

Маша и Медведь (Mashya i Medved') 'Masha and the Bear': the Spreading of Russian Nationalism as an Ideology

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Abstract-Media in Russian Federation holds an important role both in the daily life of its society and for the government of Vladimir Putin needs. Media becomes the bridge to deliver information and ideology to the mass of people, inside or outside the country. In the hand of Putin's government, ideology can be put into anywhere including to one of the most famous animated television series, Masha i Medved'. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to reveal the spreading of Russian nationalism ideology through the hidden meaning behind visual signs in Masha i Medved'. In order to do this research, the author use Roland Barthes' semantic theory, denotation and connotation. The methods used in this research are expository, descriptive, and criticism. From this research, it can be concluded that there are Russian nationalism ideology inside Masha i Medved' affects the audience from all over the world, including Indonesians.

Keywords-ideology, media, Masha i Medved, nationalism, Russia

I. INTRODUCTION

Along with technological developments, the media has become an important role in the present. All forms of media such as radio, television, magazines, films, or books become part of everyday life. After waking up in the morning, the first thing we listen to or watch are radio and television. News in magazines and newspapers become material for exchanging information with friends or co-workers on the sidelines of work. Films, books, and television can become entertainment after a long and tiring day. The community's dependence on the media makes the media as something that can easily change one's perception of the problems that occur. The media can be used as a means of conveying ideology by large countries accompanied by strong control over it.

Russia is one country that has strong media control. Since the first day Vladimir Putin served as president, he has dominated the media in Russia. Not only media that is managed by the state, but also private media. A case example that have occurred are the *Dozhd* television station. The television station was originally a media that presented a non-government perspective in politics and people's lives. However, in January 2014, the television station got into trouble because it held a poll about whether the Soviet Union should allow Nazi forces to take control

of Leningrad to save hundreds of lives of Russian people who died during the invasion [1]. Russian government

authorities gave orders to stop the broadcast of *Dozhd* television station because it had created a bad image of Russia.

The case above is one of the many forms of media control carried out by Putin as a form of his effort to create a positive picture of Russia, both at home and abroad. Putin's efforts to maintain a positive picture of Russia are not only in the form of negative impressions. However, he also fostered Russian nationalism in the hearts of television connoisseurs through the program aired. The clearest evidence can be seen in the most famous Russian animated television series to all over the world, *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' which was first shown on the television channel *Первый канал* (Perviy Kanal) on 7 January 2009. *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' has been aired in one hundred countries and one of them is Indonesia. The story in this animation is based on Russian folklore about the friendship of a little girl with a bear who is a former circus player [2]. *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' has certain qualities that distinguish them from other animations.

In *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear', there are visual signs that promote russianness. For example, the color of Masha's clothes, pink, which gives a soft and loving impression, and a bear character who is described as a kind and loving bear. Based on the finding of a number of visual signs that can be interpreted, the writer choose the television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' as the data analyzed in this study. In this study, the author uses Roland Barthes' semiotic theory of denotation and connotation. Denotation is a general meaning and connotation is another meaning behind these visual signs that will be associated with the spread of Russian nationalism ideology.

Based on the background above, the problem discussed in this study is how Russian nationalism is spread as ideology through the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear'. The purpose of this research is to reveal the spreading of

Russian nationalism ideology through the television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear'. The method used to analyze the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' is the expository method which describes information on Russian values contained in the animation. The second method used is descriptive, which is trying to describe the elements contained in the animation. Then the third method used is criticism, which is analyzing, interpreting and criticizing the television *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved) 'Masha and The Bear' based on the evidence contained inside it.

II. MATERIALS AND METHOD

The main theory used in this research is semiotic by Roland Barthes about denotation and connotation. Semiology or semiotics is a common science of signs proposed by Saussure in his lectures on linguistics published posthumously in 1915 as a study in General Linguistics. Saussure envisions a science that can read all human sign systems systematically. Therefore, semiology is often used to refer to the analysis of signs other than those found in the linguistic sign system. According to Saussure, the sign has no meaning because it is directly related to the object or action in the world. A sign is a combination of signifier (sound or writing mark) and signified (concept). Signs are not objects or actions but mental concepts. Meanwhile, according to Roland Barthes, the sign is the relationship we draw between the signifier and the signified [3]. For example, rose, is a sign of romance in one culture. This is due to its use in love poems or portrayed on Valentine's Day cards resulting in the merging of signifier (words or pictures) with a signified (the concept of rose in the culture) to produce rose as a sign of romance, passion and love. The sign is the equality we draw between signifier and signified.

