

Visual propaganda or simple entertainment? Golden age of Polish comics and the cultural policy of the Polish People's Republic¹

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Abstract

The distinctive language of comics makes it well suited to various political purposes. The 70s of the 20th century were the age of cultural opening to the western popular culture in Poland. Many comic book series and magazine *Relax* gained acclaim among the readers. These publications were aimed at upholding cultural hegemony of the Polish People's Republic political regime, prove its ideological appeal as well as educate the new socialist man. On the other hand, as the recollections of comic book authors from that era suggest, they had seen themselves as providers of entertainment. The aim of the article is to look at the tension between the two aforementioned ways of perceiving the comic books published in the period concerned and to evaluate the degree of their involvement on the side of the political regime. The British School of Cultural Studies approach, defining popular culture as inherently political, will be employed to analyse the involvement of comics in upholding of the domination of the Polish non-democratic regime. Through the analysis of the historical and social context and the comics texts themselves, it will be possible to see to what extent comics published during the golden age of Polish comics were a tool of propaganda as opposed to just innocent entertainment.

Keywords: comic books, propaganda, entertainment, cultural policy, Polish People's Republic.

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Propaganda wizualna czy zwykła rozrywka? Złoty wiek polskiego komiksu a polityka kulturalna Polskiej Rzeczypospolitej Ludowej

Streszczenie

Specyficzny język komiksu sprawia, że doskonale nadaje się on do różnorodnych celów politycznych. Lata 70. XX w. były epoką kulturowego otwarcia się Polski na zachodnią kulturę popularną. Wiele publikowanych wtedy serii komiksowych oraz magazyn *Relax* zyskały uznanie czytelników. Publikacje te miały na celu podtrzymywanie hegemonii kulturowej PRL-owskiego reżimu politycznego, dowodzenie jego ideologicznej atrakcyjności, a także edukowanie nowego socjalistycznego człowieka. Z drugiej strony, jak sugerują wspomnienia twórców komiksów z tamtego okresu, postrzegali oni siebie jako dostarczycieli rozrywki. Celem artykułu jest przyjrzenie się napięciu między dwoma wspomnianymi sposobami postrzegania komiksów publikowanych w badanym okresie oraz ocena stopnia ich zaangażowania po stronie reżimu politycznego. Do analizy zaangażowania komiksów w podtrzymywanie dominacji niedemokratycznego reżimu w Polsce wykorzystane zostanie podejście Brytyjskiej Szkoły Studiów Kulturowych, uznające kulturę popularną za z natury polityczną. Poprzez analizę kontekstu historyczno-społecznego oraz samych historii obrazkowych będzie można przyjrzeć się, w jakim stopniu komiksy publikowane w okresie świetności komiksu polskiego były narzędziem propagandy, a w jakim stanowiły zaledwie niewinną rozrywkę.

Słowa kluczowe: komiks, propaganda, rozrywka, polityka kulturalna, Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa.

Comics and graphic novels are a relatively new medium and through their history they were often a subject of heated debates regarding their status as a viable form of art. Such controversies were mostly raised due to the popularity of the medium and its perceived (adverse) influence on readers, especially the young ones. The popular saying 'a picture is worth a thousand words' is more related to the sphere of politics than might usually be expected. The distinctive language of comics, encompassing both words and pictures, makes it well suited to various political purposes, like propaganda (as in the case of American second world war comics) or upholding of a dominant ideology. On the other hand, and more likely in democratic regimes, comics might also serve as a tool of political resistance against the hegemonic culture.

