

LOVE AND EXPLOITATION: PERSONALITY CULTS, THEIR CHARACTERISTICS,
THEIR CREATION, AND MODERN EXAMPLES

By

SARAH GAIL HUNTER

(Under the direction of Sherry Lowrance)

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to uncover the mystery behind a commonly used term: personality cults. Made famous during the reign of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, personality cults are written about but not fully explained from a theoretical perspective. In this study, I detail a theory of personality cults by exploring the characteristics that make up personality cults, how they are created, and demonstrate this through three case studies. The cases used are Russian president Vladimir Putin, Cuba's former leader, Fidel Castro, and Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez.

INDEX WORDS: political culture, personality cults, Vladimir Putin, Hugo Chavez, Fidel Castro, political leadership

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SARAH GAIL HUNTER

B.S., Emory University, 2010

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GA

2012

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By

SARAH GAIL HUNTER

Major Professor: Sherry Lowrance

Committee: Howard J. Wiarda
Han Park

Electronic Version Approved

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2012

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

The Roman Emperors wore a gold laurel wreath on their heads to symbolize, not just their temporal power, but also their own divinity. The Emperors were raised to the status of gods. In today's world, the idea that a political leader is a god is absurd. We know, logically, that our political leaders are flesh and blood humans who are fallible. Yet, some leaders are idolized, and, for all intents and purposes, worshiped. What differentiates modern leader idolization from the worship of Roman Emperors? The difference lies mainly in the source of authority. The Roman Imperial throne was an established institution, and the position itself was more revered than the person holding it.

Other monarchical systems operate in much the same way: the Queen of England is revered because she is the Queen. Several leaders of the 20th and 21st Centuries have been revered in spite of their position. For example Chiang Kai-Shek of the Chinese Nationalist Party was revered in Taiwan despite being the leader who was defeated by the Chinese Communists in the civil war and had been exiled to Taiwan.

Such devotion and adoration falls under the idea of a personality cult. Jeremy Paltiel, writing against the backdrop of the Cold War, defined the personality cult of Communism as the “establishment of personal authority as against the institutionalized authority of the party” and happens when the leader becomes the “fountainhead of authority of an entire political system.” Paltiel uses the Soviet experience in his definition of a personality cult, but one could easily generalize his definition to create a definition that is relevant outside of the Communist Party.

Therefore, I will change Paltiel's words to define a cult of personality as *the acceptance of absolute personal authority regardless of the institutionally defined position, or lack thereof, that supercedes the established institutional state authority*. The idea behind a personality cult is that the person becomes a more legitimate source of authority than the actual government, so it is the person, not the position that inspires obedience.

Historically, the most famous personality cults studied have been Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union, Mao Zedong of Communist China, Chiang Kai-Shek of the Chinese Nationalist Party, and Kim Il Sung of North Korea. These studies have mostly been geared toward the case-study approach and are fairly light on theoretical descriptions of personality cults. This study will combine both approaches. Using the past case studies from other scholars, I intend to describe a personality cult in terms of what they are, why and how they form, what they look like after they have formed, and what purpose they serve. To explore the idea of a broader theory of personality cults, I will include three case studies from today's international political scene and evaluate the potential for a personality cult, or if a personality cult has indeed started to form. This study intends to describe why a personality cult forms and how it looks so that they may be identified. As they are identified, the politics of the states with personality cults may be better understood in light of the influence a personality cult has on the domestic and international politics of a state.

Personality Cults v. One-man Rule

A personality cult is more than one-man rule. It is not a dictator or a *caudillo*, and is much more than simple fame. Earlier, I took and adapted a previous definition of personality cult to read *the acceptance of absolute personal authority regardless of the institutionally defined position, or lack thereof, which supercedes the established institutional state authority*.

A personality cult exists when the person becomes more important than the formal position. A personality cult is not hero worship either. The personality is a national hero, yes, but is more than heroic. Heroes, though considered figures to imitate, do not have much political authority or power. Once a personality cult has been fully formed, he or she is revered as the only legitimate authority of the state. When the Soviet Union and North Korea were formed as states, it was under the leadership of personality cult leaders: Lenin of the Soviet Union and Kim Il Sung of North Korea. These two leaders carried so much authority that institutions were stunted and these two men were the authority, not the weak institutions. This allowed the successors, Stalin and Kim Jung Il absolute authority over their respective states.

A personality cult differs from a dictatorship and a monarchy because of the reverence for the person, rather than respect or fear of the position, which becomes irrelevant. Under the 1924 Soviet Constitution, the USSR was to be ruled by the Central Executive Committee comprised of the Federal Soviet and the Soviet of Nationalities. These were all elected positions. Yet, the recognized authority of the Soviet Union rested on Joseph Stalin, whose official title (1922-1952) was General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Stalin's legitimacy came from a combination of executions, popularity, and the creation of his own personality cult. Kings and dictators, for the most part, are respected for their position in the state's established authority (whether established by tradition, coup, or constitution). For example, when the Spanish Armada came toward England, people did not fight for Elizabeth I, they fought for the Queen of England. The national anthem of the United Kingdom is "God Save the Queen," not "God Save Elizabeth II." Monarchy is an institution with tradition and that tradition is the cause for reverence or respect, not the person who sits on the throne for a few years. The Glorious Revolution in England demonstrated this fact. An unpopular king did not

end the monarchy; rather, the monarchy was preserved with the forced abdication of the old king and a new one crowned.

Dictators, even under questionable legitimacy, also differ from a personality cult in terms for similar reasons as monarchies. Dictators still hold a position of power and that position commands respect even if the person in it does not. He or she has no need to play nice or endear themselves to the population, his or her authority has been established the moment he or she took office. Usually, there is an institutionally defined position, sometimes created by the dictator himself, and rules by terror or popularity under the authority of an institution, usually the military. An example of this would be Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan. He seized power in a coup, but before that he was a leader in the army. He only derived his authority from his position in the military and from the coup that used said military power. A personality cult, however, is based partially on the support of the masses for the person rather than the position he or she maintains. The lack of need for institutional authority is what sets personality cults apart. They form only when the people believe more in the person rather than the institution.

Why do personality cults form?

Now that the precise definition of personality cult has been established, the new question that needs to be answered is: under what circumstances do personality cults form and what purpose do they serve? Paltiel argues that personality cults are an “element of traditional culture.” (Paltiel 1983) Another scholar suggests the personality cults form in response to weak institutions, structural factors within the Communist party and social problems within the state itself (Gill, 1984). Glyptis (2008) argued that the personality cult formed around Ataturk was an “embodiment of Revolutionary ideas and national unity.” Turkish people of all classes, religions, and races were unified by the memory of Ataturk, bringing the country together, rather

than allowing tensions to divide it. Robert Tucker (1979) claims that Stalin created his personality cult to solidify his own political power. Similarly, Taylor (2006) argues that Chaing Kai-Shek's personality cult was a deliberate production put on by the Chinese Nationalist government and Chaing himself.

All of these scholars have done great work on their respective subjects, yet they are mostly atheoretical case studies, which limit the theoretical scope and application of their findings on personality cults. Paltiel and Gill both studied personality cults in the context of the Communist Party. Their theoretical work on personality cults are only expanded enough to generalize to the states under the Soviet Union, which is nonexistent today, therefore cannot be applied to other cases without updates. Glyptis, Tucker, and Taylor all studied one single personality cult and the context that went with that one case. There are similarities across cultures and cases that these authors did not address. Personality cults are not exclusive to Communist regimes, nor did they disappear with the Soviet Union. Personality cults are capable of forming under non-Communist regimes in the past and in the present. As Gill and Paltiel have claimed, the weak institutional structure of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the authoritarian culture surrounding it was susceptible to the formation of a cult of personality, but neither Ataturk nor Chaing Kai-Shek had the excuse of the structure of the Communist Party.

By analyzing the context of our known cases of personality cults, themes emerge that could point to the answer to why personality cults form. All six cases emerged in a time of chaos for the states. Lenin emerged out of the Russian Revolution, Stalin the turmoil of post-Lenin years, Kim Il Sung emerged out of the liberation of Korea, the Korean War, and the establishment of North Korea as an independent State. Mao and Chaing came out of the long and bloody Chinese Civil War and the Japanese Invasions prior to and during World War II.

Ataturk emerged out of the Ottoman defeat in World War I, the Turkish War of Independence, and the creation of the westernized, secular Turkish Republic. In all of these cases of personality cults, the state's institutions had failed the people in some way. For example, the Chinese government under the Chinese Nationalist Party failed to effectively fight off the invading Japanese. Also, North Korea had just emerged from Japanese subjugation. The established institutions of the state, such as the military and the government, failed to provide the basic needs of the population (i.e. security), therefore were vulnerable and open to radical change.

The formation of a personality cult is not the only result that can come from such conditions, but such failure of institutions is a necessary precondition for personality cult formation. If institutions were functioning perfectly well, then the people would not have to find an alternative source of authority. However, dysfunctional institutions do bring about mass resentment and become unpopular with the people. Existing institutions can fail the people by not delivering on promises. That means that institutions can fail the people by bad policies that lead to: bankruptcy (Greece today), inflation (Weimar Germany), unemployment (last year's riots in UK), corruption, not delivering on welfare or pension promises (again, Greece), as well as lack of physical security (as discussed earlier with North Korea). No matter the cause of turmoil, once the faith in institutions is lost, a void is created and a personality can easily step up to fill said void. From here, a personality cult is not eminent, but the opportunity has been created. As a result, a figure can emerge as the hero, the victor. This figure could be the liberator from foreign imperial rule (such as Kim Il Sung) or the one who overthrew domestic tyrants (Lenin, for example). Mao, Chiang, Lenin, Stalin, Ataturk, and Kim all lived in chaotic times in their respective states, and were highly active in attempting to end the upheaval. These activities allowed them to step onto the national or international stage.

