, which also divided American public opinion. Both of these acts promoted the need to sacrifice some of our personal freedoms for the sake of the safety of the community. Tony Stark claims that the act is beneficial to society, while Captain America is sceptical because of the loss of their personal freedoms. This divide among the superhero community eventually leads to a civil war with staggering casualty numbers. In the end, however, Captain America surrenders to Iron Man so as to end the hostilities between the two superhero teams. In other words, Captain America finally is convinced to sacrifice his personal liberty for the sake of the safety of society.

Marvel's *Civil War* is only one example of the intricate links between comic books and American politics. Comic book writers have regularly derived inspiration from major political events and, according to Dan Hassler Forrest and Joyce Goggin,

heroes and supervillains are "adjusted to different political climates and changing social values" (Goggin & Forrest 130). In addition, Bradford W. Wright supports that comic books, as a form of history, emerged out of the "shifting interaction of politics, culture, audience taste, and the economics of publishing" and, therefore, that a critical examination of these comics can lead us to a better understanding of the ways in which the United States evolved (xiii). Jason Dittmer also underlines the connections between comic books and politics, as well as the political significance of those ties. Particularly, he argues that superheroes such as Captain America not only reflect changing narratives in American political life (Dittmer, "The Nationalist Superhero" 63), but also shape new ones and contribute to their perpetuation (93). Thus, an academic examination of comic books can help us understand the ways in which American politics evolved.

The content of comic books has been linked to American politics ever since the first half of the twentieth century. According to Wright, Marvel's *Captain America* (1941) specifically was a political creation used by Simon and Kirby as a "metaphorical war against Nazi oppression, anticipating the real American war that they believed was inevitable"(Wright 36). Indeed, the cover of the first issue depicts Captain America punching Hitler in the face, indicating that the United States needs to act against the Nazis (Figure 3). Taking into account the popularity of the series, it might well have had an influence on its readers in favour of America's participation in WWII, which ultimately happened on December 8[th, 1941], nine months after the publication of *Captain America*'s first issue. However**,** no matter what the intention of its creators were or what kind of impact it had on public opinion, *Captain America* did successfully reflect the tensions within American society concerning whether or not the United States should participate in this second World War in a generation**.** This tension dominated the era's

politics and *Captain America* clearly based its content in part on that contemporary political discussion.

Even after the end of WWII, the content of comic books remained connected to American politics. According to Mike S. DuBose, the changing political status quo of the 1980s is portrayed through the vigilante characters in DC Comics' the *Dark Knight* and *Watchmen* (DuBose 916). DuBose argues that morality in the politics of the 1980s was far more complex than during WWII and, consequently, superheroes' morality changed as well in order to adapt to the new status quo (918). To him, unlike in the 1940s, when the distinction between evil and good was clear, in the 1980s the distinction became blurred. Therefore, heroes could not be either completely evil or completely good (926). Vigilantes in comic books, like Batman in the *Dark Knight* or Ozymandias in *Watchmen,* are instances of this blurred morality; they act both inside and outside of the political system in illegal or extrajudicial ways**,** while their purpose is defending and maintaining justice (926). Consequently, the shift in American politics in the 1980s is mirrored in the content of contemporary comic books, which poignantly depict the blurred political morality of the era.

Not only did comic books depict the political discourse in and of the 1980s, but they did so in later eras as well. One of these eras is the one that followed the 9/11. Jason Dittmer states that shortly after the attacks, a new *Captain America* series, which included direct references to the events, was released by Marvel. (Dittmer, "Captain America's Empire" 637). The series begins a mere few minutes after the attacks and, according to Dittmer, a dichotomy is immediately created (637). He specifically claims that the series puts a stress on the differences between the victims of the towers (and consequently all Americans) and the attackers, who came from outside the country (637). Keeping in mind Dittmer's assumption that the *Captain America* series functions

as a way in which Americans come to understand their position in the broader geopolitical landscape (626), the depiction of 9/11 in the series can be regarded as a part of this process. Americans were shocked and intimidated by the attacks, and could easily identify with the victimized Americans in the series. At the same time, they could differentiate themselves from the attackers, who are depicted as dangerous armed Arabs. In this way, *Captain America* contributed to the creation of a new narrative which helped Americans understand their place in the geopolitical map, in which they were the insiders and the Arabs the outsiders. Considering the fact that this narrative and the events of 9/11 dominated the American politics for a decade or more in the early 21st century, we can argue that *Captain America*'s content was associated with contemporary American politics in this new century as well.

Whether as part of WWII popular culture, capturing the morality of American politics in the 1980s, or chronicling the events of 9/11, comic books always linked their content to contemporary politics in America. Not only did they comment on each era's political discourse, but they also contributed to the establishment of new narratives, which Americans were able to use as a way to comprehend the contemporary political status quo. Thus, it can be argued that comic books have influenced, to a certain degree, the way political culture as well as society evolved from the 1940s up until today. Certainly, comic books have been part of American politics and the study of their content and the links between comic books and American society is of crucial importance. M. Thomas Inge argues that "the comics as we know them today are arguably a distinctively American art form that has contributed significantly to the culture of the world" and "serve as revealing reflectors of popular attitudes, tastes, and mores, and they speak directly to human desires, needs, and emotions" (M. Thomas

Inge 307). Therefore, studying comic books' content lets us better understand America and its people.

This study, however, will focus on examining the relationship between the content of comic books and American imperialism as it is expressed in the American cultured during the Cold War**.** Considering the massive number of comic books produced during this era, though, examining all of them is practically impossible. For this reason, this thesis will concentrate on one of the most popular publishing houses, Marvel Comics, and will study the ways in which two if its heroes are connected to American imperialism. Due to Marvel's recent popularity (after the expansion of its universe to the big screen) and its titles' continued ties to American politics since the Second World War, studying this house's titles' links to American imperialism can be of merit**.** Indeed, the latest movie of Marvel Cinematic Universe, *Captain America: Civil War*, had a revenue of 1,153 billion dollars, 420.6 billion dollars more than the latest DC Extended Universe film, *The Suicide Squad*. Of course, a personal preference for Marvel's superheroes also played a not insignificant role in selecting this particular publishing house as the main component of this thesis. Specifically, this thesis will examine Captain America and Iron man during the early and later Cold War respectively and will attempt to answer the following question:

In which ways do these Marvel Comics' superhero titles support and defend American imperialism during the Cold War?

This thesis, as such, contains three chapters. First, the theoretical context is set. Particularly, in the first chapter, I explain the imperialist facets of the Cold War and the culture that evolved around it by referring to the existing literature on the field. Then, I provide a justification as to the selection of the particular comic book superhero titles

and the reason why each of them is discussed in relation to a specific era within the Cold War. Finally, to complete the methodological basis of this thesis, the chapter summarises the existing literature concerning the analysis and criticism of comics. Additionally, I define which are the cultural characteristics (that supported American imperialism) of each era that this paper attempts to trace and identify in the selected comic books. Having done all these, the thesis proceeds with the next two chapters and the study of Captain America and Iron Man's content in relation to these specific cultural characteristics.

In the second chapter, therefore, Captain America is examined in association with the early years of the Cold War. The *Atlas Era* publication of the title, which ran from December 1953 until September 1954, is used as source material. Particularly, the chapter focuses on three major elements of the American culture that characterised the early Cold War and favour somehow the American claims in world hegemony. These elements are the Red Scare, masculinity crisis, and American exceptionalism. For this study, these cultural elements are the main narratological codes that run throughout the series and determine its content, while linking it to the general Cold War narrative. Thus, the chapter examines the way these elementts function in Captain America's stories of the 1950s and, ultimately, confirms that they indeed connect the series' content to American imperialism, as it was expressed in the culture of the early Cold War.

Similarly, in the second chapter, in which Iron Man is studied within the context of the Vietnam War, the first stories of its publication history that are found in *Tales of Suspense* from issue #39 up and until issue #99 (March 1963-March 1968), are used. This chapter, however, examines the later years of the Cold War and, especially, the Vietnam War. Thus, the cultural elements that are discussed in the chapter cannot be

the same. Indeed, the chapter analyses how anti-communism, militarisation, and Asian stereotypes run throughout Iron Man's stories in the 1960s and linked the series' content to American imperialism. Hence, this study establishes the connection between American imperialism, as it was projected in the culture that evolved around the Cold War, and Captain America and Iron Man's stories of that time.

1. **Setting the Theoretical Framework: Cold War Culture, Empire and Comic Book Analysis**

As I explained in the Introduction, this study will focus on the ways two major American comic book superheroes, Captain America and Iron man, commented on American imperialism during the Cold War, supporting somehow the contemporary American attitude towards American claims for world hegemony. To do so, this study needs to establish a theoretical framework, within which it will operate. Nonetheless, the inquiry of the study is a complex one and demands the combination of several elements so that it can reach safer conclusions. By this, I mean that since a lot of concepts are discussed in this study, we have to establish some referential points as to the nature of the Cold War, the Cold War culture, the notion of the empire in relation to the Cold War, the role of the comics in general and during that specific era, and most importantly the way to analyse comics. Hence, this study will be able to define how the stories of those comic book superheroes commented on American imperialism during the Cold War.

This chapter, thus, will follow a four-point structure, referring to the academic discussion concerning American empire as a concept of the Cold War, the culture of the Cold War in relation to American imperialism, the way to analyse comics, and, ultimately, the way this study will proceed with the analysis of the two comic book series featuring Captain America and Iron Man respectively. First of all, the chapter will refer to the academic discussion on the formation of the American empire after the end of WWII and its connection to the course of the Cold War. Then, the focus will shift on the culture during the Cold War and its relation to the US claims for world hegemony. At that point, several examples of Cold War cultural products, including comics, will be discussed so that we can define the way the American culture functioned

during that era. Henceforth, the chapter will go on with the debate concerning comic book criticism and the established ways of analyzing comics. Having established all these, the chapter will define the analytical strategy of this study and will delineate the main points of the argument.

To begin with, the term *Cold War* was first used by George Orwell to describe a world that was in a constant fear of a nuclear war (Orwell 1945). However, according to John Lewis Gaddis, Bernard Baruch, in a speech given the 16th of April 1947, was the first to use the term to describe the post-war situation between the United States and the Soviet Union (Gaddis 54). Historians disagree regarding the starting point of the Cold War with most of them, though, placing it to the period after the end of WWII. Nevertheless, William Walker suggests that the first glimpses of the Cold War made their appearance even before the end of WWII. Specifically, Walker points out that during the war the United States and the Soviet Union, under the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Stalin respectively, allied envisioning a new anti-imperialist feature for Europe (Walker, "The Cold War" 2). Nonetheless, as he further explains, with the death of Roosevelt the relations between the two "began to fray" (2). Walker also suggests that the detonation of the atomic bombs by the Unites States in 1945 triggered "Soviet efforts to design its own nuclear weapon and to enhance its espionage activities in the United States to secure atomic technology" and, consequently, a large part of the American public opinion turned against Communism and the practices of the Soviet Union (2). Hence, based on Walker´s suggestions, we can assume that the Cold War probably emerged even before the end of WWI.

Indeed, as Walker claims, the Soviet Union began to violate a number of agreements in Eastern Europe by the end of 1945 (3). As a result, he explains, the United States aimed to sustain the anti-communist governments in Europe and launched the

Marshall Plan for the economic recovery of Europe (3). These acts, though, "were viewed as confrontational and hostile by the Soviet Union and strained the relationship with the United States" (3). Walker also suggests that the Soviet Union advanced to Asia as well, and the rise of Communism in China triggered the fear of a worldwide Communism infiltration, which led to the formation of NATO by the United States, in 1949 (4). Therefore, we suspect that the Cold War, which originates back in the 1945, had clear taken his place in world affairs by the end of the decade.

While Walker regards the detonation of the atomic bombs as the starting point for the decay of the alliance between the United States and the Soviet Union, Charles S. Maier views it as "the big bang of American Empire" (Maier 143). Maier, specifically, suggests that America's ascendancy in world hegemony became a fact after WWII and the detonation of the atomic bombs was the "founding moment" of the American Empire since it promised a kind of invulnerability to the United States (143). Thus, we can assume that the inception of the Cold War coincides with the American ascendancy in world hegemony. Maier justifies his assumption that the Cold War was the era of the American empire by indicating the "frontier" issue between the United States and the Soviet Union. Specifically, Maier views the division of Germany as the creation of a boundary between the West and Communism (155) and underlines the fact that that the maintenance of the boundaries is a common feature in all imperial systems and has a direct impact to "the politics of the centre" (148). Since, the creation and maintenance of boundaries is considered an action undertaken by empires so that they can secure their power (78), we can assume that the effort put by both the United States and the Soviet Union to secure their influence within their "frontiers" in Europe, as well as in Korea and Vietnam, was actually an effort to secure their imperial systems and reinforce their influence in these territories.

As mentioned above, the division of Germany was actually the creation of a frontier between the West and Communism. In other words, the imperial systems of the United States and the Soviet Union, during the Cold War, were based mostly on ideology; America's Capitalism and the Soviet Communism. The west Germany symbolized the West and Capitalism embodied by the Unites States and the East Germany represented the Communism enacted by the Soviet Union. Anders Stephanson suggests that the Cold War was caused fore and foremost by the "mutual demonology" between the United States and the Soviet Union, which "considered themselves to embody universal ideologies of right" (Stephanson 122). He specifically affirms that the tension of the Cold War was, indeed, expressed in terms of Capitalism versus Communism (122). As he further explains, the fact that the tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was ideological is the reason why it was named Cold War, meaning that actual geopolitical and military actions were either restricted or "served to keep the struggle (…) in the realm of ideology" (123). Hence, we may consider the Cold War the result of the ambition of the United States and the Soviet Union to lead the world, which was based on each side's assumption that it represented the universal ideology of right.