The seventies of the twentieth century were the age of cultural opening to the western popular culture in Poland. After a period of being harshly criticised as an element of American imperialism, comic books gained certain recognition among the political elites. The popularity of graphic narratives was noticed and they were employed to proliferate regime friendly messages. Many comic books series like *Kapitan Żbik* [*Captain Żbik*], *Podziemny front* [*Underground Front*], *Pilot śmigłowca* [*Helicopter's Pilot*], *Legendarna historia Polski* [*The Legends of Polish History*], aimed at foreign markets] or the stories published in *Relax* magazine gained enormous acclaim among the readers. Their publication served as a way to propagate desired behaviors of the citizens, especially the young ones. The publications were aimed at upholding cultural hegemony of the Polish People's Republic political regime, prove its ideological appeal as well as, in accordance with more general government's cultural policy, educate the new socialist man.

These aims were achieved through different aesthetic as well as editorial methods. On the other hand, as the recollections of the comic book authors from that era suggest, they did not perceive their own work as specifically politically engaged. Rather they had seen themselves as providers of entertainment, that today has a cult status among the comic book fans.

The aim of the article is to look at the tension between the two aforementioned ways of perceiving the comic books published during the seventies (and partially eighties) in the Polish People's Republic and to evaluate the degree of their involvement on the side of the political regime. The British School of Cultural Studies approach, defining popular culture as inherently political (see: Fiske 1996; Staniuk 2006), will be employed to analyse the involvement of comics in upholding of the domination of the Polish non-democratic regime. On the other hand, this approach also allows as to look at the daily practices of individuals that might defy hegemonic political or social conceptions. Through the analysis of the historical and social context and the comics texts themselves it will be possible to see to what extent comics published during the golden age of Polish comics were a tool of propaganda as opposed to just innocent entertainment.

Comics and (cultural) politics

Before we take a closer look at the Polish comics it might be useful to make a few general remarks on the nature and the history of the medium and its relation to the world of politics. Comic books have often been used as a tool of political influence due to the uniqueness of its language. As Fredrik Strömberg puts it, "the intimate combination of words and pictures is one explanation [of the magic of comics]. Speech balloons, captions, onomatopoeic words etc. tend to give life and meaning to what might otherwise be lifeless images" (Strömberg 2010: p. 9). Therefore, they have been employed for political purposes almost since the beginning of the medium as we know it today.

Comics are predominantly a visual medium that uses pictures to narrate a story. Scott McCloud, an active comic book author himself, defines comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (McCloud 1995: p. 9). Will Eisner, a legendary comics creator, used the term "sequential art" to describe comics. According to him they are "arrangement of pictures or images and words to narrate a story or dramatize an idea" (Eisner 2008: p. xi). The strength of comics as a medium used for social and political purposes comes from both visual and textual components, as the pictures might enhance the influence of the message on the reader. Certain aesthetic decisions made by comic book authors might influence the way comics affect the readers and the extent, to which they can persuade them to accept a presented point of view (see: Duncan 2021).

Comics were quite often used to communicate political messages as a part of propaganda machine, in democratic as well as in non-democratic regimes. Propaganda might be perceived as "any conscious and open attempt to influence the beliefs of an individual or group, guided by a predetermined end and characterised by the systematic

use of irrational and often unethical techniques of persuasion" (Smith III 1989: p. 80). Jason Stanley adds that "the essence of political propaganda on my approach is that it is a kind of speech that fundamentally involves political, economic, aesthetic, or rational ideals, mobilized for a political purpose. Propaganda is in the service of either supporting or eroding ideals. The first distinction between kinds of propaganda has to do with whether or not it erodes or supports the ideals it appears to embody" (Stanley 2015: p. 48).

Fredrik Strömberg noted that "war, comics, and propaganda make for a fruitful combination" (Strömberg 2010: p. 38). The specific combination of visual and textual messages might be used to convince citizens of the necessity to undertake a particular set of actions or to propagate certain behaviors. During the Second World War comic books were used by American government to entertain soldiers sent to fight overseas, at the same time presenting them with the images of the enemy using derogatory stereotypes of Germans or the Japanese (Scott 2007: p. 327–328). At the same time, audiences could find in comics assurance that their sacrifice is going to contribute to the world's peace. On the home front comic books were advocating for ongoing vigilance towards possible acts of sabotage or, on the other hand, for engagement in the war effort for example through the bonds collection (Wright 2003: p. 30–55; Scott 2007: p. 329). Comic book publishers openly cooperated with the Office of War Information to provide stories capable of uplifting the American spirit.

