

Running head: FROM PROPAGANDA TO A BLOCKBUSTER: The role of nationality in the reinterpretation of Captain America for modern, international audiences

From propaganda to a blockbuster: The role of nationality in the reinterpretation of Captain
America for modern, international audiences

Master's Thesis

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Captain America comics were originally created in the 1940s as war propaganda. In the 2010s the story was remade as a successful movie franchise. Nowadays Hollywood is quite dependent on overseas sales, which is something they need to consider when producing their high-budget films. This thesis concentrates on how the story and the character of Captain America were reshaped to better appeal to modern and international audiences. This is done by comparing the ways America/Americans and other countries/ nationalities are addressed both in the comics and the films. The study shows that the movies include more references to other countries and nationalities, and there are considerable positive references to Germany, the main villain of the comics. America and American nationalism play a central role in both versions, but the movies take a more discreet and often comical approach to the overflowing patriotism surrounding the story. In the comics the character of Steve Rogers concentrates solely on defending his homeland and its ideals, without further questioning of his motives, whereas the Steve of the films gets a backstory that explains his sense of duty, and his inner motivation to fight injustice.</p>	
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Tiivistelmä <p>Captain America -sarjakuvat luotiin alun perin 1940-luvun sotapropagandaksi. 2010-luvulla tarinan pohjalta tehty elokuvasarja on saavuttanut suuren suosion. Hollywood on tänä päivänä melko riippuvainen ulkomaan myynnistä, ja tästä johtuen etenkin korkean budjetin elokuvia on syytä katsoa kriittisesti. Tutkielmassa keskitytään Captain American tarinaan ja hahmoon, ja siihen kuinka niitä muokattiin, jotta elokuvat vetoaisivat paremmin moderniin, kansainväliseen yleisöön. Vertailun kohteena on se, miten Amerikasta ja amerikkalaisista puhutaan sarjakuvissa ja elokuvissa, ja toisaalta taas, miten muista maista ja kansallisuuksista puhutaan. Tutkimuksesta käy ilmi, että elokuvista löytyi enemmän viittauksia eri maihin ja kansalaisuuksiin, ja huomattavia positiivisia viittauksia sarjakuvan keskeisimpään viholliseen, Saksaan. Amerikka ja amerikkalaisuus ovat keskiössä molemmissa versioissa, mutta elokuva suhtautuu hahmon ylitsevuotavaiseen isänmaallisuuteen hillitymmin, ja usein myös komediallisesta näkökulmasta. Steve Rogersin hahmo keskittyy sarjakuvassa räikeästi ja selityksiä kaipaamatta kotimaan ja sen ideaalien puolustamiseen, kun taas elokuvan Stevelle maalataan taustatarinan kautta velvollisuudentuntoon perustuva sisäinen motivaatio, ja tarve nousta epäoikeudenmukaisuutta vastaan.</p>	
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis builds around the story of Captain America. The Captain America comic books were first created in the 1940s as a tool of war propaganda. In the 2010s, the Captain is the star of several, internationally successful blockbuster films. His purpose has changed: Originally he was created to inspire and unite war-time Americans, while now he has been revived to attract movie goers all around the world. Thus, Captain America was reinterpreted and reshaped to appeal to modern and international audiences, and this is the idea around which this study is built.

While the character within the comic book surely has developed on its own over the years, I want to compare the original story of the 1940s to the most recent interpretation executed by Marvel Studios. Superhero movies have gained a huge popularity among audiences around the world in the recent years, which is why they should also be looked at critically. Hollywood nowadays is quite dependent on overseas market. For instance, the second Captain America solo movie, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* got 63.7% of its total revenue from overseas sales (Box Office Mojo, 2015). The focus is switching from domestic audiences to foreign ones, and especially countries such as China and Russia have proved to be key destinations for marketing Hollywood films (Acuna, 2013a). Marvel Studios has already made note of this, for instance when releasing their hit movie *Iron Man 3*. In the version released in the Chinese market they added a subplot with Chinese characters interacting with Iron Man. These scenes were only shown in the cinemas in China (Acuna, 2013b).

Because of the large overseas sales, Hollywood needs to make conscious decisions about how to sell their films to larger, more varied audiences. I would argue that Captain America films would be quite different in a film targeted only for Americans. The intercultural element to my thesis extends to both generations and regions. Captain America is

a product of a certain time and place that in the 2010s communicates to people from a different era and of varied backgrounds and nationalities.

While this thesis concentrates only on one character and the stories around him, the central ideas can still be applied and reflected on other modern Hollywood blockbusters. They are all in the same situation, needing to appeal on wider and more diverse audiences than even before. People within the United States themselves come from multiple different backgrounds, nations and cultures, but in addition to that, overseas audiences need to be attracted. The same film needs to have appeal among white Americans, and also in China, in Russia, in Europe, and so on and so forth.

Hollywood's dependency on overseas sales is a current and thus very relevant phenomenon. Concentrating on Captain America in the study gives it a fascinating twist, as the character is, all in all, so deeply, distinctly American. Captain America has been studied before, especially the comic books, but this intercultural, cross-media approach is a fresh one. These facts make this study significant.

The thesis begins with a look on the material used for the study. I describe the birth of Captain America as a comic book franchise, and also within the comic book, explaining the origin story of how Steve Rogers turned into Captain America. I then move on to provide theoretical background to support my argumentation. Functions of mass media will be discussed both from the points of view of the media and the audience. I will then touch upon nationality and nationalism from several viewpoints, nationalism obviously being an integral part of the character and story of Captain America. I discuss my research questions, and method of conducting the study, before the analysis is a three-part look into the findings I made researching the material. The main focus is on the presentation of America and Germany, the latter being the enemy nation in the story.

Today's world is balancing between globalism and nationalism. The origins of Captain America are deeply rooted in nationalism – typically and understandably for a time when it seemed important and necessary to bolster up the image of America as a superior and virtuous nation, creating a considerable contrast to the enemy nation. Today, however, Captain America's focus reaches outside his homeland borders. This thesis mostly draws from the first Captain America film, *The First Avenger*, since it presents an interesting balance between, indeed, globalism and nationalism: The story is based on nationalism and set in a nationalistic environment, but at the same time it is made for global audiences to enjoy and relate to. The role of nationality and how it is handled becomes central in this context.

1 MATERIAL

The material for this thesis was gathered from two types of media: comic books and feature films. I am looking at the scripts of both and mostly concentrating on written/spoken lines and sometimes non-verbal communication.

First of all I am looking at the very first issues Captain America comic books from 1941. I chose to examine only the first five issues for the purpose of this thesis. Thousands of issues of Captain America comics have been published over the decades, but I want to look at the very origins of the character and the story, to get an understanding of how far Captain America has come in 70 years, and to compare the roots of the character to his rebirth as a modern movie hero.

Marvel Studios has released several films in the 2010s featuring Captain America: his solo movies include *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), *Captain America: The*

Winter Soldier (2014) and *Captain America: Civil War* (2016). In addition, Captain America has been featured in two ensemble films, including *The Avengers* (2012) and *The Avengers: Age of Ultron* (2015). Two more ensemble movies – *The Avengers: Infinity War* and a yet-to-be-titled sequel – are scheduled to be released in 2018 and 2019.

Out of all these movies, in my analysis I am mostly concentrating on the first film, *Captain America: The First Avenger*. The movie re-establishes the character and the story of the Captain, introducing him to a new generation and a wider audience, which is why it is vital and extremely relevant to my purposes. The movie is also closest to its 1940's roots due to the central World War II storyline. The ensemble films feature several other Marvel heroes in addition to Captain America, focusing on the story of all these heroes coming together, with less emphasis being on the personal stories of single characters. I only examine a couple of specific scenes, where Captain America is in the center, and his story and character are clearly on the focus.

1.1 The origin story of the Captain

This section is to provide a general grasp on the central characters and storylines of Captain America. It will be vital to be able to perceive the overall themes, especially further on in the analysis section. The following descriptions are based on my understanding gained from familiarizing myself with the comics and the films.

Captain America is a story of Steve Rogers, a young American man living in Brooklyn, New York City in the early 1940's. As the Second World War is raging in Europe, he decides he has to do his part and enlist in the army. Due to his frail physical state, he is denied, but he keeps trying, as his just and courageous nature does not allow him to give up. His virtuous character is detected, and he is chosen to participate in a governmental scientific experiment called Project Rebirth. This turns him into a super human with extreme strength, speed and stamina. He uses his powers to fight the evil threatening the values and safety of his

homeland. In the movies, the government makes him a tool for selling war bonds – reflecting the character’s propaganda roots. He travels around the States inspiring patriotism where ever he goes, until he finally gets to demonstrate his real strength and courage, after which he takes part in fighting the Nazis in Europe. (The first comics were published when the United States was still not involved in the war, so also in the first stories he mostly fights villains domestically.)

James “Bucky” Barnes is Captain America’s most trusted companion. In the comics he is a young boy who is a huge admirer of the Captain, and who becomes his official sidekick in the very first Captain America issue. In the film Bucky is Steve’s closest childhood friend, who he rescues after being captured in Italy and they fight together until Bucky is presumably killed on a mission – later to be revived, which is a storyline appearing much later in the comics as well.

Johann Schmidt or the Red Skull is the arch enemy of Captain America. The horrifying red-faced villain appears also in the very first Captain America comic book issue. He is the perfect Nazi, hand-picked and trained by Hitler himself, and his trusted right-hand man, who turns out to be an American industrialist. He does not possess any special powers, and the red skull is just a mask, unlike in the film, where the face is his own and he gains powers similar to the Captain’s. In the film he is the leader of a Nazi terrorist organization called Hydra. The same storyline takes places in the comics too, as the Red Skull returns more powerful and terrifying, but this happens years later.

Peggy Carter is Captain America’s love interest both in the comics and movies. She is a government agent, in the comics American and in the films British, also serving in the US army during the Word War. The significance of this will be discussed later in the analysis section.

Dr. Abraham Erskine (Dr. Reinstein in the comics) is German scientist, who is the mind behind the super soldier serum that turns Steve Rogers into Captain America. Erskine is forced to escape Germany as the Nazi powers start to take hold, and they become interested on his work. Erskine's role in the film is quite a bit more significant than in the comic.

These were the main characters that the story of Captain America is built around. All of them will be referred to and analyzed to some extent later on, as all of them hold some importance to the topic of the thesis.

