Ideological socialisation in the childhood: Cheburashka

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ABSTRACT
Cheburashka is one of the most famous animation characters in the Soviet period. This paper carries out a discursive analysis of four animation films in which the curious creature, Cheburashka, is the protagonist. This paper explores the pedagogic and ideological socialisation functions that the Cheburashka animation films bring about, analysing the implicit and explicit values passed on to the audiences.
The paper comprises a theoretical introduction and a methodological framework section in which the formal arguments of the analysis are elucidated. The next section examines the four animation movies that make up the saga: *Gena the Crocodile* (1969), *Cheburashka* (1971), *Shapoklyak* (1974) and *Cheburashka goes to school* (1983). This paper confirms the appearance of ideological principles that start showing in the way the characters handle conflict resolution. This paper finishes with a succinct conclusion and reflection.
    Keywords: legitimisation, objective reality, cinematographic script, principles of screenwriting, discursive ambivalence.

1. Introduction. Socialisation and ideology

The socialisation of children is a key stage for the development of their personality and their integration in society, which leads to the assimilation of cultural patterns and skills. By this process, children learn to get by in the world in which they have to live. This paper examines the ideological socialisation of children during the Soviet period, utilising a very famous Soviet period animation character, Cheburashka. This paper scrutinises the Cheburashka animation movies looking for underlying Soviet doctrine. But firstly, it is necessary to revisit briefly the notions of socialisation and ideology, as they are the main concept arteries for this paper.

Rocher defines socialisation as the process by which an individual learns throughout her/his life the sociocultural patterns of the surrounding environment to the point that they become an integrating part of his/her personality to be able to live in the societal structures in which she/he will have to develop (Rocher, 1978: 133-134). As Berger and Luckmann (2003) pointed out, human beings are inclined to socialisation processes. The role of the socialisation process is strengthened by the lack of instinctive specialisation, the weak position of human beings throughout childhood and the plasticity of human behaviour. An adequate socialisation provides the necessary elements for the integration and interaction with the reference groups that surround human beings.

Children are born in a social structure that precedes them, an objective environment that manifests and imposes itself upon the child as the only and authentic reality. The transmission of language, values, norms and all the necessary elements for the integration of the child in

society takes place in this framework. The socialisation process is mediated by two filters. Firstly, the 'objective environment' given by the individual's belonging to society and/or part of it, and namely political nation, social class, ethnic group, religious community. Secondly, the socialising agents which carry out the induction process. For example, a child from a wealthier social class will receive a different socialisation from that of a child of a lower social class. However, the socialisation of two individuals from the same social class will not be identical either. Parents and other socialising agents will leave their own traces in the process. The primary socialisation takes place during childhood. After a person is born, the first reality of a baby is that of her/his family. Due to the affective and emotional links, the primary socialisation brings about a strong adherence to the learnt behaviours. During the secondary socialisation, human beings acquire specific roles, intertwined with the division of work and with the institutions in which human beings will have to participate: education system, army, labour market. The secondary socialisation does not need the affective links of the first socialisation: such a higher emotional identification with the roles is not necessary. It is sufficient that, through language interactions, each person learns the necessary tasks for each person. In this way, each group, for example professionals, uses distinctive codes unintelligible for the members of other groups. (Berger; Luckmann, 2003: 162-182)

Moving on to ideology, Van Dijk (2003:14) understands it as the most important beliefs of a group and its members. Musijin (2011: 128) points in the same direction, asserting that the beliefs and convictions are at the group's core. Ideology has a pragmatic dimension that drives activity, fosters human beliefs in their environment, and justifies the actions taken. Rocher's (1978: 475) definition incorporates this two tiered legitimising and implementing dimension. In this way, ideology should be understood as an organised system of ideas that serves a group to make sense of their situation in their environment; likewise, the actions of the group feed from ideology. However, the fact that ideology steers the actions of social groups does not mean, as pointed out by Musijin (2011:128), that the actions can be clearly inferred from ideology. The high level of conceptual abstraction found in ideology allows individuals to take different, even opposite decisions based in the same ideology. Nevertheless, social groups will try to justify their decisions using their ideological orientations and not those of the others.