During periods of peace, in democratic regimes, comic books might be employed to champion various social and political causes. However, any engagement of comic books authors in governmental political communication is a matter of their choice. They might endorse the policies they believe in, but they might also object to the actions of political regime. *V for Vendetta* graphic novel by Alan Moore and David Lloyd is a clear example of authors' critical approach to Margaret Thatcher and to the whole Thatcherism, as well as a political thought treatise (see: Lewandowski 2019). Comics can also become a way to promote important social values, like inclusiveness and anti-racism (European Commission 1998) or to help people understand mechanism of spreading viral disease by using zombie metaphor (*Preparedness...* 2011). Comics were also used in 2009 as a part of the *Be Part of the Story* campaign by UK Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) promoting among young people an option of joining military service. The posters presented as a part of the campaign contained a short comic book stories similar in a way to style of "Commando" picture libraries that had been published in Britain since the 1950s (on campaign, see: Rech 2014; on British war comics, see: Chapman 2011: p. 95–107).

Finally, we need to make a few remarks on the cultural policy itself. This term might be defined in many ways, however all of them include a component of governmental involvement in supporting cultural industries and arts (see: Mulcahy 2006: p. 319–322; Przystek 2016: p. 10–13). The role of government in cultural activity in democratic regimes is limited. Most cultural productions are created by independent companies. As Daniel Przystek notices, the term cultural policy „produces associations linked closer to non-democratic regime states, where culture makes a considerable element of support for the authorities, of promotion of certain content, not of building a pluralistic model of culture" (Przystek

2006: p. 10–11). In non-democratic political regimes culture is perceived as a tool used to influence social and political behaviors as well as a source of keeping up ideological coherence. Therefore, all cultural production is taken over by the government or the leading party, controlled by specialised institutions and censored according to ideological demands. Mass culture's access to large audiences makes it a perfect channel for dissemination of propaganda materials and for keeping up the desired political regime. The fate of comic books in Polish People's Republic seems to confirm such assumptions.

Comics in Polish People's Republic

History of comics in Polish People's Republic is certainly a complicated one (for its concise outline, see: Tatuć 2014; Stańczyk 2023; p. 51–117; Szytak, Konefał 2023; Osuch, Wągrowski 2023). Popular before the Second World War, they fell prey to the ideological shift of the post war era. Initially some of previously known titles resumed publication, however their editors had to adjust to the new realities and mediate between old style entertainment and the necessity to educate the new socialist man.

During the earliest Stalinist period, particularly from 1947 till 1956, a campaign against comics as an imperial form of art prevented issuing of new comics for many years. To a certain extent the crusade against the comic book in Poland resembled the one that took place in the United States, resulting in the self-censorship by the publishers, fearing a possible governmental action (see: Lent 2009; Wright 2003; p. 154–179). Comic books in both countries were accused of presenting brutality, violence and having a possible bad influence on the development of the juveniles. In the United States they were blamed of creating a derogative image of American nation internationally (see: Hirsch 2021). In Poland, comics became the symbol of the hated western world along with products such as *Coca-Cola* or bubble gum (Ciszewska 2010: p. 22). It was necessary to defend the Polish citizen, especially the young one, against such a dangerous and stultifying medium (Zwierzchowski 2004).