1.2 The context of Captain America then and now

Captain America was first created in 1940, when World War II was already being fought in Europe. This was, however, before Pearl Harbor and before the United States entered the war, and when the country had still not abandoned isolationism. The creators of Captain America, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, designed the character to promote their view of American ideals, and to make a political statement about America's position towards the war. (Dittmer, 2007) In their opinion the United States had the responsibility to interfere and participate in the war in Europe, and this is what they were commenting on with the creation of Captain America. Although many people were skeptical about getting involved, the general sentiment of the American people was reflected in the patriotic, justice-seeking, freedom-defending Captain, and the character was created to address that shared consciousness (Peitz, 2013). The very first issue holds a bold cover featuring Captain America hitting Adolf Hitler in the face (Simon & Kirby, 1941a).

The intended audience for the comics included children, as well as adults and soldiers, and the first issues were indeed consumed by all ages and a wide variety of Americans (Dittmer, 2007). Captain America Comics reached a great popularity and success, with the first issues selling over a million copies each (Dittmer, 2007). However, as the

Second World War ended, the popularity of the Nazi-fighting hero suffered a considerable drop (Peitz, 2013). He was revived again later, with varied success. Comic books featuring Captain America are still published today, and his storylines often reflect the current political and socio-cultural atmosphere in the United States and elsewhere.

The 2010's *Captain America* films did not mark his first appearance on big screen, but certainly they have been the one with the most popularity and international reach. Marvel Studios has been incredibly successful in the recent years, with the series of films set in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU). Their success began in 2008 with the release of *Iron Man*, followed by *The Incredible Hulk*, *Iron Man 2* and *Thor*. *Captain America: The First Avenger* was released in 2011, preceding the smash-hit *The Avengers* in 2012. (Marvel.com, 2016b.) The title itself refers to the following ensemble movie, so the success of the film was important to build hype for the upcoming *Avengers*.

All three *Captain America* movies were box office successes, with all of them gaining more than half of their gross revenues from overseas: *First Avenger* 52.3%, *Winter Soldier* 63.6% and *Civil War* 64.6% (Box Office Mojo 2016a, 2016b & 2016c). This fact is important for the idea of this thesis: With so much of the financial success relying on overseas sales, it was crucial for the studio to consider foreign audiences when creating the story and adapting the character of Captain America.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In this section I will briefly describe the theoretical background I am using on my thesis, to support my claims and my analysis. I will explain the uses and gratifications theory and functions of the mass media. Finally, nationality is discussed from several points of view. I

also begin to analyze how these theories relate to my topic and how they support my claims, making some important conclusions.

2.1 Uses and gratifications theory

The uses and gratifications (U&G) theory is concerned with different kinds of uses of the mass media from the audience's point of view. In other words, the assumption behind the theory is that the audience is active and makes conscious choices according to what they wish to gain from each medium (Rayburn, 1996). The theory originates from the 1970s, from the publications of Katz (e.g. Katz, Gurevitch and Haas, 1973).

The U&G theory can be approached from two points of view. First one is to ask what kinds of gratifications the audience seeks to obtain from the media. The second approach is to ask how the media are used in the process of gaining the gratifications (Miller, 2002). I will examine both of these questions in order to get a deeper understanding of the uses and gratifications theory.

Researchers have found various gratifications that audiences seek from different media. According to Miller (2002), the gratifications are individual, and it is not uncommon to observe various different gratifications being obtained within one medium, even by one person. All in all, the different types of gratifications can be divided into categories. A common categorization includes 1) information, 2) personal identity, 3) integration and social interaction and 4) entertainment (McQuail, 1983).

The first category, *information*, refers to gratifications such as satisfying the need or curiosity for knowledge, learning, gaining a sense of security thought being more knowledgeable, or getting advice. When the gratifications sought fall under the second category, *personal identity*, the aim is to find models of behavior and reinforcement for existing personal value, identifying with others within the medium, or gaining some insight to one's own personality and self. The third category that has to do with *integration and social*

interaction, the gratification sought is about gaining a sense of belonging and identifying with a preferred group, preparing for future social interaction by finding points of conversation, connecting with one's family and friends, or looking to substitute for real-life companionship. The fourth and final category, *entertainment*, seeks for gratifications such as relaxing, escaping everyday troubles, experiencing cultural enjoyment, filling time, or gaining an emotional release.

It has also been argued that there needs to be a distinction between the gratifications that are sought and the gratifications that are actually obtained (Miller, 2002). The idea is that an individual might want to obtain something out of a media, but finally ends up getting something else.

To discuss the second question I will talk about selectivity, attention and involvement, identified by Kim and Rubin (1997). These are used to describe the attributes of the gratification process, and I will describe them as explained by Miller (2002). *Selectivity* refers to individuals choosing what kind of media they want to expose themselves to, depending on the type of gratification they are seeking. *Attention* is a process in which individuals allocate their usage of cognitive effort, depending how much concentration the task at hand requires, for the gratification to be obtained. Finally, *involvement* refers to the emotional attachment that the individual often builds towards the medium they are using. A message in a film might trigger an emotional reaction in the viewer, and the audience constantly connects with characters in a television show, finding themselves involved in the lives and being affected by what is happening to them.

This was a summary of some of the most important aspects of the uses and gratifications theory. Although there is much more to the theory – how it has developed, criticized and used in different studies, for instance – at this time I am only reviewing the

basic idea. In the following I will explain how the theory is connected to the topic of the thesis, and why it is important.

Connecting the uses and gratifications theory to Captain America, it is easy to say that people in the 1940's United States were looking for very different things when reading the comic, compared to the 2010's people around the world, who buy a ticket to see another Captain America adventure. The following my own personal understanding of what I imagine the majority of the audience of both the comic book and the films were/are seeking from their respective media. I acknowledge that the reality is most probably more complicated, but for the purpose of this study I will somewhat generalize.

The 1940's comic book readers were seeking to gain reinforcement to their personal identity as Americans. What set Captain America apart from other American symbols – such as the flag of the United States or the bald eagle – is that Captain is a real person with a character and backstory, which means that everyone can identify with him (Dittmer, 2007). Captain was something that every American could aspire to be. He represented the ideal American, and by acting according to the values that he presented, a person would feel more like a true American – accepted and appreciated by his or her peers. In this way, also integration and social interaction were sought as a gratification. In the uncertain era preceding the United States joining the war, a social togetherness was a preferred state. There was a strong sense of 'us', 'the Americans', and reading a thoroughly patriotic comic as Captain America was must have been a great reinforcement to the sense of community. Then again, entertainment was certainly also sought – for young readers at least this was probably a main gratification. As for information as a gratification, it is completely possible that some viewers sought for facts – perhaps about how America's values are superior to others.

A modern movie goer is generally seeking for entertainment – a stress release, an escapist hour or two away from the troubles of the real world. If integration and social interaction are sought, it rarely has to do with nationality, even with such a strong national hero as Captain America. The group where identification is sought is more likely a group of friends – for instance a high school student might be concerned about keeping up with the latest trends to be able to discuss them with his peers, and thus seem socially accepted. Identity might be a more subconscious gratification. Perhaps seeing how the virtues of Captain America are praised and idolized on screen makes the viewer feel better about him or herself, if they identify with the same values.

To sum, it could be argued that in general the audience of the Captain America Comics were mainly looking for social identity and belonging, while modern movie goers seek first and foremost to be entertained. These are at least the most implicit reason for the both audiences to be consuming the media. In the following section I will discuss the matter from the media's point of view.

2.2 Functions of the mass media

Lasswell and Wright looked at mass communication from the points of view of the audience, the communication experience and the communicator (Severin, 1988). Together they named four functions of the mass media: surveillance, correlation, transmission and entertainment (Lasswell, 1948 and Wright, 1959). They concluded that while these functions are generally beneficial to the society, they can also cause dysfunctions that on the other hand are harmful to the society. Although not very recent, I find the idea of these functions still quite relevant for my purposes in this thesis. I will briefly explain each function, as described by Severin (1988). I will concentrate on the two functions I am using to support my claims, so those that are the most relevant to my topic: correlation and entertainment.

Surveillance of the environment functions to provide news and information to the society. The acts might include warning about natural disasters or other unrest, or delivering news that are essential to the public. On the other hand, surveillance can cause dysfunction, like panic and a lack of perspective of what is normal in the society. When the aim of a mass medium is *transmission* of culture, the function is to teach. Media communicates information and central values and norms from one generation to the next. This means to integrate everyone to fit into the same society, to create cohesion and a sense of belonging in the members of the society, and to continue the traditions of each cultural group. On the downside, transmission can lead to depersonalization of society, and reduce the number of different subcultures, as media standardizes one culture to be the central, “right” one.

Correlation as a function refers to selecting, criticizing and interpreting information about the surrounding society. One task of the media is to manage and monitor the opinion of the public, to recognize and prevent threats to social stability. Social norms are enforced and reinforced through this function, and social consensus is maintained. Propaganda content falls under the correlation function. The danger of this function becoming dysfunctional lies in stereotyping and the power of the majority. Correlation can stand in the way of much needed social change, as the majority wants to minimize any criticism targeted towards the system that keeps them on top. Through correlation power is preserved, and new innovations are hindered.

Entertainment might be the most common function of mass media. This function can often exist within other functions, like in newspapers, whose main function would be surveillance. Entertainment is something for people to use their leisure time for. It provides an escape from the troubles of everyday life and creates exposure for mass culture like music and art. However, entertainment can also be a source of dysfunction, when escapism preoccupies

too much of a person's life. It can also be argued that mass culture diminishes the value of fine art.

Functions of the mass media relates quite well to the uses and gratifications theory. To again connect this theory to my thesis, I will examine the assumed function of the comic and the movies as intended by the communicator – the creators of both pieces of popular culture.

Correlation is the clear main function of the 1940's comic book. Propaganda falls under this function, so categorizing the comic created as war propaganda is quite a clear choice. The creators of Captain America saw their work as a means for education and socialization (Peitz, 2013). Affecting the opinion of the public was a clear goal for Simon and Kirby, idolizing the virtues of Americans, while downgrading those of others. The ways of doing this will be discussed further in the analysis section. It is interesting to ponder whether the audience of the 1940's knew that they were being correlated, and to what extent. The movies of 2010's implicitly fall under the entertainment function. This would mean that the gratification that the audience seeks matches the media function. An interesting discussion would be, of course, to talk about the more implicit functions of the *Captain America* movies. Are the filmmakers not reinforcing social norms and promoting certain opinions, disguising it all in a form of a blockbuster? This would be an interesting topic for another study.

