From the Mansion of the Pasha to the Crypt of the Sphinx: The Representation of the Eastern Mediterranean in the *Mikros Iros* Magazine

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The article examines issues 17–20 of Mikros Iros *(*Little Hero*), a widely read Greek pulp magazine for children and adolescents written by Stelios Anemodouras and illustrated by Vyron Aptosoglou. Published weekly between 1951 and 1968, the magazine has appeared in a total of 798 issues. Its protagonist, the teenager Giorgos Thalassis, joins the Greek resistance during the German Occupation of Greece (1941–1944). The narrative intertwines real historical events with elements of popular literary imagination. In issues 17–20, Giorgos confronts the Nazi agent Seitan Alaman, first in Cairo and subsequently in Istanbul. These episodes construct a representation of regions, spaces, and prominent monuments of the Eastern Mediterranean, shaped predominantly by discourses of Orientalism, ethnocentrism, antifascism, and popular fiction. To interpret these representations, the article employs a theoretical framework that draws on Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism, Marc Augé's concept of touristic non-places, and Michael Billig's theory of banal nationalism.*

Keywords: modern Greek literature / Anemodouras, Stelios: *Mikros Iros* / pulp magazines / imagology / Eastern Mediterranean / Orientalism / non-places / banal nationalism

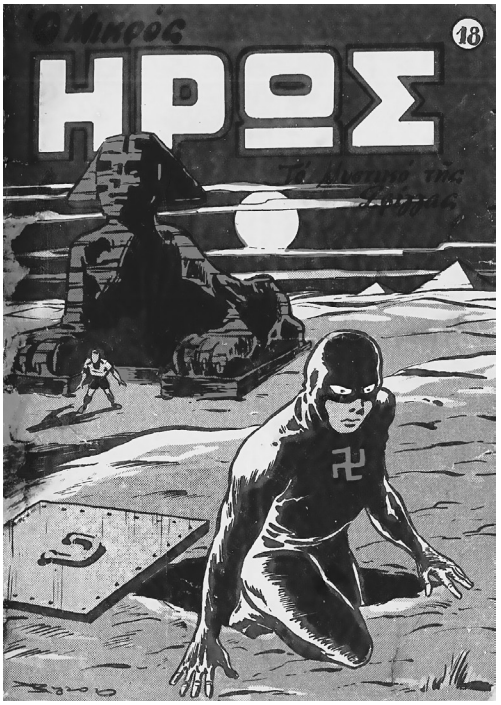

Figure 1: Cover of issue 18 of *Mikros Iros* titled "The Secret of the Sphinx."[1]

In this article, I examine issues 17–20 of *Mikros Iros* (Little Hero), a highly successful and influential Greek pulp magazine of spy fiction targeted at children and adolescents during the 1950s and 1960s. A significant part of the narrative in these issues unfolds in Istanbul and Cairo during World War II. These two cities, as major urban, cultural, and historical centers of the Eastern Mediterranean, serve as the backdrop for a classic conflict between archetypal characters: the protagonists aligned with the Allies, and the antagonists belonging to the Axis powers. Within these issues, a complex narrative emerges that intertwines features of literary styles and genres with broader cultural and ideological elements in patterns of both antagonism and synthesis.

In this article, I will refer to these literary and cultural motifs as discourses to grasp the integration of narrative structures into a broader socio-historical fabric that interests me in *Mikros Iros*. Following Michel Foucault's classic conceptualization of *discourse*, reading the magazine in terms of discourse will enable me to pose the question of fundamental socio-psychological mechanisms of persuasion and discipline.

[1] I am grateful to the publisher Leokratis Anemodouras for sending me the image.

Three primary discourses seem to be at play here. First, there is the Orientalist-touristic discourse through which historically and culturally significant urban spaces and archaeological sites of Asia Minor and Egypt—particularly Istanbul and Cairo—are portrayed in exoticized terms. These representations reflect what Edward Said describes as "the broadly imperialist view of the world," characteristic of Orientalism (Said 15), and they also align with the commodified, ahistorical lens of mass tourism. This discourse is further shaped by the stylistic conventions of popular culture, especially popular fiction. However, alongside this Orientalist-touristic perspective and the tradition of popular fiction, a third discourse emerges, rooted in ethnocentric historical memory. This discourse is informed by complex and often nostalgic associations with the Eastern Mediterranean that were prevalent when issues 17–20 of *Mikros Iros* were published (see Vlachos 20). As we will see, the construction of fictional characters is deeply entangled with these discourses, forming a dynamic interplay between narrative, ideology, and cultural memory.