How to Recognize Personality Cult Formation

Personality cults take on a certain shape and share certain characteristics while forming. Although each cult has a different historical and cultural context behind it, there are several characteristics that each have in common. Patterns emerge out of the cases studied previously that can be linked into a guideline for recognizing personality cults in today's world. Each separate cult does have its own style, but they all seem to behave in similar ways across cultures. The following section will discuss the different traits of personality cults.

IDEOLOGY

Many personality cults emerge from a nationalist surge, or another ideology with a unifying element. Such ideologies are more aggressive in how they spread or manifest. Nationalism, a common culprit, is defined by Druckman (1994) as a feeling that “involved feelings of national superiority and a need for national power and dominance” (47). Nationalism is more about the exclusion of others and is associated with more war-like tendencies (Druckman 1994). Nationalism was the inspiration behind both World Wars. A member of a Serbian nationalist group assassinated the Austrian archduke to protest the empire. Hitler's entire rhetoric was based on German nationalism and the superiority of the Germans over all other peoples. Nationalism is a powerful force in both domestic and international politics. As with the Hitler example, nationalism can also be a tool for domestic politicians. This is especially true in states where a cult of personality forms. Historically, these personalities around which cults formed were quick to identify with an ideology driven cause. Both Lenin and Stalin played a part in the Russian Revolution and the later Bolshevik Revolution. Stalin, especially, emphasized his part in liberating Russia from the Czars and claimed the victory in the Great Patriotic War (a.k.a. World War II). Stalin and Lenin both also pushed the Communist ideology

to build support. Kim Il Sung became known as the great national hero because he fought against the Japanese invasion of Korea and later helped the Russians to liberate it. These leaders understood the value of identifying with the people and a popular ideology cause was just the way to do it.

THE IDEAL LEADER

Personality cults often form around people who are seen as the national ideal. This ideal can be anything from the ideal Communist (as Stalin tried to be) to the ideal nationalist (as Chiang Kai-Shek claimed to be). This relied on a careful presentation of the leader to the public. The public could only see the side of the leader that the leader (or his party) wanted them to see. Stalin was the master at building his public persona. In the aftermath of Lenin's death, Stalin's position was nowhere near solid. Over time, Stalin created a public persona to gain favor with the masses and Communist Party elites alike. Stalin became a humble man with leadership thrust upon him. He became a master of Marxist philosophy and a contributor to the same field. Stalin then moved against leading Soviet Communist philosophers such as Deborin and Plekhanov, declaring them to be equal to "Menshevism idealism." From there, Stalin took the public role as a "real Bolshevik" and therefore, more worthy of praise from the masses (Tucker 1979). The concept behind the ideal is that the masses need to connect to some aspect of the leader's personality. The leader had to have a public persona that has appeal to the masses. Garzia (2011) argued that politics has become very personal and that political success requires a symbolic closeness and identifying with the masses. Chiang and Stalin both had appeal to the broader population.

One can argue that the reverence for Mustafa Kemal Ataturk goes beyond a cult of personality. Even the name "Ataturk," meaning Sire of the Turks, gives a clue on how important

he was and is. Ataturk almost single-handedly overthrew the Ottoman Imperial government and established the Turkish Republic, where his own party, the Republican People's Party was the sole party in power for three decades. Like Lenin, Ataturk did not need to build a public persona: it was done for him. His position as father of the Turks and a symbol of Turkish nationalism has been pushed by the state into a symbol of national identity as well. Glyptis (2008) demonstrates the institutionalization of the Ataturk cult by using this example: "every Turkish schoolchild files past the mandatory bust of Ataturk adorning every schoolyard, every morning, chanting 'ne mutlu "Tu"rku"m" diyene' ('how happy he who says "I am a Turk"')." Even those who do not intentionally build a public persona for the purpose of inspiring their own personality cult or simply expanding their own power, can have such a thing happen on its own. Public figures, especially of the magnitude of Ataturk and Lenin, are personalities that are easily used as symbols, which is what was done in both cases.

STATE-CONTROLLED MEDIA

Stalin worked very hard to create his public persona and others such as Chaing Kai-Shek and Kim Il Sung also did this work. Yet, they did have the help of a state controlled media. The press did not have the freedom to refute or even show a different side of the leader. (Really, who would want to expose Stalin as a fraud?) They used the media as a tool to expose the masses to only the public persona, and not the real person. Therefore, media control is an important part of building a cult of personality, especially if the one building is the person around which the cult is formed. The media and leadership do have an important relationship: Schertz (1986) argued that Presidents do not have privacy because everything is done under the scrutiny of the media. Those who wished to build a personality cult used this lack of privacy to their advantage. The

media follows them around and does not have the freedom to report anything but what the leader wants. Stalin, both in public and in private, frequently attempted to deny the adulation of the masses and those high in the Communist Party. Though, as Tucker (1979) argued, he was the one trying to build his own personality cult.

GREAT MEN IN HISTORY

As the leader builds his or her public persona, he or she often has a guild in the form of a historical figure of immense popularity. This tool often associates the personality not only with a nationalist cause, but also with someone who had great success with said national cause. In the minds of the people, the personality becomes linked with their successful predecessor, making the personality himself (or herself) linked to success. Many times, the figure that a leader chooses to emulate either has a large following or a cult of personality of his or her own. When the new leader takes on the role of the old leader's chosen successor, the group that supported the old leader leans more toward the new personality. This theme continuously appears in the formation of personality cults. Stalin styled himself after Lenin, who was often hailed as the successor of Marx and Engels in Communist philosophy. Chiang Kai-shek associated himself with the Chinese Republican founder and co-founder of the Chinese Nationalist party, Sun Yat-sen.

WHAT IS IN A NAME?

Naming places, days, streets, etc. after a leader is another sign of personality cult formation. This process puts the name of the personality forever in the thoughts of the masses and providing a constant public presence for the leader. When the personality has cities, squares, universities, public buildings, etc. named after him or her, it will most likely not be out of sight, out of mind. How could a Soviet forget about Stalin or Lenin with the presence of Stalingrad

and Leningrad while under Communist rule? In Taipei, there is a hall whose name translates literally to “The Hall of Chiang Kai-shek’s Longevity” (Taylor, 2006). History is often forgotten during hard times, and these men were leaders in hard times, but they were able to unite their people behind them. This authority even survived after their deaths because the public was not allowed to forget them. Through state-sponsored worship, state-controlled history curricula, or simply names of places, the cult of personality stays alive in some ways. In the case of Mao’s China, his picture hung on nearly every wall. There were statues of Lenin and Stalin in many towns and cities in Russia. Names of places or objects are not necessarily the only way for the leader to be a constant presence in the people’s lives. While the personality is alive and things are beginning to be named after him or her, the personality cult truly solidifies and starts to spread. Once the cult is spread wide enough and is given the constant reminder of the power of the individual in power, survival of the cult can last a long time, even after the leader himself or herself had died.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Some cults survive well after the death of its personality. The cults of Lenin and Ataturk are different from the others in this way. While the others were carefully crafted and implemented by the personalities themselves to gain or secure power, the cults of Lenin and Ataturk were rather spontaneous and kept alive through the people rather than state implementation. Stalin, in many ways, helped to advance Lenin’s personality cult after his death, but the foundation had been built during Lenin’s lifetime. Tucker (1979) wrote about the genuine reverence for Lenin, despite protests from Lenin himself. His fiftieth birthday celebration, where various Soviet elites offered Lenin a great amount of praise, showed both Lenin’s disapproval of the adoration and the lengths that the people would go to show him their

respect. After Lenin's death in 1924, Stalin advanced Lenin's stature in the hearts of the people by giving Lenin the attribute of infallibility. Even after his death, the cult of Lenin grew and was maintained by a constructed public persona advanced through a state-controlled media. As discussed earlier, Ataturk is still very much revered in Turkey, decades after his death.

EROSION OF INSTITUTIONS IN FAVOR OF PERSONALITY

The last sign of personality cult formation also happens to be the consequence of a powerful personality cult. When the masses have more faith in an individual rather than the governmental institutions, the personality cult has solidified and the institutional weakness has become more apparent. The institutions have failed to provide basic needs for the citizens, as evidenced by our cases. The personality offers hope and a solution to the problems that the institutions fail to respond to. Stalin offered a New Economic Policy to protect the proletariat and Mao instated the Cultural Revolution. These acts overthrew the established institutions and gave the leaders (Stalin and Mao) more power. This is why personality cults are so important to politics. In this stage of personality cult formation, the personal authority of the individual exceeds the authority of the state or the government. The Soviet Union never fully formed institutions other than the Communist Party or succession policy because the personal authority of its first two leaders was unquestionable. The same thing happened in North Korea with Kim Il Sung. Leadership was passed down to a chosen successor within the Communist Party (or, in North Korea's case, hereditary lines) and the only truly formed political institution was the Communist Party itself. The provisional government established in China under Sun Yat- Sen soon gave way to the civil war between the Communists and the Nationalists. Official party authority soon did not matter; only the personal authority of Mao and Chaing Kai-Shek mattered.

If the personality is in power long enough, the formal institutions become obsolete and could disappear entirely.

These are six components of a personality cult. One does not need to see all six in order to establish the presence of a personality cult. In fact, the only truly necessary components needed to identify a personality cult are an unifying ideology, the image of the leader as an ideal type, media control, and the constant reminder of a leader in the lives of the people. Emulating a past heroic figure is also highly recommended but not strictly necessary. The cult's life after the death of its personality is also an indication of a particularly strong personality cult. The erosion of institutions is a consequence of a personality cult as well as a sign of its formation. This erosion occurs only when the personality cult has truly taken hold, and therefore is an indication of a fully formed and powerful personality cult.