The legitimisation of reality appears as one of the main functions of any ideology. Berger and Luckman (2003: 118-119) define this legitimisation as the process through which the reality experienced by individuals becomes credible or reasonable in terms of its materialisation, and how those individuals involved do integrate effectively in their society. The ideological legitimisation process is intertwined with the socialisation mechanisms taking place during childhood. The process of ideological legitimisation is therefore necessary to pass on the meaning of the institutional web and societal structures to the new generations, contributing to its continuity.

2. Cheburashka and the methodological framework brief

In 1965, Eduard Uspensky brought to life Gena the Crocodile and his inseparable friend Cheburashka in his fictional literary works for children. Cheburashka made the leap to the

big screen four years later under the artistic direction of Leonid Shvartsman and the direction of Roman Kacharov. This paper looks at the four animation movies that make up the saga: *Gena the Crocodile* (1969), *Cheburashka* (1971), *Shapoklyak* (1974) and *Cheburashka goes to school* (1983).

For the methodological framework analysis, this paper uses Robert McKee's (2009) *Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. According to McKee, all narrative structures have some obligatory elements: inciting incident, progressive complications, crisis, climax and resolution (2009:223). Due to the relatively straightforward character of the animation movies analysed, the last three elements of the narrative structure (crisis, climax and resolution) will be grouped together.

The inciting incident is understood as 'the first big event of the story, which is the main cause of all the actions that follow and steers the other four elements of the narrative structure' (McKee, 2009:223). The inciting incident is used to set the story plot, drawing the spectator's attention, introducing the spectator to the narration dynamics. The inciting incident is followed by progressive complications, that is, the difficulties that the characters must overtake by facing antagonistic elements. The events taking place in the story will make the characters experience different crises leading to the situation of higher tension or climax. Finally, the resolution or outcome closes the story.

The narrative value of the story is closely linked with the narrative events taking place in the story. The narrative events in the big screen mean change, and these changes are intentional, looking to place the characters at the heart of the story. McKee (2009:55) states that narrative events produce changes full of meaning in the life situation of characters; the narrative events express themselves in terms of values and are reached through conflict. Regarding the meaning of the concept of narrative value, for McKee it encompasses binary human experiences at stake, such as love/hate, absence/presence, freedom/slavery, all/ nothing (2009:54).The analysis of the narrative values is very important indeed. It allows the understanding of the message carried by the animation movie, usually articulated in a discourse system[1].

The codified message within the discourse narrative cannot be simply reduced to the sublime creativity of the story teller, but it is a determined and socially created product (Valdera, 2013). Since the Cheburashka movies are aimed at children's audiences, its pedagogic functions have to be contextualised according to the ideological principles of the period. This makes the saga an evident source of socialisation.

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[1] Regarding ideology and discourse, Van Dijk stated: "one of the crucial social practices influenced by ideologies are language use and discourse, which in turn also influence how we acquire, learn or change ideologies. Much of our discourse, especially when we speak as members of groups, expresses ideologically based opinions. We learn most of our ideological ideas by reading and listening to other group members, beginning with our parents and peers. Later we 'learn' ideologies by watching television, reading text books at school, advertising, the newspaper, novels or participating in everyday conversations with friends and colleagues, among a multitude of other forms of talk and text". http://www.discourses.org/UnpublishedArticles/Ideology%20and%20discourse.pdf accessed 1/7/14. A Spanish version of this book has been published by Ariel, Barcelona 2003.

3. Formal discourse analysis

3.1. Gena the Crocodile

After finishing his day of work at the zoo, Gena goes back home. Gena gets bored at home as he hasn't got anyone to play with. Then he decides to write an advertisement to find friends: Young Crocodile looking for friends (Молодой крокодил хочет завести себе друзей). Cheburashka had just appeared in the scene some time before. A fruit shop keeper has opened a box of oranges, finding a bizarre animal with big ears and resembling a bear. As he gets out of the box, the creature cannot stand and falls down in two occasions. The shop keeper decides to baptise him as Cheburashka (Чебурашка), as in Russian the verb '*Чебурахнуться*' means 'coming down crashing'. As the shop keeper does not know what to do with him, he sets off to the zoo. At the zoo, he gets Cheburashka back as they don't know his origins. Cheburashka starts working in the fruit shop window to attract customers, and lives in a phone box. One fine day, Cheburashka comes across Gena's advertisement and he decides to look for him. The 'up to now' description serves as the inciting incident.