In Władysław Gomułka's era (1956–1970) comics were still generally perceived as a tool of American imperialism, however gradually such perspective started to evolve. The popular demand for that kind of entertainment and a gradual acceptance of that medium as a useful resource in social education led to the publication of i.e. *Tytus, Romek i A'Tomek* [*Tytus, Romek and A'Tomek*] by Papcio Chmiel originally devoted to the promotion of scouting (for more about ideological and axiological aspects of that series, see: Grzegorzewski 2017). The late Gomułka's era was also the moment, when more openly propagandistic titles such as *Podziemny front* [*Underground Front*] or *Kapitan Żbik* [*Captain Żbik*] began to be published. Both titles were connected to Citizens' Militia (pl. *Milicja Obywatelska*, MO), the latter one specifically designed to promote the service, especially among young people (more detailed history of the comics briefly discussed here, will be presented in the next section).

However, it was Gierek's era that might be branded as Polish golden age of comics. The first half of Edward Gierek's rule as the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers'

Party (pl. *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza*, PZPR) was a period of modernisation and westernisation. It fostered the development of the comic book "market" resulting in appearance of new titles like *Pilot śmigłowca* [*Helicopter's Pilot*] or *Relax. Magazyn opowieści rysunkowych* [*Relax: Illustrated Stories Magazine*]. One of the possible explanations of party elites' acceptance towards such a capitalist medium was Gierek's own childhood spent in France and Belgium that might have influenced his perception of comics (Szytak, Konefał 2023: p. 59). "Relax" magazine was also publishing stories of foreign authors, although, due to financial constraints, only from the Eastern Bloc (Rusek 2014: p. 82–83).

The Seventies were also a moment, when Polish comics were published in foreign markets. Two titles are particularly worth noting in that context: *Legendarna historia Polski* [*The Legends of Polish History*] and *Kapitan Kloss* [*Captain Kloss*], the latter being an adaptation of a popular television series. The idea for the first one was devised in cooperation with The Kosciusko Foundation, with an objective of reconnecting Polish living in America with their fatherland. It was followed by Sport i Turystyka publishing house sequel series *Początki państwa polskiego* [*The Beginnings of the Polish State*] presenting early history of Poland.

The reasons for gradual acceptance of comics and of them becoming a part of Polish People's Republic cultural policy were at least twofold, including supply and demand aspects. First, the appeal of comics to younger generation of Poles allowed the Party's elite to use mass culture methods to shape the minds and characters of juveniles. Mateusz Szlachtycz, when writing about the magazine *Relax*, puts it that way: „The comrades from the Department of Culture of KC PZPR played a wicked game, tempting with comics as if it were a bottle of cold *Coca-Cola*, thanks to which the young readers of the magazine were supposed to swallow pills of propaganda, bland in taste” (Szlachtycz 2017: p. 52). Constricted access to popular culture goods from the Western Bloc also partially explains the popularity of the local production, including comic books. Secondly, comic books' popularity influenced Polish People's Republic elites' decision to invest in the production of that medium as a relatively easy way to increase profitability of state-owned companies (Rusek 2014: p. 77).

Finally, it is also worth noting that over the whole period of Polish People's Republic the word "komiks" ["comics"] was avoided, with the exception of using it in pejorative sense. Instead, a set of synonymous expressions were developed to describe that visual medium. Color notebooks (pl. *kolorowe zeszyty*), illustrated stories (pl. *opowieści ilustrowane*) were the most popular among them, clearly differentiating local production from the imperialistic ones and alluding to the terms used in prewar Poland to describe comic book (for a list of such term, see: Stańczyk 2023: p. 13).

Entertainment and propaganda

Teaching through entertainment, simply entertaining or subjecting readers to the state propaganda might have been the major goals of Polish People's Republic government, when they gradually allowed comic books to be published in Poland. Confronta-

tion with messages aimed at making them good citizens was the price the fans of the medium had to pay. Publishing houses that wanted to publish kolorowe zeszyty had to convince policy makers of the social, political and ideological advantages of such publications. Support for initiatives important to decision-makers, for example for building of children's hospital Centrum Zdrowia Dziecka (see Rusek 2014: p. 78) was one way to do that. Information of commitment to support such initiatives was usually placed on the front cover just below the symbol/ logo of a particular series.