Maier argues that the situation at an empire's boundaries affect the politics of the centre and the Cold War possibly affected the American politics respectively (148). Likewise, the ideological tension of the Cold War might have influenced the American (political) culture. As a matter of fact, Carosso argues that even though the Cold War begun after the end of WWII (Carosso 12), the 1950s was the era in which the effects of the Cold War were more prominent (9). To him, during the Cold War, and especially in the 1950s, "the United States presented two obvious public faces"; on the one hand prevailed the prosperity and the economic growth of the state and on the other hand the

unease and fear connected to the nuclear annihilation and Communism (8). Obviously, both of these aspects were directly based on the aftermath of WWII and the relation of the United States and the Soviet Union. Americans felt the invulnerability gained by the atomic bombs, but, at the same time, they were living in a constant terror that the Soviets will finally have their own nuclear weapon, which can be used against them. Carosso also argues that this ambiguity was articulated within American society through culture in the form of narratives, which probably shaped the American identity during the 1950s (11). In other words, Carosso supports that the narratives articulated by (popular) culture "are the principal way in which we make sense of the world" (11). In the same way, we suspect that the narratives associated to the Cold War ideology, which shaped the American national identity in the 1950s, might have influenced the public opinion in favour of America's ideological right to lead the world. Thus, the articulation of such narratives has possibly favoured the American claims to world leadership and, consequently, American imperialism.

Nonetheless, the Cold War spanned from the 1950s to the early 1990s and, consequently, the culture that sprang during its course is not homogenous. Indeed, the character of the early Cold War, that of the 1950s, is essentially different from that of the late Cold War. Thus, this study will proceed by distinguishing the two main Cold War eras and the culture that characterised them. The two particular eras that distinct among others within the Cold War are those that are characterised by significant imperial aspects, since military events are the physical manifestation of imperialism's aim to maintain or enlarge a nation's influence abroad as well as to enhance its hegemony worldwide. Therefore, we assume that the two main eras of Cold War are those that were influenced by the course of the Korean War and the Vietnam War respectively.

The early years of the Cold War and mainly the 1950s, were militarily expressed at that time in the Korean War, while the next major military event, the Vietnam War, influenced the 1960s and the 1970s. Of course, there have been plenty other military events during the Cold War, but the Korean and the Vietnam wars were the longest and the most severe. Also, scholars agree that these wars were proxies for the ideological conflict between the West and Communism. Therefore, this study will examine the stories of Captain America and Iron Man during these eras, which were probably the most intense of the Cold War, at least in terms of American imperialism. First, the study will focus on Captain America stories of the Atlas era published in 1954, found in *Men's Adventure's* #27 and #28 as well as in *Captain America* from issue #76 to #78. Then, the focus will shift on the stories of Iron Man during the 1960s, found in *Tales of Suspense* from issue #39 to #72. To do so, however, the next section of the chapter will focus on the culture evolved around those two eras so that we can comprehend its nature and the cultural context, within which those comic book stories came into life.

As far as it concerns the 1950s, Carosso argues that during the 1950s "the United States presented two obvious public faces"; on the one hand the prosperity and the economic growth of the state prevailed, and on the other hand an unease and fear existed, connected to nuclear annihilation and communism (8). Obviously, both of these aspects were directly based on the aftermath of WWII and the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union. Americans acknowledged the veneer of invulnerability provided by the atomic bombs, but, at the same time, they were living in a constant fear that the Soviets would ultimately have their own nuclear weapons, which in turn could be used against the United States. Among the narratives of the early Cold War culture that are discussed by Carosso are consumerism (46), suburban lifestyles (59), the rise of middle-class (12), domesticity (71), conformity (105), race

inequality (159), the masculinity crisis (120), the Red Scare (28), youth culture (139), and American exceptionalism (52).

All of these elements and the fact they co-existed within American society indicate the ambiguous nature of the 1950s, which might in part have been caused by the Cold War and America's ambition to lead the world. Specifically, Carosso explains the way these elements were presented and propagated at some points in contemporary American culture. Among others, he refers to the media as a means to promote and normalise consumption as part of "America's new capitalism" (42). Particularly, to him, magazines such as *Life* created different sorts of mini-films or series that praised American capitalism and consumption as something that confirms. *The New America*, a Cinerama film produced by *Life* magazine, "declared that, because of its economy, post-war America was a new world which could be measured by its economic achievements, which in turn were the result of a new version of capitalism (…) no longer ruthless or exploitative, but rather called upon workers, corporations and government to cooperate in improving living standards for all" (41). The magazine also claimed that consumption was the key for the new capitalism, contributing, therefore, to the broader concept of the "affluent society" that prevailed in the 1950s (41). Taking into account that the Cold War was for and foremost a war of ideologies and, specifically, a war between Capitalism and Communism, the promotion of the capitalistic model was in fact the promotion of the United States against the Soviet Union in the war for world hegemony.

Of course, the press was not the only medium to contribute to the broader consensus of the American culture of the early Cold War. Carosso suggests that television played a significant part as well. To him, the rise of the television coincides with the suburbanization of America and somehow supports it. Not only this, but he

also argues that television promoted and confirmed the stereotypical gender roles, which came up as the result of suburbanization and the rise of the nuclear family (86-94). Sitcoms of the 1950s were among those programs that normalised post-war gender dynamics. In *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952– 19666) the mom and the kids of the central family deferred to Ozzie, the respected patriarch, while the female roles in *Father Knows Best* (1954– 1962) and in *Leave it to Beaver* (1957– 1963) "represented the promises of the economic and social processes that established their social subjectivity as homemakers" (95). Finally, as Carosso explains, "male sitcom actors were chosen in a way that allowed them to fit the new role of the American male, caught in the changing dynamics of the post-war family" (96).

Just like the press and television, films, music, and comics also reflected the culture of the early Cold War, which ideologically supported American claims to world hegemony. Similarly, the culture that evolved around the Vietnam War reflected the contemporary American views on the war and American imperialism in general. Nevertheless, the era of the Vietnam war was characterised by much more ambiguity than the 1950s, since a lot of scepticism concerning America's military actions was cultivated within American society. Indeed, as Susan A. brewer suggests, "from the beginning, government leaders found it hard to explain to the American people why U.S. troops fought in Vietnam" (Brewer 179). She, particularly, explains that the Vietnam War was mostly a "war of performance" and the leaders of the United States feared that a possible failure U.S to prevent Vietnam from turning Communist would damage America's image of power regarded to be significant in the ideological conflict with the Soviet Union (180).

The Vietnam War, despite being controversial, affirmed the anti-communist feelings within American society, feelings which favoured the American imperialism

of the early Cold War. According to James T. Patterson, "cultural and social changes seemed to accelerate rapidly in the early 1960s, to reshape public policies in the mid-1960s, and to polarise the nation in the last few years of the decade" (Patterson 443). This polarisation was enhanced by and partly derived from the Vietnam War. Patterson suggests that even though the 1960s were a more tolerant era than the 1950s (442), "the Vietnam War revealed the persistent power of patriotic, anti-communist opinion" (455). Rick Berg and John Carlos Rowe also suggest the Vietnam War was "one among the countless colonial wars waged in Southeast Asia over the last thousand years" (Berg & Rowe 1). They also claim that the Vietnam War connects the United States "to the ugly history of Western colonialism" (1) and that the United States waged that war due to their aspiration to expand their "sphere of influence" (3). The fact that the Vietnam War was the result of the aspiration of the United States to lead the world gives credence to the notion that the 1960s were not so geopolitically different from the 1950s, when the United States engaged in its first ideological conflict with the Soviet Union for world leadership.

Similarly, the culture of the 1960s reflected on the Vietnam War and influenced the way Americans perceived it. Indeed, Berg and Rowe support that the cultural means of imagining the Vietnam War are "the essence of the new brand imperialism that we [Americans] continue to sell in the furthest reaches of the world" (3). In other words, Berg and Rowe claim that the American culture of the 1960s, which evolved around the Vietnam War, justified American imperialism then and now. In addition, Brenda M. Boyle and Jeehyun Lim claim that the Vietnam War had a "significant bearing on U.S. cultural narratives, memorialization practices, and attitudes towards authority" (Boyle & Lim 1). Finally, Christopher Renny confirms that "the political positions that

were laid out during the war [..] have become entrenched in American cultural reworkings of the war" (Renny 1).

Not only this, but the government of the United States seems to have intentionally propagated the war through media. According to Brewer, the White House organised a campaign for the promotion of the war; "To manage the news, each administration concentrated on what it considered to be the most influential sources: the television networks, the New York Times, the Washington Post, Time, and Newsweek" (Brewer 180). In addition, to Brewer, television was mostly supportive of the government's action concerning the Vietnam war and at several points it "tended to disguise the flaws in the administration's war aims (181). Of course, film industry also dealt with the Vietnam war. Even if the instances are as many as in television, most of them were supportive of the war. According to Stephen Prince, "there were more than a dozen American films dealing with the struggle against communism in Southeast Asia", including *The Ugly American* (1963), *Operation C.I.A* (1965), and *The Green Berets* (1968) (Prince 121).

Even though plenty of American cultural products reflected contemporary views on American imperialism and promoted somehow the American claims to world hegemony during the Cold War, this study will only focus on two specific comic book superheroes, Captain America and Iron Man. Specifically, Captain America will be discussed in the context of the 1950s, since it was during the Korean War when the hero was "reborn" by Marvel comics, making its content extremely relevant to the course of the war. Respectively, Iron Man's stories will be examined in the context of the Vietnam War and, especially, the 1960s, when the hero made his first appearance as a fervent anti-communist warrior in Vietnam. To be able to analyse these stories, this study needs to briefly explore the main points of comic book criticism and the

mechanism applied for their literary interpretation. Not to forget that this study is mostly a literary approach, which takes into account politics and history, rather than a purely historical project. As also said in the Introduction, what matters more in this study is not the motives of the creators of the comics in question nor the actual effect they had on American society. Instead, the study concentrates on the content of the comics itself and examines the extent to which it promoted the already established narratives that supported American imperialism.

As mentioned earlier on, the thesis's analysis will be based on close reading, which will conform to the current theories concerning comic book criticism. According to Aaron Meskin and Roy T. Cook, comic books as part of the popular culture constitute a form of hybrid art since it appears to be a combination of several earlier art forms (Meskin & Cook xix). However, Meskin and Cook argue that comic books are not merely a sum of combined pre-existing art forms, but rather a complete art form that "evolved from its heterogeneous origins" and developed a wealth of (…) conventions governing panel placement, panel borders (or frames), speech and thought balloons, narration boxes, sound effects, motion lines and other emanata, and a host of other characteristics. Also, to them, those comic book conventions vary from culture to culture and, therefore, "comics are saturated with convention, and cultural variation of convention, to a degree unmatched by any other visual art form" (xix). Hence, the study of comic books demands a lot of attention.

Several comic book artists, philosophers and scholars, including Scott McCloud, Will Eisner, and David Kunzle, have attempted to explain the nature of comic books and, therefore, the way they should be analysed. Comic book artist McCloud, for instance, argues that comics should be analysed from the scope of formalism, since comic books' popularity is based on their structure; that is the "juxtaposed pictorial and

other images in deliberate sequence" that "convey information" and "produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud 9). On the other hand, Will Eisner agrees with art historian David Kunzle that comics hold a "moral and topical" nature (Kunzle 1973) and suggest that despite its structure and visual aspects, comics is a "form of reading" and should be analysed content-wise (Eisner 1). Nevertheless, it was David Carrier's work that shed more light to the study of comic books. Specifically, Carrier explains that comics interpretation differs from the interpretation of "high" art as comics are in fact a sequence of "self-interpreting pictures" (Carrier 121).

Despite the nature of the comics, one other concern in comic book criticism is representation. The relationship between images and text in comic books is part of the representation. According to Thomas E. Wartenberg, "it is characteristic of comics to give equal priority to the text and the pictures (…) neither the text nor the image provides an independent constraint upon the other" (Wartenberg 87). Indeed, the majority of the Academy sees comics as a form of literature. Nonetheless, Aaron Meskin argues that comics is a hybrid form of art that combines literary devises with pictures and, therefore, it should be analysed respectively. Henry John Pratt agrees and indicates that narrativity, which is a major literary device, plays a crucial role in comics' interpretation too but he also suggests that comic books' analysis and interpretation resembles that of films since narrativity is merged with images (Pratt 107-110). Wartenberg claims that unlike illustration books, where images agree with the meaning of the words (Wartenberg 89), in comic books "the images and text both contribute at an equally basic level to their story-worlds" (97). Moreover, Wartenberg suggests that in comic books images are not merely pictorial, meaning that they do not only give an image, but they also function in a descriptive way. One such example is, according to him, the 'speed lines', which are drawn in a panel not for pictorial purposes but to

describe that an object or a character is moving fast (97). Similarly, text in comic books is not only descriptive or narratological but "is used in a representational way, but not visually or pictorially" to represent "sonic elements of the scene that is represented pictorially by the images in the other frames in the strip". The use of the word "Pow" to indicate a sonic event in comic books is an example of this kind of representation that functions as "a translation of (usually) auditory features of the depicted (fictional) world of the comic into visual form" (100). Consequently, the use of both text and images enables comics to represent descriptive, narratological, pictorial, and auditory elements as the films do.