A first encounter with the little hero

Before I proceed with my analysis, let me provide an overview of this iconic Greek pulp magazine. *Mikros Iros* was an exceptionally popular and culturally influential periodical aimed at children and adolescents, published weekly from 1951 to 1968. Over its 17-year run, it produced 798 issues. The magazine was both written and published by Stelios Anemodouras (1917–2000), while the illustrations were primarily created by Vyron Aptosoglou (1923–1990), who signed his work under the pen name Byron. Anemodouras also used the pseudonym Thanos Astritis, in order to distinguish his popular fiction writing from his professional identity as a journalist and publisher in Athenian newspapers. Nevertheless, *Mikros Iros* and similar children's magazines ultimately became the focal point of Anemodouras' writing and publishing career, spanning from the early 1950s to the late 1990s.

The magazine's format remained consistent throughout its publication history. Each issue measured 17.5 × 12.5 cm and comprised 32 pages. The cover featured colorful illustrations, while the interior pages combined prose with black-and-white drawings that interrupted and complemented the text. The pricing of *Mikros Iros* was deliberately kept low, making it affordable to a broad base of young readers across Greece. Like other pulp magazines for youth during that period, it was

distributed from Athens to mainly urban regions via the nationally established network of the (mainly Athens-based) press.

The protagonist of *Mikros Iros* is a Greek teenager named Giorgos Thalassis. Following the murder of his parents by the Nazis, Giorgos forms a guerrilla group that actively resists the Axis powers during the German occupation of Greece (1941–1944). The hundreds of adventures depicted across the magazine's 798 issues are rooted in real historical events. Indeed, Greece witnessed a strong resistance movement against the Axis, largely supported by the British and other Allied forces. In 1982, these efforts were formally recognized by the Greek state as part of the National Resistance.

Nevertheless, alongside its historical underpinnings, *Mikros Iros* is heavily shaped by conventions of popular literary genres—particularly spy fiction, thrillers, and sentimental novels. As such, the magazine weaves together historical reality and literary imagination, often allowing the latter to overshadow or reframe the former.

Perhaps the most striking example of this mythologization of history through popular fiction is the way in which the National Resistance is portrayed in the magazine. A defining aspect of the Resistance period—and of the Occupation more broadly—was the violent and polarized conflict between left-wing and right-wing factions. This political division ultimately culminated in the Greek Civil War (1944–1949). Yet, this central historical tension is conspicuously absent from *Mikros Iros*.

Although Anemodouras held leftist antiauthoritarian and antifascist ideas throughout his life, he consciously self-censored his work, particularly in *Mikros Iros*. This decision was likely motivated by a desire to avoid conflict with the dominant anticommunist and ethnocentric governments that mainly governed Greece in the aftermath of the civil war, up until the 1960s. The result is a narrative that, while antifascist, strategically omits the politically sensitive cleavages that defined Greece's wartime and postwar experience.

Due to the central role of popular fiction in *Mikros Iros*, its narratives are marked by a pronounced Manichaean dualism. On one side, Giorgos Thalassis, his team, the Greek resistance, and their British allies are portrayed as embodiments of freedom, justice, democracy, and Christian virtue. On the other side, the German Nazis, the Italian fascists, and their collaborators are consistently depicted as evil, violent, tyrannical, and corrupted by an insatiable desire for political and economic domination.

Giorgos' two main companions are Spithas ("Spark Boy") and Katerina. Spithas is a physically large, somewhat dim-witted, but courageous and powerful boy, often serving as comic relief to serious and even

violent adventures. Katerina is the teenage daughter of the Greek resistance leader; she joins dangerous missions despite her youth and the perceived vulnerability associated with her gender—a representation shaped by the dominant postwar gender norms of Greek and broader Western society. She and Giorgos share a platonic romantic bond, which adds a sentimental dimension to the narrative.

The character of Giorgos is constructed as a near-superhuman figure. Despite his young age, he possesses extraordinary strength, mastery of "Japanese wrestling," advanced weapons skills, proficiency in operating various vehicles, and fluency in multiple languages. Initially, his missions take him across the Balkans and the Mediterranean, but as the series progresses, he ventures into increasingly distant and exotic places, combating Adolf Hitler and his followers. His effectiveness and elusiveness earn him the notorious nickname "Ghost Child." Throughout these global adventures, Giorgos, Spithas, and Katerina acquire new allies and face fresh enemies—both types of characters typically appearing for a limited number of issues, emphasizing the serialized nature of the narrative.

Mikros Iros achieved widespread popularity among Greek pre- and early teens, profoundly shaping their worldview during their formative years. In parallel, the magazine played a significant role in constructing both personal and collective memories of the past—at existential, local, and national levels (see Filippaios, "Childhood"). Its remarkable success sparked a proliferation of similar pulp magazines for young readers, many of which were produced by Anemodouras himself and his collaborators at his publishing house (see Papadakis et al. 46–179). However, none of these subsequent publications attained the cultural impact or longevity of *Mikros Iros*.[2] This wave of "little-heroic" publishing gradually declined in the late 1960s and early 1970s, as younger generations gravitated toward different aesthetic sensibilities and values shaped by an increasingly globalized, technology-driven popular culture marked by a rising dominance of American color comics and the emergence of television (see Filippaios, "Greek").