What purpose does it serve?

As our examples have indicated, personality cults may be formed in a time of great upheaval for a state. A personality cult forms to counteract that chaos and to unite the people behind a cause. The cult of Chiang Kai-shek is a great example of this. His Chinese Nationalist Party was exiled to Taiwan after losing the Chinese Civil War to the Communists. These people were beaten and had no country and no government. But they were brought together by adoration and veneration for one man: Chiang Kai-shek. The cult of Ataturk provides the same national unity. The cults of Stalin and Lenin helped end the chaos that followed the Russian Revolution and brought the Soviet Union under firm control. Of these examples, Taiwan is now a functioning democracy and Turkey is a stable, secular republic. Personality cults could serve a real purpose in the political world.

Chapter 2:

Russia's Vladimir Putin

Russia has had a long history of authoritarian rule. They transitioned almost immediately from the oppressive reign of the czars to the totalitarian rule of the Soviet Union. Russian history also provides some of the best examples of personality cults. Much of personality cult research focuses on the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the formation of the Lenin and Stalin personality cults. Therefore, it would not be surprising to see the rise of another personality cult in Russia. The personality cult forming now centers around former President, current Prime Minister and Presidential elect Vladimir Putin. The former KGB officer was the hand-chosen successor of the first president of the Russian Federation, Boris Yeltsin. Putin's party, United Russia, has held a majority of the seats in the Russian Duma for the past decade

Challenges facing post-soviet Russia:

Boris Yeltsin's second term as President of the Russian Federation saw some of the toughest economic times in Russian history. Russia never truly recovered from the economic depression following the collapse of the Soviet Union. By 1995, the Russian GDP had decreased to 58 percent of its level in 1989 (Lane 2004). From there, the economic situation only worsened. By 1998, the Russian government owed 113 billion rubles in interest for state loan bonds as well as salary to all of the workers. The maximum amount of taxes that could be raised was 164.6 billion rubles. Also at this time, \$22 billion from the IMF had gone missing. There was no hope for the Russian economy if things did not improve rapidly. The United Nations could not help any more while Russia hastened toward economic ruin (Shevtsova 2003).

The growth rate of the Russian GDP in 1998 was -4.9 percent and inflation reached its peak in 1999 at 85.8 (Tompson 2004). Also on August 17 of 1998, Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko declared Russia to be bankrupt. Some people lost their entire savings in that financial collapse (Shevtsova 2003). This was the economic legacy left behind by President Boris Yeltsin for President Putin to clean.

In wake of the financial crisis, social unrest was a big issue facing the Russian people. Miners who had not been paid blocked the railroad tracks and gathered in front of the home of the Russian cabinet. Other social problems included rampant disease, a failing education system, millions of homeless children, and widespread and thorough corruption. Even life expectancy for men decreased from 64.2 years in 1989 to 57.6 in 1994. Crime and corruption were very common as well in this time period (Shevtsova 2003). The social condition of Russia in the 90s decade was quite bleak and several separatist movements in regions that were not ethnically Russian, such as Chechnya, began to move forward. All of these social issues only weakened the Russian state further and started to unravel any unity present in the state.

While many of Russia's social problems of the 1990s stemmed from the shrinking economy, the largest culprit of both was the lack of leadership from the top, especially from President Boris Yeltsin himself. This lack of leadership and Yeltsin's attachment to power led to much political instability in Russia. The oligarchs of Russia pretty much ran amok doing whatever they wanted and the regional leaders (such as governors) ignored directions from Moscow. The system, mostly created by Yeltsin quickly spiraled out of his control. But Yeltsin was not ready to give up what power he already had. During his two terms as President of the Russian Federation, he went through seven prime ministers. Yeltsin's biggest fear was that the prime minister would oust him the way Yeltsin himself had overthrown Gorbachev. Each time a

prime minister got too powerful or admired, Yeltsin would fire him. The political scene in the Kremlin was one of constant personnel shifts. By the time Putin was appointed Prime Minister, he was just another in a long line of Yeltsin minions. Yeltsin was so concerned with his own power that his internal policies had suffered greatly (Shevtsova 2003).

If the social, economic, and political problems that faced Russia were not enough, the physical security of the state was also in peril. Chechnya best demonstrated the problems Russian Federation was having with some separatist groups. The First Chechen War took place from 1994 to 1996 and was a bid to prevent Chechnya from separating from the Russian Federation. The threat was not an army sitting at Russia's borders, instead it was losing territory. Putin said it best when he stated in a speech, "During all of its times of weakness ... Russia was invariably confronted with the threat of disintegration" (in Tsygankov 2005). Such was the threat in 1994 during the First Chechen War (which was not truly considered a war by the Russian government, but more of an armed intervention). The danger that prompted the second Chechen War was more of an actual military threat than a threat of disintegration. On August 2, 1999, Chechen separatist attacked and invaded the neighboring region of Dagestan. Later in that month, some of Moscow's and other cities' residential buildings were bombed, taking the lives of over 300 civilians. From there, the then Prime Minister Putin ordered "anti-terrorist operations," which are commonly referred to as the Second Chechen War.

The eve of Putin's ascendancy to power had all of the markers of instability: economic collapse, out of control corruption, the threat of disintegration, terrorism, social problems not seen since the early days of the Soviet Union, etc. This instability had a marked effect on Russian politics. To be frank, the state was falling apart. President Yeltsin was losing control of not only regions inclined toward separatism, but also the regional governors and the oligarchs he

helped into power. The Russian people needed a leader to take on these problems with much more success. Who could fulfill their needs and wants?

The Putin Difference

Putin offered many contrasts with his predecessors both as a Prime Minister and later as President. First of all, he was young by comparison. He was only 48 when first elected at a time when most Russian leaders were elderly. Putin was middle-aged and athletic while the aging President Yeltsin could barely speak and suffered from a heart condition. As Yeltsin's hand-chosen successor, Putin and Yeltsin also have many similarities. Both took office at tumultuous times in Russian history. Both Yeltsin and Putin were elected for second terms and let Russia through a war in Chechnya. Yet, it is Putin around whom we see a personality cult forming, not Yeltsin. What difference did the leadership of Putin make?

When Putin took office as President of Russia, he took on a huge amount of problems. Russia was having trouble on all fronts: economically, socially, and security. Over the course of his two terms in office as president, Putin was able to win the war in Chechnya, the economy improved drastically, and his approval rates remained high. Under Putin, the GDP growth rate went from -4.9 percent in 1998 to 9 percent in 2000 and remained positive for the next few years. Also, life expectancy, lowered to 58.83 for men in 1999, climbed to 62.29 by 2002 (Thompson 2004). The "anti-terrorism operations" in Chechnya while Putin was Prime Minister were wildly popular (over 60 percent approval rate) compared to the first war in Chechnya during Yeltsin's first term in office (54 percent disapproved) (Shevtsova 2003). The results of the second election also show the difference in the two leaders. In his second run for the Russian presidency, Yeltsin only won about 53 percent of the vote, while Putin won over 70 percent of the vote for his second term. So, was the difference between Putin and his predecessor simply success, or was it

more? The answer is both, because many of the same differences in Putin that promoted success are also the same attributes that spawned his personality cult.

The Cult of Vladimir Putin

Putin's -ism: Bringing a country together

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the damage was not limited to economics and politics, but it was also took away something much more important: Russia's super power status. Even though the last days of the Soviet Union were marked with rapid decline, it was still feared as a nuclear-wielding super power. Arguably, the loss of prestige was much more devastating than the economic depression and political chaos in the immediate post-Soviet period. How could one be proud to be Russian if Russia was a failure? When Russia was weak? Combined with this were the nationalist movements at a sub-national level. Regions such as Chechnya tried to assert their independence from the Russian Federation like the Soviet Republics had established their own sovereignty (Kuznetsov 2010). Nationalism in Russia in the early 1990s was defined along ethnic, regional, or religious lines, and therefore did not provide a unifying ideology.

Under President Boris Yeltsin, the Kremlin attempted to produce a new kind of nationalism in an attempt to unite all the Russian regions, not just the ethnically Russian regions. The new definition of "Russian" would include anyone who accepted Russian culture and values. Later, President Putin expanded the concept to include the Russian speaking population abroad, left over from the Soviet Union (Panov 2010). In opening up the concept of "Russianness," Yeltsin and Putin gave all of the people living in Russia a reason to unite behind one ideology, much like Communism had in the days of the Soviet Union. This was especially important in the regions prone to independence.

Putin's conception of "Russianness" also had the side effect of encouraging patriotism, as he often spoke about in his speeches. Putin defined patriotism as "a feeling of pride in one's country, its history and accomplishments [and] the striving to make one's country better, richer, stronger, and happier" (in Sakwa 2004, p. 163). Putin demonstrated a desire to return Russia to great power status (Tsygankov 2005). He claimed that this could be done without imperialism or nationalism (Sakwa 2004). Yet, can one work toward the rather ambitious goal of great power status without nationalism? Drukman defined nationalism as simply the feeling of the superiority of one's own nation. Putin claimed that Russia deserved to be a great power and to be richer, etc. What about Russia made it deserve to be a great power over, for example, Georgia or Ukraine? Therefore, we can label what Putin called "patriotism" in an effort to include all ethnicities in Russia as nationalism à la Drukman.

Within a short period of coming to power, Putin had purposed an ideology and a goal that could unite Russia at a time when it seemed to be falling apart. Although Putin expressed an interest in distancing his idea of patriotism as far as possible from the concept of nationalism, one cannot completely separate Putin's conceptualization of Russian patriotism from the concept of nationalism. Nationalism itself has a bad reputation, especially in Europe. When defined along ethnic or racial lines, nationalism can cause immense destruction and has already done so in Europe. Putin's idea of Russian nationalism was to give a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, incredibly diverse country a common identity and a common goal: the return of Russia to its former glory. Like Stalin and Lenin, Putin found a popular cause, the restoration of Russian glory, and an ideology, Russian nationalism, and used it to its full extent his election campaign and his terms in office. Putin's personal association with nationalism also contributed to his personality cult. He himself was nationalist more so than the corrupt government of the time.