Indeed, comic books resemble films in the sense that they both employ image, text, and sound. However, Roy T. Cook explains that it is a mistake to apply the techniques and theories constructed for the interpretation of films in the interpretation of comics (Cook 165). Cook argues that "there is a genuine need for a separate account of the structure and aesthetics of comics" since film theory and criticism seem at some points unable to grasp the complexity of the comics' nature (184). Moreover, according to Karin Kukkonen, comic books are now considered to be literature due to "their complex narrative strategies", which "allow to them to participate in and reflect on the contemporary cultural debate" and, therefore, the development of analysing methods for their interpretation is necessary (Kukkonen 177).

Kukkonen agrees with Neil Forceville that cognitive approach is the most fruitful way to analyse comics (Kukkonen 14, Forceville 89). Particularly, Forceville argues that cognitive approach in comic book analysis derives from linguistics and focuses on "the systematicity and pattern-finding" that is related to the meaning-making process (Forceville 90). He also adds that as far as it concerns comic book analysis, cognitive approach is interrelated with culture and ideology and, therefore, narrative

and language theories contribute to the better understanding of comics, even though comics is a non-verbal or partly verbal art form (90-91). To him, cognitivist-oriented comic book analysis is mostly influenced by conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory as well. Conceptual Metaphor Theory is the attempt to "conceptualise abstract and complex phenomena by *systematically* understanding them in terms of concrete phenomena" (91). Even though Conceptual Metaphor Theory entails to a degree hybridity, "there are many other forms of hybridizing" that can be better capture by Blending Theory (93). Blending Theory "postulates that different semantic domains (…) merge to create a new 'blended space' (…), which combines selected elements from the input spaces and as a result yields new, emergent meaning that was not present in either of the input spaces" (93). In other words, two sides are combined and provide an implied meaning. Finally, Forceville suggests that both Blending Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory "rely on mental structures known as "image schemas": the patterns that function as the abstract structure of an image, which connects different experiences to a central recurring structure" (94).

Thierry Groensteen also supports that comics function as a system, whose parts conform to central recurring structure, also known as "codes" (Groensteen 7). To him, comics are primarily a language, "an original ensemble of productive mechanisms of meaning" and, hence, should be analysed in terms of cognitivism and not "through a grand theory, such as structural analysis or narrative semiotics" (2). Groensteen also explains that there are four distinct eras of comic book analysis, which either concentrate on structure or on ideology and usually analyse comics in terms of minimal units and not as a whole (3). According to him, though, comics should be seen as a system of codes, either visual or narratological, and should be analysed both in terms of smaller units and broader codes. Particularly, he suggests that "at certain analytical

moments, we move to the interior of the panel" to explore "certain component elements (…) with reference to the codes (…) that determine these components" (7). In addition, the code system of a comic is ruled, to Groensteen, by a spatio-topical code, "which organises the co-presence of panels" and "governs the framing relations" between the visual and the narratological elements (6).

Not only does Groensteen argues for the interpretation of comics as a system, but he also claims that the comic book analysis should be analysed in terms of 'elementary relations' (which is a form of restricted arthrology focusing on the sequence of panels, frames, and codes) and 'general arthrology' (which is the network that links the elementary elements) (22). Furthermore, page lay-out and breakdown, as parts of arthrology, "mutually inform one another" and contribute to the analysis of comic books (143). Specifically, the lay-out has to do with the arrangement of the panels in one frame and the breakdown with the sequence of the frames within a comic book. As said before, the broader narrative of a comic book determines these elements and, henceforth, the analysis of lay-outs and breakdowns is able to reveal the nature of the comic's main narrative.

Taking into account the literature concerning the criticism and analysis of the comics, this thesis will treat each of the two comic book series in question as a whole, while analysing them in terms of both narrative and image. As in every comic book, there are some major narratological codes that determine the smaller units of Captain America and Iron Man's storylines during the 1950s and the 1960s, respectively. This thesis considers American imperialism to be the major narrative that runs throughout the series and determines its arthrology, while the cultural characteristics mentioned above are the sub-narratives that connect the content of the comics to the broader narrative. The rest of the study, henceforth, will examine these sub-narratives within

the comic books in question and will explain their role in the connection between those comic books and American imperialism.

2. The Early Cold War: *Captain America* in the 1950s

Even though the *Captain America* comic series is part of a popular culture, which is often seemingly bland or apolitical, the series' political aspects and ways in which it reflects on, reacts to and arguably even influences American politics should not be overlooked or underestimated. Jason Dittmer argues that the series' popularity was based on its ability to reflect contemporary American narratives and political views (Dittmer, "America is safe" 403-4). Moreover, W. Wright argues that *Captain America* was a political creation used by Simon and Kirby as "a metaphorical war against Nazi oppression, anticipating the real American war that they believed was inevitable" (Wright 36). Taking the popularity of the series into account, it can be argued that *Captain America* influenced its readers in favour of America's participation in WWII, which ultimately happened on December 8th, 1941, nine months after the publication of the first issue of *Captain America*. Needless to say, the attack on Pearl Harbour itself was a big enough catalyst to not need *Captain America´*s outspoken support, but the comic book series arguably did help shape public opinion in those nine months prior to the attack. Indeed, Dittmer suggests that superheroes, and Captain America specifically, are able to "legitimate, contest and rework states' foreign policies" (Dittmer, "The Nationalist Superhero" 2). As stated in the introduction, WWII was not the only time when the *Captain America* comic series' content was closely linked to American politics. Thus, this chapter will focus on the early Cold War and the publication of *Captain America* in the 1950s, in order to see how the series related to the American political culture of the time, and especially its imperial facets. Consequently, whether or not *Captain America* favoured American imperialism during the first years of the Cold War can be established by a close reading of the source material.

This chapter is divided into three sections. As explained before, the culture of the early Cold War was extremely complicated and ambiguous, combining the feeling of superiority and economic growth as well as the fears that derived from the detonation of the atomic bombs. Therefore, this chapter will focus on elements of this ambiguous culture, which was directly influenced by the Cold War and its imperial aspects. For lack of space, though, only three of these elements will be isolated so as to proceed with the following three parts, which will consist of a close reading of the primary sources. The cultural elements in question, which are also the main codes that run throughout the series, are the Red Scare, masculinity crisis, and American exceptionalism. Consequently, each of the following three sub-chapters will consist of an analysis of a particular element of the early Cold War culture and will attempt to identify this element in the *Captain America* comics of the Atlas Era, so that a conclusion can be provided concerning the position of the series towards American imperialism. In other words, this study regards those three cultural elements as the series' main codes that determine its arthrology and connects its sub-codes to the broader narratological code, the cultural expression of American imperialism during the early Cold War.

The selection of those cultural elements is based on the assumption that the ambiguity described by Carosso should be highlighted, so that the chapter will give a consistent image of the era. In other words, this chapter will provide an examination consisting of a combination of narratives that encompasses both prosperity and economic growth, as well as anxiety and fear, a combination that shaped the ambiguous nature of the American 1950s. Clearly, the Red Scare is directly derived from the fear and anxiety within American society, while American exceptionalism comes to the fore more regarding the issue of prosperity and the feeling of invulnerability gained by the detonation of the atomic bombs. Finally, even though masculinity normally reflects the

conformity associated with the suburban lifestyle of the middle-class, and, consequently, the economic growth of the 1950s, when in crisis, it is heavily influenced by the anxiety of the Cold War. Thus, it can be argued that the masculinity crisis corresponds with both the prosperity and the anxiety of the 1950s. Therefore, by proving the association of *Captain America* with these narratives through a close reading of *Captain America*'s source texts**,** it can be shown that the series reflected the aforementioned ambiguous nature of the Cold War political culture, which was of vital importance in the shaping of American identity and has helped strengthen the United States' claims to world leadership.

2.1 Captain America against the Reds: Red Scare and Espionage

William T. Walker states that "the fear of communism dominated American political life" after the victory of the United Stated in 1945 (Walker, "The Red Scare" 1). This fear, which was not wholly new to the American society, was called the Red Scare. Don E. Carleton argues that the Red Scare was a dominant aspect of post-war American life and was "characterized by a widespread series of actions by individuals and groups whose intentions were to frighten Americans 'with false and highly exaggerated charges of communist subversion for the purpose of political, economic and psychological profit'." (Carleton 4). As has already been mentioned, the Cold War was in part the result of the ambitions of both the United States and the Soviet Union to lead the world, which was based on the assumption that each of them personified the universal ideology of right (Stephanson 122). Therefore, we can consider the Red Scare a result of the ideological tension of the Cold War, which was expressed in terms of capitalism versus communism. Also, the cultivation of the Red Scare has possibly aimed to favour the American ideology of freedom against communism in the battle for world hegemony.

The fear of espionage was an important expression of the Red Scare within American society. The detonation of the atomic bombs triggered excessive spying activities by the Soviet Union, which heightened anti-communist sentiments among Americans (Walker, "The Cold War" 2). According to James T. Patterson, the first Soviet atomic bomb detonation, on the 29th of August 1949, raised Americans' fear of espionage even more since they "simply refused to believe that the communists (…) could have managed the feat by themselves" and therefore chose to believe in the narrative that this was the result of Soviet espionage (Patterson 170). Thus, the feeling of invulnerability among Americans begun to fray since the advantage of the United States over its antagonist had vanished. Consequently, further stressing the ideological aspects of the Cold War was a way to maintain the ascendancy of the United States. Hence, the propagation of the Red Scare, in the form of the fear of espionage, "rose to the centre of American society, politics, and foreign policy" (Patterson 165).

The promotion of fear of espionage within American society could have been a way to justify American military interventions abroad, which aimed at the reinforcement of American economic and political influence worldwide. Also, Julius Rosenberg, who was accused and convicted, along with his wife, for leaking classified technical information on the atomic bomb to the Soviets, regarded their case a frame job and claimed that "there had to be a Rosenberg Case, because there had to be an intensification of the hysteria in America to make the Korean War acceptable to the American people" (Meeropol, xxxi). Indeed, when the Rosenberg case came to the fore in 1950, it enhanced the Red Scare and according to William T. Walker, it provided evidence of Soviet spying, which affirmed Americans' fears that the United States were under attack and "converted many of them into supporting McCarthy and other right-wing politicians (Walker, "The Red Scare" 52). It is possible, therefore, that the

promotion of a fear of espionage aimed at maintaining and expanding American influence abroad, which was based on the ideological conflict between America's freedom and the Soviets' communism.

Not only was the Red Scare spread throughout American society and politics, but it pervaded American culture as well. According to Michael Kackman, "spies were everywhere in the 1950s American media culture" such as books, magazines, films, radio, and television, and this prevalence affirmed America's fears of communist subversion (Kackman 1). Consequently, American popular culture contributed to the promotion of the Red Scare and by doing so it favoured America's being right in the question of who gets to be the world hegemon. According to Kackman, in television and radio, espionage stories "emerged from a media culture fascinated with spies and fearful of communist subversion" and led editors to compete for more and more compelling and outrageous spy stories (6). In the same way, comic book editors followed this rave and introduced their own espionage stories. Marvel, then known as Atlas Comics, not only introduced four new espionage titles but also enhanced existing series with espionage stories.

Captain America, as an expression of the American culture of the 1950s, also depicted and propagated fear of espionage. During the Atlas Era the series was filled with espionage stories; seven out of the eleven stories dealt with or referred to Red espionage (the rest involved other kinds of plots against the United States). These stories were divided into two main categories: those which narrated an espionage story, and those which only referred to spying activities. The first category is comprised of three stories, including the very first Captain America story of the Atlas Era, 'The Girl Who Was Afraid', found in *Men's Adventures* #27 (May 1954). The scene opens with Steve Rogers (the alter ego of Captain America) and his assistant, Bucky, enjoying their

vacation in Egypt. However, the happy tranquillity stops abruptly when Captain America says that "It's not all on the surface!", meaning that things are not the way they appear to be and the spies can be found everywhere (Masterworks, 10). Specifically, he suspects a friendly Egyptian who approaches them of being a spy (Figure 2). Thus, from the very first page, the Red Scare madness is evident. Of course, the selection of Egypt as the setting of the story is of great importance, since during that time Egypt was part of the Non Aligned Movement, consisting of states not aligned to either USSR or the United States. Therefore, it was an economic, ideological, and political battleground in the race toward world domination and espionage activities as well as other subversive elements might have been favoured by both the Soviet Union and the United States.

Captain America suspects the friendly Egyptian, named Adu Bey, throughout the whole story. His fear is also heightened by the confession of a girl, who claims to be the Egyptian's prisoner. Finally, the girl leads Captain and Bucky into an ancient tomb, where a Soviet armoury is kept. However, Captain America finds out that the real spy is in fact the girl herself, who simply attempted to frame the Egyptian. This storyline approximately reflects the spirit of the era. As Lindop argues, the fear of espionage led Americans to suspect everyone (neighbours, friends, family) and made them feel unsafe, since Soviets and their spies were supposed to be everywhere (Lindop 26). Even those who seemed innocent, like the girl in the story, could be Soviet spies.

The other two stories of this first category follow the same track. In "The Betrayers" (*Captain America* #76, May 1954), for instance, a Soviet spy who works as a photographer attempts to frame his partner, journalist Betsy Ross. So, he takes several photographs of secret army projects, which Betsy Ross is then accused of leaking to the Soviets. Thus, Betsy has to prove that she is not "mixed up with spies!" (Masterworks, 55). During that process, Captain America, who already believes in Betsy's innocence,

follows the photographer and reveals the fraud. Again, this story hammers home the fact that *it's not all at the surface* and Americans may never know who is a Soviet spy. In this story, we can also identify the widely spread practice of interrogating people concerning their ties to the Communist Party (or other communist activities) and its importance for the person's public and professional life. If it had been proven that Betsy indeed had leaked the photographs of the projects, she would have been sent to prison or even faced the death sentence, just like the Rosenbergs.