In the second part of the movie, one can identify progressive complications and a resolution. The apparition on the scene of the antagonist character, Shapokliak, starts off the beginning of the problems. Shapokliak is portrayed as a crippled old woman who finds it amusing to annoy everyone around her. She always carries in her bag some sort of rat ready to attack when Shapokliak feels like it. Loneliness is the inciting incident that steers the narrative action: to stop being lonely, Cheburashka, Gena and other characters decide to build a little house, which is the challenge to be overcome. This little house would be used by anyone who wishes to have a meeting point where new friendships could flourish. They name it 'the little house of friends' (домик друзей). Even though Shapokliak tries to stop them, they successfully finish building the house. After the construction, Gena starts asking everyone to join them when a giraffe asks: *'What is the point of joining in if we are already all friends anyway?'* Cheburashka fears that all the hard work was in vain. However, the others tell him that thanks to the team work needed for the construction of the house they all became friends. Finally, Cheburashka decides to give the house to children and to work inside the house as a toy.

The central value of the animation movie is friendship and the importance of being in company of others as opposed to being lonely. The construction of the little house brings all the characters together allowing them to forge a friendship. The activity undertaken could provide some reminiscence of the voluntary day work or 'субботник', a long-standing practice in the Soviet Union. It is also noticeable that all the main characters have an occupation: Gena works in the zoo and Cheburashka works initially in a fruit shop window, and later on as a toy in the little house. The diligent undertaking of work has a symbolic meaning associated to the achievement of prestige in the Soviet Union – Gena and Cheburashka appear in the honorific picture at the building site. The displaying of all the pictures of the role model workers was used as an inciting stimulus for the others. From the point of view of ideological socialisation, it could be concluded that the defence made of labour and practical activity are used as the basis of social cohesion and prestige in the Soviet Union. This is the idea that the

animation movie passes on to children, connecting it with the acceptance of a group of equals in their peer group.

3.2. Cheburashka (1971)

The second animation movie is named after its protagonist: Cheburashka. In this movie, Gena is celebrating his birthday singing a well known Russian song. Cheburashka enters the scene by appearing from the back of a lorry, handing Gena a birthday present. At this time, a group of pioneers appear singing and marching in the street. The pioneers are a youth Communist group. Cheburashka and Gena observe them with great admiration and ask them if they could join in, but they are not accepted: this is the inciting incident. The pioneers only accept the best and more able youth. From this moment, the progressive complications start to unveil leading to the event resolution. Cheburashka and Gena have to prove that they are worthy candidates to join the pioneers. Once again, labour and activity becomes the central axis to reach their objectives. Cheburashka and Gena start off by building a house for the birds, albeit with a disappointing result. They then meet some children up to mischief as they do not have any space where to play: a child climbs up a ladder and falls down into a gutter, but thanks to Gena there is not a tragic end. Cheburashka and Gena decide to help the children by building a playground for them to play in. They first start to use the space around an electric current converter, but they give up after Gena gets himself electrocuted. Nevertheless, they don't give up and they start the playground construction. Even though a policeman accuses them of using some tools without permission, they finish their construction work with excellent results. The pioneers see firsthand that Cheburashka and Gena are willing to help others and they are not as clumsy as they seemed when they first met each other. The climax arrives when the two heroes collect scrap metal for the pioneers. Thanks to all these actions, Gena and Cheburashka are accepted into the youth organisation as full members.

Friendship and belonging to a group of equals were utilised in the previous movie to socialise children in the importance of work for goal achievement (labor vincit). In this movie, the fact of belonging to a group of equals is still the main value enshrined, but in political terms. The pioneers are not an informal group of equals, as Cheburashka's and Gena's other group of friends. In this case, this is a formal group of equals, the children's section of the Communist Party, an organisation aimed at recruiting and initiation to the official revolutionary ideals. It could be argued that the activities carried out by the pioneers were not political and had little difference to those carried out by Boy Scouts in the USA: a child does not become Communist simply by going camping, building bird houses or marching in the streets. It is the practical activities and the feeling of belonging to a group of equals that promote the allegiance, more than the organisation's ideological apparatus. However, this analysis would indeed lack another layer – the children are not only playing and interacting with their peers, but are getting to know and familiarising themselves with the hierarchical societal structures. The children are getting used to the hierarchical structures whilst assimilating the presence of these societal structures, with their predetermined and de facto powers (Berger and Luckman, 2003). Lastly, children have been indoctrinated into the meritocratic values of the organisation. Anyone can become a member of the pioneers,

regardless of their social origin (even a crocodile or a Cheburashka), if individuals work hard and have accrued enough merits. The positive discourse towards labour is reinforced with the discourse rhetoric.