2.3 Nationality and nationalism

When discussing a character called Captain America, it seems absolutely necessary to discuss nationality and nationalism as well. In this section, the idea of nationalism will be defined and discussed, and then looked at from the point of view of, first of all, nationalism during war time and war propaganda. There is a section about American nationalism and identity, and finally the role of nationalism in the globalizing world is discussed.

Nationalism can be defined as ‘an ideology embodying the feeling of belonging to a group united by a common history and a combination of ethnic/religious/racial/linguistic identity, which is identified with a given territory, and entitled to its own state’ (Mann, 2013). Nationality and nationalism are, however, terms loaded with different meanings, definitions and perspectives. The term ‘nationalism’ or ‘nationalist’ bear some connotations that are not all positive. Through the years nationalism has been seen as something primitive and unsuited for modern, civilized people: for instance Albert Einstein referred to nationalism as ‘the measles of the human race’ - children’s disease – and Friedrich Hayek suggested that nationalism belongs to uncivilized tribal times: ‘our emotions are still governed by the instincts appropriate to the small hunting band’ (Miller, 1995, p. 5). Due to the negative connotations, the said term nationalism is often avoided and replaced by ‘patriotism’ or ‘national consciousness’, for instance (Miller, 1995).

Berlin (1981) defined nationalism from the point of view of four beliefs. 1) People are significantly affected and shaped by the groups that they are members of. 2) The members of the groups and their actions are connected and always going towards what is good for the whole group. 3) The actions of the individuals are targeted towards a goal, and the goals mark the core values of the nation, rather than universal values. 4) The values and goals and interests of the national group are superior to any other, and nothing can come to the way of pursuing them. These ideas present a very collectivist view that nations and the needs of nations rule over individuals as well as other groups of people, and pushing ethical limits can be justified, as long as the nation as a whole benefits (Miller, 1995) This view fits very well to the World War II period ideas.

Miller (1995) looks at nationality and nationalism from three points of view: 1) national identity, 2) ethical and 3) political. To expand on the first point, Miller claims that nationality can be an essential, rational and justified part of one’s identity. Nations exists, and

feeling yourself being a part of it is natural, as is identifying yourself as “American” and “French”. At the same time, nationality does not have to be the only or the main identifier that a person has. National identity means that you feel a part of your nation and understand your place in the world through that. The second, ethical point of view suggests that we feel most responsible towards the members of our own nation. There are certain ethical duties that we have towards human beings in general, but the commitment to fulfill the duty is more urgent when it comes to fellow-nationals. Third, Miller mentions the political proposition towards nationality, which means that nations and members of a nation are entitled to have political decision power over issues concerning them.

2.3.1 Nationalism and war

It is a general idea of the public that nationalism causes wars. Of course, wars were fought a long time before the idea of nationalism came to be, but war and nationalism certainly seem to have some connections. Nationalism relies on the idea that a person is entitled to live with their fellow-nationals without a foreign interference. It can be argued that a strong nationalist spirit among people enhances success in war, as there is an intense urge and commitment to protect and fight for the good of the home country. (Hall & Malešević, 2013)

Another way that war impacts nationalism is through myth-creation. After a nation has taken part in a war, the way it is talked about afterwards turns into a collective memory, loaded with cultural meaning and symbolism. Wars can strengthen the shared national consciousness through enforcing ideas of identity and ‘us vs them’ way of thinking. (Smith, 2003 & Hutchinson, 2005) The myth that the Second World War turned into for Americans is present in the recent Captain America films, as will be mentioned in section 5.1.4.

Hall and Malešević (2013) argue that in a way war and nationalism feed off of each other. A strong national mindset can urge war, and at the same time, war can create a

nationalist spirit among people. Although nationalism as such is not defined as anything aggressive, it has potential to become so if there is hatred towards other groups involved (Mann, 2013). There are many examples of this. Nationalism has been linked to both two world wars, for instance; it played a central role especially in Europe during World War II, as Adolf Hitler and his rising nationalism in Germany was the core cause for the conflict. In the United States, however, nationalism was not particularly high, in terms of war involvement – many wanted to keep out of the war in Europe. Nationalism was enhanced by the attack on Pearl Harbor, as it forced the first reluctant United States to get involved. This resulted in a more aggressive kind of nationalism. (Mann, 2013) Simon and Kirby played with this kind of nationalism with their comics even before the US involvement.

The nationalist aggression draws from ‘us versus them’ type of thinking, which was already mentioned above. The social identity theory talks about in-groups and out-groups, which may lead to prejudice through exaggerating similarities within your in-group and differences between your group and the out-group. (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) This mentality can even result in extreme racism and violence. The original Captain America comics are full of ‘us vs them’ rhetoric, and that will be discussed in the section 5.3.1.

Billig (2010) also discusses the ‘us vs them’ theme. He relates this to the ideas about nations, homeland being ‘us’ and the world being ‘them’. This mentality also comes with commonly understood and accepted idea about national duty and honor, and the morality and admiration linked to anyone who feels duty over his nation. He argues that this kind of thinking is rooted to deep that it is considered common sense, and similar thinking is quite universal, found all around the globe. As a character, Captain America is all about honor and duty over his nation.

2.3.2 *War propaganda*

As the second part of my material – the Captain America comics – falls under the category of war propaganda, I found it important to also look into propaganda theories. These definitions, typical functions and methods were useful in analyzing and understanding the material.

Propaganda is tricky to define, because it can refer to acts in so many different contexts. It can be discussed in the context of advertising or public discourse, for instance. However, since the roots of propaganda research are based on war-time data, and my material also falls under war-time propaganda, I will discuss only this one side of the concept.

Lasswell (1927) named the four major objectives of propaganda, and they do explain the war-time function quite well, as they were identified based on the propaganda during World War I. The objectives are:

1. To mobilize hatred against the enemy
2. To preserve the friendship of allies
3. To preserve the friendship and, if possible, to procure the cooperation of neutrals
4. To demoralize the enemy (1927, p. 195).

These are the assumptions in the background that I will keep in mind when collecting and analyzing my data. They will help me confirm that the material I am reading actually is propaganda, as described in this instance.

The work on the strategies of propaganda by Lee and Lee (1939) has remained popular and is still referred to today (Vincent, 2007). Lee and Lee's propaganda analysis identified seven instruments, which are name calling, glittering generality, transfer, testimonial, plain folks, card staking, and the band wagon effect. I will now briefly review the concepts as described by Vincent (2007).

Name calling “involves the use of labels to project an idea in a favorable or unfavorable light” (Vincent, 2007, p. 243). Often a name is attached to a certain group, which leads to stereotyping, when all the representatives of this group are assumed to be similar and coherent with the attached label. When name calling is used to paint a negative image, the purpose is to hinder the public from critically analyzing the “enemy” and reflecting them through extensive evidence, but rather through emotional reactions urge them to adopt a narrow, negative understanding (Vincent, 2007).

Glittering generality means “the tendency to associate an issue or image with a noble or virtuous term” (Vincent, 2007, p. 245). So, it is the opposite of name calling. The idea is to try to affect people’s ideas of certain things by attaching vague but ostentatious virtue words to them. Euphemisms would also fall under this category. The use of these grandiose words, for example “great” or “holy”, is not explained or validated, but the aim is that they will prompt the audience to accept the proposed information and images (Vincent, 2007). Like name calling, glittering generality is a tool to appeal to people’s emotions, in the hopes that they will not think critically, only accept the offered idea.

Image transfer refers to using a well-known concept, with existing status of power and respect, as an association with whatever product, group or individual one wants to promote. The idea is to take an advantage of these positive qualities and transfer them, often through images or symbols (Vincent, 2007). The American flag, for instance, holds a great amount of meanings, and one can transfer all the values and ideals that are associated with the flag and thus draw parallels between oneself and those meanings. It is about identity and image, and how something or someone wants to be understood and presented.

Testimonial “consists of having some either respected or hated person say that a given idea or program or product or person is good or bad” (Lee and Lee, 1939, p.74). It means quite simply using a famous person with a certain kind of reputation to affect people’s

opinions on an issue. A celebrity can for example show their support to a politician sharing material on social media, or just appearing alongside them in the public. Thus people's opinions on the famous person affect their opinion on the politician or whatever other issue, as well.

Plain folks is an instrument of propaganda used when a person wishes to communicate that he or she is "one of the people", an ordinary person just like everyone else, and thus their ideas should also be believed (Vincent, 2007). This is done to appeal to the majority, and to make them feel a personal connection to the communicator. The desired message communicates humility.

Card staking "occurs when a presentation uses a selection of facts and distortions, elucidations and confusions, and both logical and illogical statements" (Vincent, 2007). In other words, the communicator presents arguments only from one side, ignoring the opposite arguments, and perhaps even making up some facts. As Severin (1988) points out, this method is easy to recognize from advertising, when only positive comments on a products are introduced and highlighted.

Finally, the bandwagon approach is built around the notion of justifying an action, because "Everyone is doing it", and thus people are encouraged to follow the crowd (Vincent, 2007). "Everyone" refers to one's peers, whichever group one identifies with, suggesting that one is an outsider unless one thinks a certain way, does a certain thing, or owns a certain product. This instrument definitely taps into the need to belong and to be accepted.

2.3.3 American nationalism and identity

Every nation has an identity, and every nation has stories and myths to support and reinforce that identity. The United States has a very strong identity, and in the core of it is the world-famous American patriotism. The patriotism has a very strong presence in popular culture,

and through that it has gained a very established place in the American identity and in the way both American and non-Americans perceive the country. The stars and stripes of the United States national flag are a symbol present everywhere and known by all, in the itself country and outside of it. Other symbols and patriotic phrases are routinely used in advertising and popular culture. A strong sense of nation is embedded in the habits and rituals, like saluting the flag and supporting the troops. (Lieven, 2005)

The nation of United States is constantly described by words of great pride, as if America and American-ness is something fundamentally positive, worth fighting for, exemplary model for others to strive for. Here is what Herbert Croly wrote in 1909 (as quoted by Lieven, 2005), which shows that the idea of America as an exceptional nation has been around for a long time:

The faith of Americas in their country is religious, if not in its intensity, at any rate in its almost absolute and universal authority. It pervades the air we breathe. As children, we hear it asserted or implied in the conversation of our elders. Every new stage of our educational training provides some additional testimony on its behalf. Newspapers and novelists, orators and playwrights, even if they are little else, are at least loyal preachers of the Truth. The skeptic is not controverted; he is overlooked. It constitutes the kind of faith which is the implication, rather than an object, of thought, and consciously or unconsciously, it enters largely into our personal lives as a formative influence.