Additionally, in the stories that only refer to spying activities, spying is presented as an activity that takes place everywhere in the world. In "Kill Captain America" (*Men's Adventures* #28, July 1954), worldwide Soviet spying operations are ordered to stop so that the Soviets can get to Captain America. Particularly, the series depicts Soviet spies in New York, Berlin, and Korea, getting informed about halting all spying activities until Captain America is dead (Figure 3) Also, in "The Green Dragon" (Captain America #78, September 1954), which is set in China, a spy steals a list of reformed communists. In this way, such stories mirrored Americans' fears that they were under attack both from outside as well as within American borders.

Several other stories refer to Americans being threatened or lured in by the Soviets so that they will pass information to the Russians concerning the atomic bomb or other military projects. In "Captain America Strikes!" (*Captain America* #76, May 1954), Captain America, while being Steve Rogers, is approached by the Soviets, who offer him money to turn him into a spy. Additionally, in "You Die at Midnight (*Captain America* #77, July 1954), the Soviets threaten to kill the son of a designer at the shipyards so that they can make him bring a "midget atomic engine" to them (Masterworks, 82).

Thus**,** espionage in *Captain America* is depicted in several ways. It might be extreme in its depictions and stories due to its fictional context, but it still reflects the way espionage was seen by Americans during that era. As explained by Edmund Lindop, the early 1950s were a period of extreme fear of espionage (Lindop, 24) and we can see that this fear is also depicted in *Captain America* stories. According to Walker, the propagation of espionage stories, such as the Rosenberg case, intensified the Red Scare (Walker, 52). The Red Scare, in turn, influenced American public opinion regarding the Soviet Union and intensified the ideological tensions between capitalism/freedom and communism/oppression, which are connected to the ambitions of both the United States and the Soviet Union to lead the world. Therefore, Captain America in Atlas Era favoured American ascendancy in world hegemony, since through its many stories warning of the dangers of espionage, it provided a breeding ground for the cultivation of the Red Scare.

2.2 Masculinity and the Battle against Communism

Andrea Carosso argues that during the first years of the Cold War, masculinity underwent a crisis due to the "conflict between an assumed norm of masculinity" and the new domesticated role of men (Carosso, 120). In short, men became anxious and insecure about their role in this new status quo, which was influenced by the rise of television, economic growth, and the massive participation of women in the job market (Carosso, 102-107). Similar to the fear of espionage, the masculinity crisis was derived from the anxiety within American society. According to Barbara Epstein, the masculinity crisis, in terms of homosexuality, was linked to communist subversion (Epstein 73). To her, communists could challenge the prevailing social order in a way similar to how homosexuals could challenge the prevailing sexual order (Epstein, 74). In a way, homosexuality represented the temptation to try alternative things not only in

the sexual aspects of life, but in its socio-political aspects as well. Hence, it was regarded to be as dangerous as communism itself. Specifically, Epstein argues that the "portrayals of communists and homosexuals in the mainstream popular media showed a number of parallels"; they were both presented as conspiracies against the American nation and the conspirators shared many of the same qualities (Epstein, 74). Therefore, the masculinity crisis addressed the anxiety associated with the Cold War and the fear of communist subversion.

The association between communism and homosexuality, according to Geoffrey S. Smith, led to the re-establishment of conventional definitions of masculinity and femininity (Smith, 313). Indeed, Keith Moore asserts that "the fear of communist penetration into the United States through sexuality resulted in reaffirmation of masculine patriotism wrapped in anti-communist rhetoric" (Moore, 24). Hence, normative gender roles, and especially "fervent masculinity", functioned as a weapon against communism (Smith, 313). Keeping in mind the notion that anti-communism was the result of the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union for world leadership, it can be argued that the promotion of conventional sexuality and fervent masculinity favoured the American ascendancy as a hegemon.

The *Captain America* comic series promoted conventional definitions of gender roles and celebrated fervent masculinity. First of all, the physical appearance of Captain America itself is a masculine stereotype; well-built, muscular, strong. In every story of the Atlas Era publications, Captain America is the most muscular as well as the strongest character. On the cover of "The Girl Who Was Afraid" (*Men's Adventures* #27, May 1954), for instance, among the five characters, Captain America is the tallest, biggest, and most muscular (Figure 4). Even if he appears behind them, he is still the

most visible and occupies the most space. In fact, he is double the size of every other character in the frame.

Of course, Captain America's physical appearance is not the only affirmation of his masculinity. In "Kill Captain America" (*Men's Adventures* # 28, July 1954), the Captain has to "fight the strongest men [the Soviets] have" so as to prove his identity (Masterworks, 40). Thus, Captain America's strength is regarded as a unique feature and is reaffirmed by his capability to defeat the Soviets. Indeed, Captain fights and defeats them all. Additionally, in "The Hour of Doom" (*Captain America* #78, September 1954), he prevents the explosion of a Soviet bomb by "holding back the minute hand" of a huge clock (Figure 5). He literally stops the clock "using only the strength of his powerful body" (Masterworks, 129). Hence, his strength, which is a characteristic of masculinity, helps him fight the Soviets. In the same way, Americans were supposed to defeat communism by embracing their masculinity.

Undoubtedly, most of Captain America's masculinity is derived from the use of violence. As also stated by J. Richard Stevens, the Atlas Era of *Captain America* is the most violent of all eras (Stevens, 61). Stevens describes that even if violence was Captain's main characteristic from the very beginning, it was only during the Cold War that this violence reached its highest level (Stevens, 62). He argues that 56 percent of the stories of the Atlas Era were resolved by the use of violence (Stevens, 62). Indeed, violence is present from the first story onward. While in an ancient tomb with a Soviet girl, Captain America deliberately makes her fire her gun so as to be able to collapse the tomb on her. At the end of the story, Captain feels no remorse. On the contrary, he feels proud, since murdering the girl contributed to the maintenance of world peace (Figure 6).

Murder as a form of violence is a common practice in the *Captain America* comics of the Atlas Era. Specifically, five of the stories include or even end with a murder. In "The Betrayers" (*Captain America* #76, May 1954), for example, Captain America sets a building full of Soviets on fire. The final frame depicts him, along with his fellow Americans, watching the enemies run while on fire. Captain then claims that the Soviets deserved it (Figure 7). Furthermore, in the last story of *Captain America* #77 (July 1954), Captain America intentionally lets a spy get into a plane that is about to explode. The spy dies, and Captain is satisfied with the success of his plan (Figure 10).

Masculinity in *Captain America* is further conventionalised through the depiction of female characters and their relationship with Captain America. In the first story, "The Girl Who Was Afraid" (*Men' Adventures* #27, May 1954), the Soviet girl pretends to be afraid and in need of Captain America's intervention. Moreover, she is depicted as vulnerable and weak. When Captain America arrives, he holds her in his arms and she looks relieved. A few stories later, in "The Betrayers" (*Captain America* #76, May 1954), another woman is in need of Captain's help. The Journalist Betsy Ross, who is accused of espionage, can only find help in the form of the powerful Captain America. Again, the female character is depicted as fragile and unable to save herself. In this way, *Captain America* stories affirmed the stereotypical image of women as weak and inferior to men. This affirmation validated conventional gender roles, which enhanced the prevailing sexual order and, consequently, sexual and political conformity.

To sum up, in the 1950s, sexual subversion and the decline of conventional masculinity were associated with communist subversion. As a reaction, normative masculinity and gender roles in general were reinforced. *Captain America* propagated

this kind of masculinity through his physical appearance, strength, and the use of violence. Taking into account that conformity functioned as a weapon against communism and the Soviet Union in the battle for world hegemony, it can be argued that the affirmation of sexual conformity promoted American claims against the Soviets. Similarly, Captain America promoted anti-communism by propagating conventional sexuality and gender roles. In this way, the series supported the American right to lead the world.

2.3 American Exceptionalism: Democracy and Superiority against Communism

According to Anders Stephanson, the Cold War was mostly a war of ideologies (Stephanson, 122). Stephanson points out that Americans as well as Soviets "considered themselves to embody universal ideologies of right" (122). Based on these ideologies, each of the two counterparts aspired to word leadership. Stephanson argues that right after the Second World War, "the United States began to think of itself as leader of the free world" (113). As James Patterson further explains, "American people (…) developed ever-greater expectations about the capacity of the United States to create a better world abroad" and "America's political leaders (…) managed to stimulate enormous expectations about the nation's ability to direct the world affairs" (Patterson, vii). According to both Stephanson and Patterson, Americans aspired to shape the world in their own image and found an ideological outlet to express this aspiration in the values of freedom and democracy.

These values opposed the Soviets' communism. The United States, Stephanson describes, assumed that "the Soviet Union was inherently driven to world conquest" and considered communism dangerous to society (123). He also posits that Americans believed that only they were capable of containing communism. For this reason, he

claims, the United States embraced the concept of "containment", which dominated American foreign policy during the Cold War. Therefore, it can be argued that America's sentiments of exceptionalism characterized the state's foreign policy and strengthened the claims to world hegemony. If a feeling of uniqueness had lacked in the country's collective post-WWII psyche, another less outward foreign policy would have been embraced.

The notion of exceptionalism, which was connected to America's claims to world leadership, was justified and strengthened by American culture. Specifically, R. Philip Loy argues that "Western films reinforced and mirrored an important American belief. Americans felt they were a people destined for greatness" (Loy, 41). In addition, Roy explains that Manifest Destiny – the belief that Americans have a mission to lead the world to better things – was connected to the idea of progress, which was considered "unquestionably good" (41). The concept of progress opposed the Soviet's totalitarianism and Americans used it as a sign of their superiority over their enemy. In this way, Western films promoted the American right to lead the world.

In the ideological war between the United Sates and the Soviet Union the concepts of democracy and freedom made Americans feel superior to their opponent. Similarly, in *Captain America,* democracy plays a leading role in the battle against communism. The introductory section of "The Betrayers" is a good example of this (*Captain America* #76, May 1954):

> *Yes, the greatest champion of democracy is back with his pal,*
>
> *Bucky…Back to fight the worst menace of the freedom-loving peoples*
>
> *of the world have ever faced! Together they battled fascists and Nazis.*
>
> *But now they're needed again to fight… "The Betrayers"!*

The term "betrayers" refers to the Soviets and the passage clarifies that Captain America and the United States fight against communism. In this battle, they are armed with democracy, which is suggested to be uniquely American. Specifically, Captain America is described as the "greatest champion of democracy". Based on Dittmer's suggestion that Captain America, as a nationalist superhero, functions as a symbolic representation of the state (Dittmer, "That Nationalist Superhero" 4), it can be argued that the aforementioned passage regards democracy as uniquely American. This exclusivity contributes to notions of American exceptionalism and enables the United States to fight the Soviet Union, which threatens world freedom. In addition, it is implied that among all the "freedom-loving" peoples, only the Americans can save the world. Hence, American exceptional qualities are further underlined.

Indeed, in Captain America the United States is presented as the only power able to stop the spread and prevalence of communism, based on the assumption that freedom and democracy are uniquely American values. In *Captain America* #77 (July 1954), for instance, Captain, while explaining a plan to Bucky, claims that the only cure for communism is American's freedom and democracy. Therefore, it is suggested that the United States, as the only global force capable of guarding these values, has no other choice but to interfere to save the world from communism. In general, the series depicts both democracy and freedom as exceptional values that are personified in Captain America. Taking into account that Captain America represents the United States itself, the series attributes democracy and freedom to the United States, enhancing American exceptionalism and a missive feeling to spread and safeguard those values all around the globe, heralding the United States as a unique, positive force in the battle for world hegemony.

American exceptionalism in the Atlas Era *Captain America* is mainly derived from the comparison between the United States and its opponent, the Soviet Union. Actually, the depiction of the enemy was a very vital matter in *Captain America*. To adequately depict the stories and convey American exceptionalist ideology at the same time, every part of the comic was important**,** from the story's details to the colours of the illustrations, as well as the depictions of the enemy as two-faced, evil, inferior, and dangerous. On the first page of "Captain America Strikes!" (*Captain America* #76, May 1954) the highly detailed artwork of John Romita can be seen. The colours, the sketch and other elements are drawn quite meticulously. As can be seen in figure nine (Figure 9), the main element of this particular illustration is a globe. A pale bony hand with long sharp nails and the emblem of communism is ready to take over, and a dark shadow already covers a part of the globe. On the other corner are Captain America and Bucky, who are attempting to stop this hand, which, needless to say, represents communism. This illustration constitutes a major allegory in the form of a ring fight: the two rivals in the two corners of the ring are ready to fight each other. The two rivals, though, are not depicted in the same way. Captain America and Bucky are illustrated as running fast and straight, conveying notions of honesty and bravery. The communist hand, however, is depicted as filthy, scary, and lurking, signalling dishonesty and cowardice.

The comparison between the Soviets and Americans is further detailed in "Captain America Strikes!" (Captain America #76, May 1954). Specifically, the introductory note of the story states that Americans fight the Cold War with "friendship and peace", while the Soviets use espionage and treason (Masterworks 59). It is made clear, thus, that Americans are of a benevolent nature, while their enemy is evil. In this comparison, Americans are seen as superior and their claim to world hegemony is thus

justified. After all, world hegemony should only be held by exceptional and benevolent people, like Americans.

The promotion of American superiority against the Soviet Union and the celebration of democracy as a uniquely American feature underline the notion that American people were exceptional. Since exceptionalism strengthened America's claim to world leadership, the propagation of this ideology through *Captain America* helped justify America's actions, which aimed at the spread of American influence worldwide.

