

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Animations are generally considered a harmless form of entertainment for children, but a number of people argue that animations have also been produced for political propaganda, which sometimes involves nationalist sentiments and racist representations of the others (Ívansson 2). Propagandists tend to regard movies and animations as highly useful for disseminating nationalist ideologies to young people. In the United States after World War II, some animated films with nationalist propagandas, such as *The Spirit of 43' Donald Duck* cartoon, were banned as they conveyed explicitly racist perceptions and attitudes. Those who were against this kind of movies contended that the ideologies embedded in these movies would make children misunderstand, stereotype, and generalize people from other societies as they could have been influenced by the bias and prejudice of those who produced the films (Sullivan, “Cartooning the Nation”).

Significantly, there have been many discussions and studies about nationalism and racism in animations. Firstly, however, it is important to provide some background knowledge about nationalism and racism and their intimate relationship.

According to *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, nationalism can be briefly defined as the attitude that members of a nation have about national identity, which often involves common origin, ethnicity, or cultural ties. Nationalism can also refer to actions

taken by members of a nation when trying to achieve self-determination.

Another meaning of nationalism is that it is a belief, or ideology that makes an individual become attached to one's nation or country of origin

<<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2010/entries/nationalism/>>.

At first glance, it appears that nationalism is a rather neutral concept and might even be seen as vital to national unity and the survival of a nation. However, a number of scholars have maintained that nationalism has its dark side, especially when it involves sentiments or attitudes that discriminate against or look down on outsiders or those excluded from membership of a nation. As Davis argued, nationalism and racism are intricately linked to the construction of the nation, and nationalist sentiments can become racialized as membership of the nation depends on being born into it and those who do not share the same origin as the majority tend to be excluded. Nonetheless, Davis conceded that intermarriage could sometimes provide a solution for outsiders who would like to be part of the nation (4).

Another scholar, Michel Foucault, a well-known post-modern theorist, believes that the overlapping of nationalism and racism goes back to the moment when nations or states tried hard to control and manage populations in their territories. The words “nation” and “race” were initially interchangeable, and they helped establish the division or dividing line among peoples. Racism in Foucault's point of view is understood as “a way of introducing a break into the domain of life that is under power's control: the break between what must live and what must die” a way of “separating out the groups that exist within a population” (254).

Foucault's view concerning the formation of a nation or a state is not very positive as he sees it as inevitably involving violence and discrimination against those regarded as outsiders. To explain, Foucault sees racism as “bound up with the workings

of a State that is obliged to use race, the elimination of races and the purification of the race, to exercise its sovereign power....the most murderous States are also, of necessity, the most racist.” According to Foucault, racism is the precondition for exercising the right to “kill.” “Killing” in this context does not have to be limited to murder as such, it can be anything from exposing someone to political death, expulsion and so on.

Foucault argues that in everyday circumstances, some people may “kill” other human beings as they believe that doing so would make their lives in general “purer” or safe from the “impurities” carried by the “enemies” or “outsiders,” who are considered threats, either external or internal, to the population (255-58).

It can be seen that nationalism and racism can be intertwined and nationalist ideologies may end up promoting racist ideas or viewpoints. A good example is what happened in the United States during WWII. In those days, the US relied on movies and animations to educate American children about who was right and who was wrong during the war, and movie studios were encouraged to show their support of the US army and navy by producing movies and animations which carry political propaganda. The aim of these movies was not merely to glorify the US, but also to demonize the enemies. In these movies, America symbolizes heroism, justice and liberal ideas whereas countries seen as America’s enemies are represented as the embodiment of destructive and tyrannical values. Popular shows like *Donald Duck* and *Bugs Bunny* were often employed as part of the anti-Japanese propaganda, and Japanese characters often assume the roles of villains or untrustworthy figures (Sullivan, “Cartooning the Nation”).

Kristján Birnir Ívansson conducted a study about how Donald Duck was used in propaganda. The four short Donald Duck movies: *The Vanishing Private*, *Sky Trooper*, *Fall out-Fall in*, *The Old Army Game* and *Commando Duck* sought to depict a very

positive image of an American soldier and establish a number of rules concerning what a soldier is supposed to do and what he is not allowed to do in service. Another three Donald Duck movies: *Donald's Decision*, *The New Spirit* and *The Spirit of '43*, encouraged the audience to buy a war bond as part of the effort to defend American democracy and liberty (34-36). Moreover, in 1942 the Navy asked Disney to design an emblem appropriate for its new fleet of Navy torpedo boats known as “mosquito boats.” In response, Disney provided its famous symbol of a mosquito riding a torpedo, which soon decorated all of the newly built PT boats. The Disney Studios also designed a winged tiger flying through a large V for victory for the world famous “Flying Tigers.” When the war ended, it was very surprising that the Disney Studios had produced over 1,200 insignias for both the U.S. Army and Navy, as well as Allied units, without charging a fee (Breiner, “Walt Disney Goes to War”).