Before we take a closer look on the narrative schemes presented in the selected comic book series, it is worth noting that most of them were directly connected to uniformed services like Citizen's Militia (MO) or Polish People's Army (pl. *Ludowe Wojsko Polskie*, LWP) or at the very least to the state approved scouting organisation (the Association of Polish Scouting). Of course, there were exceptions to that rule like in the case of the series about the legendary beginnings of Polish state or of "Relax" magazine. However, all of them were supposed to present a positive image of Poland regardless of the narratives' settings.

The reflections below are going to embrace such comic book series and magazines as: *Podziemny front* [*Underground Front*], *Kapitan Żbik* [*Captain Żbik*], *Pilot śmigłowca* [*Helicopter's Pilot*], *Legendarna historia Polski* [*The Legends of Polish History*], *Kapitan Kloss* [*Captain Kloss*], *Początki państwa polskiego* [*The Beginnings of the Polish State*], and stories from *Relax. Magazyn opowieści rysunkowych* [*Relax: Illustrated Stories Magazine*]. All of them were published in rather high numbers of copies (maybe with the exception of *Podziemny front*) and were able to reach a considerable number of readers.

One crucial feature that enabled them to connect entertainment with education, either civic or historical, was the characteristic structure of each issue within any of aforementioned comic book series. Apart from the main story, which was usually presented on the 32 pages, most of the issues contained additional materials related to what they were promoting. For example, the third cover page of *Kapitan Żbik* was devoted to real-life stories of heroic actions by uniformed services members. The special page was entitled *Za ofiarność i odwagę* [*For Sacrifice and Courage*]. These short accounts of heroes selflessly saving other people's life were supposed to promote certain behaviors in emergency situations.

Pilot śmigłowca contained even more non-diegetic materials. It was supposed to share more information about the nature of service in Polish Air Force. The second cover page usually contained content devoted to the equipment of Polish Air Force, such as different types of aircraft or information about specific kinds of operations pilots were able to perform. That cover page also presented information about the necessary levels of physical fitness that each pilot was supposed to achieve, encouraging readers to engage in various sport activities. Finally, fourth cover page was devoted to the stories from the history of People's Polish Air Force (for more detailed coverage on these pages, see: Dmowski 2010: p. 678–681).

Third cover page of *Podziemny front* comic book series hugely relied on the real activities of People's Army (pl. *Armia Ludowa*, AL) troops. It presented chronology of ac-

tions of the unit. To some extent such a structure reminds of British war comics such as "Commando" or "Battle Picture Library" (especially popular from late fifties to seventies) that published information on military equipment relevant to the presented story on the second cover page. This, accompanied with realistic nature of the stories presented within picture libraries, has been perceived as an explanation of the rise of historical knowledge among British students (Chapman 2011: p. 99–100).

Apart from the structure and the relations between diegetic and non-diegetic content of the comics, the stories published were revolving around a certain set of topics and tropes. Maciej Wycinek's analysis of *Kapitan Żbik* might offer interesting perspective to read and interpret most of the stories published during the golden age of Polish comics. Apart from the social setting comic book series focused on several other topics that could be found in all titles discussed here: „creation of the model of a socialistic hero, idea of return to the motherland, foreign policy, that is the theme of the enemy and of a friend and the Second World War" (2010: p. 112). These four tropes might well be used to briefly analyse the persuasive content of the selected comic book series and stories.

A hero with whom the readers can identify is crucial to engage them in the story as well as to convince them to accept certain messages related to the content of the narrative. A socialist hero, the first theme according to Wycinek, supposed to be intermediary between the readers and uniformed services they were supposed to promote. Writers of the stories tried to create characters as original as possible, but also immersed in the local Polish context. Captain Żbik, a handsome, well educated, physically fit police officer was often compared to characters like James Bond or even to Superman. The latter comparison underlines the character's strength and power, which were similar to that of American superheroes. However, in my opinion, a comparison with Batman rather than Superman would be more relevant, because Jan Żbik, just as Bruce Wayne, lacks any superpowers, and their achievements are the result of their own abilities and of hard work. These two characteristics might also be attributed to the good socialist man working for the benefit of the whole society, sometimes even at his own expense.