The “Dutiful son of Leningrad”: Putin as the Ideal Russian Man

When Vladimir Putin entered the national stage in Russian politics as the appointed Prime Minister in 1998 under President Boris Yeltsin, he was largely an unknown entity. His previous political experience consisted of being an aide to the St. Petersburg mayor and head of the post-Soviet incarnation of the KGB, the FSB (Foreign Security Services). Before his career in politics, Putin worked for the KGB first in St. Petersburg then in East Germany. This was not the person anyone saw as the future president of Russia. Yet, somehow it worked and he did become one of the most important politicians in the world. He also enjoyed a ridiculously high approval rate for most of his terms in office. How did this happen? Earlier, I wrote that politics have become increasingly personal, and that explains much of Putin’s success. His ability to relate to the people of Russia was a great asset to him during his terms in office (both as President and Prime Minister).

The team behind Putin has gone to many lengths to show Putin as a shining example of Russian masculinity. He is athletic, strong, stoic and emotional at the appropriate times, he supports the military and espouses patriotism. But more importantly, he is one of them, a Russian. One example of his connection to the people on a more personal level was his family history. His parents were factory workers in Leningrad (now, St. Petersburg) where they survived the siege in World War II. The story goes that Vladimir Putin the elder was wounded in the siege and donated his rations to the hospital despite his own starving and that of his wife and their eldest son (who died during the blockade). The emotional tale was a way of connecting Putin to the Russian people. He commented once that every Russian lost family in World War II and “any falsification or distortion in the portrayal of the war was therefore looked on as ‘a personal insult, a sacrilege’” (Wood 2011). When Putin tells the story of his own family’s

suffering in the war, he is also telling the story of so many other Russian people. This connection allowed many Russian people to identify with Putin and therefore be more apt to support him.

Along with his association with World War II, Putin also related to the Russian public with his words. In several of his speeches, he uses the phrase “my friends” or “my fellow Russians” to level the playing field (see President Putin’s New Year’s address to the Russian people Dec. 31, 2007) . The administrations before Putin were mostly led by elites and the so-called oligarchs. Putin was different. He is a man’s man, for lack of a better term. Putin used slang in his speeches, such as his statement that he would “‘wipe out’ the Chechen terrorist ‘in the john’” (Shevtsova 2003, 72). Not only did Putin impress the Russian masses with his normality, he also showed off his masculinity in spectacularly public ways. There are many photos of Putin shirtless or enjoying some dangerous physical activity. One photo shows him fishing in Siberia shirtless. This photo made its way to a tabloid front page with a headline that said “Be Like Putin” (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2007/08/22/putin-shirtless.html>). Putin has also been known to shoot Siberian tigers with a tranquilizer gun and co-pilot fighter jets over Chechnya. One writer for BBC suggested that these stunts by Putin are to show a man that Russian men should aspire to be (Rodgers, 2009).

Putin has made himself into the ideal Russian man. He is patriotic, masculine, active, athletic, strong, etc. He also emphasizes a duty to Russia and its people. From his first inaugural address, Putin promised to take care of Russia, just as his predecessor is said to have instructed. To commemorate World War II, he visited veterans, schools, and churches. One scholar notes that each setting gave him another role: “The forms of the masculinity vary, including different presentations as dutiful son, solicitous father, and leader of men” (Wood 2011, p. 175). He is a

role model of a Russian man because he can be all of these things. He portrays himself as the “defender, even the savior of the Motherland”(Wood 2011, p. 172). This portrayal of the leader as an ideal is an essential part of forming a cult of personality. Such actions show that the leader is worthy of admiration and should be followed; just others should try to “be like him.”

The Reversal of Glasnost?: Putin and the Media

Putin’s public image was helped along greatly by the media. The media portrayed the Vladimir Putin that Putin and his advisors wanted the public to see. The public saw Putin as that patriotic, masculine ideal that saw every Russian as his friend. There were not whispers of past indiscretions or any skeletons in the closet. Putin’s domestic media coverage is usually flattering and the reason is not that Putin is perfect, or that the media just loves him that much. Fear of persecution is nothing new in Russian history. Under the Soviet Union, the press was rigidly controlled, until the program of *glasnost*, which allowed for more media freedom, was initiated by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The media retained a large amount of freedom even though the presidency of Boris Yeltsin. Today’s Russian media has a Freedom House rating of “not free” (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/country/russia>). This lack of media freedom has allowed Putin’s image to remain largely untarnished.

Putin’s path to restricting media freedom started with simply buying companies. The Russian government, or the state-owned company Gazprom, bought out the three national television networks by 2001, and today owns many smaller media outlets. Yet, the Russian government does not own all of Russian media. To keep control over the media that the government does not own, government-friendly businessmen persuaded to buy into the media market and get control over their investments. Media control has been an invaluable tool for those developing personality cults. Stalin controlled the Soviet media with an iron fist, as did

Chaing and Mao. Putin's actions concerning the media have fallen directly in line with the other leaders with personality cults, especially with those who actively pursued personality cults.

Redeeming a dictator: Putin and Stalin

Like Stalin emulating Lenin and Chaing Kai-Shek emulating Sun Yat Sen, so Putin, too, emulated Joseph Stalin. Joseph Stalin will always hold an odd position in Russian history. He was a cruel dictator who routinely killed many of his own political supporters and was responsible for the death and imprisonment of more people than Hitler. Yet, he also led the Soviet Union into its height of power and was the hero of the Great Patriotic War (World War II). One historian who was not a fan of Stalin by any means expressed his grudging admiration, writing that, in "his crude and bloody way...his [Stalin's] policies turned the country into a superpower" (Zubok 2005). Stalin had his own personality cult, partially made from emulating Vladimir Lenin. Putin, associating himself with the memory of World War II, also linked himself to Stalin himself.

No matter what opinion of Stalin one holds, it is indisputable that he was striking historical figure. Putin, in many ways, does have a few characteristics in common with the old dictator. First, Putin openly praises Stalin in a domestic context and has, like Stalin, taken on a sort of paternal role over all Russia (Wood 2011). Putin's words also showed his emulation of Stalin: in 2000, Putin began his speech with the same address used by Stalin to begin his speeches. Putin also had Stalin honored in other ways including a plaque made to honor Stalin for his leadership during World War II (Wood, 2011). This also gave the appearance of a connection between the two leaders as wartime Russian leaders. Stalin, of course, led the Soviet Union through World War II and Putin through the second Chechen War. When Putin honored Stalin's actions as a leader during war, he also brought attention to his own wartime leadership.

Stalin and Chaing both wanted the support of their predecessor's supporters, so they allowed themselves to be the successor, the one to uphold their mentor's ideals, etc. Yet Putin chose to emulate a rather controversial figure in using Stalin as an example. What did Putin hope to gain from this? The answer is simple: Stalin's accomplishments. As earlier stated, Stalin made Russia strong. Stalin made Russia into a nuclear wielding superpower that put people into outer space. Upon taking his position as President, Putin had a goal in mind: Russia's return to great power status (Tsygankov 2005). It is, therefore, only logical that Putin use Stalin as a model. When Putin associates himself with Stalin, he is saying that his goal is possible and he would be the one to achieve it.

In the Name of Putin

When a personality cult has taken shape, the leader often gets many things named after him. From buildings to cities, the leader's name appears all around the public. Surprisingly, several things have been named after Putin already. Many of these things are in Russian popular culture and everyday life. From the early days of his presidency, Putin found himself the namesake of candy bars, meat dumplings, canned foods, and even a hit song ("Someone Like Putin) (White and Mcallister 2008). Putin's name became part of the everyday vocabulary for the Russian people. Everywhere they were reminded that Putin was their leader, and, as the song implies, someone to admire and respect. Using Putin's name in brands and other popular culture phenomena started the solidification of Putin's personality cult. At first, the public was taken by Putin's strength and apparent success, but increasingly, his name appeared in their everyday lives, keeping Putin himself in their everyday lives.

Yet, Putin's name was not always used with his consent. With apparent humility, Putin has tried to avoid having his name used on certain brand names. The first example is Putinka

vodka released in 2003 and made by a Moscow distillery. All parties deny any affiliation with Putin, but the name is suspiciously similar. Those marketing the product were aware of the association and hoped the popularity of Putin himself would drive sales of the vodka brand. It was a success: in 2006, Putinka was Russia's number two selling vodka (Osborne, 2007). In 2011, another vodka brand attempted to capitalize on Putin's name. The attempted name was "Volodya and Medvedi," oddly similar to Vladimir and Medvedev, and the suggested symbol was a bear, the symbol of United Russia, the party to which Putin belongs. The government of Russia did not allow the patent to go through and banned the name, although it was able to get through in Ukraine (<http://www.abs-cbnnews.com/lifestyle/classified-odd/03/16/11/russia-bans-putin-medvedev-vodka-brand-report>).

Along with songs, food, and vodka, Putin has also had something much larger named after him: a mountain. Late in 2010, the president of the former Soviet republic of Kyrgyzstan drafted a law to name a mountain after Putin, then Prime Minister of Russia. The former president Yeltsin also has a peak named for him in the same mountain range. Putin's mountain is 4,446 meters high, while Yeltsin's is only 3,500 meters tall. This matters because Vladimir Lenin's name is on the highest peak (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-12113463>). Giving Putin a higher peak than that of the first president of the Russian Federation shows his position in history. It shows that Putin's place in history will be a little higher than that of Yeltsin. That is like saying that one of the contemporary American presidents has a place above George Washington. The naming of things show that Putin is not only on the mind of the collective Russian public, but it also shows how other think of him and his place in the world.