Conclusion

Captain America, as an expression of popular culture, has always been linked to American politics. This chapter, particularly, focused on the association of the series with the early Cold War so that its position towards American imperialism can be explained. The Cold War is in part the result of America's ambition to lead the world, and, consequently, the promotion of the American ideology against Soviet communism can be read as a way to favour American imperialism. Based on Carosso's suggestion that Cold War America was characterised by the ambiguity of prosperity juxtaposed with anxiety, this chapter analysed three aspects of the Cold War culture which depicted this ambiguity. These three aspects function in the text as the main codes, which, according to Groensteen, determine a comics' arthrology. Hence, this chapter focused on the way in which *Captain America* corresponds to these three aspects. First of all, the fear of espionage, which is often propagated in the *Captain America* series, enhanced anti‑communist feelings within American society and, consequently, justified hostility against the Soviet Union. Secondly, the conventionalization of gender roles and the celebration of fervent masculinity in *Captain America* stories affirmed social

and sexual conformity, which was regarded as a key element in the battle against communism. Finally, the promotion of American exceptionalism by means of moral superiority and exclusivity in the form of democracy intensified Americans' missive feelings to save the world and consequently lead it. All of these three elements reflected the anti-communism derived from the Cold War and their promotion through *Captain America* can be read as a way to rationalise American imperialism in the 1950s. In any case, the series' content is connected to the political culture of ideologically battling Cold War giants and managed to depict the ambiguous nature of this conflict in the 1950s.

3. The Vietnam War: Iron Man in the 1960s

As explained in the previous chapter Captain America was the patriotic comic book hero who protected the United States during WWII and shortly afterwards in Marvel's fictional universe. Specifically, the content of the series during the 1950s, the decade that characterised the early Cold War, reflected the culture of that time. The role of certain codes within the text has proven to be extremely significant as they determined the series' content and made it relevant to the contemporary culture, which at the best part favoured American imperialism. Nonetheless, according to Paul Fellman, during the Cold War, Captain America and many other "wartime comic book heroes found themselves unpopular and out of work" due to publishers' interest in "stories of criminals rooted in dark, chaotic worlds that mirrored the noir movement in Hollywood cinema" (Fellman 11). Fellman suggests that this shift within the comic book industry created several problems since the war against communism had to be rationalized to children and teenagers, who were supposed to wage it in the future (11). Out of this conundrum, Fellman says, "emerged America's most ardent patriot and Cold Warrior", Iron Man, who defended the world from communism (11). Iron Man's appearance in *Tales of Suspense* lasted from March 1963 (*Tales of Suspense* #39) until December 1965 (*Tales of Suspense* #72), when the events of the Vietnam War overwhelmed American society.

Iron Man's own origin story placed him (and his stories) in the heart of the Cold War, namely in the midst of the Vietnam War. Tony Stark, Iron Man's alter ego, is found in the jungle of Vietnam, captured by communists, and constructs a powerful iron armour to be able to escape and put an end to their actions. Thus, Iron Man was 'born' in Vietnam, and his actions were engaged in fighting communism from the first

moment of his existence onward. Fellman further explains that the stories of Iron Man during the 1960s presented "an image of an arrogant and aggressive post-war America that, despite this, remained deeply suspicious and paranoid of both foreign agents and domestic dissidents". Considering the popularity of the Iron Man's stories in the *Tales of Suspense* during that time as well as his direct connection to the Vietnam War, it can be of merit to examine these stories in the context of a study of the links between Marvel's superheroes and American imperialism. Therefore, in this chapter, Iron Man's association with American imperialism during the Vietnam War, as it was presented in *Tales of Suspense from* #39 to #72, will be detailed.

Moving on from the early years of the Cold War and *Captain America* to the Vietnam War and Iron Man, this chapter will concentrate on several features of the Vietnam War culture that are associated with American imperialism: anti-communism, the stereotyped representation of Asians, and the militarisation of the state. Particularly, this chapter will attempt to identify these elements in the *Tales of Suspense* stories which feature Iron Man. Iron Man's stories will be analysed as a cultural text under the prism of these three features to examine the ways in which the series contributed to the discourse of American imperialism, and whether or not these additions justified America's intervention in the Vietnam War.

3.1 Iron Man the "Cold Warrior": Anti-Communism in the 1960s

Even though scholars like Larry Ceplair and M.J Heale argue that anti-communism in the 1960s was not extremely prominent, one cannot ignore the influence it had on American society. Indeed, James T. Patterson states that "a virulent anti-communism still flourished at most levels of American politics and culture" with books and films containing anti-communist rhetoric still being very popular among American

audiences (Patterson 445). Patterson further explains that the Vietnam War and the way Americans perceived this conflict show the patriotic, anti-communist nature of the United States in the 1960s. To him, the fact that all three presidential candidates until 1970 "opposed American withdrawal from the war" indicates the deep anti-communist feeling within the United States (445).

As already mentioned, Paul Fellman claims that in the 1960s, there was a need for a means to rationalize the war against communism and, consequently, the Vietnam War, to those who were expected to wage it in the future (Fellman 11). Thus, the war against communism was closely connected to the Vietnam War and it can be argued that the promotion of anti-communism could help legitimise America's intervention in Vietnam. Not only does Fellman support the connections between anti-communism and the Vietnam War, but he also argues Iron Man's role in promoting anti-communism and rationalising the war was important (11). This section, therefore, will analyse the stories of Iron Man in *Tales of Suspense* and specifically the ways in which anti-communism is represented in these stories, to define if the series followed the anti-communist consensus of the 1960s.

Anti-communism is a vital element in the first years of Iron Man's publication history. From the very first story of his initial appearance in *Tales of Suspense* until the last one of the series, anti-communism returns repeatedly as an important component of Iron Man's identity. Story #39, which introduces Iron Man to the audience, shows Vietnamese communists torturing innocent civilians and planning to conquer the world. In this way, the story presents communism as dangerous, evil, and dreadful. The leader of the Vietnamese communists, Wong-Chu, is described as a "tyrant", who until the very last moment, after Iron Man has defeated him and he is about to die, acts in a purely evil way, ordering the slaughter of all his prisoners (Figure 10) (ToS 39:12).

Also, in story #41, Iron Man is seen "fighting America's enemies [the Reds] from within and without" (ToS 41:4).

In general, the series presents communism and communists as dangerous and evil, no matter whether the stories revolve around Russians, Asians or communists in other parts of the world. In fact, most of Iron Man's enemies are communists: Wong-Chu, the Red Barbarian, Gargantus, Crimson Dynamo, the Mandarin, Black Widow, the Actor, Titanium and many more. All of these villains are inherently evil and threaten America as well as Iron Man's life. The Red Barbarian, for example, is described as "the greatest danger [Iron Man] has ever faced!" (ToS 42:1). Moreover, on the cover of *Tales of Suspense* #46, Iron Man, who is about to fight Crimson Dynamo, is afraid of his dreadful Soviet enemy and prays that "this will not be [Iron Man's] final battle"(Figure 11). The same happens on the cover of *Tales of Suspense* #50, where "Iron Man fights for his life in the castle of a madman", the Mandarin (Figure 12) (ToS 50:1). Therefore, for the writers of Iron Man, both the ideology of communism as well as its representatives in the comic series are evil and dangerous to the well-being of Americans as a people as well as to Iron Man's life individually. In addition, the series indicates that these supervillains are primarily evil because of their communist identities, rather than because of any other factor.

However, Iron Man's communist enemies are not exclusively ugly creatures. Black Widow, for instance, one of the recurring villains in Iron Man stories, is depicted as a beautiful, well-educated and charming woman, who, nonetheless, works as a spy for the Soviets. She not only approaches Tony Stark, Iron Man's alter ego, to steal his notes on American weapons (ToS#52), but she also attempts to get an American villain to betray his country by doing her favours (ToS #64). Specifically, she sexually allures Hawkeye, an American villain archer, and then convinces him to be her partner in her

spying activities against the United States. So compelling is her beauty that Hawkeye claims that even though he "can't be a traitor to [his] country […] [he]'ll do it no matter what the cost!" (Figure 13) (ToS 64:5). Communism, therefore, is presented in the image of the Black Widow as something that is able to turn Americans against their own country. Additionally, the character's name itself also indicates her evil nature since Black usually stands for darkness. 'Black widow' is also the name of a notorious female spider, which consumes its partner after sexual intercourse. In the realm of fiction, a woman like Black Widow can take advantage of a male partner, leaving him behind "left for dead". Taking into account that the Black Widow is one of the various representations of communism in the series, it can be argued that the series' writers thought of communism as able to allure and exploit Americans, sometimes even with "deadly" consequences.

Not only Iron Man is a fervent Cold Warrior, but his alter ego, scientist Antony Stark, is one as well. In *Tales of Suspense* #40, for instance, the life of Antony Stark is described. The story depicts Anthony Stark as continuously fighting against "the communism menace" and the "Reds" by constructing all kinds of advanced weapons, which of course will end up being used in Vietnam (ToS 40:2). In the first story, Tony Stark appears so devoted to this activity that he even travels to guerrilla-occupied Vietnam in order to test the effectiveness of his new weapons in the Việt Cộng jungle (Figure 14). Tony Stark's main activity in the series is constructing weapons for the security of the United States against the Reds. It is explicitly stated in the series that "Stark is America's greatest weaponry scientist! Without him, the American defence effort would be far weaker!" (Figure 15) (ToS 46:5) Therefore, in Marvel's fictional world, the fight against communism in every aspect of daily life is presented as something virtuous.

Lastly, the series deals with communism in both overt and more disguised ways. The series uses a lot of subtle references to the Cold War. In the second Iron Man story in *Tales of Suspense*, for instance, allegory is employed and aliens substitute communists. A huge alien monster has been sent to Granville and has brainwashed the city's citizens to worship him. In this way, the series allegorically addresses the commonly held belief that communists use brainwashing techniques to control Americans. Furthermore, the Aliens in the story symbolise how Americans thought of Soviets and communists as "alien" forces; forces they could not comprehend and, therefore, feared. Also, the monster of the aforementioned story orders its brainwashed citizens to build a wall around the city and let no-one in. The construction of this wall may be an allusion to the construction of the Berlin Wall, which was erected two years before the publication of this story and was deeply etched into American political and cultural memory. Thus, this story affirms the American perception of communists as aliens and addresses commonly held beliefs regarding communism.

In summation, in *Tales of Suspense,* Iron Man is presented as the ultimate Cold Warrior, who fights communism while being the anti-communist weapons manufacturer Tony Stark at the same time. Both his everyday life and its superhero counterpart revolve around the war on communism. The fact that Tony Stark's superhero identity is born in Vietnam, where he fights communism for the first time, directly links the superhero to the Vietnam War itself. One of the characteristics of 1960s American culture at that time was anti-communism, including promotion of a nearly irrational fear of communism. In the series, this fear of communism pervades the stories due to the involvement of communist supervillains, who are depicted as evil and dangerous. The fear of communism also comes to the fore through the occasional depiction of espionage activities. Additionally, the series also deals with communism

in symbolic ways, again depicting it as something dreadful which should be contained. Hence, anti-communism serves as main narratological code in the text and defines the nature of the content while connecting it to the broader narratological code, American imperialism. As far as we can see in the first Iron Man publication, the series played upon anti-communist feelings promoting and justifying America's participation in the Vietnam War.

3.2 Iron Man Against Asians: The Asian Stereotype and the Vietnam War

According to Renny Christopher, the current version of history regarding the Vietnam War was nearly entirely shaped by the United States, which excluded the Vietnamese experience from the mythologization of the war (Christopher 4). To Christopher, the cultural representations of Vietnam as a country and the Vietnamese as a people led to only one important distinction between "them" and "us": The stereotypical representation of the West as desirable and good, versus a Vietnam and Vietnamese who are inherently evil (5). Specifically, Christopher connects the stereotypical representation of Asians to American imperialism and argues that its legacies are based on this aforementioned distinction between "us", meaning the United States, and them (112). Also, he adds that stereotypes are people's means of understanding both the world and themselves, and that, consequently, the stereotypical representation of Asians could well have influenced the way Americans perceived the war (113). Christopher underlines that in American literature, Asians were always represented as inferior, as evil, as "sinister Orientals" of a cunning nature, as aliens, and as sallow (116). To him, the representation of Vietnamese followed the same patterns and overall favoured American imperialism by promoting the need to save poor oppressed masses or stop dangerous Asians in their tracks (168). Thus, American literature during the Vietnam War strengthened the stereotype of the Asian, which in

turn helped justify America's actions in Asia. This subchapter, therefore, will focus on the ways in which the Vietnamese, and Asians in general, are depicted in the stories of Iron Man and will establish whether or not these depictions affirm the stereotypical image of Asians in the American culture.

The above-mentioned Asian stereotype appears from the first of Iron Man in the series onward. As mentioned, Iron Man's birth as a superhero character took place in Vietnam. Not only does that origin story define who Iron Man is, but it also indicates who and what the enemy is. From the beginning of this series, the Vietnamese are Iron Man's rivals. The story's villain is Wong-Chu, who is described as a "Red guerrilla tyrant" (ToS 39:3). This man, who clearly symbolises the North Vietnamese in the story, is an evil man who burns down whole villages and tortures innocent civilians. Not only does he torture villagers, but he also captures Anthony Stark to force him to construct a powerful weapon for him. It is then revealed that he holds another scientist hostage as well. Thus, Tony Stark, as a captive of Wong-Chu, creates a powerful armour so as to defeat the evil man and save the rest of the villagers. Therefore, the creation of the superhero Iron Man was the result of an American's attempt to save himself as well as innocent people from an evil Vietnamese tyrant. Iron Man's whole existence in the Marvel world as such represents America's aspiration to save the world, based on the assumption that the North Vietnamese were dangerous and evil.