Apart from comical figures like Bugs Bunny and Donald Duck, superheroes like Batman and Superman also took side of America to protect the country from its enemies such as Nazi Germany and Japan. Superman’s slogan is “Fight for Truth, Justice and the American Way.” Originally, it was just truth and justice, the “American way” was added during the Second World War and carried over into the 1950s TV series. Superman is a fictional alien from a fictional planet who aims to protect American “ideals,” specifically American nationalist ideologies. Moreover, he regards American values as the best in the world (Sullivan, “Cartooning the Nation”). One of the most famous comics, especially created during wartimes, was *Captain America*. Captain America, the protagonist, is a very patriotic figure, totally dressed up in the style of the American flag. This highlights the fact that an important character in American popular culture can be represented in a way that associates with the values of the nation (Dittmer, “*Captain America* and the Nationalist Superhero”).

In addition to the aforementioned works which focused on America, there have been many instances of propaganda identified in some movies for children. Yashruti indicated that filmic version of *The Jungle Book* (1967) portrays gorillas and orangutans who act and speak like black people while Bagheera, Col. Hardy, Shere Khan and the wolf pack appear quite civilized and have “noble” British accent (Yashruti, “The Jungle Book Colonial Propaganda or Wholesome Family Fun”). Another common stereotype noted in Disney movies is that of the Native Americans in *Pocahontas*. In the study “The Pocahontas Paradox: A Cautionary Tale for Educators”, Pewewardy argues that the element of nationalism and racism are obviously shown in the original soundtrack. The negative vocabulary such as savage, heathen, disgusting race, vermin and evil are used in the lyrics. According to Pewewardy, these words lead to the generalization and stereotyping of Native Americans. Moreover, Kathi Maio, a film editor and a feminist writer, points out in her study “Disney’s Dolls” that some of the more current releases with racial stereotyping include *Aladdin* and *The Lion King*. For example, Jarfar in *Aladdin*, is portrayed as a bad Arab with thick foreign accent while Jasmine and Aladdin speak in standard Americanized English. Some of the lyrics in *Aladdin* also convey racist overtones. In *The Lion King*, the hyenas, who appear to represent the racialized others, have inner city African American dialect.

When turning our attention to Thailand, it can be seen that nationalism exerts supreme power on the perceptions and attitudes of the elite as well as those of ordinary people. This study will focus on animated movies for children because children tend to be more susceptible to ideological messages than adults, and could be negatively affected by them in various ways. The animated films chosen for this study are *Khan Kluyay I* (2006) and its sequel, which are among the most popular computer-animated feature films set during the Ayutthaya era. The animations, directed by

Kompin Kemgumnird, are based on the legendary Chao Praya Prab Hongsawadee, who was believed to be King Naresuan's wartime elephant. The popularity of the animations and their significant impact on mainstream audiences are testified by a number of prestigious awards. These awards include Thailand National Film Association Award, Golden Doll Award, Starpics Award, and Star Entertainment Award. A sequel to this movie, known as *Khan Kluay II*, is about another attack by the Burmese, and Khan Kluay's struggle to make a decision whether to stay with his wife and children or to go to war to fight against the Burmese.

The important message conveyed through *Khan Kluay I* and its sequel is that a person was born to serve one's nation and to avoid or escape such a duty is disgraceful. A true hero sees this obligation towards one's homeland as an honor. The animations also highlight the great significance of kings in the formation and defense of the Thai nation. The other important aspect of the movies is the characterization of the Burmese generals, their soldiers and their elephants as Siam's long-term rivals, who possess largely negative traits.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyze nationalist ideology and underlying racist assumptions in *Khan Kluay I* and *II*.

1.3 Educational advantages

It is hoped that the findings from this study will provide the readers with greater understanding of the representations of nationalism and racism in animated films. The study also aims to raise awareness of the hidden dangers of nationalist and racist elements in animated films