Among all of this is a general and underlying belief that America is special, chosen and superior. The core of this belief lies in pride over the American democracy, which is claimed to be the oldest, most successful and most developed form of democracy (Lieven, 2005). President Woodrow Wilson's view about World War I was, "America had the infinite privilege of fulfilling her destiny and saving the world" (Lieven, 2005). The national myth about United States as the saviors of the world has been repeated time and time again in popular culture, and it also reflects to the politics of the nation.

The strong belief in nation and belonging has been challenged by globalization and growing diversity of the American people. The general idea of it will be discussed in the following section about nationalism in decline.

2.3.4 Declining nationalism

This section is to discuss the idea that nationality is in decline, and national identity is being replaced by global identity. Even though the source text for this section was published over 20 years ago, it sums up well the globalization phenomenon and its effect on nationality.

Miller (1995) writes about the declining idea of nationality. There are several arguments why this is happening; why people identify themselves less through their nationality now than before. The first reason is related to globalization, and the huge growth of international trade. What we eat, buy, watch, read and wear all over the world – in other words, global consumption patterns, have become a lot alike. This is largely due to shared sources of media that guides us to act, behave and shop the certain way. Trends have become global. Because of this, people have less of a sense of nationality, as their consumption behavior is not dependable on where they live, and it is not considerably different of other countries or even continents.

The second reason for the decline of nationality is the increasing geographical mobility among people all around the world. People travel outside their countries both for business and pleasure, for short and longer time periods. Countries and cultures that from the distance might have seemed foreign and strange start to seem less so when experienced first-hand. A distinct part of nationality is based on an idea your own nation is significantly different from others, and this idea is challenged by a direct contact with other cultures. The uniqueness of one's own nation erodes, as one realizes that life lead outside your own country is not fundamentally different from yours.

The third point, according to Miller, is that people increasingly define themselves and build their identity through groups and communities that do not have to do with nationality. The sub-culture can be based on religion, profession, political stance, ideology, or an interest. Rather than a nation, these groupings can be international or tied to a local environment. Nationality is still a part of one's identity, but it can be argued that its meaning has diminished, while these other groups have become more important.

The fourth and final point raised by Miller has to do with political decision-making. Even though nation-states have political power over the decisions made regarding the country, they are not the sole unit of power. There are regional decision-making bodies, and more importantly international ones, like the European Union. One of the main ideas that nationality relies on is that nations should be seen as independent actors, fully in charge of any decisions and events that affect their people. Although having international bodies such as the EU rule over national decisions can spark a greater sense of nationalism, it is also evident that most people see the sense in having certain decisions made in either local or international level, rather than national.

Global events in the recent years have made clear that globalization has been confronted by a new rise of nationalism. Despite this, the concepts presented here exist and are true to many. People identify themselves through some many other aspects than just nationality, and in this sense, identities have become more international and cross-cultural, with communities based on gender, age, ethnicity, interests, and so on.

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

As I have mentioned before, nations and nationality are central themes in my thesis. As discussed in the introduction, nowadays big-budget Hollywood movies rely a lot on overseas sales, and this means that movies need to be adapted so that they appeal to wider, more diverse audiences. Captain America is historically a very American and patriotic figure, and my assumption is that the original version of him and his story (meant for American wartime propaganda) is considerably different from the revived, modern MCU version that has the main purpose of alluring movie-goers internationally. American patriotism and superiority as a world power is a controversial issue, and Marvel presumably had to be careful when making Captain America, not to make it off-putting for international audiences. In some countries Captain America was omitted from the title in order to avoid anti-American sentiment. (Duncan, & Smith, 2013) I believe that nation and nationality have a significant role here.

Due to these reasons in my study I chose to examine the way nations and nationalities are addressed. These are the two research questions for my thesis.

RQ1: How are America and Americans addressed in the Captain America films compared to the original comics?

RQ2: How are other nationalities and countries addressed in the Captain America films compared to the original comics?

4 METHOD

In my thesis I look at specific ways Captain America and his story have been reshaped by a modern film studio to suit their purpose of selling movie tickets. I consider the role of

American nationalism and patriotism and how they are still visible in the modern interpretation of an obviously patriotic American superhero; but in ways that do not exclude someone who does not relate to being American. Even though other comic book heroes have been remade into feature films (for instance, Batman and Superman from DC Comics and Iron Man, Spider-Man, Thor and Hulk from Marvel Comics), I chose Captain America because of its obvious connotations to American patriotism and culture. I think it offers an interesting setting to a film that needs to sell abroad and not only in the United States, where the character so distinctly belongs.

I did this by looking at ways 1) America/Americans and 2) other countries/nationalities are mentioned in both the comics and the films. I assume that since the films have a larger, more varied audience, more countries will be addressed in more positive light, as well as American patriotism will be more subdued. Below I will describe in more detail how I collected my data and conducted my analysis.

I do not have one single theory that I would build my study around. Instead, I use the theoretical background I reviewed before to support my analysis by proving some important points. I considered the role of the audience with the help of uses and gratifications theory, to see how different the audience of Captain America was in the 1940s compared to now: what they used to look for in reading the comic differs from what people look for now when they go see the movie. This, of course, also affects what kind of an interpretation is offered to the audience. As for the functions of the mass media, I used this theory to point out the differences between the functions of the comic and the films, my assumption being that the purpose of the 1940s comics differs greatly from the 2010s films. In addition to this, I looked into nationality and nationalism to understand the distinctly nationalistic character of Captain America.

I started by gathering data from the films. I watched all three films (*Captain America: The First Avenger*, *Captain America: The Winter Soldier* and *The Avengers*) that I was planning on using. I had already seen each film before, but at this time I was paying attention to all instances when 1) America or Americans are mentioned and 2) other countries or nationalities are mentioned. Some of the instances were not a direct reference to a country, but the idea was apparent judging from the context. For instance, in *The First Avenger* a character says, “We are going to win; we have the best men”, obviously referring to the United States. I noted down all such lines that were uttered, as well as the time in the film and sometimes something meaningful about the context. I marked those utterances that seemed especially important, because I knew I would not end up using each unit of data in the final study.

After this, I moved on to gathering data from the comics. I started from the very first Captain America issue, and again, noted down all the instances when 1) America or Americans are mentioned and 2) other countries or nationalities are mentioned. Again, I marked the units that seemed the most significant, noted down the issue and the page number, and also made sure to write something down about the context – this was important, because I was not as familiar with the comics as I was with the films, and reading the collected data later would be easier with some context. I kept collecting data until I felt I had enough for the study. This was after going through eight issues. At this point also the usable units of data were getting scarcer and less significant. This is why I decided to use only the first five issues in my study. In terms of material and collected data, it also seemed in balance with the films and the data gathered from those.

At this point of the thesis process I took some time to confirm the prior idea that my study would be qualitative. I did consider the option of making a quantitative study instead, focusing on the number of times a certain nation or nationality is mentioned, and in

what manner. However, I want to leave room for interpretation, since not all units will be that easy to categorize (under positive, negative, neutral, etc). I want to analyze the context and the reasons behind each unit of data. This is why I made the final decision to make this a qualitative study.

After gathering the data from both the films and the comics, I conducted a thematic analysis with the help of Owen's three-step-process for qualitative data analysis. The method was first described in a study of relational communication, where themes were identified from the data based on recurrence, repetition and forcefulness (Owen, 1984). This was a good way for me to identify regularities, similarities and differences in the ways different countries are addressed. Even though the three-step-process is usually used for studies related to relational and interpersonal issues (Croucher and Cronn-Mills, 2015), I think it worked quite well for the purposes of this study as well. I will now explain each step of the process.

The first step is called recurrence. This meant going through the data and keeping an eye on and noting down any recurring themes within the units of data (Owen, 1984). I had a presumption that the three broad recurring categories would "positive", "negative" and "neutral"; indeed, the units fell very naturally under these three themes. Another categorization that I noted was geo-political. There was a clear division between the United States and its "enemies": the nations that have a history of conflict with the US (in this case notably Germany). This became the categorization that I used to structure my analysis: The homeland, the enemy, and the neutrals, which are for example allies to the United States. Under these three categories I later noted more sub-categories. These will be presented and discussed in the analysis sections below.

The second step is repetition, which is about finding specific words, phrases and notions that are repeated within the recurring units (Owen, 1984). The repeating themes

within the categories helped me form the sub-categories. There were for example repeating notions of patriotism, repeating words like “soldier”, and repeating phrases that reinforced the character of Steve.

Finally, the third step is forcefulness, which refers to “vocal inflection, volume, or dramatic pauses” (Owen, 1894, p. 275), and in written text to the “underlining of words and phrases, the increased size of print” (Owen, 1984, pp. 275-276), among other stylistic measures. This step was useful especially when analyzing the data from the comics. A comic as a medium uses a lot of stylistic tricks to add to the story and make the message clearer. This step I used in further explaining the categories and pointing out the most important and centric themes.

To summarize, the three main categories I noted in the data were “the homeland”, “the neutrals” and “the enemy”. These are partly divided further into sub-categories according to different points of view. For instance, I will discuss America and Americans and their positive and negative representations, Steve Rogers as a symbol for perfect Americans, and American propaganda as used in both comics and films. These subcategories emerged from looking at the repeated themes. Through this analysis I determined differences and similarities between the two versions of Captain America, and how each presented different countries and nationalities. I then explained them according to the theories and other background information I have described before. Thus I answered my research questions and came to conclusions discussed later.

5 ANALYSIS

This section is to analyze all the units of interest gathered from the material, and to present the findings that I made in this study. Again, when gathering the material based on my research questions, I found three main categories. These nations or nationalities were, as mentioned: United States as the homeland, Germany as the enemy, and other neutral or allied countries. I will start by discussing America from several points of view, continue to shortly cover the neutral countries, and finish with some interesting findings on Germany and how it is portrayed in the comics and the films.