The March Election and the Future of Russian Institutions

On March 4, 2012, Putin was once again voted into the office of President of the Russian Federation after serving two terms in that office and one term as Prime Minister under President Dimitri Medvedev. Since becoming Prime Minister under President Yeltsin in 1999, Putin has been in the political spotlight and played a central role in Russian politics. It has been suggested that his role remained unchanged from his terms as president and the one as Prime Minister, with a news article calling Putin Medvedev's "boss" (Kendall, 2012). Despite the change in his institutionally defined position, Putin's appearance of being in charge has remained unchanged. The perception of Putin as the authority figure has been hinted at and speculated yet there is no hard evidence to support this hypothesis. His new presidential term lasts until 2018 and he will have the option to run for re-election for another term. All of this adds up to a man with a constant presence at the top of Russian politics for nearly 20 years, or more if he decides to seek re-election. To put this in perspective, Leonid Brezhnev ruled the Soviet Union for 18 years, the longest of the Soviet rulers after Stalin. Yet, this past election was quite different from the others in which Putin has participated. As an incumbent in 2004, Putin received over 70 percent of the vote as did his sponsored candidate, Medvedev in 2008. This passed election saw Putin gaining approximately 64 percent of the vote, accusations of election fraud, and protests in Moscow. Yet, an article from BBC states, "no one doubts that Putin won more than 50 percent of the vote" (Kendall, 2010).

Conclusion

Excluding recent protests over the election, Putin has enjoying a fairly high approval rate in Russia (sometimes over 70 percent). In the course of his career, Putin has an inclusive form of Russian nationalism, become the model Russian man, brought the media to its knees, redeemed

Joseph Stalin and reconciled the Soviet past, and been the namesake of vodka, mountains, and rock songs. His tenure in office has seen a transformation of Russian from impoverished, bankrupt and disintegrating to a thriving economy and united people. Although the first part of Putin's new term in office has been marked by objection from the people, Putin's legacy of a stronger Russia might prevail and restore his popularity. The protestors, estimated in the tens of thousands represent less than one percent of Russia's total population of over 138 million people. Do these protests truly pose a threat to the Putin's new presidential term? Only time can tell if the Putin personality cult can stand under the pressure of opposition.

Chapter 3:

Cuba's Fidel Castro

Communism has long been a backdrop of studies into personality cults. Many famous personality cults did come out of Communist regimes: Lenin, Stalin, Mao Zedong, and Kim Il Sung to name a few. Another Communist personality cult is the case of Fidel Castro, who has managed to hold on to power in Cuba for over fifty years. Castro has out-lived the other Communist leaders, even one of the most famous personalities that spawned a cult: Joseph Stalin. Like Stalin, Castro had many different positions in the Cuban government. First he held the post of Prime Minister (1959-1976), President of the Council of Ministers of Cuba (1976-2008), President of the Council of State of Cuba (1976-2008), and First Secretary of the Communist Party of Cuba (1965-2011). No matter which position he held, Castro was the unquestioned leader of Cuba. As Castro gets older and more ill, the speculation about Cuba's future has been on the minds of many scholars. How much of the government's authority come from Castro's personality cult than from the support for the current government?

Cuba before Castro

Since independence from Spain in 1901, political development in Cuba has been an odd mix of attempts at liberal democracy and the lasting effects of colonialism. Caudillos have come and gone as well as elected democratic officials. At the time of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, the country was under the rule of dictator, Fulgencio Batista, whose reign began in 1952. The Batista government collapsed when Batista himself fled in January of 1959 after a poor showing of the Cuban army against rebel guerrilla fighters. The Batista government was a close ally to

the United States but, to the Cuban people, his was an illegitimate, repressive authoritarian regime. His refusal to hold elections eventually led to an uprising against his regime.

Cuba in the 1950s was a surprisingly developed Latin American country. The literacy rate was at 75 percent and there was a sizable middle class. One author wrote that “Cuba’s level of development was comparable to that of other, more advanced Latin American nations” (del Aguila, 2011 p. 438). The social and economic problems in Cuba were not the lack of resources, but from the large gap between urban and rural life. Rural life offered little to Cuban citizens. However, in urban areas, education, healthcare, and job opportunities were much better, especially in larger cities such as Havana. Rural areas, which mostly depended on sugar farming, had much higher unemployment rates after the crop was harvested. Opponents of the Batista regime were able to capitalize on this divide and manipulate the issues to make the regime look incompetent.

Until Castro’s consolidation of power, Cuba’s political climate one of frequent change. The Batista regime came into power in a bloodless coup against the constitutional democracy that had been in place since 1933. The *Authéntico* party held free and fair elections and made many liberal reforms that aided the country’s development. However, the *Authéntico* era also allowed for corruption to run rampant. The system of patronage networks came to dominate the government. Political violence and organized crime became common. The corruption combined with the unfulfilled promises from the democratic reformers led to decreased trust from the Cuban population. The distrust allowed Batista to gain support or passive agreement among all sectors of the population. When it became clear that Batista did not have any democratic inclinations, his support also waned and it opened to door to opposition, one of which was Fidel

Castro's Twenty-sixth of July Movement. These opposition groups used violence in an attempt to end the regime, forcing the regime to use violence in turn (del Aguila, 2011).

Violence, corruption, and the urban-rural divide came together in the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Pérez-Stable (1993) summed up the problems facing Cuba at the end of the Batista regime: "six factors interacted to render Cuba susceptible to radical revolution: mediated sovereignty, sugar-centered development, uneven modernization, the crisis of political authority, the weakness of the *clases economicas*, and the relative strength of the *clases populares* (p. 7). The opposition had support from nearly every part of the Cuban population. Change was needed and the Batista government, or the constitutional one before, failed to deliver these changes. Personality cults form when the established authority has failed to provide the needs of the people. Cuba in 1959 provided an environment that made the formation of a personality cult possible.

Castro: A different kind of leader

Fidel Castro's charisma is certainly noteworthy. But, his charisma is not the only reason Castro stands out from other Latin American leaders. Castro was involved early in politics and eventually led a guerrilla movement against the Batista regime. After the Batista regime fled, Castro was the logical one to fill the power vacuum. Castro, while well known in Cuba, was still an unknown entity to the international community. His ideology and political leanings were unknown. Some thought that Castro would restore the constitutional government while others saw him as more radical. It was after he came to power that Castro's Marxist sympathies came to light. The Castro government instituted many leftist reforms such as collectivization of industry, yet there was no political backlash from the moderates or conservatives who initially supported what they thought was the non-Communist option in the opposition. This is the Castro

difference. The Cuban people, even the dissidents, did not attempt to end the regime. Instead, many Cubans who did not like the regime left. Castro was said to have “mesmerized crowds” with his speeches (del Aguila, 2011). The unwavering support from the Cuban population even in the midst of radical transformation and a time where speaking against the government were persecuted. Yet, after fifty years, the Castro government is still in power, surviving attempts from the United States to remove it and economic decline since the 1970s.

The Personality Cult of Fidel Castro

Ideology: A Cuban Communist Revolution

In the beginning of Castro’s political career (his involvement with the Cuban revolution), his ideology was somewhat hazy and undefined. Many factions joined the revolution and believed it to be a bid to return democracy to Cuba after Batista’s dictatorship. Castro’s Twenty-sixth of July Movement had no specific ideology. It was open to anyone and any beliefs. The ideological ambiguity allowed the movement to have many supporters and “unusual appeal to all sectors of Cuban society” (Falcoff, 1994 p.114). Castro first came to power and popularity through a lack of clear ideological rhetoric, but that did not last. By 1960, the Castro regime had begun to abolish the capitalist system.

The decision to join the Communist party was calculated and shrewd. At first, the move was to gather support from the Communist Party while the moderates and liberals protested the regime’s radical economic policies of collectivization of the main sectors of the Cuban economy. The Communists’ support would effectively compensate for the loss of support from the moderates and liberals. This move also coincided with the failed 1961 CIA-planned invasion at the Bay of Pigs. The Castro regime, which had already taken an anti-American position, needed more allies abroad. A Communist ideology allowed Castro to make an ally out of the Soviet

Union. The Communist Party of Cuba was instrumental in organizing the change in policy. Castro made his stance known in 1961 when he called himself a “Marxist-Leninist until the day that I die” (del Aguila, 2011, p.437).

More than just Marxist, Castro’s ideology also had a healthy dose of Cuban nationalism. According to Liss (1994), Castro’s conception of socialism became equated with Cuban nationalism. He made many claims that Communism is better than capitalism and that communists are inherently better than capitalists (Liss, 1994). As Liss (1994) states it, “[t]o Castro, ideology encompasses a fighting spirit, dignity, revolutionary morale, and high principles” (p. 42). Castro made the Cuban revolution into an act of liberation. In December of 1961, Castro declared the revolution to be an “anti-imperialist, socialist revolution.” (in Harnecker, 1987 p. 23). Castro stated that Cuba was “the first one to free itself from U.S. imperialism, the first one to establish full control over its own wealth, the first one to disobey their orders...” (in Liss, 1994 p. 57). In establishing Cuba’s place in history as a free and independent state, he is linking national pride and the socialist revolution, even socialism itself.

Despite the calculated foundation of Communism in Cuba, it has taken off as the supporting ideology of the Castro regime. Castro made a stance against capitalism, especially capitalism that made Cuba dependent on foreign nations. The early days of the Castro government saw many radical policies to allow the state to take over key sectors of the economy and redistribute wealth. Those who disagreed with the regime were arrested or forced out of the country. In 1976, a new constitution was enacted that carried significant socialist overtones. The Cuban Communist Party was given a privileged position as the country’s most powerful political party. With that political position, the CCP also gains an ideological monopoly on the media and educational systems (del Aguila, 2011).