Semiotic theory of Barthes is the development of Saussure's theory of signifier and signified. The connotation of Barthes is a development in terms of signified with the user's point of view. Roland Barthes suggests that there are two orders of significance processes of a sign. Each sign system consists of E (expression), C (content), and R (relation) connecting E and C [4]. The system is the first system and formulated as the primary sign (E1 R1 C1). The primary sign can be a signifier in the second system so that it is formulated as E2 (E1 R1 C1) R2 C2 which produces a secondary sign. So the primary sign is denotation and the secondary sign is a connotation. Barthes uses the connotation to describe the interactions that occur when a sign meets the feelings or emotions of the user and their cultural values [5]. Based on the theory, the author will reveal the spreading of Russian nationalism ideology through the hidden meaning behind visual signs in *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved) 'Masha and The Bear'.

In this study, the author will also use theory of characters and characterizations, as well as background place in the film based on Dennis DeNitto. The term "character" is not just limited to humans. "Characters" may

include cartoon figures, such as dog characters in De Sica's Umberto D movie, or physical entities, such as computer figures named HAL in 2001: A Space Odyssey by Stanley Kubrick. However, the theory of character and characterization Dennis DeNitto refers to a human figure and how the character is being projected in the movie. According to DeNitto [6], one can be called a character if they meet two criterias. First, the individual must be identified and not just part of the movie background. Secondly, the character can not be removed from the movie without substantially altering the plot or affecting a minor theme or a movie's major theme.

Furthermore, the author will explain the understanding of the ideology given the things that are disseminated through the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear'. Ideology according to Capmbell dalam Gerring [7] is a very complicated, closed, and has a broad structure understanding. According to the origin and the use of its connotations, it is basically political, even though the scope of its structure is the form of objects used to develop content outside of the political order. The attitude structure which is very different from its parts organized coherently. Ideology is also something that must be solved by the concept of high-level abstraction and must provide several dimensions that can be used to make changes. The type of ideology that will be analyzed in this animated television series is nationalism.

Nationalism is a political ideology which states that: 1) a nation exists with identifiable members and unique collective characteristics; 2) the nation is the main key to politics; and 3) the highest loyalty of individuals must be the core of the nation's interests or mission. The term "nation" refers to concepts or categories that connote kinship based on criteria, including race, term, language, religion, region, or nationality. As an ideology, nationalism has become a modern feature that has been called upon the name of people, and no longer becomes God's gift or eternal right from birth. In the last 150 years, specifically, nationalism has become a strong legitimacy and mobilized tools for actors who are able to train, maintain, or seize political power[8]. In this study, Russian nationalism is an ideology that tried to be spread and planted in the minds of people from Russia and outside Russia by the government. The media that being used to disseminate this ideology is the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear'.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The character of Masha is described as a little girl from Russia. This is manifested in his clothes which are traditional Russian dress. In all episodes in the *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear', Masha always wear pink Russian traditional clothes with a pink scarf on her head. The example taken is in scene above which is an episode titled *Первая Встреча* (Pervaya Vstrecha) 'First Meeting'.



Fig 1. *Первая Встреча*

This episode tells Masha's meeting with the bear character for the first time. In the minute 00.03.33, Masha is clearly shown wearing the pink clothes that she wears throughout the series. Then, in scene 26 entitled *Осторожно Ремонт!* (*Ostorozhno Remont!*) 'Caution, Renovation!', Masha is still wearing the same pink outfit. This can be seen clearly at minute 00.01.02 which shows Masha standing and talking to the bear.



Fig.2 *Осторожно Ремонт!*

Based on the two images and explanations above the signifiers in this scene are the pink clothes and scarf worn by Masha. The signified is a little girl from Russia. The denotation meaning that can be taken is Masha as a Russian little girl who always wears pink clothes. The connotation meaning of the clothes worn by Masha is Russia which maintains its cultural identity, but also maintains the diversity of society, religion and culture.

The rejection of forced secularization in Soviet Russia was a symbol of no less than the process of liberalization and democratization until in the 1980s came the notion of pluralism. Pluralism is understood as an acknowledgment of widespread religious diversity, affirmation of equality of rights and status for different religions, equal treatment for religious and atheistic people, and unlimited freedom given by the state to all religious organizations [9]. The diversity of religion is still owned by Russia until now. The choice of Masha's clothes that wear traditional dress has meaning as a Russian cultural identity.