[2] More precisely, the shift of Greek publishers, writers, and illustrators toward a younger readership began in the latter half of the 1940s. However, Anemodouras significantly advanced this trend, developing it into a dominant force in the following decade. For a concise and comprehensive overview of Greek popular literature, particularly that aimed at children and adolescents, see Filippaios, "Greek."

The theoretical framework

The Orientalist, touristic, and historical representations of the Eastern Mediterranean—particularly of Cairo and Istanbul—as well as the fictional characters operating within these settings will be analyzed in this article through a theoretical framework composed of three distinct but complementary cultural approaches: Edward Said's critique of Orientalism; Marc Augé's concept of non-places within modern tourism; and Michael Billig's theory of banal nationalism.

Said's influential analysis of Orientalism, first articulated in his seminal 1978 work *Orientalism*, has had a profound impact across the humanities and social sciences. Said conceptualizes Orientalism as a long-standing Western discourse that predates the Age of Discovery and extends well into the twentieth century. It is made up of three basic elements: a vast corpus of texts—including literary works, political treatises, scientific writings, and personal memoirs—that collectively constructed the East as an exotic, primitive, deceptive, and underdeveloped realm; a systematic and seemingly rational, yet fundamentally ideological, Western hegemony over the peoples of North Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and the so-called Middle East; and a coordinated effort by the major European colonial powers to assert both hard and soft diplomatic control over these regions.

In this article, my focus lies primarily on the first dimension of Orientalism and its textual articulation, particularly within popular literature. According to Said,

> the very power and scope of Orientalism produced not only a fair amount of exact positive knowledge about the Orient but also a kind of second-order knowledge-lurking in such places as the "Oriental" tale, the mythology of the mysterious East, notions of Asian inscrutability—with a life of its own, what V. G. Kiernan has aptly called "Europe's collective day-dream of the Orient." (Said 52)

While Said demonstrates how the Orientalist perspective shaped the ideological hegemony of the West, anthropologist Marc Augé addresses the role of tourism in reinforcing the dominant ideologies of Western modernity. In his influential book *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (1995), Augé introduces the concept of the non-place. According to his analysis, non-places are transient spaces in which individuals spend time without meaningful engagement or cultural anchoring—examples include hotel rooms, airports, and shopping malls. In these environments, the dense network of

meanings associated with national, ethnic, tribal, regional, cultural, or class-based identities is unraveled and supplanted by a set of signifiers—images, sounds, spectacles, and forms of entertainment—that serve the consumerist imperatives of contemporary mass tourism. As Augé observes with both depth and irony:

> We can contrast the realities of *transit* (transit camps or passengers in transit) with those of residence or dwelling; the *interchange* (where nobody crosses anyone else's path) with the *crossroads* (where people meet); the *passenger* (defined by his *destination*) with the *traveller* (who strolls along his *route* …), the *housing estate* ("group of new dwellings," Larousse says), where people do not live together and which is never situated in the centre of anything (big estates characterize the so-called peripheral zones or outskirts), with the *monument* where people share and commemorate; *communication* (with its codes, images and strategies) with *language* (which is spoken). (Augé 107–108)

This vivid contrast between anthropological places and non-places invites us to extend the concept of the non-place to include archaeological, historical, and cultural sites—ranging from ancient and medieval structures to traditional neighborhoods. In the context of mass tourism, these sites—originally spaces of memory and communal significance—are increasingly traversed by visitors who receive only a superficial, often commodified historical account, typically conveyed by a tour guide, in printed material, a digital application, or a website. Consequently, the anthropological richness of these places is eroded, replaced by a distracted and ephemeral tourist gaze—which, upon closer inspection, is deeply informed by the surviving ideologies of colonial inequality.

The final concept of my theoretical framework in this article is that of banal nationalism, introduced by sociologist and social psychologist Michael Billig in his 1995 book of the same name. Like Said, Billig draws on the foundational concept of hegemony, as formulated by Antonio Gramsci. According to Gramsci, hegemony refers to the organized efforts of the dominant class to present and propagate its economic and political interests in such a way that they are perceived as natural, inevitable, and unchangeable—essentially as ideology. Billig extends this understanding of hegemony by suggesting that national hegemony is not only advanced through overtly violent forms of nationalism—such as chauvinism and fascism—but also through more subtle, everyday expressions of nationalism, which often go unnoticed:

> The ideological habits, by which "our" nations are reproduced as nations, are unnamed and, thereby, unnoticed. The national flag hanging outside a public

> building in the United States attracts no special attention. It belongs to no special, sociological genus. Having no name, it cannot be identified as a problem. Nor, by implication, is the daily reproduction of the United States a problem. (Billig 6)

In what follows, I will demonstrate how the interconnections between Orientalism, non-places, and banal nationalism are woven into the narrative fabric of *Mikros Iros*, particularly in issues 17–20. These themes manifest through dialectical relations of alliance and antagonism, producing unexpected literary and cultural discourses. The analysis of these discourses and their interactions will follow in subsequent sections of the article.