Creator and original writer of *Kapitan Żbik* Władysław Krupka was not looking for any particular inspiration while working on the series. As he said in an interview „we meant to create a Polish hero, an MO officer who'd win the readers and improve the image of the Polish militiaman. I believe we were successful at that time" (Krupka 2004: p. 85). Citizen's Militia needed the character connecting members of the service with people and to convince the latter of militiamen's professionalism and engagement in the service for the common good. *Kapitan Żbik* creator also highlighted the originality of the character: "Captain Żbik is original and not based on other famous characters, e.g. Bond [...]. Żbik's personality was a combination of the features of many militia officers whom I personally knew and with whom I worked on a daily basis" (Krupka 2004: p. 85). These closeness to real militiamen was supposed to bring comic book character even closer to the readers.

Communication with readers is another way of creating a sense of realism of the character. In one of the interviews Władysław Krupka mentioned that editorial team

was receiving many letters to captain Żbik as if the readers treated this character as a real person. Initially Krupka tried to answer, but the numbers were overwhelming. That resulted in letters written by the captain to readers, published in different issues of the series. It was where he explained, for example, why he had decided to work as a militiaman, what are the prerequisites to joining the service, or he informed readers about his promotion (more on that communication, see: Stańczyk 2023: p. 93–97). This approach resembles the well-established practice of American publishers who often devote one or two pages per issue to communication with the readers. Series published by EC Comics between 1947 and 1954 are one of the best examples of such communications in the American market.

Jan Żbik was a character solely devoted to his work, in which he resembles characters of the series *Podziemny front* that dedicated their lives to the collective action of their unit. Captain Kloss was always placing the mission first, setting the bar really high. Sławomir Karski from *Pilot śmigłowca* series might be considered more human, more relatable for the readers. His health condition forced him, a fighter pilot, to be relocated to helicopter unit, showing that a member of uniformed services might be vulnerable. Also, a love plot served to humanise the character.

The second trope suggested by Wycinek, namely the return to the motherland, is connected with the issue of Regained Land and with the lack of certainty regarding the status of the western border of Poland. The topic of the Regained Land engaged an important part of the Socialist government's propaganda as a way of legitimising its power. Analysed comics rarely touch upon that theme. Probably the most explicit representation of that fear was presented in the final issue of *Podziemny front*. The story entitled *W pułapce* [Trapped] takes place in Lubań in the formerly German region of Lower Silesia. The Polish army tries to ensure incorporation of the city to the Polish administrative structures at the same time dealing with distrust of the local population and with actions of Werwolf saboteurs. The problem with German saboteurs is also discussed in the penultimate issue of *Kapitan Kloss* simply entitled *Gruppenführer Wolf*. *Początki państwa polskiego* [The Beginnings of the Polish State] historical series also argues, though indirectly, for the Polishness of the Regained Land and depicts long lasting conflicts with the German neighbor.

Foreign policy, third out of the suggested tropes, relates to the issue of allies and enemies on the international arena. In all of the discussed comics we might find references to the eternal friendship between the Polish Peoples' Republic and Soviet Russia. Other Eastern Bloc countries were obviously also considered allies. Among the enemies, the most important ones are the United States of America and the Western Germany. Of course, any other countries of, widely understood, Western Bloc are presented with certain distrust, probably due to their relations with both of the main enemies.