The Ideal Revolutionary

Castro has many things in common with Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez. Both Chavez and Castro present themselves as revolutionaries. Each leader projects himself as the protagonist in an epic struggle against a more powerful opponent. Their lives are a real life example of fight between David and Goliath. These so-called revolutionaries have stood up against the oppressors, or who they have indicated the oppressor to be. Such revolutionaries take steps to demonstrate their devotion to the little guy.

In 1953, Castro and his fighters attacked a military garrison at Santiago, Cuba, where most of the fighters were killed and Castro himself was arrested and put in prison. After his release from prison in 1954, Castro continued to lead the revolutionary movement from exile in Mexico. Castro could have been arrested and shot by the Batista regime, like many of his men, but was spared this fate and tried. In his trial, Castro was able to characterize his actions as for the good of Cuba. He described his actions as patriotic and stated a need to return to a constitutional government for the good of the people (del Aguila, 2011). Castro showed his devotion to the revolution, not only by launching an attack that he could not possibly win, but also by declaring himself a patriot. If he was to be believed, Castro was just a man caught trying his best to overthrow a corrupt government. Castro, by prison and exile, suffered for a cause. Then, he proceeded to persevere from Mexico.

Castro's physical appearance in public settings also contributed to his revolutionary image. In most photos of Castro, he is wearing a military uniform. He does not wear a dress uniform, usually, but plain green fatigues. This uniform was one he wore as a guerrilla fighter against the Batista government. This uniform is particularly symbolic in the context of Cuba's previous leaders and the rise of the Cuban Communist Party. Castro offered a significant

contrast to the previous presidents to Cuba. Batista was a general in the Cuban army before becoming involved in politics. In many pictures, he is wearing a military dress uniform with many medals and decorations. The two presidents prior to the end of the constitutional period and subsequent dictatorship of Batista, Ramón Grau and Carlos Prío, wore Western-style suits. The Batista officer dress uniform indicated rank and an elite status, or class, while Castro plain fatigues indicated something less aristocratic. The unadorned uniform represents someone who is more a part of the proletariat than the bourgeoisie. The uniform that Castro wore also had the added advantage of distinguishing him from the Western politicians, who wore suits, not military uniforms. The uniform also served as a constant reminder of the revolution and Castro's part in it. He always dressed for battle, so that must mean the war is ongoing.

Castro had a carefully constructed public image. He was the revolutionary who stood up to American influence and worked tirelessly to free Cuba from the corrupt Batista government. This image of Castro as a perpetual revolutionary continued to be present in Cuba, even now. Castro's actions and his appearance while in public have been his method of remaining the face of the Cuban revolution. This was similar to another Latin American leader, Hugo Chavez. Both were revolutionaries who were determined to be seen as such.

José Martí's Heir

Fidel Castro often considers himself to be the heir of José Martí (1853-1895), a leader in Cuba's struggle for independence from Spain. He was a poet, essayist, and fighter for Cuban freedom. Martí died fighting against Spain and became a symbol for the cause of the Cuban struggle against Spain. One author claims that out of the many influences on Fidel Castro, José Martí stands out (Liss, 1994). Martí is Cuba's great hero and the symbol of Cuban freedom for many Cubans (Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature). Castro took Martí's ideas and

used them as a foundation of his July 26th Movement. Although Marti was critical of Marx, Castro linked the two to create his version of a socialist Cuba. Castro saw Marti as “an anti-imperialist reformer, some of whose ideas epitomize the Cuban ethos and must be incorporated into Cuban socialism” (Liss, 1994 p. 35). Castro used the name of Marti to show his loyalties and ideology in the Cuban Revolution. The devotion to Marti demonstrated Castro’s commitment not only to the revolution, but also to reform and the struggle against American imperialism.

In his trial after the failed attack on Santiago in 1953, Castro made a famous speech explaining his actions. He claimed that they stemmed from the deepest roots of patriotism and were only for the betterment of the Cuban people. Then, Castro claimed that he was only following what Jose Marti would have done in the same situation. Marti was a rebel against an oppressive regime, and so was Castro – in Castro’s mind at least. Marti was Castro’s inspiration for the 26th of July Movement. The speech Castro made at his trial is called “History will absolve me.” Castro claimed that he would earn his place in history because: “I carry the teachings of the Master [Marti] in my heart, and in my mind the noble ideas of all men who have defended people's freedom everywhere!” Castro claimed the side of freedom and on the side of all for which Marti fought. Castro argued that he would be redeemed for his failed coup in the history books because he was following in Marti’s footsteps (Harnecker, 1987).

Media Control

The Cuban Revolution threw the country into chaos. The constitutional government had been overthrown in 1952 by the Batista regime, which did not attempt to restore a legitimate political system. In 1959, Castro overthrew that regime. When Castro took power, he immediately started to consolidate his power. By the mid-1960s, the media was under government control and freedom of speech was nonexistent. Anyone who spoke ill of the

revolution became a counter-revolutionary. Any criticism could be tried and the number of political prisoners rose to a number somewhere in the thousands. The restrictions on media and speech freedom allowed the regime to be seen only as the state wished it to be seen (del Aguila, 2011). Media control has allowed Castro's perpetual revolutionary appearance to stay constant.

Staying Close to Castro

Fidel Castro has always had a distinct presence in Cuban society. One could never forget who exactly was in charge in Havana. Castro did not have to name everything after himself to keep his name in the public mind. Instead of invoking his own name, Castro and the top ranking members of his administration invoke the name of the revolution. In Havana, there is a Jose Marti Revolutionary Square and a Palace of the Revolution. The Revolution itself is the focus of the names of many things in Cuba. However, Castro put much effort into appearing as the ideal revolutionary. The name Fidel Castro is tangled up in the Revolution and extremely difficult to separate. Castro himself gave the appearance of becoming the embodiment of the revolution. Indeed, in a speech in 1987, Raul Castro stated "The most important symbol we have is named Fidel Castro" (in Latell, 2005 p. 121). Castro constantly reminded the Cuban people of his presence by his association with the Revolution and the process of naming important places after the Cuban revolution.

Cuba after Castro: Can Communism Survive?

There has been much speculation about Cuba lately with the ailing Fidel Castro getting older by the day. Fidel Castro temporarily handed power over to his younger brother, Raul Castro while undergoing a medical procedure several years ago. In 2008, Fidel stepped down as President of Cuba, handing power permanently over to Raul. Even after his retirement, Fidel remains a powerful force in Cuban politics. Up until 2011, Fidel was still First Secretary of the

Cuban Communist Party. Fidel could live another 20 years or another 5 years, but what will a Cuba without Fidel look like? A large part of the support for Communism in the beginning came from the support for Fidel himself and his charismatic nature made the transition to socialism smoother. The question remains on how dependent the current system in Cuba is on Castro's political influence.

Gill (1984) claimed that personality cults formed in the Soviet Union from the weakness of institutions and the lack of institutionalization in the Soviet Communist Party. There is certainly a basis for this theory in the Cuban experience. The Communist Party that is in power in Cuba today was formed around Fidel Castro and his regime. Also, the current constitution of Cuba was written under the Castro regime in 1976. There is a strong case for a lack of independent institutions in Cuba. Article 5 of the 1976 Cuban Constitution states:

The Communist Party of Cuba, a follower of Marti's ideas and of Marxism-Leninism, and the organized vanguard of the Cuban nation, is the highest leading force of society and of the state, which organizes and guides the common effort toward the goals of the construction of socialism and the progress toward a communist society.

Most the institutions were created around the regime directed by the Communist Party rather than being created independently. So, how would another regime function in this context? The average age of the members of the Council of State, the Cuban executive committee of the National Assembly, is 78 years old. These are many of the men that fought in the Cuban revolution and created the government. What will happen when they are out of power? (del Aguila, 2011)

Raul Castro does not have his brother's charisma. In fact, the section in a textbook that describes the transition from Fidel to Raul is headed "From an Ailing Messiah to an Uninspiring Administrator" (del Aguila, 2011). Raul cannot inspire or mesmerize the people as Fidel did. Instead, Raul is in charge of the administration of Fidel's system. Already, there is a distinct

difference in the Fidel and Raul regimes. Fidel never let up on Communist rhetoric once he proclaimed himself a follower of Marx. Raul, a life-long Communist, has called for economic reform. Although privatization is not in the foreseeable future, there have been steps to (very slightly) encourage the private sectors (as directed by the state). Fidel was able to hold on to power, even under dire economic circumstances. Only time will tell if Raul's regime survives without Fidel.

Conclusion

It is the sign of a personality cult when the personality becomes more important than the institutions. In Cuba, it is hard to separate the two, as the institutions were built with the personality in mind. Yet, it is clear that the devotion to Fidel Castro does fall into the category of a cult of personality. His charisma brought him to power and helped him hold onto it in the early days, but it was his personality cult that has survived all these years in Cuba. Castro proposed an ideology that got the population of Cuba behind him, created a public image of himself as the ideal revolutionary, controlled the media to keep his image, and has outlasted his institutional position with his influence on Cuban politics and the people. Fidel Castro's personality cult now allows Fidel's chosen successor and heir (his young brother Raul) to rule Castro's Cuba without fear of a popular uprising. As the Revolutionary generation fades, it will be interesting to see if the Cuban Communist Party can survive.