3.3 Shapoklyak (1974)

Gena and Cheburashka set off on a holiday by train. Shapoklyak, the old creepy lady, steals their train tickets, and, as they cannot prove that they are travelling legally, the conductor asks them to leave the train. This scene serves as the inciting incident. The progressive complications follow immediately after: Shapoklyak steals Gena and Cheburashka's luggage on their way back walking to Moscow. Gena and Cheburashka get themselves lost in the woods with more problems to be solved than ever: some tourists are trying to fish with dynamite, a factory is polluting a river so the citizens cannot bathe. However, the narration takes a turn and Shapoklyak decides to help the heroes face the difficulties to teach the tourists a lesson. Gena talks to the factory director regarding the pollution, but he ignores Gena and decides simply to bury the pipeline that takes the pollution to the river. Gena challenges the director's response by diving and blocking the pipe with his body, which makes the factory collapse. The children thank Gena and Cheburashka for their action, as they can bathe in the river again. Finally, Shapoklyak gives them their luggage back, and they all return to Moscow by train singing happily *Goluboj Vagon*.

The narrative value in this movie counter-poses good/bad or correct/incorrect. The creepy old Shapoklyak acts wrongly causing harm to the heroes initially, but then she does the right thing. The tourists and the factory director promote the wrong values regarding the protection of the environment as a natural space for everyone, whilst our heroes change the course of the action towards a positive outcome, teaching the tourists a lesson and stopping the pollution caused by the factory.

3.4 Cheburashka goes to school (1983)

In this animation short movie, the action starts at the airport. Cheburashka had promised Gena to pick him up, but he does not show up. When Gena arrives home, he realises with surprise that Cheburashka had not forgotten about it; he had not read Gena's telegram with the exact details of his arrival, as Cheburashka did not know how to read or write. This is the inciting incident.

Gena decides at that time to enrol Cheburashka in school, but he finds successive complications: firstly, in a clothes' shop, they cannot find a school uniform for Cheburashka's size; secondly, the school does not open until September due to some construction work. In this movie Shapoklyak also intervenes to overcome the problems. Following the previous movie behaviour patterns, even though Shapoklyak starts off by causing trouble instead of helping out the heroes (she makes Gena believe an elevator is not working, and she steals a school uniform and a car), she then becomes pivotal for the successful resolution. Shapoklyak, with the aid of her pet (a rat), puts pressure on the lazy builders to speed up the school construction. Likewise, when the school's head teacher cannot find teachers, she and Gena offer themselves to teach the children. The prevailing values in this movie are based on the dichotomy of educated/un-educated; children are socialised to accept naturally the

importance of the schooling process, so they can assimilate the role of formal instruction as a mechanism of integration and participation in the societal structures.

4. Conclusions: The socialising principles in the context of the ideological legitimisation framework

In the aforementioned discourse analysis this paper has elucidated some ideological socialisation principles, pivotal for the future life of a child, such as education, which is at the same time utilised as a means to achieve work and political participation. The four animated movies portray a not very pleasing image of Soviet reality, for example, that of business and tradesmen such as the fruit shop keeper or the one selling school uniforms. Likewise, the construction workers trying to finish the school are not good role models to follow. Finally, the factory director, whose acting role in the movie could be seen to symbolically represent bureaucracy and managerial establishment, proceeds with the management of the factory with negligence. Was Uspensky (the author) trying to criticise the Soviet regime rather than aid with its legitimisation? It is noted that even though the four stories may provide an ambiguous picture of the Soviet reality, the satirical criticism does not affect negatively the ideological reality, far from it; it is argued that it reinforces it. The main function of the narrative to legitimise ideology does not stop when showing problems and difficulties of the reality that is trying to legitimise, but in showing the resolutions taking place within the hegemonic framework of that given ideology. The difficulties to overcome are the raison d'être of the four movies analysed. The fact that the characters face difficulties, struggle when showing opposition to their anti-heroes, and finally succeed, reinforces the ideological socialisation principles implicit in the four movies.