Not only does the series define Asians as the main enemy of Iron Man at the beginning of the publication, but it then builds on this notion by making the Mandarin the archenemy of Iron Man throughout the whole series. The Mandarin is a Chinese villain, who collaborates with the Reds but usually acts autonomously. The Mandarin first appears in Tales of Suspense #50, where he is described to possess an incredible power that "matches the evil in his heart" (Figure 16) (ToS#50 cover). The Mandarin is

depicted as a purely evil but also mysterious entity. Specifically, it is mentioned that he is "the most mysterious, the most feared oriental of all time […], more than human" (ToS#50 cover). The fact that the comic describes the Mandarin as someone who might not be a human being indicates that according to the creators of the series, Asians should not be seen as human beings but rather as aliens or animals of evil origins. In this way, Iron Man enhances the Asian stereotype and justifies Americans' fear for the mysterious Oriental enemies. In the analogy of "we" and the "other", Iron Man stands for the United States while the Mandarin represents Asians. Taking into account that the emphasis on "otherness" was a major characteristic of American culture during the Vietnam War, it can be argued that the series contributed to the skewed American perception of Asians, which was supposed to justify the hostilities against Asians. Of course, no matter how dangerous Iron Man's enemies are, the (Asian) Mandarin turns out to be the most dangerous of all. In that sense, Asians in the Marvel universe are depicted as the most dangerous enemies of the United States itself.

Wong-Chu and the Mandarin are not the only Asian villains in the series. A number of minor Asian characters are also introduced in the series. Most these is presented as either evil and dangerous, or weak and helpless. In story #62, for instance, the Mandarin's aunt is presented as an evil lady without any feeling, who attempts to kill her baby nephew in order to inherit his father's wealth and power. In addition, in story #39, the villagers are seen as helpless victims of Wong-Chu, who need Iron Man's help to survive. Also, professor Yinsen, who is also a captive of Wong-Chu, is presented as a fragile person and no matter how smart he is, he is still unable to escape South Vietnamese without an American's help. Therefore, Asians in Iron Man stories in *Tales of Suspense* are either evil creatures that should be stopped, or helpless citizens that are holding out for American saviours.

To conclude, American culture during the Vietnam War subscribed to a racial Asian stereotype as part of the mythology of the war. This kind of mythology was, according to Cristopher, closely connected to American imperialism, and –to the American electorate- justified America's military action in Asia. Likewise, the function of the Asian stereotype as a main code throughout Iron Man's stories strengthened this process and rationalised America's intervention in Vietnam. Specifically, Asians in the stories of Iron Man in the *Tales of Suspense* are all depicted as inferior to Americans, with most of them being extremely evil. Iron Man's own archenemy is an Asian who possesses unknown powers and is of a mysterious origin. In the few cases, they are not evil, Asians are depicted as utterly helpless and in need of Americans' interventions. Iron Man's stories, henceforth, got even more connected to the culture that evolved around the justification of the American intervention in Vietnam by contributing to the dominant narrative that Asians are either evil and need to be stopped, or innocents who need to be saved.

3.3 Iron Man and the Militarization of the State During the Vietnam War

Lisa M. Mundey argues that the early decades of the Cold War are characterised "as an era of rising militarism in the United States" by many scholars (Mundey 5). Indeed, Cathy J. Schlund-Vials elaborates that war and militarisation characterized the United States during the post-war era (Schlund-Vials 160). Especially in the 1960s and the Vietnam War, Fellman argues, the United States became "paranoid due to a perceived constant threat to domestic security" (Fellman 14). This feeling could well have influenced public opinion in favour of excess militarization of the state as a means to maintain domestic security. To Fellman, "America fantasized over weapons that could literarily make the communists disappear" and Iron Man proved to be the perfect superhero for a new militarised America (15). Hence, in the last section of this chapter,

the links between militarisation and Iron Man will be examined in order to define the Marvel comic series' position towards the American military intervention in Vietnam.

Iron Man's own existence is an ode to militarisation. Iron Man is nothing more than a man in a powerful iron suit of armour equipped with the latest technology in weaponry. In plenty of cases throughout the series, Iron Man is the only one who can help the United States because of this advanced weaponry. In *Tales of Suspense* #40, Iron Man is described as "the creature in the unbelievably powerful iron shell, equipped with many ingenious attachments, before which his enemies cower, whether they be gangsters or [..] a madman of science who seeks to rule mankind" (ToS 40:4). Thus, the series regards Iron Man's advanced weaponry the reason why all his enemies, the enemies of the United States, can't hurt America or its people. In addition, in plenty of stories, Iron Man defeats his enemies at the last moment by employing a new technology recently implemented in his suit. In story #62, for instance, while the Mandarin has tied up Iron Man, the latter uses a tiny diamond, which can be adjusted on the fingertips of his iron shell, and cuts the ropes that keep him captive (Figure 17). Therefore, the series' fictional weaponry support militarisation as a way to defeat the enemies of the United States and keep the country secure. Moreover, the publication of these stories coincides with the excessively militarised tactics in Vietnam by the contemporary Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, who "was one of the chief architects of the Vietnam War in the 1960s" (Fischer 197).

Not only Iron Man's presence supports militarisation, but that of his alter ego as well. In the fictional Marvel world, Tony Stark is America's most prominent weapons designer and has devoted his life to the construction of technologies that will assist the United States in the fight against communism and, specifically, in the Vietnam War. In the first story Tony Stark is testing a new transistor technology, which is able

to make American weapons more powerful in the jungles of Vietnam. He is presented as so devoted to weaponry that he even risks his own life to develop weapon technologies for the sake of American security. In general, the series presents Tony Stark as constantly working on these kinds of projects. In *Tales of Suspense* #41 Tony Stark is seen testing some atomic naval cannons and claiming that he is "always trying to help the U.S defence effort" (ToS 41:3). Therefore, Tony Stark's actions define militarisation as a way to enhance the protection of the country.

Tony Stark's work on weaponry is presented in the comics as such a vital component for U.S. security that even the Soviets know about it and regularly attempt to steal his plans in order to produce their own powerful weapons. When Wong-Chu captures Tony Stark, he forces him to construct a superweapon for the Vietnamese troops (Figure 18). Additionally, in *Tales of Suspense* #42, the Red Barbarian plans to steal the designs of the latest Stark weapon, which is able to "make America invincible" (ToS 42:5). Some issues later, in *Tales of Suspense* #46, Tony Stark's contribution to the defence of the United States is once more praised by its enemies. Specifically, Crimson Dynamo, a Soviet weapon scientist, claims that "Stark is America's greatest weaponry scientist" and "without him, the American defence effort would be far weaker!" (ToS 46:5). Hence, the acknowledgment of America's superior weaponry by its enemies indicates that the only reason why the United States is safe, is maintaining its superior military power. In other words, according to the series, the only thing that keeps communists away is America's advanced arsenal.

Even when issues of anti-militarism arise, the series manages to reverse them into pro-military stances. Occasionally, Tony Stark seems to be averse of his iron suit and, consequently, of American militarisation. However, time and again, at the end of such stories he again recognises the necessity of the suit for his survival and the defence

of his country. On the cover of *Tales of Suspense* #56, Iron Man argues that he is "sick of being Iron Man! Sick of having to wear an electronic chest plate 24 hours a day" (ToS#56). Tony Stark is convinced that he must stop being Iron Man because he thinks that continually being Iron Man eventually will end up harming him. This is, of course, an argument in favour of anti-militarism, a movement which criticised militarisation and argued it was harmful to the country. If we consider Iron Man to be the symbol for the militarisation of the state in Marvel's fictional universe, Tony Stark's realisation that the Iron Man suit does nothing, but harm can be read as an argument against militarisation, and an argument which forwards militarisation harms the country as well. Nonetheless, at the end of the story Tony Stark understands that his decision to abandon Iron Man is selfish and he acknowledges the importance of defending his country from enemies. Thus, he puts on his iron armour again and sets out to fight the uncanny unicorn saying that he does it "for the sake of those who need me" (ToS 56:11). Hence, the fictional series offers a counterargument to anti-militarism by underlining the importance of national security.

In sum, the series depicts militarisation as a means of opposing communism and defending the country. Iron Man, in Marvel's fictional universe, is the personification of America's militarisation. Throughout the series he is presented as the only one who can save the country because of his advanced weaponry. Not only Iron Man represents the intense militarisation of the 1960s, but his alter ego does so as well. Tony Stark always designs weapons to help defend the United States. His contribution is so important that even the Soviets recognise it and try to steal his plans. Finally, whenever an anti-militarist argument arises in the series, it is thwarted by the necessity to protect the country and the importance of weapons in this undertaking. Therefore, the fictional Iron Man stories in *Tales of Suspense* underline the necessity of militarisation as a

means to resist communism within the borders of the United States, as well as abroad in Vietnam, as militarisation is one of the vital codes that gets the series going.

Conclusion

The 1960s as a decade was closely connected to anti-communism, which after WWII was associated with American imperialism, as has been explained in the first chapter. Similarly, The Vietnam War is often regarded by scholars as an aspect of American imperialism, which had to be justified to Americans. Iron Man is one of several cultural products that have contributed to the rationalisation of the Vietnam War. Indeed, this chapter has shown that Iron Man's stories in *Tales of Suspense* promoted the American intervention in Vietnam. This has been shown by identifying three major characteristics of America culture during the Vietnam War that function as the main narratological codes in these series.

Firstly, the persisting anti-communism within American society that was also prevalent in the Iron Man stories has been touched upon. Iron Man devotes his actions to the battle against communism, with most of his enemies being either Soviet or Asian communists. Also, his alter ego, Tony Stark, spends much of his time so as to help the United States stop the Reds, who are always presented as evil and dangerous. The series deals with communism even in symbolic terms, when it narrates stories in which the enemies are some kind of aliens, indicating that communists should be seen as aliens as well.

Secondly, the stereotypical representation of Asians in Iron Man's stories has been examined. The Asian stereotype, which presents Asians as either evil and dangerous or innocent and helpless, rationalised the intervention of the United States in Vietnam as a way to help the innocents and stop the dangerous tyrants. Iron Man's

stories in *Tales of Suspense* seem to confirm the stereotyped image of Asians and cement the popular Asian stereotype, which according to several scholars helped legitimise America's military presence in Asia.

Finally, the association of Iron Man with the militarisation of the United States is chronicled. Militarisation was commonly seen by Americans as a way to resist communism and defend the country. Iron Man himself is a representation of superior American weaponry in Marvel's fictional universe, and is presented as the only one who can stop America's enemies because of his advanced weaponry. In addition, his alter ego Tony Stark is considered to be the most prominent weapons designer of the United States, and even America's enemies acknowledge his importance in the defence of America and attempt to steal his plans. Even when anti-militarist ideas appear in the series, they are immediately thwarted by underlining the importance of militarisation as a means to maintain domestic security.

Therefore, the promotion of anti-communism, the focus on the Asian stereotype, and the justification of militarisation throughout the series together can be read as part of the American culture surrounding the Vietnam War, which rationalised American military intervention in Vietnam. Considering that the Vietnam War is seen by many scholars as a military expression of American imperialism in the 1960s, it can be argued that Iron Man stories in *Tales of Suspense* added to the broader cultural narrative of American imperialism.

Conclusion

If we take the arguments of the previous chapters to be correct, this study proves that two of Marvel Comic's superheroes, Captain America and Iron man, linked their content to the general narrative of the Cold War and, especially, American imperialism. Furthermore, the study regards several elements of the Cold War culture to function as catalysts in the establishment of this statement and bases its arguments on the analysis of six of these elements in relation to the primary sources. Based on the contemporary theories concerning the analysis of comics, the study defines these six cultural elements as the main codes that determine the series' content and lay-out. Not only do these elements regulate the sub-codes of the series but they manage to connect them to its broader and more vital code, American imperialism. Specifically, the study examines Captain America's stories during the 1950s in relation to the Red Scare, masculinity crisis, and American exceptionalism. As far as it concerns Iron Man's stories, this study focused on the way anti-communism, militarisation, and Asian stereotypes function in the text so as to connect the series to the broader narrative of the Vietnam War. Thus, this thesis is developed in three chapters, where Captain America and Iron Man are linked to the broader narrative of the Cold War and the culture that evolved around it.

Indeed, for this study, the Cold War is closely connected to American imperialism and, consequently, the culture that evolved around it favoured American claims in world hegemony. Charles S. Maier views the detonation of the atomic bombs as "the big bang of American Empire" (Maier 143). Maier, specifically, suggests that America's ascendancy in world hegemony became a fact after WWII and the detonation of the atomic bombs was the "founding moment" of the American Empire since it promised a kind of invulnerability to the United States (143). Thus, we can assume that the inception of the Cold War coincides with the American ascendancy in world

hegemony. Maier justifies his assumption that the Cold War was the era of the American empire by indicating the "frontier" issue between the United States and the Soviet Union. Specifically, Maier views the division of Germany as the creation of a boundary between the West and Communism (155) and underlines the fact that that the maintenance of the boundaries is a common feature in all imperial systems and has a direct impact to "the politics of the centre" (148). Since, the creation and maintenance of boundaries is considered an action undertaken by empires so that they can secure their power (78), we can assume that the effort put by both the United States and the Soviet Union to secure their influence within their "frontiers" in Europe, as well as in Korea and Vietnam, was actually an effort to secure their imperial systems and reinforce their influence in these territories.