5.1 The homeland

America and Americans are naturally in the center in a story about Captain America. In this section I will talk about the different themes that I found in the ways that America and Americans were talked about in the comics and the films. I will talk about Steve Rogers as the ultimate American, the United States as a superior country, the “bad” Americans, and the explicit propaganda of the comics that is used differently, with an element of ‘meta’ storytelling, in the films.

5.1.1 *Steve Rogers as the (relatable) American patriot*

This section is to discuss the way Steve Rogers is presented; concentrating on differences in the ways the comic and the film first introduce the character – and the significance of those differences. The introduction of Steve Rogers and the emergence of Captain America are described in significantly different ways in the comic and the film, although the story is of course the same. The film takes considerably longer time to explain Steve’s background and his true character, while the comic jumps right into action. Here is a more detailed description of the character introduction in both the comic and the film, followed by an analysis of the importance of it. All the descriptions of the film are from *Captain America: The First*

Avenger (Feige & Johnston, 2011), and the comic references are from the first Captain America issue (Simon & Kirby, 1941a).

The First Avenger does not waste time establishing the character of Steve Rogers as a true, brave, admirable patriot and a very good person. He is first introduced being in the process of enlisting in the army. A fellow enlistee is reading a newspaper, full of news about battles happening in Europe. “Boy, a lot of guys getting killed over there... kinda makes you think twice about enlisting, huh?” the man nervously says to Steve, who simply answers, almost cheerfully, “Nope”. He is considerably shorter and skinnier than everyone else, and the contrast to the other men around him is clear. Despite this, he seems braver than the taller men next to him. We then learn that both of his parents are dead, both died serving in the military, which Steve explains bravely and with a bit of pride, and this invites sympathy on his behalf. We see a list of his health issues, including asthma, high blood pressure and heart trouble. The doctor rejects Steve despite his wishes.

Clearly disappointed, Steve goes to movies, where they are showing a clip from the war in Europe, announcing that “help is on the way”, and “every able-bodied young man is lining up to serve his country”. Steve is clearly taken by a clip of the American soldiers serving abroad, and we see a woman weeping. A man in the audience shouts, “Who cares? Play the movie already!” Steve reacts instantly by whispering to him, “Hey, wanna show some respect?” As the man continues to shout, we see the audience uncomfortable and silently disapproving. No one else stands up to the brute, except Steve, who this time frankly tells the man to shut up. The man stands up threateningly, and the scene is cut to Steve being beaten up in a back alley.

As the man keeps punching Steve, he keeps getting up. He holds a round lid of a trash can as a shield, mirroring his main weapon later on as Captain America. “I could do this all day”, he says, before once again getting hit to the ground. Steve’s friend Bucky shows up,

and drives the man off. Their following conversation reveals that this happens frequently, both Steve trying to enlist under various aliases, and him getting mugged for challenging people bigger than him. It also turns out that Bucky has gotten his orders, and he will be leaving for Europe the next day. Steve is beaten by the fact that he is not going. Bucky tries to tell him that there are other important jobs that he could do from back home, to which Steve answers, head unturned, that there are men risking their lives, and he has got “no right to do any less than them”. This attracts Dr. Abraham Erskine.

Dr. Erskine invites Steve inside, and tests him to see if he has the right character for the experiment. He asks Steve if he would like to kill Nazis to which Steve answers, “I don’t wanna kill anyone. I don’t like bullies. I don’t care where they’re from.” Later on we see Steve struggle to keep up with the bigger, stronger men in the physical tests to find the right candidate. He does, however, show that he is smart when fetching a flag from a pole (by taking down the pole instead of climbing it), and that he is brave and selfless (by jumping over a false grenade to absorb the blast and save everyone else). This will lead to him being chosen to take part in the experiment that turns him into Captain America.

The character of Steve Rogers is thoroughly likable and is sure to have the audience’s sympathies very soon after his introduction. He is kind, a loyal friend to Bucky, endlessly determined, with a strong sense of duty, loyalty and justice. At the same time he is very vulnerable; he is very awkward around women, and owns an endearing, self-deprecating sense of humor. How could one dislike a person like that? He is presented as the ultimate yet honorable underdog, “the little guy”. You feel for him, but at the same time admire him. It does not matter which country he wants to fight for, because his virtue seems universal.

The film puts a lot more emphasis on the roots of the character, compared to the comics. It takes the film over 35 minutes before we first see Captain America emerge. This is more than one fourth of the full running time. It was clearly important to the filmmakers to

well establish the character of Steve, and have the audience know him as a good-hearted underdog before turning him into a super human. The film does not glorify America during the first half an hour; it only glorifies the character of Steve Rogers, yet in a vulnerable manner. In this way, by the time he turns into Captain America, he has won over the audience's sympathies, and even if the audience does not relate to American patriotism, they can relate to Steve's loyalty, selflessness and vulnerability.

The comic is much hastier in presenting the transformation, and does not provide much of a backstory to Steve. It takes four frames from the first introduction of Steve Rogers to him turning into Captain America. During those four frames, we do get to know the basic facts about Steve: he is a frail man, but calm when being injected with the serum, which is telling of his courage. Professor Reinstein (Dr. Erskine in the film) explains the situation further: "Today [this young man] volunteered for army service, and was refused because of his unfit condition! His service to his country seemed gone!" Steve does not even speak until after his transformation, when one of his first lines is, "Come on out, you SKUNK", spoken to the German agent who kills the professor. In the film Steve confronts the agent as well, but it would be unfit for him to utter such line – more suitable to the brute, who beats Steve up in the back alley. In the comic the spy gets killed by electricity, which Steve deems to be "a fate well deserved". In a few frames he becomes the savior of the nation, gathering fame as the hero who fights against the forces of evil.

The Captain America of the comics, though of course an honorable and brave fighter, often embarrasses his enemies by shouting out witty and somewhat cocky one-liners when fighting them, showing how they are no match for him. In addition to the first "skunk" that he fought, some examples of his one-liners include:

"Strike one for the home team!" (Simon & Kirby 1941f, p. 4)

"Looks like somebody has to teach you manners!" (Simon & Kirby 1941g, p. 8)

"Let's start cleaning house!" (Simon & Kirby 1941i, p. 7)

Granted, this is a typical style for comic books of the time, so it is not surprising that the comic book Captain America uses this kind of rhetoric.

Compared to the comics, however, the film presents a more down-to-earth, slightly perplexed version of the post-transformation Steve, who is understandably amazed and even confused by his powers, and continues to be the same humble, awkward “little guy” on the inside. It is, however, very satisfying for the viewer to now see Steve receive the physical tools to match his courage. It is clear that he will use his new powers for good and justice, so the audience still roots for him.

Why is the introduction of the character so different in the movie and the comic? The decision can be analyzed using the theory on the functions of the mass media discussed in section 2.2, and the uses and gratifications theory discussed in 2.1. The main function of the film is to entertain, and it is also what the audience is mainly looking for. The film needs to properly introduce the main character, and make the audience sympathize with him, in order to be engaged with the story and later on support him in his struggles and the fight against the villains. The comic, while also looking to entertain, its main mission is to present the main character as someone ideal and virtuous. As times were different, the comic does not need to justify Steve’s willingness to turn into a superhuman to fight for his country – national sense of duty was a given when war was around the corner. Then again, the film needed to take some more time to remind the audience that in Steve’s situation, knowing what he is like and what his world is like, being such a patriot is admirable and understandable. As Billig (2010) writes, the ideas of national duty and honor are embedded in our subconscious, as common sense, something universally expected. This is visible especially in the comic’s introduction of Steve. The film has to remind people – “I don’t like bullies, no matter where they’re from” – that Steve’s sense of duty is similar to what the audience feels to their country, not just specifically American.

Steve is a patriot; this is made immediately and undeniably clear in both the film and comic. As Miller (1995) writes, the term ‘patriotism’ is often used instead of ‘nationalism’, due to the negative connotations regarding the latter. However, when looking at Berlin’s (1981) definition of nationalism and comparing it to the character of Steve, clearly fits to the description of a nationalist: Steve is affected by the society he lives in, and he channels the values and ideals posed by it. He is concerned about the good of his nation, and his goals are to act accordingly and serve his country. This goal is a priority to him, and he sees it as superior to any other goal.

In addition, Miller’s (1995) viewpoints on nationalism also add to the argument that Steve is a nationalist. His identity is built around his nationality, and his biggest dreams, motivations and goals are related to serving his country. Thus, his national identity is very strong, even before he got the name Captain America. He is eager to fight injustice and “bullies”, and these are of course defined by his context, his country – if he had lived in Russia or China, his understanding of the enemy would be very different. The ethical point that Miller makes also relates to Steve. He has a sense of justice and goodness, and he does not want to hurt people from an enemy country just because they are “the enemy”. However, if the good of his homeland requires, he will hurt them. The commitment to his home country is more urgent than the commitment to mankind in general. This aspect of the character is present in both the comics and the films.

Be it comic or film, Steve Rogers is presented with a strong, explicit relation to the United States. From his superhero name to the way he is dressed and to the values he fights for, he embodies the ideal American nation. This idea will be expanded in the following section.

5.1.2 “Peace-loving America”

The American nationalism – or patriotism, which ever one chooses to call it – is present in both the comic and the film, continuing after the introduction of Steve and his transformation into Captain America. This section is to discuss the way the idea of America as a superior nation comes across both in the comics and the films. (The films sometimes bring this idea across as a nod to the propaganda roots, and this will be discussed in the section 5.1.4.) The distinctive American nationalism that was discussed in the section 2.3.3 is also related to the comic and films. The role of the stars-and-stripes suit is also analyzed, to demonstrate how Captain America acts as a representative of the American ideal.

The way the American identity and perceived superiority is constructed in the comics relies a lot on the contrast made in relation to other nations – namely, the enemy nations. Dittmer (2007) calls this ‘differentiation’, and he poses an example from the beginning of the very first issue of Captain America Comics. The narration to set up the story goes as follows: “As the ruthless war-mongers of Europe focus their eyes on a peace-loving America... the youth of our country heed the call to arm for defense” (Simon and Kirby, 1941a, p. 1). Here the reader immediately gets the idea that while Europe is violent, America will only take action to defend their country and peaceful values. This differentiation will be discussed more in the section 5.3.1.