However, Masha who wore a scarf is a manifestation of the diversity of religions in Russia. This is caused by the use of headscarves which are not only used by the biggest religions in Russia, Orthodox Christianity, but also used by other religions such as Jews and Islam. Meanwhile, the color of Masha's clothes, pink, has the meaning of

calmness, feminine, and love which give a soft impression of Russia.



Fig. 3 *Первая Встреча*

In addition to the portrayal of Masha as the manifestation of positive things of the Russian state, namely its diversity, the bear also has a role to foster Russian nationalism. During the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (*Masha i Medved'*) 'Masha and The Bear' took place, the bear showed a caring and loving attitude towards Masha. Although, he has been repeatedly disturbed, he still shows affection to Masha. The clearest example is in episode 1, *Первая Встреча* (*Pervaya Vstrecha*) 'First Meeting', at the minute 00.05.50, shows the bear hugging Masha with happiness. Then, in episode 10 titled *Праздник на Льду* (*Prazdnik na l'du*) 'Holiday on Ice' at the minute 00.04.36-00.06.40 which shows the moment when Masha pretended to faint and two bear characters who frantically approached her like parents worrying about their own child. Two bears who are portrayed as lovable figures relate to how the Russian state is presented to non-Russian society. Firstly, the author identifies the signifier in the two episodes above, namely the bear character who hugs Masha kindly and lovingly and two bears worrying about Masha. The signified of two episodes above are a bear who has a kind and compassionate character, also has considered Masha like their own family. The denotation meaning that can be taken is the bear who loves Masha. However, if traced further, the display of the goodness of the bear's character is not only to make the character become lovable. Bears are important animals for the Russian state.

This can already be seen from the way Russian people call bears in their language. Unlike many language groups in the Indo-European language family, Slavic languages generally do not use words based on the old Indo-European word for "bear". In contrast, most Slavic languages use what linguists call "substitutes". For example, in Russian the word *медведь* (*medved'*) actually means 'honey eater'. Russians generally refer to bears with secondary substitution terms, such as the name "Misha" or "Mishka", which is the nickname of the male name "Mikhail". Two theories offer a plausible explanation for Russia which avoids the direct term for "bear" which is "taboo for hunters" and "taboo for religion". The taboo for hunters is the belief that if the hunter utters the name of the bear violently, instead of calling it euphemism, the animal may hear and avoid the hunter. On the contrary, the "taboo religion" theory explains that bears are connected with the supernatural world so avoidance using their real names is associated with fear or respect [10]. Apart from the two

theories above, bears hold important positions and are associated with Russia.

Bears are used as official symbols of the state for several things. Bear symbols can be found on weapons and regional heraldic flags of the Russian Federation. For example, on the uniform arm of the Chukotka region, there is a polar bear symbol. Then, in Khabarovsk Krai and the Republic of Karelia a black bear emblem was used on the flag and uniform. In addition, during the Soviet era, bear was chosen to be mascot for the 1980 Summer Olympics. The match was held in Moscow and marked the first time Russia (or the Soviet Union at that time) hosted the most famous sporting event in the world. Although, bear does not specifically become symbol chosen to represent "Russia", it is very likely that bear was chosen because of their association with Russia in other countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the bears began to be used as a symbol of rusianness in the Russian Federation. One clear illustration is in the logo of Russia's biggest political party, *Edinaya Rossiya*, which was founded in 2001. Based on the above explanation, it can be said that bears are significant animals in Russia so they symbolize the state of Russia itself. The meaning of the connotation that can be taken is that the bear character shown as a loving figure is the government's effort to soften the image of Russia for other countries including Indonesia so that a sense of nationalism grows for Russia.



Fig. 4 *Раз, Два, Три! Ёлочка Гори*

For its mission to spread the ideology of Russian nationalism, changes in character were also carried out just like in episode 3 entitled *Раз, Два, Три! Ёлочка Гори* (Raz, Dva, Tri! Yolochka Gori) 'One, Two, Three! Light the Christmas Tree! This episode tells Masha and the bear who celebrates Christmas holidays. In the 00.03.43-00.04.07 minute, a Santa Claus-like figure comes with a snowmobile and carries a bag of gifts. The figure of Santa Claus is called *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz) in Russian. However, the way of the figure dressing is not described in accordance with the description of *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz).

Signifier contained in this scene is *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz) clothes. The signified is a figure from Russian folklore that his dressing way is altered. The denotation meaning that can be taken is the alteration of *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz) in the way he dresses up. *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz) usually has more luxurious clothing and looks more grand than the western version of Santa Claus. He is usually depicted carrying a stick with a long white beard.