Wilk w matni [Trapped Wolf], the eight issue of *Podziemny front* comic book series, focuses on Polish army hunt for Nazi Germany war criminals in Berlin. American „allies” at the time, were presented as untrustworthy and willing to pursue their own interests rather than serve the just cause of punishing people responsible for the Second World

War atrocities. In *Kapitan Żbik* series crimes perpetrated on Polish soil are organised by American or German masterminds, like in issues *Tajemnica ikony* [*The Mystery of the Icon*] or *Śledzić Fiata 03-17 WE* [*Tracking the Fiat 03-17 WE*]. Captain Żbik also has to deal with foreign spies, like in issues *St. Marie wychodzi w morze* [*St. Maries pushes out*]. Polish society must remain vigilant and collectively act against that threat. Captain Żbik's success is only possible through cooperation with the society and especially with young scouts, who might be future recruits to Citizen's Militia.

The final trope, namely Second World War, is linked to the previous one. The relations between Poland and Germany are the result of the ongoing historical process culminating in that military conflict. However, Second World War trope is also connected to the historical manipulation of the socialist government serving to legitimise power. Therefore, a certain vision of history is presented in comic books, supporting only the regime friendly perspective on Polish history (for more on this issue, see: Czaja 2010: p. 43–62). War comics published between the Sixties and Eighties were focused on showing the common struggle of Polish and Soviet armies against the Nazi German threat. The role of the Home Army (pl. *Armia Krajowa*, AK) was diminished and its leadership criticised. However, individual Home Army soldiers were presented as patriotic (even if misled among the historical turmoil and part of the "wrong" formation) and eagerly cooperating with the People's Army (see: Czaja 2010: p. 43–62; Lichtblau 2017).

Podziemny front written, among many, by the People's Army veteran Tadeusz Pietrzak was intended to popularise actions and bravery of that formation, both during the occupation or in the first postwar days. *Kapitan Kloss'* main character was a Pole (his real name was Stanisław Moczulski) working for the Soviet intelligence. He was impersonating a German officer and thanks to that was able to obtain valuable information and perform acts of sabotage. He was also cooperating with another Polish underground army, i.e., Lower Silesia, that implicitly suggested Polishness of the Regained Lands (for more on historical manipulation in that series, see: Janicki 2024). Even *Relax. Magazyn opowieści rysunkowych* needed to publish war comics, presenting Eastern bloc armies' (including guerrilla army) successes at the fronts of the Second World (see: Miedziński 2010).

Conclusions

In an interview for newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza* Grzegorz Rosiński recalled: „Once I was driving from Brussels, speeding up, with Warsaw getting closer – and close to Łowicz the police stopped me. All of my papers were Belgian, but all of a sudden, the policeman says »Mr Rosiński? Haven't you by any chance drawn *Żbik*? If it were not for you, I would not have joined the police«” (qtd. in: Ciszewska 2010: p. 26). Rosiński's anecdote might to some extent illustrate comic books' success as a tool of Polish People's Republic propaganda. *Kolorowe zeszyty* were supposed to indoctrinate young readers for them to become good citizens of the socialist state. It was the goal of Polish United Workers' Party to warm up the image of the socialist state and its uniformed services.

As a part of widely available mass culture, comic books were able to reach audiences that were craving for this form of entertainment. It seems like the fulfilment of the major goal of Polish Peoples' Republic cultural policy.

On the other hand, Polish non-democratic regime provided a form of entertainment that inspired a whole generation of readers. Comic book series and magazines briefly analysed in this article reached the „cult” status for generations of Poles born in the Sixties, Seventies and Eighties of the twentieth century. For them, including the author of this article, they marked a lifelong fascination with the medium as an entertainment. The audiences were thinking about the medium more as an entertainment than a source of propaganda. Furthermore, as Marcin Jaworski (2019) suggests, even in these heavily controlled series it was possible to slip some counter-hegemonic messages. Even if not intentionally, Polish Peoples' Republic, through its cultural policy, introduced comics to its market, creating a generation of writers, artists and, what is most important, of readers.

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