Spaces, places, and little heroes under the shadow of representation: Facing the enemy for the first time

On the first page of issue 17, Giorgos Thalassis finds himself in Cairo, where he is summoned for a meeting with the chief of the British Middle East Command, responsible for overseeing the British military operations in Egypt during World War II. The meeting is prompted by the arrival of a new Nazi secret agent in Cairo, who has already carried out a series of illegal activities, including crimes against the Allied forces. When Giorgos inquires further, the commander provides the following account:

> For some time now, a strange child has appeared in Cairo. He wears a tight black uniform and a hood that covers the upper part of his face. On his chest is embroidered a red swastika, Hitler's symbol. He is an agent of Hitler and acts against us with such diabolical skill that we have not yet been able to capture him! He infiltrates our headquarters and camps, steals documents, and causes explosions, only to vanish without us being able to apprehend him. He is faster than the wind, more flexible than a snake, and more aggressive than a hungry tiger! The Arabs have named him Seitan Alaman, which means "the Devil-German!" And they are not wrong! (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 3)[3]

In this excerpt, three distinct discourses intersect: the stylistic conventions of popular literature, particularly influenced by postwar US traditions; an antifascist yet ethnocentric perspective; and an Orientalist discourse. Specifically, Seitan Alaman's uniform evokes the costumes of superheroes from postwar US science fiction and action comics. In

[3] All translations of excerpts from *Mikros Iros* are mine.

fact, Stelios Anemodouras likely drew inspiration from Captain Nazi, the primary antagonist of Captain Marvel, a character from the well-known *Detective Comics* series. Additionally, Alaman possesses nearly superheroic abilities, a trait commonly found in US comics and other kinds of popular literature.

However, the popular culture discourse is inextricably linked to an antifascist and even ethnocentric viewpoint in *Mikros Iros*. Alaman's villainy is almost entirely defined by his identity as a Nazi agent, thus reinforcing the narrative of good versus evil, where good represents the Allies while evil is embodied by Nazi forces.

Moreover, Alaman's name and the setting of his actions are key elements of the Orientalist discourse. The phonetic rendering of Satan as "Seitan" undoubtedly invokes Turkish and Arabic linguistic traditions, while the surname Alaman (derived from *Allemagne*, the French word for Germany) directly connects the antagonist to the German enemy. This name construction aligns with the stereotypical, derogatory depictions often found in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British and American Orientalist literature. Said illustrates this kind of representation through an example from a 1908 article by Lord Cromer, a high-ranking British diplomat in Egypt; in Said's reading of Cromer, "Orientals or Arabs are … shown to be gullible, 'devoid of energy and initiative,' much given to 'fulsome flattery,' intrigue, cunning, and unkindness to animals; … Orientals are inveterate liars, they are 'lethargic and suspicious,' and in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race" (Said 38–39).

Through the fictional character of Alaman, the stereotype of the Muslim imposter—a characteristic that, according to Said, was first attributed to Muhammad by various poets and authors, possibly beginning with Dante's *Divine Comedy* (Said 69)—merges with the figure of the Nazi criminal, as it was depicted in US antifascist propaganda from the 1940s onward. This figure of the Nazi villain was propagated across various media, including literature, comics, print, cinema, television, and radio. As Jordan Maxwell Foster notes in his recent study of representations of Nazis in US comics, "over the past 80 years … one monolithic figure has embodied the identity of absolute evil and provided an example of true villainy in literature, television, and film: the Nazi" (Foster 2).

As we will see in the following sections, Giorgos confronts Alaman in places and spaces that are central to the Orientalist, tourist, ethnocentric, and popular representations found in *Mikros Iros*. These settings—comprising urban landscapes, the mansion of a fictional Pasha,

and important archaeological monuments—serve as key loci in the narrative, contributing to the multifaceted discourse woven throughout the story.

The urban spaces of Cairo and Istanbul

Following the initial introduction of the "diabolical" Seitan Alaman, the narrative of *Mikros Iros* becomes dominated by action and violence as Giorgos Thalassis pursues the Nazi agent. After several suspense-filled scenes, Giorgos chases Alaman across the seemingly endless expanse of Cairo's rooftops: "Seitan Alaman is in the center of the city, where the buildings are constructed close to one another. As far as the eye can see, terraces and roofs of houses stretch out. The Ghost Child will have a hard time reaching him on these roofs" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 10). A similar representation of an important Eastern Mediterranean city is given in issue 20, where two Turkish policemen hunt Alaman through the sewers of Istanbul: "Meanwhile, in the vast network of the sewers that run beneath Istanbul, the Turkish policemen are hunting Alaman. It is a strange hunt, like chasing a ghost. Hitler's agent slips into the darkness like a ghostly shadow, leaving them behind and disappearing from the light of their electric lanterns. But the Turks, of course, know the ropes much better than Seitan Alaman" (91).