Chapter 4:

Venezuela's Hugo Chavez

Similar to many Latin American countries, Venezuela has a history of violence, poverty, and oppression. From independence from Spain to the separation from *Gran Columbia* to the use of “gunboat diplomacy” in the early 20th Century, Venezuela has often had to struggle just to survive. Though an oil rich country, poverty was rampant among the population. It has been through colonization, dictatorships, and attempts at democracy. Since Independence in 1823 and separation from Columbia in 1830, Venezuela has oscillated between dictatorships and pseudo democracy. Sometimes, the transition was peaceful, other times it was violent. The present system of government was instituted in 1958 after dictator Pérez Jiménez fled into exile after a military coup. A transitional government under Admiral Wolfgang Larrazábal gave way to a democracy with the election of President Rómulo Betancourt. Democracy in Venezuela functioned much the same after President Betancourt up until the 1998 election of Hugo Chavez Frias and the 1999 re-writing of the Venezuelan Constitution. The old system, corrupt and ineffective provided an opportunity for the creation of a personality cult around Hugo Chavez.

The Pre-Chavez years

The pre-Chavez years in Venezuela were a time of constant crisis. The most immediate problem was economics. By 1987, 54 percent of families living in acute poverty (Derham 2010, 240). The 1990s were some of the worst economic years in Venezuela and only got worse as the decade progressed. In 1994, inflation rose to 73 percent and increased again in 1995 to 100 percent. Also in 1995, the proportion of Venezuelans living under conditions of “critical

poverty” was at 41 percent with another 39 percent in relative poverty, making the wealth gap between the rich and poor only wider (Trinkunas 2002). In 1998, 57.6 percent of families were still living below the poverty line. In 1994, there was also a banking crisis that lasted 18 months. Several financial institutions had been seized and closed by the Venezuelan government in June of 1994. The economic conditions of Venezuela in the 1990s were similar to that of pre-Revolutionary Russia or China during the civil war, but without war.

Not only was financial security a problem for Venezuela, but physical security of the country was also a problem. Venezuela’s insecure borders allowed for many people to enter the country illegally. Some were simply illegal immigrants, but others had a less friendly reason for going to Venezuela. Parties from Columbia often crossed the border to carry out raids to steal or kidnappings. Drugs from Columbia also traversed the border unchecked. Another problem was the illegal mining taking place in old Venezuelan gold mines by Brazilian nationals. External security was not the only problem of the 1990s: internal security was also a problem. There were riots in the streets and even a failed military coup in 1992. Ironically, Hugo Chavez was a leader in this coup. While not at war like the other states that formed personality cults, Venezuela’s national security was precarious at best. Such internal and external insecurity did not provide any stability to Venezuelan society (Derham 2010).

In addition to the economic and security problems in pre-Chavez Venezuela, there was also a crisis of national identity. Derham (2010) calls the condition of Venezuela without nationalism before President Chavez to be “a sorry state indeed.” (p.279). In fact, as Derham (2010) further points out, some Venezuelans living on the Columbian border did not know in which country they lived. The country’s poor did not participate in government. Participation was overwhelmingly dominated by the political elites of Venezuela (Rodriguez, 2008).

The conditions of Venezuela before and during the rise of Hugo Chavez are very important for this study of personality cults. Venezuela's economic problems alone can make the 1990s considered a tumultuous time, but added to it are security problems (both internal and external), illiteracy, lack of political participation, lack of communication, and a severe deficiency of national identity. Such a time of turmoil and chaos sets the stage perfectly for the formation of a personality cult. In the first chapter, preconditions in several cases were examined and a pattern emerged. For all of the cases studied, personality cults form out of chaotic times. Venezuela in the 1990s can only be considered tumultuous. In these conditions, the right person can have his or her personality cult form and solidify. Hugo Chavez was that person who really took the opportunity offered by the Venezuelan circumstances.

Not Another Regime: Why Chavez is different

In a region prone to military dictatorships, coups, and authoritarianism, Hugo Chavez is a particularly interesting figure. Although a former military officer, Chavez did not come to power through a military coup. He was democratically elected three times and has had popular support on many issues including a new constitution that gave a lot of power to the executive branch. Yet, Chavez was not part of the political elite of Venezuela either. He grew up poor and barely met the criteria to be accepted into the military academy. In Venezuela, Chavez's domestic policies have had mixed success. As a result of Chavez management, Petróles de Venezuela has had declined production. Also, domestic policies led to a decline in government hospitals that resulted in an increase in deaths related to childbirth. While his programs' successes have been ambiguous, the political success of Chavez himself has been unquestionable. In 2009, the Venezuelan people voted to end term limits, allowing Chavez to seek re-election as many times as he wishes.

The Cult of Hugo Chavez

The New Bolivar

Like other personality cults, Chavez has a hero, one that he invokes to make a point and seeks to emulate as much as possible. This hero is the great liberator himself, Simon Bolivar. Bolivar, a native of Venezuela, managed to liberate the modern day states of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia from Spain in the early nineteenth century. Chavez revered Bolivar. Of course, he was not alone in this almost deification of Bolivar. Many people in Latin America also revere and admire Bolivar for his accomplishments, especially liberating much of Latin America from Spain. In a biography on Chavez, one author wrote that “[h]is fascination turned into deep devotion that bordered on obsession” (Jones 2007, p.40). Chavez read everything he could find on Bolivar and learned as much as he could about his hero. This obsession with Simon Bolivar set the foundations for most of his political actions.

In order to build up his own personal authority or personality cult, Chavez used the existing support for Bolivar, a national hero. According to a Chavez biographer, Chavez seemed to have actually believed himself to be something like Bolivar, if not the trusted heir to carry on Bolivar’s work. An associate of Chavez once remarked, “it seems like the liberator is inside him” (Jones 2007, 48). Chavez carefully cultivated the appearance of relationship between himself and Bolivar. In an interview after his failed coup attempt in 1992, Chavez stated, “Bolivar and I led a coup d’état. Bolivar and I want the country to change” (in Krauze, 2011, p.455). Chavez was determined to be like Bolivar, or at least show everyone that he was the new Bolivar. In suggesting such a thing, Chavez tried to become everything Bolivar stood for in Latin America:

liberation. Chavez, by taking on Bolivar's ideals, appeared to be the people's champion against oppression.

Chavez's goals were therefore Bolivar's. Chavez used this connection many times. He led what was called the Bolivar Revolution. He named his social problems the Bolivar missions. He implied that the original Revolutionary ideals that Bolivar exuded and encouraged were disappearing in Venezuela. Chavez made it seem like the root of all Venezuela's problems lie in the distance from the revolutionary ideology of the nineteenth century and today's Venezuelan political climate. Chavez styled himself to be Venezuela's new "Liberator" with his constant reminders to the Venezuelan people that he was the heir of Simon Bolivar.

An Ideal Revolutionary

There is no doubt that Hugo Chavez is a different kind of leader. He leads not only with legislation and policy proposals, but also by example. Chavez has created the image of himself as the ideal revolutionary. He is bold, unpredictable, unafraid of using military means, and he is about the people. He is the man that stands up to the West and drops into a Judo stance when meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin. When Chavez was elected into office, it was something very new for the Venezuelan people. He was not part of the established political elite and was a break entirely from the old democracy with the two major political parties: Acción Democrática (AD) and the Social Christian Party (COPEI). In fact, Chavez is considered "el llanero," a "rough – and for many years lawless – breed of man for whom cattle-raising is a way of life" (Meyers 2011, p. 272). Chavez started his career as a break with the past, and his policies and actions continued to be revolutionary. Chavez the man was the revolutionary that the people admired and aspired to be.

Chavez came into the political spotlight with a bang and took its revolutionary ideas to the extreme with a military coup d'état in 1992. Chavez, then an officer in the army, led the movement with the goal of ending the line of corrupt, incompetent presidents that had allowed problems like poverty, disease, and illiteracy to run rampant while politicians and the political elite of Venezuela made more money off of oil. The willingness to overthrow the established, corrupt government demonstrated his devotion to his cause. Although he was unsuccessful in the attempt and then spent time in jail, he was no less popular with the Venezuelan people. He was the ideal revolutionary because, although he could have benefited greatly from the established system as a military officer, he still tried to overthrow it to benefit others, just as the great liberator, Simon Bolivar did. Chavez gave the appearance of a leader that took action while others used the system to their advantage. Venezuela needed a radical change and Chavez was the ideal revolutionary leader because he was willing to be extreme to transform the state. His actions showed him to be selfless and compassionate. He cared much about his fellow countrymen. Chavez was exactly what the ideal Venezuelan revolutionary should be.

Chavez was not just willing to overthrow the established state authority, but he was also willing to mock the Western authority in world politics as well. As president of Venezuela, Chavez made several steps in the opposite direction from the United States and other European powers. Chavez has been known to make anti-American comments, from calling former President George W. Bush the devil to ranting about CIA plots to kill him to condemning the imperial aspirations of the United States (Corrales, 2006). Not only did he use ant-American rhetoric, but he also met with the heads of other states that also had disagreements with American methods. These heads included Cuba's Fidel Castro and Russia's Vladimir Putin, the former with whom Chavez formed a sort of mentor-mentee relationship. Chavez's anti-

American stance, which mirrored one held by Simon Bolivar in the nineteenth century, was something else that made Chavez an ideal revolutionary (Krauze, 2011). The United States has much influence in Latin American politics and many Latin American states seek good relations and aid money from the United States. Chavez was different. He did not let himself be made a puppet and rejected Western authority in order to allow Venezuela to forge its own destiny.

Bolivarianism to the Left

To be Bolivar, the revolutionary, Chavez must also stand for what Bolivar stood for. Bolivar is said to be the “least controversial figure in Latin America” (Krauze, 2011). Many people, especially in Venezuela admire and respect Bolivar and what he stood for: an independent Venezuela. Chavez took Bolivar’s idea of independence and used it to build an ideology that set him apart from the oppressive West, especially the United States. Chavez the revolutionary was a devout Bolivarian because he was trying to overcome oppression on all levels: within companies, within the state, and within in the international community. The ideology of a revolution, of independence, justified the socialist programs instituted by the Chavez government.