The coat is sometimes red, but the most common is blue. He wears high valenki, traditional boots from Russia, to protect him from the cold. Instead of eight deer, *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz) employed three horses that pushed his Russian troika.

The origin of *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz), sometimes known as "Grandfather Frost" or "Father Frost", can be traced to Slavic mythology that preceded Christianity. According to these myths, Frost or *Morozko* were known as snow demons for some people and powerful and clever heroes who chained water with freezing dew for others. *Morozko* can be very cruel because popular folklore shows he will kidnap children and only return them when their parents give him gifts. Under the influence of the Orthodox Church and Russian writers, *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz) transforms into a better magical figure and likes to give them gifts on New Year's Eve. His simpler and more friendly appearance in the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved) 'Masha and The Bear' gives connotation meaning as a form of persuasion so that children from other countries can love Russia and its folklore more.



Fig. 5 *Раз, Два, Три! Ёлочка Гори*

Despite the changing appearance of *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz), the magical element of the character was not removed. The magical element is maintained, of course, so that the figure is not only friendly, but also more interesting. This is seen in the same episode in the minute 00.07.07-00.07.24. *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz) performed magic on the Christmas tree of Masha and the bear as a thank you for taking care of him.



Fig. 6 *День Варенья*

Another aspect of rusianness that shown in this animated television series is *варенье* (varen'ye) 'Jam' which was featured in episode 6 titled *День Варенья* (Den 'Varen'ya)'Jam Day'. At minute 00.00.35-00.01.36, the bear character is cooking *варенье* (varen'ye), a Russian jam. The signifier in this scene is *варенье* (varen'ye) itself and the signified is Russian special dessert. The

denotation meaning that can be taken is the bear and Masha who enjoy time together by cooking *варенье* (varen'ye).

Варенье (varen'ye) is the most common dessert in Russia. Many Russian dishes and drinks are made as a way to conserve fruits for winter including *варенье* (varen'ye) as a classic and popular method. *Варенье* (varen'ye) looks like jam, but it's a little different. The first difference is that there are solid berries from fruits in Russian desserts, unlike the smoothness of jam. The second difference, inside the jam there is a thickener that makes it solid. *Варенье* has a more fluid form. This food became very popular in Russia in the 19th century because of the reason the price of sugar decreased. This dessert was expensive before because it was cooked with honey. *Варенье* (varen'ye) can be stored for up to 5 years and it is one of the best ways to eat delicious fruits in the winter. Therefore, *варенье* (varen'ye) is still popular in Russia and other countries in Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, this food is not so well known in other countries outside Eastern Europe.

The display of this food in *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' is an opportunity for Russia to show other positive things from their country, namely sweet and tasty *варенье* (varen'ye). This type of food is a type that is easily liked by children. So the connotation meaning in this episode is Russia which seeks to foster love for Russia from children in other countries by introducing *варенье* (varen'ye). Moreover, *варенье* (varen'ye) has a jam-like taste so it is no stranger to the tongue of non-Russians, for example Indonesians.



Fig. 7. *Граница на Замке*



Fig. 8 *Граница на Замке*

Another Russian nationalism ideology is contained in the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' episode 12 entitled *Граница на Замке* (Granitsa na Zamke) 'Border is Locked Tight'. In this episode, the bear and Masha guard their garden which is planted with carrots. In the minute 00.04.14-00.05.59, the bear even gives Masha a special hat as a guard. The hat has a red star logo in the middle and resembles an army hat. The hat with the red star logo worn by Masha is a signifier in this episode. The signified is a small child who is given a hat to indicate that she is a guard. The denotation meaning that can be taken is that Masha gets the hat as a sign that she is responsible for carrots in their garden.

Meanwhile, red star has its own meaning related to Russian history. The red star symbol was used by Russia when its name was still the Soviet Union. The red star has the meaning of communist ideology [11]. In addition, the red star is also used as a flag of the Soviet Union in which there is a picture of a hammer and sickle. The five-pointed red star as a communist symbol is defined as the five classes of socialist society: workers, farmers, intellectuals, soldiers and youth. Based on this explanation, the connotation meaning that can be taken from a visual sign of a red star is Russia that tries to slip the history of its country into *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear'. This shows that Russia wants to remember the history and try to share it with people from the other part of the world. The title of this episode, *Граница на Замке* (Granitsa na Zamke) 'Border is Locked Tight', is also a picture of Russia's past as a Soviet Union which had a strict guard against everything. This history is included in a fun way to disguise the spread of ideology they are trying to do. In the minute 00.06.18-00.06.26, it is shown that the 'border' is guarded by a big and cute cardboard with shape like Masha. Even though it seems mild and funny, the strict guarding carried out in the form of a cardboard is a form of Russia that remembering the strictness of their regulations in everything when they were Soviet Union.