The depiction of urban landscapes in Cairo and Istanbul in these two scenes, one from the first of our selected issues and the other from the last, falls squarely within the Orientalist discourse. Cairo and Istanbul are portrayed as labyrinthine, mysterious, and complex urban spaces where exoticism, mystery, and underdevelopment converge. This portrayal evokes a dual response from the reader: while it fosters a sense of detestation and fear, particularly for younger readers, it simultaneously generates a strong sense of fascination and allure. At the same time, this representation acquires an aura of a non-place because all the historical, cultural, and sociopolitical weight of Cairo and Istanbul is lost due to a stereotypical Orientalist representation. In this sense, the narrative and stylistic elements of popular literature—particularly the genres of thriller and spy fiction—serve to amplify the stereotypical portrayal and estrangement of these spaces.

In parallel, the ethnocentric discourse of banal nationalism once again plays a significant role in the narrative. The following excerpt from the rooftop chase in Cairo provides a clear example of how the Orientalist, popular, and ethnocentric discourses intertwine:

> Thus begins a crazy chase from rooftop to rooftop and from roof to roof, a dangerous chase that every now and then brings the two opponents face to face with death. As Seitan Alaman jumps over a tiled roof, he loses his balance. He falls and rolls onto the sloping roof, moving rapidly toward the void, a thirty-meter void! Below, the asphalt awaits to receive his crushed dead body! But he is lucky: as he rolls, in front of the astonished and horrified eyes of Giorgos, his body encounters a chimney and stops.
>
> "You won't catch me, you dishonorable Greek!" the German snarls.
>
> And the chase continues. (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 10)

This passage exemplifies the blending of multiple discourses. The historical present tense of the verbs, the short, punchy sentences, and the overuse of exclamation marks all reflect the typical style of popular action narratives. At the same time, the portrayal of space remains distinctly Orientalist, with the setting of Cairo's roofs rendered as both exotic and alien to the Western eye. Moreover, the underlying ethnocentric discourse becomes apparent through Alaman's insult, "dishonorable Greek," which evokes the deep antagonism between Greece and Germany during World War II, particularly during the German occupation. This ideological division between the civilized and democratic nations (represented by Giorgos and the Greek resistance) and the barbaric and tyrannical Nazis is a common motif in wartime popular culture, already from the early stages of the war.

However, it is crucial to consider the historical context for both the readers and the author of these stories. The underage readers of *Mikros Iros* in 1953 would have likely grown up in urban environments scarred by the recent trauma of the German occupation and the subsequent civil war. These young readers, potentially witnessing the effects of urban devastation and violence firsthand, would be particularly receptive to the narrative's dramatic action and violence. Similarly, Stelios Anemodouras, the author, experienced these historical events as a young man, when he actively participated in the Greek Resistance against the Axis powers (see Anemodouras, "An sinékhiza" 16–18). Thus, the Orientalist and popular perspectives in *Mikros Iros* should be seen as intertwined with the immediate personal experiences of both the readers and the author. In this way, collective memory of recent historical events merges with the literary imagination, contributing to the creation of a narrative that resonates deeply with its audience, while simultaneously reinforcing dominant cultural ideologies.

The Pasha's mansion

The next significant setting in the narrative, where the dialectical interplay of the aforementioned discourses unfolds, is the mansion of Pasha Ahmed Azi. Initially, Ahmed Azi appears to be an ally of the British army in Egypt. However, it is soon revealed that he is a secret agent of the Axis powers, using his mansion as a hideout for Seitan Alaman. Giorgos Thalassis uncovers Azi's true allegiance and learns that Alaman is hiding there, so he decides to visit the mansion. The scene unfolds as follows:

> The door opens, and the guard, holding a naked sword in his hand, motions for them [Giorgos and Spithas] to enter.
>
> They cross a beautiful garden and enter a mansion, where the walls sparkle with works of art and decorations that cost a fortune each. The floors are covered with carpets, where feet sink up to the ankles.
>
> Somewhere, inside the vast house, lazy music is playing, and light-scented smoke circulates in the air.
>
> Giorgos enters a circular hall decorated with statues.
>
> In the middle of it, there is a marble pond where exotic golden fishes swim. Near the pond, on a pile of cushions, sits a dark-haired man in a European suit, but with a sari on his head. He is relatively young, and his features are rather handsome, although they are etched with relentless cruelty.
>
> Next to him sits a khanum with a veil over her face and a half-naked body. (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 24)

The mansion is presented in a typically Orientalist way, a space of luxurious but kitschy and obsolete decoration and architecture, in which lavishness, self-indulgence, and lethargic sensuality reign supreme. In fact, the mansion could be described as a non-place, created in a stereotypical Orientalist and colonial logic.

