Personalization in Political Leadership: An Analysis of Vladimir Putin[1]

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Abstract

For many years, the argument persists that we have entered a leader's era. Political leadership has taken pole position in political and social life when compared with political parties or their ideologies. Whether Presidentialization or Prime Ministerial Predominance, the personification rests on a single individual, portrait, or dominant figure solemnly embraced by the masses. Such a political emergence has been witnessed in numerous countries and has recently gained the attention of political science researchers. At this point, the aim of this study is to understand how personification has come to be so prevalent in political and social life and how political leaders both motivate and inspire their people to represent their beloved countries. To answer this question, the transformational leadership theory is scrutinized within the case of Vladimir Putin. The evaluation of this theory rests on its main assumption, which is posed as a leadership model shaped around a personalized charismatic leader. This is tested via a discourse analysis of Vladimir Putin.

Keywords Transformational Leadership, Personification, Political leadership, Leader effects, Vladimir Putin.

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Introduction

Political parties are both indispensable and necessary organizations for political life and democracy. However, in this sense, more important is the balanced weight of the ruling parties or the parties in power. However, over recent years, the leadership of political parties has often become more important than the party itself—regardless of whether they are in or out of office. A kind of "personalization of politics" is haunting the world with dominant political figures occupying the political arena. Burns (1978) argued long ago that "the personality cult—a cult of devils as well as heroes—thrives in both east and west" (p.1). It is important to determine precisely where party cohesion stands in today's politics, and whether party importance has decreased. Numerous portraits adorn the offices of political leaders around the world. This makes one question the emergence of leader-centered politics, which could be said to be more closely related to a personalization of politics than a party ideology or program. Such a political personalization extends to many world leaders. To give a few examples, we only need to look at Xi Jinping, for instance, who announced himself as "president for life" with a constitutional amendment. We can also look at Vladimir Putin, who switched office with Dmitri Medvedev to gain another two terms of office as President. In addition, we can examine the transition from Presidential system to Parliamentary in Armenia for the sake of shifting power from the President to the Prime Ministry for the benefit of Serzh Sargsyan, although the outcome did not meet the expectation, or vice versa, such as Recep Tayyip Erdogan's power grab in Turkey.

Although this list can be extended further, the major point to focus on is how this environment shapes the acts of the leaders regardless of the presidential or parliamentary system. Also, how do they affect one another in such an environment? According to Blondel (1987), "it is the environment that proposes, suggests, and even dictates" (p.18) the act of the leader pushing the leaders into a particular direction. Personalization in autocratic systems is not a new matter, but in a democratic one, it has certainly become an important issue to investigate. Whether it is called "presidentialization" (Dowding, 2013), "prime ministerial dominance" (Heffernan, 2003) or "chief executive empowerment" (Johansson & Tallberg, 2010), we are witnessing an era of individual politicians becoming the most prominent figures, even more so than their parties or ideologies.

One of the most important examples of this personal control or domination can be said to remain in the Russian Federation. Although the current situation is summarized by scholars as "post-modern authoritarianism" (Pomerantsev, 2015), "electoral authoritarianism" (Ross 2011; White, 2013), "semi-authoritarianism" (Ottoway, 2003), or whether this status is casting out democracy in Russia, one thing is clear that Vladimir Putin has managed to transform the country, even at the expense of dismantling the checks and balances, while still retaining high levels of approval from the masses. Taking hard measures and steps, he has managed to reform the country, especially in economy and infrastructure. As a result, he has become a figure associated with the state. For instance, "if there's Putin—there's Russia, if there's no Putin—there's no Russia," states a Russian government official named Vyacheslav Volodin (October 23, 2014). Most of the people in Russia share this thought and remain united behind his leadership. For Manin (1997), this is about "traditional party democracy has been replaced by audience democracy, which is based on a more direct connection between the political leaders and the general public" (p.219).