When Chavez rejected the free trade agreement with the United States and then proceeded to reject American influence for Venezuela, he was abiding by the revolutionary ideology he associated with Bolivar. The West, America especially, stood for oppression and exploitation. Chavez capitalized on this view. Bolivar fought to free much of Latin America from the imperialist, colonial, oppressive Spanish. Chavez uses this to justify the search for another government style outside of liberal democracy. In fact, Chavez declared that liberal democracy does not work. Chavez’s ideology has much to do with this attempt at distinguishing Venezuela from the United States. One author notes that Chavez “presented his economic and social

policies as a left-wing alternative to the so-called Washington consensus and a major departure from the free-market reforms of the previous administrations” (Rodriguez, 2008, p. 51).

Chavez uses Bolivar to justify his transformation of the economic and political climate of Venezuela (Krauze, 2011). Under Chavez, the government of Venezuela has grown and expanded to gain more power over the country’s resources. Chavez nationalized the electricity and telecommunication sectors while banning lay-offs and regulating wages. Chavez has also taken to redistributing wealth among the poorer people, especially wealth gained from oil sales into the creation of the Bolivarian missions. Although it is debatable whether or not he actually increased social efforts from the previous regimes, Chavez has definitely used the meaning behind it to his advantage (Rodriguez, 2008). Chavez has named any desire for less spending “neoliberal dogma” (Rodriguez, 2008). Chavez’s leftward leanings, while gaining him enemies from the wealthy, have made him very popular with the majority of Venezuelans who are middle-class to poor. Socialism, which sets him against American influence, also appeals to the Venezuelans who also oppose American influence in Latin America. Chavez has found an ideology that not only brings him popular support for domestic policy, but also gives him support in foreign policy.

Control of Media

In order to control his image and his sole claim on the Bolivar myth, Chavez worked to control the Venezuelan media. The power awarded to him, both by the constitution and by his own popularity allowed him to do just that and shut down independent media outlets. An old and very popular television network, RCTV, was closed in May of 2007. Later, another independent station, Globovisión, was closed down. After this, any media outlet that opposed Chavez was either intimidated or closed. Chavez eventually gained a media empire of television

networks, radio stations, and newspapers that were used for Chavez propaganda and to discredit the opposition. Chavez now owns a majority share in the one opposition media outlet (Krauze, 2011). Freedom House also rates Venezuela as “Not Free” (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/country/venezuela>).

The State of the Venezuelan Institutions

In 1999, a new constitution was written that redefined Venezuelan institutions. The President that helped write it was none other than Chávez. This new constitution gave almost unlimited power to the executive, although there are still some formal checks and balances like those found in liberal democratic systems. The formal institutions of Venezuela are purely democratic with a strong president, something found in many European countries soon after World War II. The power afforded the president in the Venezuelan constitution also provided an opportunity for someone like Chavez to take advantage of the system and become an elected authoritarian, especially the abolition of term limits in 2009.

Chavez has also found a way to bypass official government channels to get his policies going. Chavez started many social programs called Bolivarian Missions. These missions supplied food, free medical services, literacy, and education. These programs were designed to help the poor and combat the effects of poverty in Venezuela. These programs were not truly part of the Venezuelan bureaucracy. Instead they were created to bypass the official government channels and serve as a support for Chavez himself, and not the government of Venezuela (Krauze, 2011).

By the time Chavez had won his second term, it became apparent that he was consolidating his own power. The two dominant political parties before Chavez’s first election in 1998, AD and COPEI, were nearly obsolete by 2008. None of the new opposition parties had

any national successes (Myers, 2011). In 2008, Chavez “disqualified hundreds of possible opposition candidates for mayoral and gubernatorial office” (Krauze, 2011 p. 477). With the attempt at barring opposition candidates and the used of state-controlled media, Chavez and his supports were given a distinct advantage to win elections. Myers (2011), calls the system one of “electoral caudillismo” and that Chavez’s “legitimacy rests in large measure on his ability to win elections” (p. 300-1). With the disappearance of the traditional political parties of Venezuela and the creation of agencies that reported directly to Chavez rather than to the government, the institutions of Venezuela appear to be fading into the background in favor of the personal authority of Chavez.

The only major challenge to Chavez’s authority was the events of April 11, 2002. On this day, hundreds of thousands of government dissenters marched on Caracas, resulting in marchers getting shot. In the confusion of the aftermath, the military removed Chavez from office and put Pedro Carmona Estanga in his place. Less than two days later, the disorganized opposition was defeated by those loyal to Chavez, restoring him to the presidency. In the aftermath of the attempted coup, Chavez purged the armed forces of any opposition supporters among the officers and took action to isolate those officers who did not actively support his policies. The armed forces were then reorganized to give Chavez more direct control over the chain of command (Myers, 2011). The coup attempt is interesting because it demonstrated the strength of Chavez’s support among the people because the people were the ones to return Chavez to power, not the military.

Conclusion

Each step that Chavez took to consolidate his own power also had the effect of taking the support away from the government and toward support for Chavez himself. The opposition had

no voice and the military tried to take over the country. When Chavez subjugated the military after April 2002, he also strengthened his support within it through purges and strategic promotions. He now has his own personal army. The Bolivarian missions were programs instituted by Chavez, not the government. Once again, the focus was on what Chavez could do for the country, not the government. Chavez's personality cult has become the authority in Venezuela, not the Venezuelan constitution. The signs of a personality cult are present in Venezuela: Chavez's pervasive ideology, his image as the ideal revolutionary and true heir of Simon Bolivar, state control of the media, and an erosion of Venezuelan institutions.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

The three cases studied here are just a sample of personality cults. They were chosen because they show how personality cults can be form in different cultures under different contexts. Yet, this was also an attempt at systematically defining and describing exactly what a personality cult is, why it forms, and what shape it takes. Personality cults have been alluded to and studied one at a time, but never cross culturally compared and systematically defined. This essay does both. I sought out to demonstrate that personality cults are not confined to one culture or regime type. Culture, while it does have an effect on personality cults, is not the sole determining factor on where personality cults form. The factors that have been mentioned here – especially economic and security issues – also contribute to the formation of a personality cult. Once a cult has started to form, a certain pattern is followed. This pattern is a group of characteristics that most personality cults share. They are: compelling ideology, an image as the ideal, imitating a past historical figure, having a constant public presence (i.e. through names of places, objects), media control, and erosion of institutions.

It is the relationship with institutions that make personality cults so fascinating to study. My definition of personality cult defines personality cults in terms of authority. When the personal authority of a leader supercedes the authority of the state, or the institutions, a personality cult has formed. It is rare that a person can have authority in themselves over the authority of institutions, especially the military. The military is an especially important institution in any state, but it has a more domestic influence in developing countries. There have

been many military coups all over the world through modern history, yet most military dictators do not have personality cults. For a personality cult to form, the person's authority must rest outside of any institutionally defined position.

Military dictatorships derive their authority through the force of the military. Leaders such as Sudan's Omar al-Bashir use the institution of the military to stay in power. As long as they have the military, they have the authority needed to govern the people. On the other hand, a leader with a personality cult has authority in himself and does not need the backing of an institution. As we see in the Chavez case, the leader can in fact be opposed by the established institutions and still maintain his or her power. In 2002, the military launched a coup against Chavez, but were not prepared to govern once Chavez was forced out of the country. His supporters soon gained the upper hand and called Chavez to return. This was a triumph of a personality cult over an established institution. Although the coup attempt was disorganized, Venezuelans loyal to Chavez stopped the military's seizure of power through street riots and the military actions taken by troops loyal to Chavez. The military was a powerful institution in Venezuelan politics and Chavez himself led a military coup attempt in 1992. Yet, it was Chavez that held the authority in Venezuela, not the government or the military.

Personality cults do not form every day. With the chaos in places like sub-Saharan Africa where the situation is rather grim, and most institutions are weak, one wonders why they do not form more often. Yet, sub-Saharan Africa is a place of divisions. Part of building a personality cult relies on the leader's ability to unite people, mainly through ideology. Sub-Saharan Africa has many different tribes, ethnic groups, and religions. These inter-group tensions have often turned into civil war (i.e. Rwanda, Sudan, and Nigeria) (Kpessa et al., 2011). In my opinion, sub-Saharan Africa will not develop personality cults until there is some unifying

ideology that can span across ethnic, religions, and tribal lines. Vladimir Putin was able to do this when he proposed a new concept of Russian nationalism. His nationalism had nothing to do with race or religion. It was about Russian values and patriotism.

Vladimir Putin, Hugo Chavez, and Fidel Castro are all very similar figures. All came to power at chaotic times in their countries' histories. All consolidated power in their favor by subjugating opposition, controlling the media, and even pushing institutions toward obsolete status. They have all staked out a unifying ideology and represented an ideal. Putin, Chavez, and Castro all had noticeable impacts on their own countries' political dynamics. The most interesting thing is that these men all formed personality cults under completely different cultural and historical context. Although every personality cult has its own unique characteristics, these three cases show that there are certain traits that carry over from culture to culture that can be used to identify future personality cult formation.

Future research

This study only examined personality cults that have already formed or in the later stages of formation. The research question was limited to personality cults both on a theoretical level and on the practical side: Why do personality cults form? What do they look like? What are some examples? Yet, there are many more questions to be asked. The next step in the research of personality cults is to look more closely at the link between personality cults and political culture. Most specifically, the question becomes the impact a personality cult has on the political culture of a state or even a region. The three case studies that I used here were all examples of fledgling democracies before the current personality cult leadership came into power. How much did the creation of a personality cult alter the direction of change in their political culture?

Some questions are not answered here, but would provide more insight into both the study of personality cults and political culture.

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