

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Background of the Study

People live in a world where many other ideas could represent an idea. Representation is a complex activity as not all humans live in the same background, experience, and cultural practice. Though, the fact that humans can connect certain events or things through the help of a medium is what makes this process complex. The more complex the medium is, the more representation can be found and or inserted within. As Hall (1997) suggests, representation is a fundamental process as it involves using language, signs, and images to substitute other meanings. This phenomenon is composed, traded, and circulated between the members of society. From a simple blue-colored droplet-like shape that indicates a sign of water to hidden meanings, messages and ideologies that are sometimes purposely embedded in contemporary media products such as advertisements, television, music video, and many more.

Although representation fundamentally reflects what is happening in the real world, it does not exempt such activities to be ridden by certain interests, such as politics. Representation can be political because studying the internet independently will become less suitable as political acceptance develops. Thinking carefully and critically about the internet's connection to politics will become more vital (Farrell 2012). The number of studies discussing political-related topics in a music video is less noticeable than discussions about sex, gender, and race. As

Farrel (2012) suggests, the relationship between politics and the internet is a paradox. It is a paradox that the internet-politics relationship will become increasingly significant to the discipline. However, he pointed out that there will be fewer and fewer scholars' discussions about it. The downfall is not about the interest of the political scientists on the internet. Instead, it is impossible to study the topic because of its integration with the regular political practices such as fundraising, election, social movement, and other political-related agendas (Farrell 2012).

Discussing politics in the contemporary media is significantly necessary. As Railton and Watson (2011) stated, music video tends to take sides for a particular event, including the political battle arena, whether it is supporting or contrasting. One example of this matter is country-related representation driven by certain political interests. It is influenced by a particular country's domestic and foreign policies, just like Russia, which gendered its domestic and foreign policies with masculine aspects. Since his first two terms, Putin's focus on nationalistic machismo has helped him acquire support at home and abroad and strengthen Russia as a global superpower country (Sperling 2016). His third term as president gave up new possibilities for him to show his authority in foreign policy, most notably when Russia's seizure of Crimea and its involvement in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Sperling 2016). Thus, concerning this, the two music videos' publishers are from outside of Russia: Romania and Slovenia. Later at the Chapter 4, this study explains how both countries, in the scope of videos producers, address the foreign policies of Russia.

With the improvement of the internet and social media in general, more aspects and means could be achieved. New trends are generated throughout time due to its exemption from strict conventional rules, enabling people to freely express their emotions and thoughts. These forms of expression are often to be found in a work of humor and satire. Although there is a close connection between satire and humor, these two do not necessarily have similar goals. Humour is formed by juxtaposing the contrasting notions to achieve a funny impact; thus, it is why incongruity is recognized as one of the primary foundations of humor (Morreall 2009).

Meanwhile, the goal of satire is more than to make people laugh. Rather its purpose is to express criticism—disclosing the flaws or failings of individuals, institutions, or societies to become a ridicule ingredient (Baldick 2020). It is this ‘disclosing act’ that disconnects satire from the immense landscape of humor. Thus, satire depends not only on societal norms and symbols to be accepted but also analyzes and produces new ones (Tesnohlikova 2020). The environment of political satire and humor is changing and evolving at a fast pace, and it is becoming an increasingly significant component of a culture (Tesnohlikova 2020). Political satire’s primary goal is to gain amusement from politics. It is a sort of humor employed in advertising that has played an essential role in altering public opinion since ancient Greece (Botha 2014). However, there is one more humor’s ramification that often overlaps with satire, that is, parody. Parody challenges audiences’ prior understanding of an authentic text or notion by overemphasizing its most-known elements (Gray 2005). This act of overemphasizing is often found

in the work of visual pleasure—it exaggerates a famous person’s most detectable characteristics (D. G. Young 2018). The often product of parody is circulated around politics. For example, a parody of a renowned politician is often negatively presented. It is not criticizing their political persona or public policy. Rather it mocks the politicians’ personal laxity (Niven, Lichter, and Amundson 2003). However, some scholars also proposed that exposure to this comedy shows positive attitudes toward politicians (Moy, Xenos, and Hess 2005).

Almost all sense of public politics includes the presence of men within it. Political parties, and corporate executive levels are mostly dominated by men (Connell 2005). From the trajectory of Putin’s presidency, he highlighted masculine embodiment within his ruling. It is in line with the agenda of ‘remasculinizing’ Russia because when Putin stepped in Russian presidency in the 2000, Russia was seen as weak, reeling from economic collapse, and no longer a superpower both domestically and internationally. The citizenry and the Kremlin attempted to resurrect the country’s pride and worldwide image (Sperling 2016). Putin’s machismo’s patriotic depiction was also bolstered in the aftermath of the recurrent uprisings in Ukraine. Putin is glorified as a “strong man” who is against Western ideologies that potentially be a threat to the country (Sperling 2016). Putin’s masculinity has long been his calling card, which was evident very soon after his presidential role is effective in 2000. Putin’s personality as a tough, patriotic leader guarding Russia against Western intervention to undermine Russia’s resources drew a positive response from the Russian people. Putin’s ideology reaffirms the strength and sovereignty of Russia. His masculinity dominates the public image of

Russia, help in boosting the national power and valor in international affairs, as well as Putin's assertions about the supremacy of his authority in domestic landscape (Sperling 2016).