As Giorgos begins a tense conversation with Azi, he quickly manages to corner him, forcing the Pasha to reveal his true identity as a Nazi collaborator and to admit that Alaman is hiding in the mansion. At that climactic moment, something utterly unexpected takes place:

> With a sudden movement, khanum Leila lifts her veil, revealing a beautiful young face.
>
> She speaks. But from her mouth comes not a thin woman's voice, but a thick man's voice!
>
> "You have before you Seitan Alaman or Leila! And I am very pleased that you came alone to fall into my hands, Ghost Child! I never expected such luck! Why did you take on that surprised expression? Don't you know that I can disguise myself as I want?" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 25)

By disguising himself as a khanum, Alaman reaches the height of his deceitfulness and immorality. In doing so, he fully embodies the fusion of two ideologically charged stereotypes: the Orientalist figure of the Muslim imposter and the archetypally evil Nazi of US popular culture. The common thread between these two figures is a pathological proclivity for deception—so profound that it destabilizes even the perceived natural order of gender identity. This moment of gendered disguise is not merely a narrative twist; it symbolically violates a core component of Western ideological hegemony: the rigid binary division between male and female, which underpins dominant moral and cultural structures.

This particular scene in the mansion is further saturated with the discourse of banal nationalism, particularly as expressed through the Turkish guards who confront Giorgos. These guards are described in overtly stereotypical terms as "gigantic guards with huge swords in their hands" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 25), reinforcing a reductionist and exoticized view of the so-called other. Thus, the most salient marker of banal nationalism in this scene emerges through language.

As Michael Billig notes, concepts such as those of nation and language "should not be used uncritically to analyse nationalism, because they do not stand outside the topic which is to be analysed. Instead, the history of nationalism continues to run through the meanings which such concepts routinely bear" (Billig 16). In this vein, the guards' speech carries significant ideological weight. They refer to Giorgos using pejorative terms such as "unfaithful" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 26) and "giaour" (28; *giaour* is a Turkish term for non-Muslims, often used to refer derogatorily to Greeks, especially during the times of the Ottoman Empire). These expressions evoke deeply rooted historical antagonisms, particularly the collective memory of the Ottoman occupation of Greece (mid-fifteenth century to 1821). Within the hegemonic Greek national narrative, this period is framed as one of religious and cultural oppression, during which Orthodox Christians struggled to preserve their faith against Muslim rule. As such, Orthodox Christianity emerges as a cornerstone of Modern Greek national identity and its hegemonic ideological framework.

This ideological underpinning will prove crucial in understanding how archaeological monuments in *Mikros Iros* are represented—not merely as historical artifacts, but as symbols embedded in a broader narrative of national struggle and identity formation.

The archeological monuments of the Sphinx, the Bosphorus, and Hagia Sophia

The two climactic moments in the ongoing duel between Giorgos Thalassis and Seitan Alaman are set at the Sphinx in Egypt and at the Bosphorus and Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, respectively.

Following his escape from the mansion of Ahmed Azi, Giorgos tracks down Alaman, and their intense confrontation resumes. Eventually, the Nazi agent manages once again to elude capture. Alaman escapes into the Egyptian desert on a motorcycle during the night, with Giorgos pursuing him from a distance. He soon arrives at "the pyramids of the Pharaohs and the Sphinx, the gigantic statue which thousands of years of sun and rains didn't manage to destroy" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 40). Upon reaching the Sphinx, however, Alaman abruptly vanishes from Giorgos' sight. After a brief search, Giorgos discovers a hidden trapdoor leading to a subterranean chamber beneath the monument. Inside, he uncovers Alaman's secret base, containing an "enormous radio device" capable of "transmitting messages to all parts of the world" (42). As anticipated, the ensuing confrontation between the two adversaries is fierce and violent, but the resolution is deferred to the following issue (number 19).

The Sphinx in the narration is presented as enigmatic and mysterious, with secrets hidden from the public eye. Only Giorgos, the superheroic protagonist, possesses the perceptiveness and courage necessary to uncover its hidden crypt and to reveal Alaman's secret hideout. The Sphinx, of course, holds a long-standing place in the Western imagination as a symbol of both alluring and sinister mystery. This symbolic function is well documented across various literary and cultural references. One of the most notable is found in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, first performed around 429 BCE, where the mythological Sphinx poses a deadly riddle to the citizens of Thebes. Oedipus solves the riddle, prompting the Sphinx to destroy itself and thus liberating the city. In lines 390–396 of the play, Oedipus criticizes the blind prophet Tiresias, accusing him of failing to vanquish the Sphinx despite his supposed metaphysical powers:

> Come now, if you're a prophet, where's the proof?
> What happened when the rhapsode bitch was here?
> You should have spoken up and saved the town!
> Her riddle wasn't meant for passersby
> to solve. It needed your prophetic art.
> And yet you didn't know the answer. Birds
> could tell you nothing. Gods were silent too. (Sophocles 26)