Whether this is called "the leadership challenge" (Kouzes & Pooner, 1987), "visionary leadership" (Sashkin, 1988), "new leadership" (Bryman, 1992), or "charismatic leadership," (Bass & Avoloi, 1993), the key point is to understand how today's leadership examples display their politics in and out of their respective countries. Vladimir Putin has been in power for more than fifteen years and has transformed the Russian Federation. This existence is tested via a discourse analysis of Vladimir Putin to understand his personalized politics both inside Russia and abroad. Hence, it is important to understand how Putin has transformed his country via his personal control in nearly every area of social, economic, and political life. This is important in understanding that the characteristics of the transformational leadership theory explain the acts of Putin's leadership, such as his advocating of a strong reform for his people, as well as his reputation for being a risk taker. The methodology of the study rests on a brief theoretical discussion of the transformational leadership theory, and how Putin fits into being a Transformational leader, which is evaluated via the discourse analysis of the political rhetoric of Putin, who is clearly a good rhetorician, as demonstrated by his ability to convince his followers in the name of what the defends. His success relies on his sincere communication with the people, inspiring them to favor what is best for the Russian Federation.

To achieve this certainly requires the proficiency of a good rhetorician. As Butler and Spivak emphasize (2007), "speech acts uttered by a political leader function like the public performance of a national anthem" (p.62). This is crucial in the realm of convincing the electorate and transforming them into followers. By the same token, the followers become so subject to the leader and to his narrative that this positions an identity for the masses to embrace.

Transformational Leadership Theory

In presidential systems, the leaders are directly elected and do not share their popular authority and, as a result, have a far greater chance of personalizing their leadership rather than in parliamentary systems. This does not mean that there is no way to personalize politics in parliamentary systems. What is meant by political personalization is a ''process in which the political weights of the individual actor in the political process increase over time while the centrality of the political group (party) declines'' (Rahat & Sheafer, 2007:65). For instance, in the case of Europe, we see Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, or Viktor Orban in Hungary, both pf whom all personalize their politics by presenting themselves as 'Europe's Savior,' regardless of whether they are in government or not. However, in presidential systems, leaders, due to their popular legitimacy and as the sole representative of the executive, may claim to represent the will of the people on their own.

This is—what Bass (1997) argued leadership to be—a "morally uplift" or as "visionary change agents" (p.131). In the field of leadership, Burns' book entitled "Leadership," gained considerable popularity, subsequently opening up a debate on Transformational and Transactional leadership models and how to understand these concepts upon leadership in politics. According to Burns (1978), this is a leadership approach that causes change in individuals and social systems, as well as a valuable and positive change in the followers. This brings us, firstly, to the inclusion of connecting followers and a sense of identity, and self to the mission; secondly, to redesign their perceptions and values; and finally, to challenge the status quo and alter the political environment.

Burns mostly concentrates on morality with the inquiry of how it leads to motivation. For Burns (1978), it is about "the hierarchy of needs, the structure of values and stages of moral development" (p.428). This is to build a common ground of awareness and consciousness in the words of Burns, that "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (p.20). As witnessed in the case of Russia—as an emerging democracy—there is Vladimir Putin, who has been supported by a far-reaching electorate for quite some time, on which Putin makes use of the moral in his political discourse. In this sense, Putin's political behavior centers around his political style, distinguishing him from ordinary executives (Prime Ministers, Presidents), making him a leader; in this case, a transformational one. As Burns puts it, "all leaders are actual or potential power holders, but not all power holders are leaders" (1978:18). Hence, the nature of transformational leadership rests on re-creating or re-narrating the ideal; that is, to re-write the current and future prospects of the people, and a country in which every individual finds him or herself attached. In light of the above, it is worth exploring the factors causing this commitment to rise, and why people engage in Transformational leaders—not just as electorates, but also as followers. In response to these questions, Bernard M. Bass argues that understanding the success of this type of leadership is based on the fulfillment of the components making up transformational leadership.

Besides Burns, Brass has contributed substantially to the literature and has carried on the leadership debate to understand the components that constitute transformational leadership. Transformational leaders are those who "stimulate and inspire their followers in both achieving extraordinary outcomes and, in the process, develop their own leadership capacity" (Bass & Riggio, 2006:3). His findings are valuable to understanding this leadership model as, through this study, I have looked at how Putin makes a good example ofa transformational leader. Bass identifies four important components of transformational leadership: *idealized influence*, *inspirational motivation*, *intellectual stimulation,* and *individualized consideration*. I have applied these components to Vladimir Putin to understand how and why he must be considered a transformationalist leader.