During the Stalinist period, the ideological legitimising principles were based on the refutation of the structural character of certain social problems and on the attribution of those problems to obscure conspiracies (Getty and Naumov, 2001). However, there had been a rhetorical change, and during the Soviet period the premise was different: the socialist regime has things to be improved, but we can make things better with socialism. Hence the reason why, despite all the difficulties encountered, the values of the characters end up standing: thanks to the constant work Gena and Cheburashka manage to build the house and end up joining the pioneers; our heroes stop the pollution of the factory and thanks to them the school is constructed in time so children can be instructed. Even the main antagonist, the old malign lady Shapokliak, experiences a transformation turning into a good character, and despite starting as an anti-hero, she ends up helping out the heroes, and she redeems herself of her bad actions in the spectator's eyes.

In the movie *Stiliagi* (2008), Mels, a boy from the Communist Youth Section, starts identifying himself with the Stiliagi, a fifties group that worshipped jazz and rock and roll. Due to his taste and personal attire, Mels is expelled from the Konsomol (youth division of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). The resolution of the difficulties in this narration is indeed a hard critique to the cultural orthodoxy of the last stages of the Stalin regime. Mels starts off as a communist becoming an infected outcast from the point of view of the official ideology. By showing Mels as a victim of the regime's intransigence, the recent past

is criticised and the changes that took part in Russia in the nineties are indirectly legitimised[2].

The ideological principles discussed in this paper, that is, education, work, and integration in the political system, utilised as ideological socialisation in the Soviet period, share a common ground with capitalist societies. Doesn't Capitalism legitimise hard work, education and democratic participation? From a formal point of view, yes, it does. However, the perspective changes when one takes into account the material components of the principles: in abstract terms, children in the Soviet society and in a Capitalist country would learn that studying and working hard are positive values. However, children contextualise their learning experience in a predetermined institutional structure, which will set the boundaries between what is acceptable and can be legitimised and the contrary. For example, regarding socialisation in the sphere of labour, jobs such as street cleaner, taxi driver, teacher, or policeman appear in the four movies, but no private entrepreneurs appear. The reason being that the Soviet regime set clear-cut boundaries to what was considered work and what was not. A banker or any entrepreneur stood for speculation, exploitation and usury.

In the early nineties, Uspensky published another Cheburashka book (this one has not been taken to the big screen). In *Crocodile Gena's business* (1992)[3], Gena has managed to save some money and, thanks to the advice provided by Cheburashka and Shapokliak, decides to invest his money in different businesses: he buys in the property market and starts buying shares in the stock market. In this case, the destruction and reconstruction of the institutional framework in Russia, and by extension its legitimising aspects, also transforms the meaning of the value of labour. The socialising principles in the new book do not follow and orientate children towards the Konsomol, but are introducing children to the new behaviours, fostering the new structural changes towards a capitalist society.

A final remark regarding the discourse analysed in the four Cheburashka movies is that the socialisation process should not be understood as a recording and assimilation process by children that produces diligent and submissive individuals. The analysed movies did serve as an ideological socialising tool, however, that does not entail that all children assimilated those ideological principles with the same intensity or in the same manner. It could even have happened that those movies did not succeed in the socialisation process or that children could have made an instrumental use of the ideology, but deep inside did not agree with it. Enrique Martin Criado (2014) questions a much deep-rooted belief in functionalism. According to functionalist arguments, individuals act according to values deeply assimilated throughout childhood, acquired during the process of primary socialisation. Values and internalised beliefs during this period gear and explain the behaviour, but cannot be disconnected from the social situation in which they are taking place. Often the values of an individual contradict the social situations they have to face. For Martin Criado, the situation is not a consequence of the social values previously assimilated, but the situation instead regulates the application of principles in which individuals have been socialised.

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[2] From http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_nP15qaB-0 accessed 1/7/14

[3] From http://www.planetaskazok.ru/euspensky/bizneskrokodilagenyuspensky accessed 1/7/14 accessed 1/7/14

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