In *Oedipus Rex*, Oedipus refers to the Sphinx with the profane phrase "the rhapsode bitch" (*ἡ ῥαψῳδὸς κύων* in the original Greek), highlighting her power to surpass even the prophetic abilities of Tiresias and to inflict suffering upon the people of Thebes. Even the gods remained silent before her, underscoring her portrayal as a creature of profound malevolence and inscrutable mystery. This portrayal of the Sphinx as a symbol of a dark enigma has been deeply embedded in Western cultural memory, developing further across both high art and popular culture.[4] As such, the Sphinx can be understood as an integral figure within the Orientalist imaginary—a projection of the East as mysterious, threatening, and seductive. At the same time, the Sphinx also functions as a major site of Western tourism, where its enigma is commodified and consumed by visitors seeking awe and wonder. Thus, in the case of *Mikros Iros*, the depiction of the Sphinx embodies a convergence of Orientalist and tourist discourses, situating the monument within a narrative universe that draws on fascination and fear alike.

In the finale of issue 20, another duel between the two enemies takes place—first in the Bosphorus and then in Hagia Sophia—as Alaman moves from Cairo to Istanbul, with Giorgos following his trail. The rhetoric here echoes that of the Sphinx episode, combining the discourse of Orientalism, the concept of the non-place, and popular fiction. However, in the representations of these two monuments of Istanbul, the discourse of ethnocentrism becomes especially prominent. This is due to the fact that both sites carry deep symbolic significance within the context of national Greek hegemony of the historical past. This dimension is clearly visible in the following excerpt, which appears at the very beginning of issue 20: "A deep silence spreads over

[4] References to the Sphinx as both a mythological creature and an artistic symbol of mystery are so numerous and complex within Western culture that they could easily form the basis of a specialized academic study. Therefore, only two representative examples will be briefly discussed here. First, the Sphinx features prominently in several paintings by Symbolist artists, such as *Oedipus and the Sphinx* (1864) by Gustave Moreau, *The Kiss of the Sphinx* (1895) by Franz von Stuck, and *The Caress of the Sphinx* (1896) by Fernand Khnopff. In each of these works, the Sphinx is depicted as a figure of enigma and allure, fully in line with the Symbolist movement's fascination with the mysterious and the metaphysical. On the other hand, the motif of the Sphinx also maintains a strong presence in popular fiction. A brief excerpt from Arthur Conan Doyle's short story "The Ring of Thoth" (1890) serves as an illustrative example: "They would run upon the enigmatical attendant with the sphinx-like face and the parchment skin" (Conan Doyle 49). Here, the comparison to the Sphinx reinforces the attendant's unreadable and eerie presence, once again invoking the centuries-old Western association between the Sphinx and impenetrable mystery.

the vast City, which seems to dream of past glories and lost grandeurs of the age of emperors" (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 75).

In this passage, Stelios Anemodouras alludes directly to the Byzantine Empire, an era that is constructed within dominant Greek national ideology as a central phase in the historical continuity of Greek identity. Paschalis Kitromilides characterizes this view of national history as "a teleology for the Greek state," in which "Byzantium could be canonized … as the *telos* to which Greek state and Greek destinies were expected to strive to approximate" (Kitromilides 31). In this passage, Kitromilides refers mainly to the period in which the so-called Great Idea (*Megali idea*) dominated both the official ideology of the Greek nation and a great part of the mentalities of Greek people, namely from mid-nineteenth century to 1922. The Great Idea was the ideology of the imperialistic spread of the Greek state to the borders of late Byzantine Empire; this hegemonic irredentist and, in fact, nationalistic ideal was abandoned in a tragic way, with the defeat of the Greek army in the Greco-Turkish war (1919–1922) and the huge wave of refugees, comprised by Greek-speaking and/or Orthodox populations, from Asia Minor to Greece. Though the Great Idea met its bitter end in 1922, its influence on the popular imaginary was still vivid when *Mikros Iros* was published, surviving in the form of banal nationalism—an unspoken, taken-for-granted sense of national pride and identity. Of course, this introverted return to the Great Idea was supported by the hegemonic ideology of the post-civil war conservative governments of that time.