The nature of the “peace-loving America” also comes across in the way Captain America fights: he is ultimately defensive and only attacks when he or his country’s security is threatened. This is apparent in his choice of weapon as well – the famous shield can be used as an offensive weapon, but first and foremost it communicates the purpose of self-defense (Peitz, 2013). Captain America is the same in both the comics and films: he is never the aggressive attacker, only the valiant defender. In addition, he does not attack with brutal power and violence – instead he often relies on his intelligence and skills in fighting and

leadership (Dittmer, 2007). This is something that sets him apart from the enemy, and what the United States poses as the honorable way to fight.

Captain America's shield and the costume speak volumes, being an integral part of the character and his connection to America and American ideals. The intention of Simon and Kirby was to design a costume that would immediately be connected to the homeland of the superhero (Dittmer, 2007). The connection is not subtle at all: the stars and stripes of Captain America's suit are red, white and blue, unmistakably taking after the United States flag. In the comics, as Dittmer (2007) points out, only villains make fun of Captain America's costume. His friends and countrymen understand the symbolism of the stars and stripes. As Lieven (2005) described, the United States flag as a symbol is very strong, and internationally connected to the American values. Through being clad in the American stars and stripes, Captain America automatically shares the values attached to the flag.

In *The First Avenger* the story of the Captain's suit is told with care and with an appropriate dash of self-deprecation, due to the fact that the costume might seem slightly ridiculous or over-the-top for a modern viewer, especially for a non-American. The stars-and-stripes suit is first introduced in a comical propaganda scene, which will be further discussed in the section 5.1.4. The costume is presented as homespun and amusing. When Steve goes on his first real mission in Italy, he is wearing his suit but without the head-gear, which arguably is the most ridiculous part of the costume, thus making the scene more serious. As the Captain becomes an official fighter for the military, Bucky asks Steve with a tone of gentle mocking, if he is planning on keeping the outfit. Steve answers with a smile, "It's kinda grown on me". His proper suit gets a grand introduction, as it is shown off with no self-deprecation, but in an action scene with slow-motion shots, dramatic music and a demonstration of the Captain's power and skills. The scene is supposed to be rewarding to the viewer in the sense that it marks the moment when Steve has found his place and is getting the support and respect that

he deserves. It can also awake some national pride in those Americans who wish to see the scene as a demonstration of their powerful nation.

The Avengers also recognizes and refers to the Captain's costume. Having been revived after 70 years of being frozen (after an incident at the end of *The First Avenger*), Steve looks for his place in the modern world. He is called back to duty when the world is at risk, and he also gets a new costume, imitating his original one. The following is a brief exchange with Steve and Agent Coulson (who is a huge fan of Captain America):

Steve: Aren't the stars and stripes a little... old-fashioned?

Coulson: With everything that's happening, the things that are about to come to light, people might just need a little old-fashioned. (Feige & Whedon, 2012)

Through this, the film admits that the Captain America costume might look a bit silly for the modern eye, but also gets a pass for using it anyway, and urges the audience to take it seriously, being a symbol of the Captain roots and another, more simple, time.

Later on, Tony Stark aka Iron Man, with whom Steve has problems getting along from the start, snaps at Steve with a line, "Of the people in this room, which one is A - wearing a spangly outfit and B - not of use?" (Feige & Whedon, 2012). In the comics the Captain's friends never made fun of his outfit, as it would have degraded the respect for the American flag and hence the country, and this would have been completely against what the comics attempted to achieve. The 2012 film, however, is allowed this little mocking comment, and it is completely acceptable and even expected, especially coming from a character like Tony Stark, who is known to make fun at everyone's expense, be it a friend or foe.

In the comics Captain America is constantly presented as the embodiment of the United States. He is beating the villains to "settle a few accounts for uncle Sam" (Simon and Kirby, 1941c, p. 14) Being one of the major American values, democracy comes up constantly in the comics, as part of the narrative describing Captain America and the United

States. As Lieven (2005) wrote, the pride over the American democracy is one of the key points contributing to the American identity. While the word ‘democracy’ is never mentioned in any of the Captain America films, in the comics the word occurs often. For example, the enemy agent shouts as he aims to shoot Captain America and his friends, “Death to the dogs of Democracy!” (Simon and Kirby, 1941a, p. 6). The man is also described as “the Hand of Democracy’s enemy” (Simon and Kirby, 1941a, p. 5). This communicates that America equals democracy which equals something good and superior.

In addition to democracy, Captain America is constantly mentioned to fight for liberty, which is another one of America’s central values. The villains he is going to beat are referred to as ‘enemies of liberty’ (Simon and Kirby, 1941b, p. 1). In the early Captain America Comics there was a frequent section called ‘The Sentinels of Liberty’, which was used as a club for young readers to join. For joining they got a badge, recognizing them as friends and allies of Captain America, and thus supportive of the American way. In between the stories they get messages from Captain America himself. Here is Bucky speaking to the young sentinels:

Let’s all get together behind Cap and be on the constant lookout for spies... Join Captain America’s Sentinels of Liberty – the greatest army of red-blooded young patriots ever assembled under one flag. (Simon and Kirby, 1941h)

This makes the purpose of the comics quite obvious. More than just entertainment, all readers are made to recognize that they have responsibility over their homeland, and by reading the comic and joining the ‘Sentinels’ club they become part of a socially approved and honorable group.

In one example the comics clearly demonstrates its values and what it considers virtuous behavior. Captain America and Bucky are listening to a speech by a rich American man, who donates his money to support the war effort. Bucky comments: “Now that’s what I call a real American!” (Simon & Kirby, 1941e, p. 2) Steve agrees, and says there should be

more people like him. It is quite an obvious comment on acceptable and honorable behavior, urging Americans to act similarly. In the story *Captain America and the Unholy Legion*, Bucky infiltrates to a secret Nazi gathering. As the others reveal the swastika tattoos on their chests, Bucky is caught, and he is called “a spy”. Bucky replies, “No, you rat, a patriot!” (Simon & Kirby, 1941i, p. 5). It is an obvious and natural identification for the young sidekick, also urging the readers to proudly identify themselves as patriots.

The film indulges in few explicitly patriotic moments, being considerably fewer than in its comic counterpart. A rare example is when Colonel Phillips, whom Steve is working with boasts with confidence: “WE are going to win. WE have the best men” (Feige & Johnston, 2011) referring to the United States military force.

To summarize, there is some patriotism in both comics and films, as the biggest heroes in both are American. The comics underline the nation more, constantly mentioning the United States and patriotism, and relating Captain America explicitly to his country. The comics also draws a clear picture of what makes America great and how a great American behaves. On the other hand, it gives a clue of the other side as well, as described in the following section.

5.1.3 The Bad Americans

The Captain America comics do present America and Americans, but not only the certain kind, patriotic Americans. Where Captain America and his like offered a role model for the children and others of his time, the unpatriotic traitors demonstrated a severe example of what is not acceptable behavior from an American. These unpatriotic characters are also, as Dittmer (2007) writes, always punished or disciplined in the appropriate way, so there is no vagueness about what is right and what is wrong. For instance, the Captain’s arch enemy Red Skull is introduced in *Captain America and the Riddle of the Red Skull* (Simon & Kirby, 1941d) and he turns out to be an American industrialist who is working for Hitler. By the end of the story

he is exposed as a fraud, after which he is killed and thus he gets what a traitor allegedly deserves.

The first five issues include also other American villains, and a main theme is sabotage and treason. As the United States was not involved in the war in Europe yet, the adventures took place in the American soil, and often featured domestic threats. These spies are often referred to as ‘vermin’ (e.g. Simon & Kirby, 1941a, p. 2), obviously condemning such behavior as inexcusable.

The First Avenger does not include any American villains. However, there is an interesting turn in the second Captain America movie, *The Winter Soldier*, when Steve Rogers finds out that Hydra, the Nazi-based organization he fought during World War II, has been secretly growing inside and taking over S.H.I.E.L.D. – the organization he has been working for. S.H.I.E.L.D. is connected to the United States government (Feige, Russo & Russo, 2014). This is a huge hit for Steve, shaking his world view. Furthermore, in the third Captain America movie, *Civil War*, the international United Nations-based decision to regulate the actions of superheroes drives Steve further from his roots as a government-loyalist. He takes a stand against the order to save Bucky, his childhood friend, thus for the first time thinking about the best of individuals instead of his nation, defying the core belief of nationalism. (Feige, Russo & Russo, 2016) These developments give the character of Steve more dimensions compared to the simple, straight-forward patriotic Captain America of the early comic books. (Of course similar turns of events occur to the comic book Steve Rogers as well – just much later in his story arch.)

5.1.4 “*The Star-Spangled Man with a Plan*”

The propaganda roots of Captain America are addressed in *Captain America: The First Avenger* as part of the origin story of Steve Rogers’ transformation to the superhero that he will be known as. As Steve gains fame for his first encounter with an enemy spy, the military

bosses see an opportunity to use him to sell war bonds. What follows is a montage sequence of Steve travelling across the States and performing with a singing and dancing group of women, all dressed in blue, white and red stars and stripes. The women sing a catchy, empowering – and cheesy – tune about ‘the star-spangled man with a plan’. The lyrics go as follows.

Who’s strong and brave, here to save the American Way?
Who vows to fight like a man for what’s right night and day?
Who will campaign door-to-door for America?
Carry the flag shore to shore for America,
From Hoboken to Spokane,
The Star Spangled Man with a Plan!
We can’t ignore there’s a threat and a war we must win,
Who’ll hang a noose on the goose-stepping goons from Berlin?
Who will redeem, head the call for America,
Who’ll rise or fall, give his all for America,
Who’s here to prove that we can?
The Star Spangled Man with a Plan!

Stalwart and steady and true,
(see how this guy can shoot, we tell ya, there’s no substitute!)
Forceful and ready to defend the
Red, White, and Blue!
Who’ll give the Axis the sack, and is smart as a fox?
(far as an eagle will soar)
Who’s making Adolf afraid to step out of his box?
(He knows what we’re fighting for!)
Who waked the giant that napped in America?
We know it’s no one but Captain America,
Who’ll finish what they began?
Who’ll kick the Krauts to Japan?
The Star Spangled Man with a Plan!
(Who’s strong and brave, here to save the American way?) (Feige & Johnston, 2011)

The lyrics are full of components and rhetoric known to be used for propaganda. Especially name-calling and glittering – as explained in the section 2.3.2 – are used to set America apart from its enemies. Captain America – an explicit symbol for his country – is described with words such as ‘strong’, ‘brave’, ‘smart’, as well as ‘forceful and ready’ and ‘fighting like a man’. The enemy is referred to as ‘the goose-stepping goons’, and German leader as ‘afraid to step out of his box’, so in other words, cowardly. It is also made very clear, that America is

the victim and only standing up to fight because they were attacked: ‘We can’t ignore there’s a threat’ so Captain America will ‘finish what they began’.