This study unearths the portrayal of Russian President Vladimir Putin in the music videos that lift Putin as its grand narrative. Furthermore, this study focuses on music videos published by Bad History titled *PUTIN (My Heart Is Cold)* and Klemen Slakonja titled *Putin, Putout* (2016). Bad History is a Romanian animation *YouTube* channel which is owned by a company named *FrameBreed Studio*. Bad History currently has four videos on their channel, four of which present information about famous world figures. Three of them are world-known political figures, such as the 45th U.S. President Donald Trump, 2nd and 4th Russian President Vladimir Putin, and the 46th U.S. President Joe Biden, while one particular video talks about the life journey of well-known Swedish *YouTuber*, PewDiePie.

Klemen Slakonja is a Slovenian actor, comedian, television host, impersonator, and singer. Heretofore, he has impersonated more than 100 characters in his career. Among other characters that he had impersonated, he coined the *TheMockingbirdMan* project, which focuses on impersonating world-famous people (Euronews 2016). One of its projects, *Putin, Putout* (2016), first debuted in the 2016 *Eurovision* song contest. At the same moment when Slakonja stepped on stage to emcee Slovenia's *Eurovision* audition process, he shared a music video with the song mocking Russian President Vladimir Putin on *Facebook* (Sharkov 2016). Before sharing the video publicly, he had made a disclaimer that the video is intended only as a joke and not to attack anyone. Although the video

had its premiere on the *Eurovision* song contest's national audition event, it was not an official Slovenia entry for the competition as he was personally funded the whole video-making process (Euronews 2016). *Eurovision* originated as a concept in the mid-1950s as a means for Europe to unite after World War II had shattered it (Fuster 2020). *Eurovision* was one of the first serious attempts to stage an event that people worldwide could enjoy. Thus, the organizers requested that each country display a song that could reflect their culture. Although *Eurovision* is famed for concatenating the countries, the ostensibly apolitical contest has been the source of several severe political conflicts (Hart 2021).

The relations around three countries, Russia-Romania and Russia-Slovenia, marks a dynamic change in history. The Russia-Romania relationship transforms greatly and varies from dominating indifference to low respect, occasionally intense dissatisfaction, or even deep apathy, not to mention that on some occasions, it also remains neutral, depending on the geopolitical concerns (Dinu 2015). On the other hand, Slovenia is recognized for its 'friendly pragmatism' regarding Russia among the new EU and NATO members. It was shown by the inquiry that Slovenia has changed its post-independence identity from almost non-existent, to impressively wide-ranging its bilateral connections with Russia. The relation confirms the relevance of identity and history in creating policies and security communities inside the nations (Benedejčič 2016).

Relating to the discourse of masculinity, the writer provides some background information related to it in both countries, Romania and Slovenia.

Romanian's point of view about masculinity could be seen in the study conducted by Laszlo Péter titled *Football and Romanian Masculinity* (2017). He argues that personal and shared characteristics such as “*determination, consistency, honesty, pride, mutual respect, knowledge, tenacity, sense of vocation, solidarity, and fighting spirit*” are the fundamental of a man's masculinity trait in Romania (Péter 2017). Whereas in Slovenia, a Ph.D. project by Adrienne C. Frie titled *Horses and the Embodiment of Elite Masculinity in the Dolenjska Hallstatt Culture* (2018) historically shows that the idea of masculinity is embodied in the distinction of material possession, in her case of study, a horse. It could generally be viewed that having possession over something could open up to an act that visibly shows the difference over someone who does not possess the same capital. Moreover, masculinity is exercised through integrated physical activities and made a sense that particular capital has heightened one's social or intellectual skills (Frie 2018). It could be interfered that both countries' idea of masculinity belongs to the same umbrella of the stage of power.

The first music video is *PUTIN (My Heart Is Cold)* (2021) by Bad History. It describes Vladimir Putin, who is currently acting as the President of Russia. In this music video, Bad History animates their video to present the characters involved within. The video starts with Putin introducing himself while sitting on a military submarine with a wintery landscape environment, reinforcing Russia's vast geographical treasure. Throughout the video, Putin is accommodated by an American actor, Steven Seagal. Steven Seagal has been known as a special envoy to nurture the relationship between the U.S. and Russia, and Putin himself even

gave him the status of Russian citizenship (BBC 2018). The music video continued with Putin's style in leading Russia, stating his cold personality and attributes and praising Russia's military capability. The other exciting part of the video is when Greta Thunberg appears near the end of the video. Greta is a Swedish young-influential environment activist who has been highlighted in the news media regarding her brave action for demanding an immediate world leader's movement to mitigate the climate crisis. While others may praise Greta for her audacious act, Putin is personally not in the same boat with Greta's fiery spirit to slow the impact of climate change. While speaking at an energy conference in Moscow, Putin criticized Greta's speech at the UN in New York in September 2019. Putin raised the fact that the current world situation is convoluted, and the wealth level of some countries is not the same as Sweden (BBC 2019). Thus, it is not a smooth and easy process to make it happen.