Fig. 9 *Усатый-Полосатый*

Another episode that shows the joyful side of Russia is episode 20 entitled *Усатый-Полосатый* (Usatiy-Polosatiy) 'Mustached and Striped'. This episode tells the meeting of a bear with his long-time friend, a tiger. In the past they were both circus players. One proof is at minute 00.02.04 which shows photos of the bear and the tiger

displaying their circus action. Meanwhile, at minute 00.05.31, a tiger is shown playing a circus with Masha. Among many signifier in this episode, the author takes two of the most obvious signifiers: a photo of the bear and the tiger in the circus, as well as circus performance by the tigers and Masha. The signified is two circus players who have performed together. The denotation meaning that can be taken from this scene is the bear and the tiger who remember their past during a circus performance together.



Fig. 10 *Усатый-Полосатый*

Russian society views the circus as an art form that is culturally equivalent to ballet and opera for more than a century. Although the Russian circus has existed since the Yekaterina I era in the 19th century, the Russian circus evolved over time to an increasingly high level of cultural excellence. The Russian circus reached its peak under the Soviet Union's communist regime. Communist country view circus performances as a form of egalitarian entertainment to be enjoyed by the masses. As a result, the first circus school to emerge of its kind anywhere in the world is *Государственное Училище Циркового и Эстрадного Искусства* (Gosudarstvennoye Uchilishye Tsirkovogo n Estradnogo Iskusstva) 'Moscow State College for Circus and Variety Arts' which opened in 1927. After that, more circus schools was open throughout the country in the following years to teach Soviet children to become world-class circus players.

In the past, a large show of the best performers from the Russian circus began to tour abroad as part of the communist regime's propaganda campaign which showed the Soviet Union's superiority over the West. The show instilled greater appreciation for the Russian circus and circus art in general, as well as players from the Russian circus. The Russian circus began to have an impact on the way Westerners view live entertainment. In addition, the skills of Russian players are admired and imitated by Western circus players so that so many circus schools in the West are starting to train their players in the same techniques and methods.

Even after "Cirque du Soleil" introduced a truly unique circus style originating in Quebec in the late 1980s, the effects of Russian circus art in the form of training methods, techniques and skills can still be felt today in circus shows around the world. Based on the explanation above, the meaning of connotation in this episode is the introduction of the Russian circus in the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' as a form of the spread of Russian

nationalism ideology into children in other countries who watch it.

IV. CONCLUSION

The media is a powerful bridge in delivering information and ideology in Russia. The strong control over the media makes Russia easily be able to slip ideologies in any form even into animated TV series that is shown to children. In this case, the ideology of Russian nationalism is spread through the inclusion of elements of russianness, both cultural and historical, into the most popular Russian animated television series in the world, *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear'. If only seen at a glance, this animated television series is only a mere entertainment for children or viewers from other ages. However, unconsciously, the perception of the audience is influenced by the elements of russianness that are described beautifully and pleasantly. The more often the people from other countries watch *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear', the more closely in their minds the picture of Russia is shaped in such a way.

The airing of the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' in one hundred countries made Indonesia not escape its influence. Since long ago the Indonesian people had a bad picture of Russia with the tragic events related to communism in Indonesian history, namely the G30S/PKI incident that occurred on September 30, 1965. Given that communism was practiced for a long time in the Soviet Union could open up the old wounds of the Indonesian people regarding the massacre happened because of that ideology. However, Russia is no longer the old Russia. The Russian government has changed into a Federation and has values that must have been different from the Soviet Union. Animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear' is present in Indonesia by introducing the new Russia through positive sides that are sometimes forgotten by people from other countries in general.

Through the clothes of Masha, the way she behaves, and the bear character who is warm and loving, pleasant Russian culture in the form of food and circus, also the legend that comes from Russian folklore in the form of *Дед Мороз* (Ded Moroz) or Russian version of Santa Claus, Russia is continue to preserve Russian values in the heart of the animated tv series audience that will eventually leads to the growing of Russian nationalism inside of them. The insertion of visual signs reminiscent of Russian history, in the form of the Soviet Union's red star symbol, was presented as information about who Russia was before becoming the Russian Federation. Based on the elements of Russian values above, it can be concluded that Russian nationalism as an ideology has been spread through visual signs contained in the animated television series *Маша и Медведь* (Masha i Medved') 'Masha and The Bear'.

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