The whole scene is an obvious nod to the roots of Captain America, and the filmmakers use every opportunity to demonstrate the many uses of propaganda and insert ‘meta’ references to the sequence, giving the scene an upbeat and grand, yet self-deprecating and comical tone. Steve’s Captain America costume is quite homespun and childish, similar to the costume in the ridiculed 1990’s Captain America B-movies. We see Steve uttering lines, like “Each bond that you buy is a bullet in the barrel of our best guy’s gun!” We see him photographing with babies and shaking hands with men. We see him star in a motion picture with a distinct 1940’s quality. He signs autographs. Where things get immensely ‘meta’ is when we see the actual first issue of Captain America Comics with the cover of him punching Hitler being sold at the newsstands. A part of his propaganda show is also an actor dressed as Hitler creeping behind him, about to attack, and on the last second Captain America turns to hit him, leaving the audience applauding and cheering.

As discussed by (Smith, 2003 & Hutchinson, 2005) and explained in section 2.3.2, wars and the ways wars are talked about within a nation, become myths that strengthen the national consciousness and identity. For the United States, the Second World War has been discussed, recreated on screen and in writing and remembered time and time again, and it has become a huge, collective myth for the American people. This myth is in a way relived in the propaganda scene of *The First Avenger*. Even though the scene has a comical tone, the visual and atmospheric presentation of the scene will appeal to the American consciousness about the World War II myth.

A downside of propaganda is revealed, as Steve is sent off to Italy to raise the spirits of the troops. Instead of the cheering, loving audiences he faced back at the home front, the soldiers are not impressed, booing him off the stage. This side was not shown in the

comics, where he was always praised and supported. Colonel Phillips, who is in charge of the unit that Steve is visiting – and who knew Steve even before his transformation and doubted him for a good while – is seen greeting Steve with a sarcastic line: “Well, if it isn't the Star-Spangled Man with a Plan. What's your plan today?” (Feige & Johnston, 2011) This is before Steve gets to show what he is capable of, and it builds to the payback the audience gets when he does.

In the comics Steve always happily refers to himself as Captain America: “Time for Captain America to go to work!” (Simon & Kirby, 1914e, p. 5). In the films, however, the name, like the costume, sort of falls on him and he ends up getting stuck with it. The first time he refers to himself as Captain America is when he goes on an unauthorized mission to free some American soldiers held captive in Italy. There is a piece of dialogue (Feige & Johnston 2011):

Soldier: Who are you supposed to be?
Steve: I'm... Captain America.

Instead of introducing himself with pride, he just spontaneously utters the reply as if it was the only simple enough answer coming to his mind at that moment. The introduction is not met by awe or admiration, but with understandable confusion.

On another instance Steve uses his superhero alias with a hint of sarcasm: He is sitting with Bucky after rescuing him from the enemy jail, and he has been offered another mission. Steve wishes Bucky to join his team, and he asks if Bucky is ready to follow ‘Captain America’ to another mission, clearly being a bit embarrassed of all the fame he has been receiving under the grandiose alias. All of this can be interpreted as the movie’s way of recognizing the outdated roots and the somewhat cheesy original purpose of the character – and at the same time excusing itself for using the name and the costume, and asking the audience to accept it and follow along.

5.2 The neutrals and the allies

In this section I will discuss the ways that countries and nationalities outside of the United States and its enemies are addressed in the films and the comics. These are the neutral countries, or American allies. Often they fall under the role of a victim.

In the comics the most common neutral country that is mentioned is the United Kingdom. According to Dittmer (2007), the British played the role of a generic ally, mostly portrayed as a loyal and brave people. One example of the strong bond between the States and Britain can be found in the story 'Trapped in the Nazi Strong-Hold' (Simon & Kirby, 1941e, p. 1). In the beginning of the story it is announced:

The time has come when the democracies must stand together. The fate of the world depends on Britain's victory... The fate of Britain rests on the financial aid of our very own Henry Baldwin!

It is implied that Britain is a very important player and they make a great ally, but all the same they depend on the United States – through the financial aid of an American millionaire. In the same story the Captain and Bucky visit Paris briefly on their way to Germany for a mission. It is noted that 'the once gay Paris is not a pretty sight under the heel of the Nazi conqueror', and the Captain is sympathetic towards the suffering of France, but while they 'could stay and straighten France out', they cannot as they have to go to Germany (Simon & Kirby 1941, p. 6). Thus Paris is recognized as a friend, yet a victim who is in a desperate need of America's help.

The films seem to portray a wider variety of other nationalities. *The First Avenger* starts in the present day, with the discovery of Captain America's shield. The Americans are in the glacier, and it is expressed that it was a Russian oil team that first found the place and reported it. The United States and Russia have not historically gotten along very well, and indeed many Captain America villains throughout the years have been Russian, but this little nod implicated that they are currently not enemies but cooperating and

communicating allies. The story then jumps back in time to 1942 and moves to Tønsberg, in German-occupied Norway, which is presented as a place for a crime, as the evil Red Skull invades the village and kills innocent Norwegians, like the Churchkeeper who dies valiantly, trying to protect the Tesseract, the mysterious and powerful cube that would become Hydra's secret weapon. Yet Norway is a victim here.

Poland and the Baltic countries are mentioned as helpless victims, as potential victims of Hydra's plans, to be saved by Captain America. The Captain's team includes a French-speaking man, and a man of Asian ethnicity, whose background is used as a joke: As Steve is saving the prisoners in Italy, one of the American prisoners looks at the Asian-looking man and points out, "What, we're taking everybody?" This refers to the fact that Japan was also the enemy of the United States at a time, and thus the American man is suspicious of the other, who based on his appearance could be originally from Japan. The man answers dryly, "I'm from Fresno". Including this man with different ethnic roots was perhaps a conscious choice on the film makers' part to add diversity to the cast.

The United Kingdom and the Allied Forces are also mentioned several times in the film. The Project Rebirth that turns Steve into Captain America is mentioned to be an Ally project, contributed to by 'the best minds in the free world'. The comic does not imply anything like this, so the reader assumes the project is American. The most significant British plot component, however, is Steve's love interest Peggy Carter. She gets an impressive introduction, as she walks up to the candidates, speaks to them revealing her origin with her distinct accent, which makes one of the men make a snide comment, "I thought I was signing up with the US Army". Peggy puts him in line by punching him in the face. In the comics Peggy is American, and turning her British in the film seems notable and a conscious choice to bring variety to the characters. The brief exchange described above is the only occurrence

when Peggy's nationality is referred to in the film. There seems to be no other reason for the change of her nationality besides bringing diversity and making the cast less American.

The Captain America sequels feature an even wider scale of nationalities. In *The Winter Soldier* worth noticing is the presence of the World Security Council, featuring members from US, UK, India, and China. Globalism is taken into account, and the idea that the whole world is connected now, and one cannot fight for just one country anymore, but for the whole world, since everything is connected. The threat is on bigger scale, as often things are in today's world. It is not just Captain America fighting for America, for his nation. This reflects to the declining nationalism, as discussed in section 2.3.4.

5.3 The enemy

This section is for analyzing the way that the villains, in this case Germany and Germans, are talked about. There is a clear distinction, as in the comics Germany is mostly presented as the root for all evil, while the movies acknowledge the fact that Germans are not all evil.

5.3.1 "Ruthless war-mongers of Europe"

From the first page, and the quote presented in the section title, the Captain America Comics portrays the enemy as explicitly evil. The main foreign enemies (in addition to the domestic spies and traitors as villains) come from Germany, which is an obvious choice considering the geopolitical situation at the time of publishing. The Germans of the comics are evil-looking and cowardly caricatures. They look obviously villainous, with big sharp teeth, greasy hair, crouched backs and an evil glare in their eyes. The contrast to the good-looking and classically handsome Captain America is definitely intentional (Dittmer, 2007), leaving no doubt about who is the hero and who the villain.

To further set the Germans apart from the "good guys", the characters often speak in comedic and exaggerated German accents, even using full German words embedded

within their English speech (Dittmer, 2007). For instance, here is how a couple of German Nazis react to approaching Captain America (Simon & Kirby 1941e, p. 2)

Nazi1: Ach! Voss iss?
Nazi2: Who dares insult Der Great Fuehrer?

Through this the division between “us and them” becomes even clearer. Speaking in broken English also makes the Germans sound somewhat dumb and comical in contrast to the well-spoken American heroes.

The Germans often act in silly and cowardly ways. For example, the Captain and Bucky catch a German spy, and demand information from him. “My kind never talks!” he claims, until the Captain holds his throat a bit tighter, making him immediately surrender: “I’ll talk!” (Simon & Kirby 1941c, p. 5). In another story Adolf Hitler and Hermann Göring are shown hiding from an ongoing battle. As Captain and Bucky find them, the Nazis have a piece of dialogue (Simon & Kirby 1941e, p. 14):

Göring: You get the big one, Adolph, I’ll get the little guy.
Hitler: No, Hermann. I’ll get the little guy!

Thus the story demonstrates that even the leaders of the enemy are cowardly, further diminishing their credibility. “The little guy” Bucky of course ends up easily beating both of the enemies.

In *The First Avenger* the villains are also from Germany. A German spy kills Dr. Erskine right after Steve is transformed, attempting to steal the serum. The main villain Red Skull is German, as is his right-hand man, scientist Arnim Zola, as well as all of his soldiers. There is, however, a difference in the nature of the German villains, and this will be discussed in the following section.

5.3.2 “*The first country the Nazis invaded was their own*”

Some of the most interesting observations of the study came from looking at the ways that old enemy of the United States was addressed. Germany was the enemy of the United States in World War II, and it was also the main antagonist in the original comics. The film worked around this in a quite subtle way, making sure not to point fingers or villainize the current day Germany. A significant scene from *The Avengers* will also be discussed in relation to this topic.