Based on the related literature, this thesis proceeds based on the belief that the ideological tension of the Cold War has influenced the American (political) culture. As a matter of fact, Carosso argues that even though the Cold War begun after the end of WWII (Carosso 12), the 1950s was the era in which the effects of the Cold War were more prominent (9). To him, during the Cold War, and especially in the 1950s, "the United States presented two obvious public faces"; on the one hand prevailed the prosperity and the economic growth of the state and on the other hand the unease and fear connected to the nuclear annihilation and Communism (8). Obviously, both of these aspects were directly based on the aftermath of WWII and the relation of the United States and the Soviet Union. Americans felt the invulnerability gained by the atomic bombs, but, at the same time, they were living in a constant terror that the Soviets will finally have their own nuclear weapon, which can be used against them. Carosso also argues that this ambiguity was articulated within American society through culture in the form of narratives, which probably shaped the American identity during the 1950s

(11). In other words, Carosso supports that the narratives articulated by (popular) culture "are the principal way in which we make sense of the world" (11). In the same way, we suspect that the narratives associated to the Cold War ideology, which shaped the American national identity in the 1950s, might have influenced the public opinion in favour of America's ideological right to lead the world. Thus, the articulation of such narratives has possibly favoured the American claims to world leadership and, consequently, American imperialism.

However, the Cold War spanned from the 1950s to the early 1990s and, consequently, the culture that sprang during its course is not homogenous. Indeed, the character of the early Cold War, that of the 1950s, is essentially different from that of the late Cold War. Thus, this study distinguished two major Cold War eras and the culture that characterised them. The two particular eras that distinct among others within the Cold War are those that are characterised by significant imperial aspects, since military events are the physical manifestation of imperialism's aim to maintain or enlarge a nation's influence abroad as well as to enhance its hegemony worldwide. Therefore, we assume that the two main eras of Cold War are those that were influenced by the course of the Korean War and the Vietnam War respectively. Particularly, the early years of the Cold War and mainly the 1950s, were militarily expressed at that time in the Korean War. On the other hand, the next major military event, the Vietnam War, influenced the 1960s and the 1970s. Of course, there have been plenty other military events during the Cold War, but the Korean and the Vietnam wars were the longest and the most severe. Also, scholars agree that these wars were proxies for the ideological conflict between the West and Communism. Hence, thus study examined the stories of Captain America and Iron Man during these eras, which were probably the most intense of the Cold War, at least in terms of American imperialism. Especially, the study

focused first on Captain America in relation to the first years of the Cold War and, then, it examined Iron Man and the Vietnam War era of the Cold War.

Based on these, the study employed close reading to connect the specific comics to the Cold War imperialist narrative. Basically, the close reading employed by this study conforms to the current theories concerning comic book criticism. The most influential for this study concept of the comic book criticism is the cognitivist approach, which, according to Kukkonen and Forceville, is the most fruitful way to analyse comics (Kukkonen 14, Forceville 89). Particularly, Forceville argues that cognitive approach in comic book analysis derives from linguistics and focuses on "the systematicity and pattern-finding" that is related to the meaning-making process (Forceville 90). He also adds that as far as it concerns comic book analysis, cognitive approach is interrelated with culture and ideology and, therefore, narrative and language theories contribute to the better understanding of comics, even though comics is a non-verbal or partly verbal art form (90-91). To him, cognitivist-oriented comic book analysis is mostly influenced by conceptual metaphor theory and blending theory as well. Conceptual Metaphor Theory is the attempt to "conceptualise abstract and complex phenomena by *systematically* understanding them in terms of concrete phenomena" (91). Even though Conceptual Metaphor Theory entails to a degree hybridity, "there are many other forms of hybridizing" that can be better capture by Blending Theory (93). Blending Theory "postulates that different semantic domains (…) merge to create a new 'blended space' (…), which combines selected elements from the input spaces and as a result yields new, emergent meaning that was not present in either of the input spaces" (93). In other words, two sides are combined and provide an implied meaning. Finally, Forceville suggests that both Blending Theory and Conceptual Metaphor Theory "rely on mental structures known as "image schemas":

the patterns that function as the abstract structure of an image, which connects different experiences to a central recurring structure" (94).

Thierry Groensteen also supports that comics function as a system, whose parts conform to central recurring structure, also known as "codes" (Groensteen 7). To him, comics are primarily a language, "an original ensemble of productive mechanisms of meaning" and, hence, should be analysed in terms of cognitivism and not "through a grand theory, such as structural analysis or narrative semiotics" (2). He, specifically, argues that comics should be seen as a system of codes, either visual or narratological, and should be analysed both in terms of smaller units and broader codes. Particularly, he suggests that "at certain analytical moments, we move to the interior of the panel" to explore "certain component elements (…) with reference to the codes (…) that determine these components" (7). In addition, the code system of a comic is ruled, to Groensteen, by a spatio-topical code, "which organises the co-presence of panels" and "governs the framing relations" between the visual and the narratological elements (6).

Not only does Groensteen argues for the interpretation of comics as a system, but he also claims that the comic book analysis should be analysed in terms of 'elementary relations' (which is a form of restricted arthrology focusing on the sequence of panels, frames, and codes) and 'general arthrology' (which is the network that links the elementary elements) (22). Furthermore, page lay-out and breakdown, as parts of arthrology, "mutually inform one another" and contribute to the analysis of comic books (143). Specifically, the lay-out has to do with the arrangement of the panels in one frame and the breakdown with the sequence of the frames within a comic book. As said before, the broader narrative of a comic book determines these elements and, henceforth, the analysis of lay-outs and breakdowns is able to reveal the nature of the comic's main narrative.

Therefore, for this study several cultural elements of the American culture that evolved around the Cold War function as the main codes in the comics in question. Specifically, the second chapter focused on the way in which *Captain America* corresponds to these three aspects. First of all, the fear of espionage, which is often propagated in the *Captain America* series, enhanced anti-communist feelings within American society and, consequently, justified hostility against the Soviet Union. Secondly, the conventionalization of gender roles and the celebration of fervent masculinity in *Captain America* stories affirmed social and sexual conformity, which was regarded as a key element in the battle against communism. Finally, the promotion of American exceptionalism by means of moral superiority and exclusivity in the form of democracy intensified Americans' missive feelings to save the world and consequently lead it. All of these three elements reflected the anti-communism derived from the Cold War and their promotion through *Captain America* can be read as a way to rationalise American imperialism in the 1950s. In any case, the series' content is connected to the political culture of ideologically battling Cold War giants and managed to depict the ambiguous nature of this conflict in the 1950s.

Similarly, for the third chapter, the promotion of anti-communism, the focus on the Asian stereotype, and the justification of militarisation throughout Iron Mans's stories of the 1960s can be read as part of the American culture surrounding the Vietnam War, which rationalised American military intervention in Vietnam. Considering that the Vietnam War is seen by many scholars as a military expression of American imperialism in the 1960s, it can be argued that Iron Man stories in *Tales of Suspense* added to the broader cultural narrative of American imperialism. Firstly, Iron Man devotes his actions to the battle against communism, with most of his enemies being either Soviet or Asian communists. Also, his alter ego, Tony Stark, spends much of his

time so as to help the United States stop the Reds, who are always presented as evil and dangerous. The series deals with communism even in symbolic terms, when it narrates stories in which the enemies are some kind of aliens, indicating that communists should be seen as aliens as well. Secondly, Iron Man's stories in *Tales of Suspense* seem to confirm the stereotyped image of Asians as completely evil or foolishly innocent and cement the popular Asian stereotype, which according to several scholars helped legitimise America's military presence in Asia. Finally, Iron Man functions as a manifestation of American militarisation. Particularly, he is a representation of superior American weaponry in Marvel's fictional universe, and is presented as the only one who can stop America's enemies because of his advanced weaponry. In addition, his alter ego Tony Stark is considered to be the most prominent weapons designer of the United States, and even America's enemies acknowledge his importance in the defence of America and attempt to steal his plans. Even when anti-militarist ideas appear in the series, they are immediately thwarted by underlining the importance of militarisation as a means to maintain domestic security.

Therefore, both Captain America and Iron Man linked their content to the Cold War and, especially, its imperial aspects. Indeed, as seen in this study, these comics favoured American imperialism in the sense that they promoted those cultural elements that justified American claims to world hegemony. However, this study comes with several limitations. First of all, we cannot define the creators' motives. Not only is the creation of comics a complicated procedure, involving more than two or three persons, but it is also difficult to define the agency of each contributor. In addition, we cannot really know the actual impact that these comics had on Americans. What we only know, and is proven in this study, is the connection of the content of these comics to the broader narrative of the Cold War. As said before, this is a mostly literary analysis of

the comics in question rather than a quantitative research that could possibly investigate the actual impact of these comics. Moreover, this study focuses on only two superheroes of a particular publishing company. Therefore, we cannot be sure if the rest of Marvel's superhero titles are also connected to American imperialism or if the titles of other major publishers follow the same pattern. Also, superhero comics were not the only comic genre of the time but only a small part of the broader comic book culture, which included other genres too. Hence, this study cannot speak of the connection between comic books and the Cold War in general but only for the connection between the cultural aspects of the Cold War and Captain America and Iron Man's stories at that time.

Consequently, there is plenty space for further research in terms of comics' content and impact concerning American imperialism during the Cold War. Furthermore, the study of the connection between comic books and the Cold War or American Imperialism in general can establish the importance of comics and their association to politics. Indeed, the academic study of comics can set light to several issues in the field of American studies and history since comics as a cultural product speak to a great part of American population. Not only that, but comics' content is extremely relevant to its era due to comics' periodical publication, which enables them to adapt their content to the contemporary status quo. Hence, comics can provide information concerning America's everyday reality rather than distant concepts, which are usually discussed in high art.
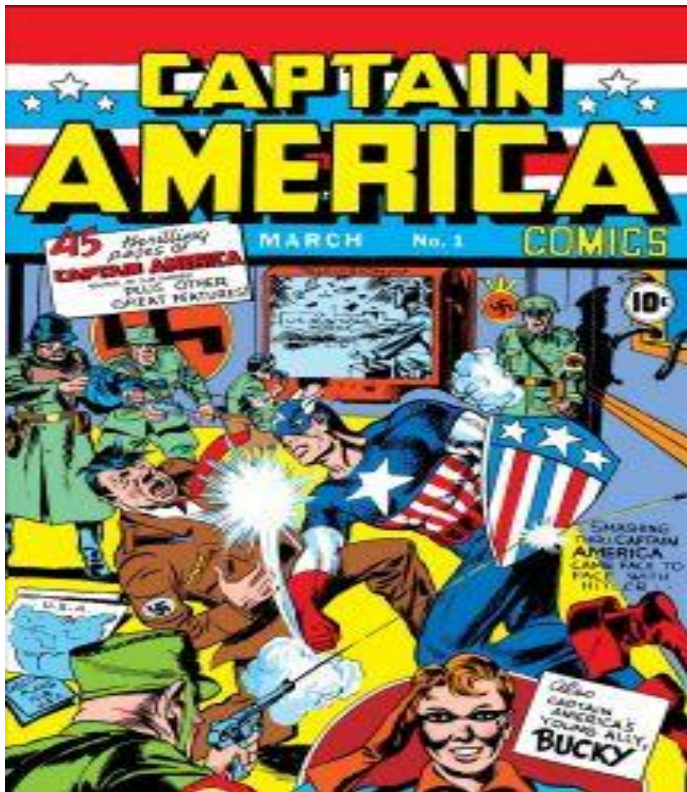
Appendix

Figure 1: *Captain America*'s first cover. Captain America punches Hitler.

Figure 2: Captain America suspects the friendly Egyptian of being a Soviet spy.

Figure 3: Espionage actions are shown to take place all over the world.

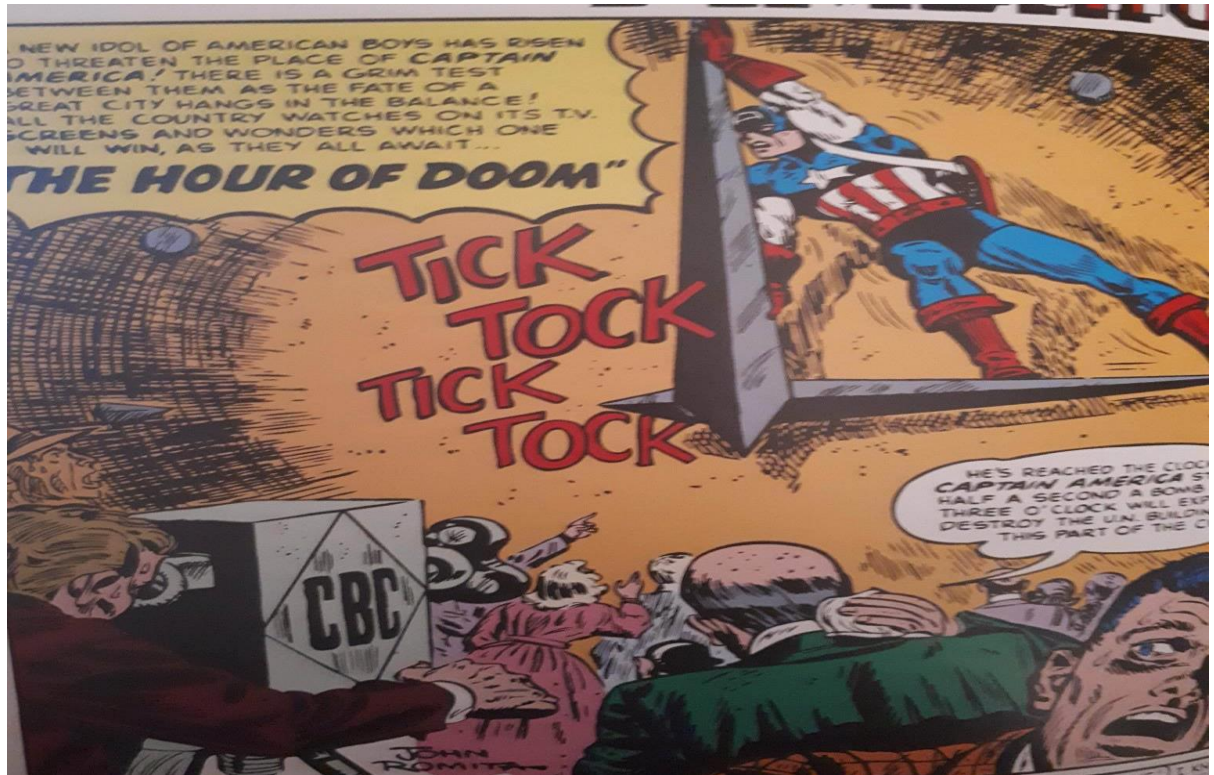Figure 4: Captain America's masculinity is celebrated through his muscular body.