The following excerpt from the duel between Giorgos and Alaman in the Bosphorus powerfully evokes the ethnocentric antagonism between Greeks and Turks, encapsulated within the conventions of popular literature. Alaman expresses a triumphant hatred, believing that Giorgos ("Agent Hellas") has perished in the waters of the Bosphorus:

> The minutes pass, without Agent Hellas making his appearance.
>
> The face of Hitler's agent is distorted under his hood by an expression of wild triumph.
>
> "The Ghost Child is dead!" he murmurs with joy. "The Ghost Child is no more! I saw him with my own eyes disappear into the waters of the Bosphorus along with the pieces of the motorboat! And he never came up again! Therefore, he is dead. I am finally free from this cursed enemy!"
>
> He remains there for a few more minutes to make sure that Giorgos has really drowned, and then he turns the motorboat toward the land and quickly moves away. (Anemodouras, *Mikros Iros* 94)

Beneath Alaman's "wild triumph" lies a deep national trauma: the crushing of the Great Idea during the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922. Crucial to this symbolic dimension is the hybrid identity of Alaman, who functions as a nexus between Nazi villainy and the enduring figure of the hostile Turk. His character allows the narrative to conflate two historically distinct yet ideologically charged enemies of the Greek nation. At the same time, the conventions of popular serialized literature inform the reader's expectations: most young readers would instinctively know that Giorgos is not truly dead, but alive and already preparing his next move.

Therefore, while the representation of the Sphinx leans heavily into an Orientalist and also touristic framework, the representations of the Bosphorus and Hagia Sophia are shaped primarily by a deeply rooted nationalist ideology. The tourist gaze recedes here, giving way to collective memory, trauma, and the symbolic geography of Greek national identity.

Conclusion: Stelios Anemodouras as a "brilliant inventor"

It is truly remarkable that within the span of just four issues of a pulp magazine for children and teenagers, all published in the early 1950s, a complex labyrinth of spatial and geographical representations is constructed. These representations interweave Orientalist, touristic, and ethnocentric perspectives, all articulated through the narrative conventions of popular literature. By examining them, we gain valuable insight into the ideological battleground of post-civil war Greece and the ways in which cultural production was mobilized in the service of hegemony, but also as a resistance to it. The creator of *Mikros Iros*, Stelios Anemodouras, can be regarded as the orchestrator of these formations. Umberto Eco characterizes the writers of popular novels as brilliant and ingenious inventors who combine in their writings a great variety of ideological and cultural elements of their time and also from other eras (see Eco). Anemodouras fits this description aptly.

First and foremost, Anemodouras was trying to balance different and even contradictory tendencies. On the one hand, he had to align with the narrow framework of the official hegemonic ideology of the state after the civil war. This hegemonic ideology combined an introspective ethnocentrism characterized by anticommunism and social conservatism with a powerful influence of Western—or North American, to be more exact—style of urbanization, based on economic growth and consumerism. After all, Greece was the only Balkan country

that became part of the Western postwar bloc. On the other hand, Anemodouras channeled some of his sociopolitical ideas to the narration of *Mikros Iros*, especially a mindset—quite popular in Greece during the 1950s and especially the 1960s—that combined patriotism, antiauthoritarianism, and a strong desire for a democratic regime based on the power of the people.

Hence, Anemodouras had to navigate strict anticommunist censorship and the general persecution of anyone who openly expressed ideas opposing the dominant national ideology. At the same time, he needed to meet the expectations of his readers, following the conventions of popular literature of his time. It is within this framework that we can understand the central role of discourses revolving around Orientalism, non-places, banal nationalism, and popular culture in the *Mikros Iros* series. This immensely popular and influential children's magazine offered a panoramic and simultaneously intimate view of the struggle for the formation and the diffusion of hegemonic ideology. This ideology had to influence and overcome the mentalities circulating in Greek society during the 1950s and 1960s, from Marxism and socialism to feminism and decolonization. In this article, I tried to show how a part of this dynamic and multifarious ideological landscape was incorporated into the body of *Mikros Iros*, in accordance with the popular literature of the time, without underestimating the sociopolitical positions of the author himself.

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Od paševe palače do sfingine kripte: reprezentacije vzhodnega Sredozemlja v reviji *Mikros Iros*

Ključne besede: sodobna grška književnost / Anemoduras, Stelios: *Mikros Iros* / šund revije / imagologija / vzhodno Sredozemlje / orientalizem / nekraji / banalni nacionalizem

Članek obravnava številke 17–20 grške publikacije *Mikros Iros* (Mali junak), priljubljene šund revije za otroke in mladostnike, ki jo je pisal Stelios Anemoduras, ilustriral pa Viron Aptosoglu. Revija, ki je izhajala tedensko med letoma 1951 in 1968, obsega 798 številk. Njen protagonist, najstnik Giorgos Talasis, se med nemško okupacijo Grčije (1941–1944) pridruži grškemu odporniškemu gibanju. Pripoved resnične zgodovinske dogodke prepleta s priljubljenimi literarnimi prvinami. V številkah 17–20 se Giorgos v Kairu in nato še v Carigradu spoprime z nacističnim agentom Seitanom Alamanom. Te epizode reprezentirajo regije, kraje in znamenitosti vzhodnega Sredozemlja na način, ki reproducira diskurze orientalizma, etnocentrizma, antifašizma in množične literature. Članek te reprezentacije interpretira s pomočjo teoretskega aparata, ki se opira na Saidovo analizo orientalizma, Augéjev koncept turističnih nekrajev in Billigovo teorijo banalnega nacionalizma.

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