The representation of Putin in the contemporary media has tendencies to share the same toolkit. Putin is described to have a powerful implication towards Russia. Also, his personality is gendered as masculine. In the second music video titled *Putin, Putout*, Klemen Slakonja impersonates Putin to mimic his facial tone and use the Russian accent of English. This video recalls some of the events in the past regarding Putin and, generally, Russia, with reconstruction and demonstration of highlighted events in a parodical way. The video also describes the good acts that Putin has done, such as singing a version of Blueberry Hill song at a children's fundraiser charity event (BBC 2010) and saving a television crew from Siberian tiger's attack (Faulconbridge 2008). Both music videos depict Russia as it is closely

related to Putin. Thus, it could be viewed that Putin's representation is Russia's representation in this music video.

The previous studies that directly pinpoint political satire topics in music videos are seldom to be found. Since the main object of this paper is a political figure, the writer believes that it is necessary to include a comprehensive understanding of the context. Putin's personality could be formulated as Dominant/controlling, Ambitious/self-serving, Conscientious/dutiful, and Dauntless/adventurous (risk-taking) (Immelman and Trenzeluk 2017). Mentioned personalities lead to his success in his way of ruling the country. Through 'presidentialization' and predominance, personification is predicated on one individual, picture, or dominant figure recognized exclusively by the people. The study shows that Putin's leadership style is becoming well-known worldwide, in which leadership performance is solely based on a leader's personal character. More significantly, Putin binds his supporters to his personality rather than ideology or party. During his presidency, Russia began to show indications of progress. This accomplishment is linked to Vladimir Putin's personal character, which sets an excellent example of handling and influencing politics through a mixture of aggressiveness, responsiveness, and competence, all of which comprise his "strong man" persona (Akbaba 2019). Although Putin's image has been perfectly built as the number one man in the country, there is a noteworthy trend of jokes about Vladimir Putin as the number of rejecting and ridiculing jokes are increasing (Nadskakuła-Kaczmarczyk 2020).

This study examines how both music videos perceive Vladimir Putin as the President of Russia. The first aim of this study is to investigate how the representation of Vladimir Putin is depicted. The second aim is to dissect how both music videos represent the relationship between Vladimir Putin and Russia.

1. 2 Statement of the Problems

Given the context of the background study, the author presents issues addressed in this study. As a result, the problem statements are as follows:

- How do *PUTIN (My Heart Is Cold)* and *Putin, Putout* represent the persona of Vladimir Putin?
- How does the idea of Vladimir Putin's masculinity is depicted in *PUTIN (My Heart Is Cold)* and *Putin, Putout*?

1. 3 Objectives of the Study

Considering the problem statements presented above, the objectives of the study that the writer aims to grasp are as follows:

- To find out the representation of Vladimir Putin's persona in both music videos.
- To investigate the depiction of Vladimir Putin's masculinity in both music videos.

1. 4 Significance of the Study

Politics is often considered serious, vital, and grave, yet humor is lighter and whimsical. However, behind the surface, humor and politics have been inextricably entwined together in political history. Political satire bears a crucial role in the way people perceive politics in the contemporary media. It can be a tool to (1) resist—

it creates new sets of meaning or (2) reinforce—it rearticulates the dominantly existing ideology that is being represented in the text within it. By uncovering the similarities and differences symbolically, narratively, and ideologically in both music videos within the satirical genre, this study could explain the circulated phenomenon of Putin's persona around the internet in the scope of two selected music videos.

Because of its influence on social hierarchy, gender is an important subject to be investigated. A preconception that men are superior to women have been so deeply instilled that it has been 'natural' that men govern and women are to be governed (Sovern 2014). In the context of contemporary condition of the world, gendered practices are still effective in some cultures. In Russia, masculine gendered practice is still dominantly covering its governmental identity, with the practice itself transform the country's image from being weak to powerful. Thus, it can be a reflection to people who are yet to understand the importance of gender studies through a semiotic point of view, especially its decodification regarding the ideology of Russia's masculinity which is often taken as granted. With the more integration of political topics to the cultural texts such as music videos, pictures, memes, etc., it is essential to bring this matter up to understand what the creators intended to subsume—in consideration that numerous internet contents are arguably ridden with implicit ideology. Furthermore, this study is expected to help bridging an academic approach to cultural-politics related music videos to enrich the scope of objects that the Cultural Studies of English Department could address.

1. 5 Definition of Key Terms

Masculinity: Social roles, attitudes, and meanings assigned to men in a particular culture at any given moment (Kimmel 2000).

Representation: The process through which people of a culture build and exchange meaning. Throughout the process, signs and visuals that represent or signify things are employed. (Hall 1997).

Russia: The biggest country in the world, stretches from Eastern Europe to Northern Asia (Vodovozov 1999).

Semiotics: The study of signs and symbols, as well as how they are used and interpreted (Chandler 2007).

Vladimir Putin: Russian politician who was officiated as prime minister (1999, 2008–12) and currently served as president of Russia (1999–2008, 2012–) (Britannica n.d.).