The only time that the comic presents a “good German”, is in the story *Captain America and the Killers of the Bund*. A German-American character who falls a victim to a Nazi plan, claims: “I am of German descent, yes! – but I’m also a good American citizen!” (Simon & Kirby, 1941j, p. 2), and swears loyalty to his American homeland. Steve Rogers also acknowledges in the story that he has “found German-American people to be very nice” (Simon & Kirby, 1941j, p. 2). This is as far, however, as the comic goes to presenting Germans as something other than pure villains.

In *The First Avenger*, on the other hand, “the good German” has a vital role; Dr. Abraham Erskine – who does not get attention in the comic book story, apart from conducting the experience and being killed afterwards – is presented as the person responsible for finding Steve, believing in him and giving him the chance to unlock his potential. As Steve and Erskine first meet, Steve notices his foreign accent, and asks where his from. “Queens”, Erskine answers, “Before that Germany.” He asks Steve is this bothers him, but it does not, and it should not, because the man seems immediately trustworthy and likable – like an ally to Steve.

In a pivotal scene Erskine sits down with Steve the evening before the experiment is conducted. He talks about his German hometown Ausberg in a sad tone, uttering a very central piece of dialogue:

“So many people forget that the first country the Nazis invaded was their own. You know, after the last war my people struggled; they felt weak, they felt small. Then Hitler comes along with marching and the big show and the flags.” (Feige & Johnston, 2011)

Through this short yet important piece of dialogue the film communicates the modern understanding of the roots of World War II, as well as the notion that Germany as a whole was not the villain of the war – the Nazis were. It takes a long step forward from the ideas in the comic and the war-time-American understanding of the villainous Germany.

The scene further separates the narrative of the film from historical facts as Dr. Erskine goes on to tell his own personal story. He talks about how Hitler was impressed by his work, and offered him a job to help the Nazi cause, which Erskine naturally declined. He describes how Hitler and Johann Schmidt, the Red Skull, both are intrigued by cold power and Teutonic myths – but while Hitler uses his fantasies to inspire people to join his side, Schmidt goes to further extremes, aspiring to become a superhuman, and establish a completely new world order.

So, even though in *The First Avenger* the villains, faithfully to the original comic, are German, they are not the regular, “real” German soldiers; they are the Red Skull and Hydra, thus taking a step backwards from the origins and well as reality. The film even portrays Hitler, Nazis and Germany as the enemy of the enemy; as it is the plan of Hydra to eventually overthrow Nazi Germany as well. In the words of Red Skull, “Hydra can grow no further in Hitler’s shadow” (Feige & Johnston, 2011). He criticizes Hitler, and Berlin is one of his targets in his plan to bomb half of the world. Perhaps one cannot go as far as calling the Nazis the victims of the story, but they are not the main villain, and Captain America does not directly fight them – not counting him punching “Hitler” on the jaw on stage over and over again. Hydra in the films eventually becomes a completely autonomous organization, separating itself from the Nazis. In the comics Hydra exists as well, but has nothing to do with

Red Skull or the Captain America storyline. Thus it seems that the film makers needed another villain to replace Germany, and Hydra was the answer.

Finally, I will discuss another example, this time from *The Avengers*. The main villain in the movie is Loki, the brother of Thor. An interesting scene featuring Loki and Captain America takes place in Stuttgart, Germany, which is hardly a coincidence. Loki terrorizes a group of people by commanding them to kneel and telling them that is their natural state. An old man in the crowd refuses to kneel, and there is a short but significant dialogue between him and Loki:

Loki: "You were made to be ruled. In the end you'll always kneel."

Old German man: (standing up) "Not to men like you."

Loki: (amused) "There are no men like me."

Old German man: "There are always men like you." (Feige & Whedon, 2012)

There is a clear connotation to the World War II past of Germany. This man is probably old enough to have lived during the Nazi rule, and when he says "There are always men like you", he quite obviously refers to Hitler. The connection becomes even clearer when Captain America shows up just in time to save the man from Loki's wrath. He greets Loki by saying: "You know, the last time I was in Germany, I saw a man standing above everybody else. We ended up disagreeing." He means the Red Skull, but he could as well mean the infamous leader of Nazi Germany.

The significance of this scene is America nodding towards the old enemy, and acknowledging that they are friends now. It is a sort of an absolution – past is past, we are now allies. At the same time, it is not an equal friendship. This is America coming to rescue Germany. The old enemy is now the victim, and this in a way makes America even more valiant and admirable, to have forgotten the old disagreements and being the bigger man now, courageously coming for rescue.

The way of presenting the historical enemy is one of the most significant differences that make the old comic and the recent films stand apart. Interesting to point out is that there are plenty of modern war films made from the US/Allied Forces point of view that portray Germans merely as the enemy, without sympathy or acknowledgement towards the fact that the nation as a whole was not all evil. *The First Avenger*, however, took significant measures to pull the story further away from its historical roots, and thus from Germany as the enemy.

6. CONCLUSION

In this study I discussed the reshaped story and character of Captain America. Originally created as war propaganda to shape the minds of Americans, unite them against a common enemy and urge them to take action, the Captain served as a tool for correlation as well as entertainment, with a relatively narrow and homogenous audience. Nowadays Captain America enjoys international fame and popularity, being a star of his own blockbuster franchise, as well as wildly successful ensemble films. His purpose is now to appeal to and entertain a wide, multicultural audience. The assumption was that the story and the character would significantly differ, due to the different purposes and intended audiences. I looked at this issue from the point of view of nationality, observing the ways that the films and comics talk about Americans and non-Americans. More specifically, I divided the observed nationalities in three categories: America as the homeland, neutral and allied countries (to the United States), and Germany as the enemy to the United States.

My study showed that the ways countries and nationalities are presented in the comics and the films are often significantly different, and the reasons behind these different

representations can be argued to be quite clear in most cases. In the original comics the separation between America and other countries is made explicitly clear, with the homeland represented as the ultimate good, and Americans as the peaceful and gentle yet brave and fierce defenders of their beloved country. Steve Rogers, or Captain America, is presented as the ideal American, a perfect product and symbol of his country. The few bad Americans that are introduced are traitors who get the punishment that they deserve as in a cautionary tale for the readers.

In the films Steve Rogers is introduced as a person, humane and flawed, before he is transformed into a superhero. This gives the audience time to grow a bond with the character and understand his actions and motivation further on when he starts going by the name Captain America. While in the war-time comic the only fact the audience needed to relate to the character was the fact that he was patriotic and a good American, the film's audience got persuaded into liking him by showing his universal virtues and presenting him as the underdog. He is caring, loyal, persistent and brave despite his poor physical condition. He wants to fight in the war because he feels he has no excuse not to: his countrymen are dying, and he needs to contribute. This is quite a universal way of thinking, and thus it will help the audiences everywhere relate to Steve.

The films do not explicitly praise America or raise it above other as a superior country. The explicit propaganda of the comics is transformed into a storytelling device (also functioning as meta humor) in *The First Avenger*. Steve goes on a bond-raising tour as Captain America, and the scene demonstrates the propaganda methods from World War II. It also explains why Steve got the superhero name 'Captain America' and the matching costume, both of which might seem cheesy for a modern viewer. Presented with a good amount of self-deprecating humor, the audience is urged to accept the old-fashioned name and costume.

Neutral and allied countries get only a few mentions in both the comics and the films, though the films still has more variety in terms of nationality. A significant change is the British-turned Peggy, a major character in the first film, bringing some diversity to the all-American hero line-up. Other than that, the neutral nationalities usually function as passive victims.

Germany is an interesting case, playing the role of the enemy in both comics and films, though their approach is considerably different. The war time propaganda typically portrays the enemy as unconditionally evil, and so the Germans of the comics are cruel, ugly, cowardly and often unintelligent. The film, on the other hand, presents a good German as one of the major characters, reminding Steve and the audience that “the first country the Nazis invaded was their own”. Furthermore, the villains of *The First Avenger* are not actual historical Germans, and not even Nazis; Red Skull and his Hydra-followers are of German nationality, but they have very little to do with the actual country.

In summary, countries and nationalities do play an important role in the reinterpretation of Captain America for modern, international audiences. It is quite a relevant topic considering the lack of research around it – although there has been quite a few studies on Captain America, especially the comics, the focus has never been on the intercultural aspect of the reinterpretation, as far as I know. The American film industry has been globally spread and followed pretty much since the birth of Hollywood, so in a way they have always had to consider other nationalities too when thinking about their audience. However, with the vast global trend of the past decade or so, foreign markets play more and more important role to big Hollywood blockbusters. This fact gives my study relevance.

As far as limitations go, there are some, of course. A more holistic view to the Captain America universe could be gained by studying the whole history of the comics; there has indeed been a lot of development in the character and the storylines throughout the years.

For a Master's thesis a study of such lengths would not be realistic, but it would surely be interesting to take the same topic as in this study, and look at the more recent Captain America comics as well – their audience is presumably less diverse, so perhaps the original, distinct 'American-ness' is more present there? The modern comic book Captain America might still be closer his 1940s counterpart, compared to the Steve Rogers that jumped over to the cinematic universe.

Another intriguing approach would be to concentrate on propaganda and look for such elements in the films or the recent comics. Despite the main function of the films being nowadays entertainment, certainly the studio is still aiming to deliver some kind of a message; perhaps a pro-American one, even though that might not be an explicit, prioritized message. As Peiz (2013) writes, "(Captain America's) behavior always reflects the politics and policies of the moment. As America changes, the ideals, values, and identities of the American people change as well, and Captain America is always there to support those changes."

Just looking at the findings of this thesis, the statement above seems quite accurate. Created for a certain purpose in the 1940s, the Captain served loyally to unite the Americans of his time, and to demonstrate the ideal qualities of a tireless sentinel of American values. As the world changed, so did the Captain and his audiences, and he found his place in the modern, global society as a universally honorable and admirable hero. The Captain America in *The First Avenger* does not flinch over the fact that he is working with a German or fighting alongside of an Asian descendent, and does not hold a grudge on any specific nation – his enemies are "bullies, no matter where they are from". As at the end of the film Steve wakes up in the modern day New York, his physical existence seems to finally have caught up with his progressive and benevolent mind; he is then in a place where he can fight for the freedom and well-being of the whole world, where rigid national borders have less

meaning than in the era of his origin. In today's interconnected world it would be small-minded, selfish and somewhat unrealistic of Steve Rogers to fight only for America.

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