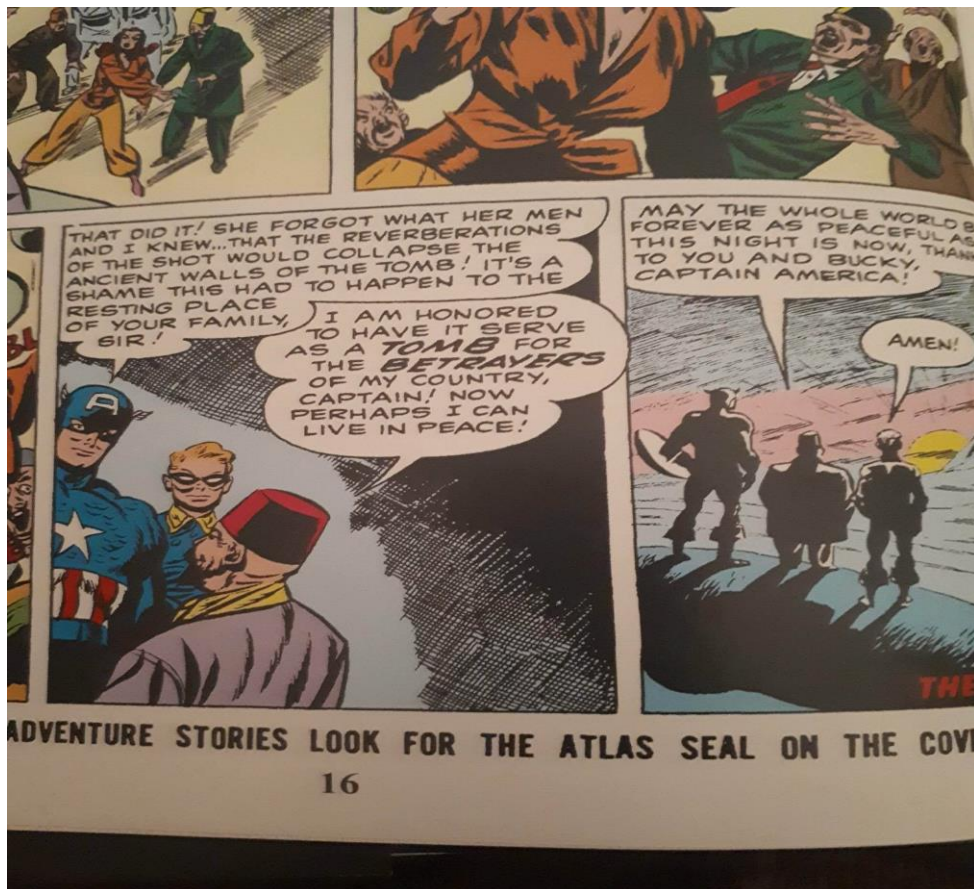Figure 5: Captain America uses his physical power to prevent an explosion.

Figure 6: After killing the "betrayers", Captain America seems satisfied.

Figure 7: Captain America is once again satisfied after killing America's enemies.

Figure 8: Captain America is described as the "greatest champion of democracy" that will stop "the betrayers".

Figure 9: Captain America VS communism

Figure 10: The Asian villain orders the assassination of the prisoners some minutes before he dies.

Figure 11: Iron Man prepares for the battle ignoring the danger of losing his life.

Figure 12: Iron Man's life is again in danger.

Figure 13: Black Widow seduces Hawkeye and he is willing to be a traitor for her.
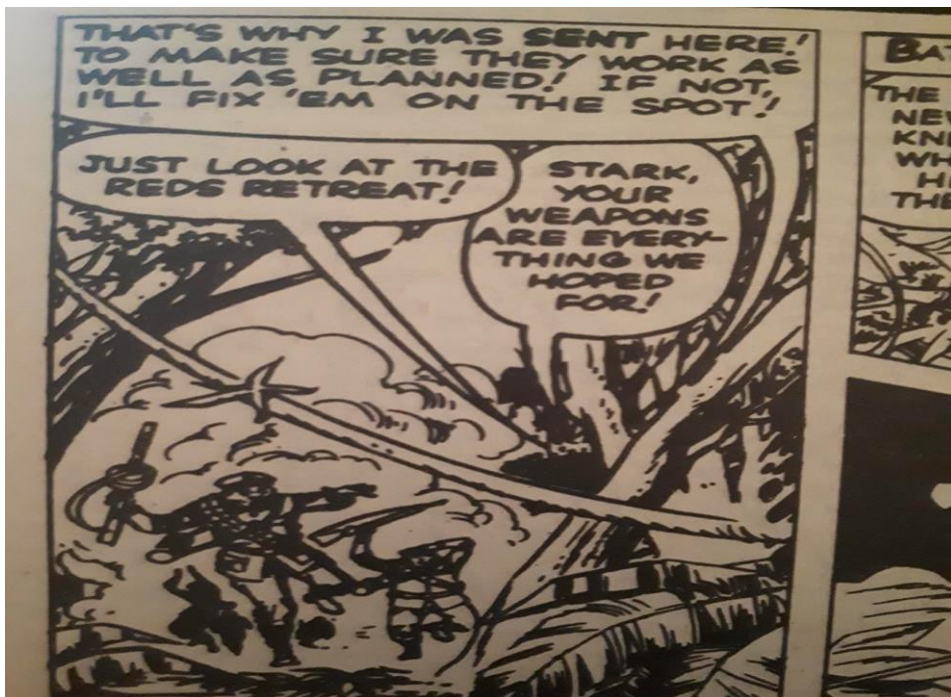
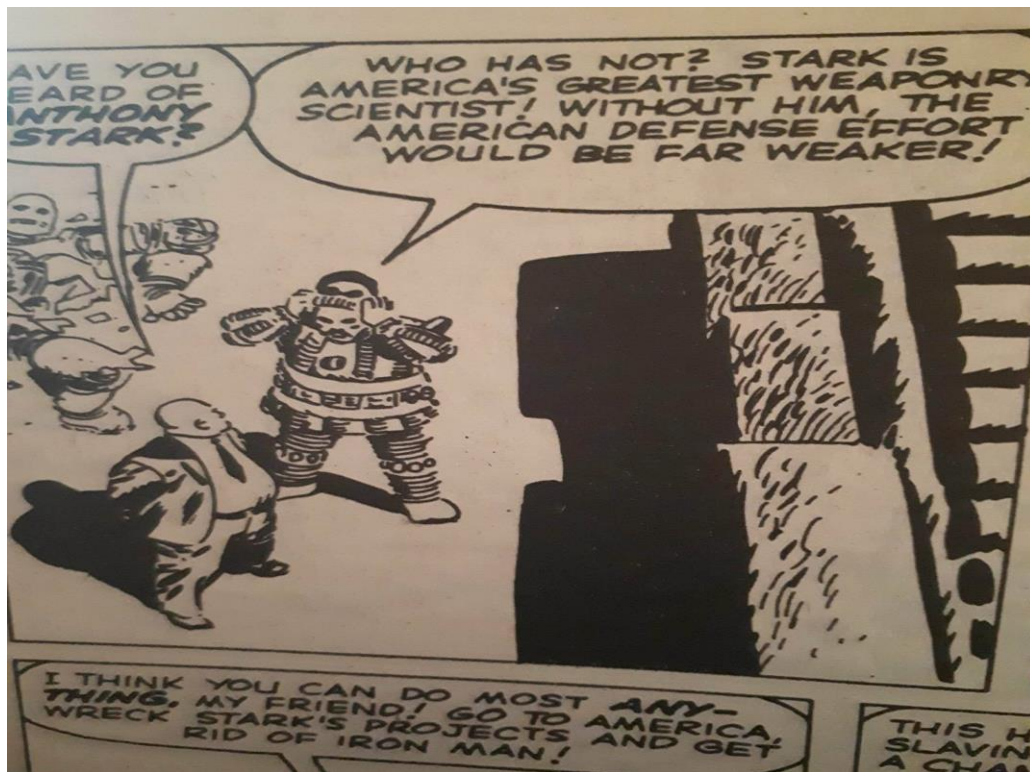Figure 14: Tony Stark goes to Vietnam to test the efficiency of his weapons.

Figure 15: Even the enemies recognise the importance of weaponry in America's effort in Vietnam.
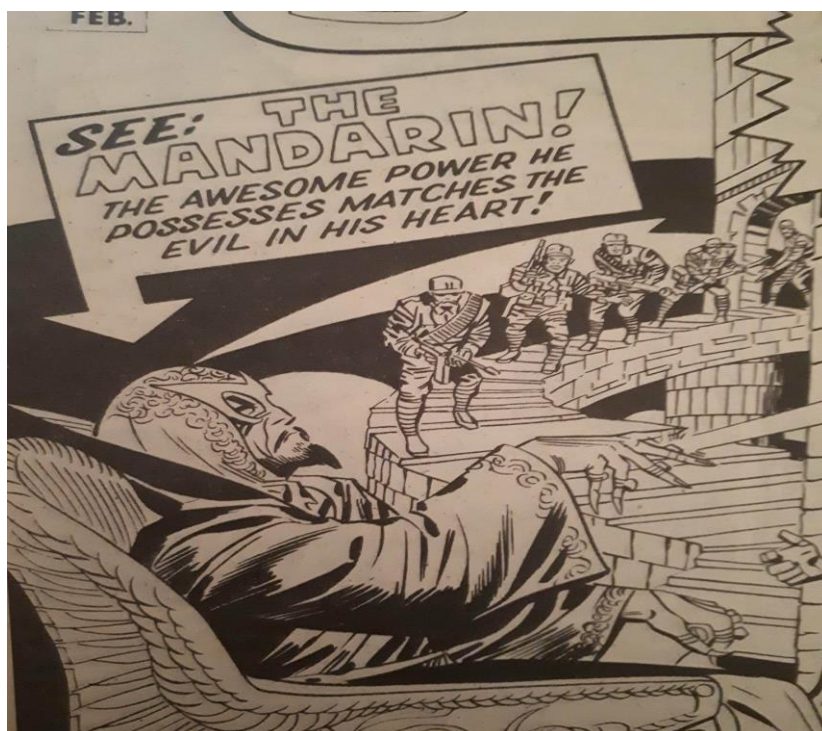

Figure 16: The Mandarin, an Asian supervillain, is Iron Man's archenemy.

Figure 17: Iron Man's armour is equipped with a tiny diamond blade, which he uses to break free.
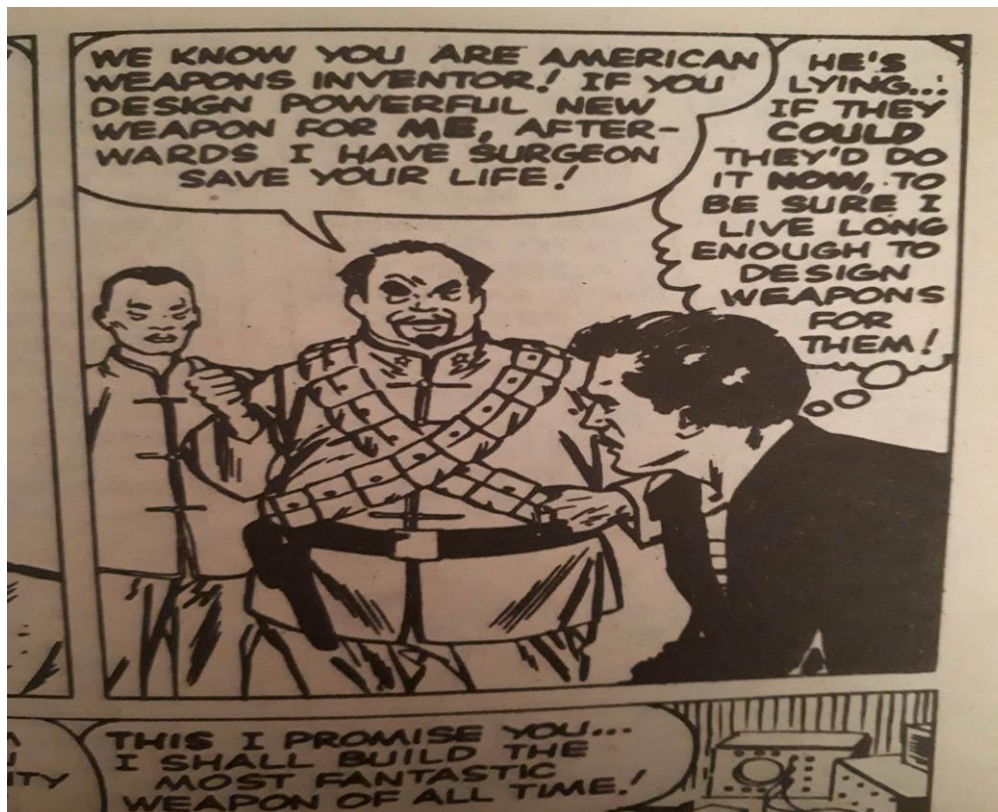

Figure 18: The Asian tyrant wants to get Tony Stark to construct a powerful weapon for him.

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