Idealized influence is about the leader's presence via his/her charisma. Leaders generally display trust and conviction and have a strong ability to gather the masses around a shared purpose. Bass (1997) acknowledges this as "they are admired as role models generating pride" (p.133). The importance of this component is that it converts the electors to followers, in which they both embrace and emulate the leaders with high levels of trust, respect, and understanding. In turn, the leaders build a strong leadership image in the imagining of the followers. And even in times of crisis, this image is not shattered, but deeply embraced. The charisma of the leader guarantees that any problem or crisis faced by the population is to be overcome. In the leader, the followers find themselves—a kind of self-discovery through both pride and sacrifice. The personality the leader possesses and the way he/she interacts with the followers inspires them, which, in turn, makes it easy for the followers to identify with the leader. This brings the case to the other component of transformational leadership—inspirational motivation.

Goleman et al. (2002) argue that "great leadership works through emotions" (p.3). Inspirational motivation includes how the leaders encourage the people by telling them what needs to be done for the

well-being of the nation as a whole. In doing so, the leader articulates a vision for the future, thereby inspiring the followers by giving (new) meanings to projects while also challenging the status-quo. For Goleman et al. (2002), this is about the leader's way of communicating with their followers; that is, how they "speak from their heart and offer a measure of re-assurance and certainty of conviction about the direction in which they are being led" (p.29). At this point, the leader becomes a road-map—someone who encompasses the dreams, beliefs, hopes, values, etc. shared by the followers. In turn, the leader creates a sense of unity with great passion and enthusiasm—both moral and national—as these leaders are more connected to the people. The success of this lies in the leader's capacity "to frame and deliver a message that resonates with their follower's emotional reality and sense of purpose …" (Goleman et al., 2002:9).

Intellectual stimulation is about how leaders encourage the people; that is, the way they stimulate their followers. According to Avolio and Bass (2002), this is "to be innovative and creative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and approaching old situations in new ways" (p.2). There are a variety of ways to stimulate followers; for example, by exchanging solutions, questioning, encouraging voicing issues, helping to interpret issues, or modelling new ways of thinking (See Bass, 1998; McDermott, 2003). At this point, it is important to focus on how leaders create emotional experiences that develop a bond with the followers together and boost their performance. For Hernandez Baeza et al. (2009), this is about "the charisma of the leader, who fosters a positive team climate" (p.515). By developing such an atmosphere, the leader directly locates political situations in emotional contexts.

Individualized consideration is the good communication the leader establishes with the followers as a coach, a mentor, or even a teacher. In creating this environment, the leader establishes a bridge between him and his followers. This bond is further strengthened by the leader's past experiences—good or bad confrontations—and in lecturing on how to overcome them for the benefit of all. According to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), "followers are treated as ends not just means" (p.185). The leader is deeply concerned with the needs and expectations of the followers, and respects them empathetically. At this point, the leader is aware of not being able to overcome the necessary changes alone.

Burns (2003) argues that "transformational change flows not so much from the work of a great man who single-handedly makes history, but from the collective achievement of a great people. While leadership by individuals is necessary at every stage, beginning with the first spark that awakens people's hopes" (p.240). As introduced by Bass (1985), the abovementioned components of transformational leadership are important to understanding how leaders act in a political sense so that discourse becomes irrevocable for the followers. This is about the "self-concept, which is a composite of our identities, like a member of a nation, a group, etc." (Bass & Riggio, 2006:38). This mode of politics, led by transformationalist leaders, creates an identity in which the individual commits themselves. According to Bass and Avolio (1994), the leader constructs a culture of "leaders who build such cultures and articulate them to followers typically exhibit a sense of vision and empower others to take greater responsibility for achieving the vision. Such leaders facilitate and teach followers" (p.542-43). In turn, they become the mentors of their respective people. Bass and Riggio notice that, when narrating the political culture, the leaders must follow some aspects. This is about understanding and respecting the past, returning to it for inspiration,

instruction, and identification of past objectives, principles, and strategies…" (p.115).

Starting with the 2000s, Putin has had a strong influence in transforming Russia. He certainly identifies himself with the state, and mostly with the strength of Russia, which he has acquired as a result of his leadership. I will continue this paper by clarifying how the transformation of the Russian Federation has come to be under the highly-personalized leadership of Putin. In doing so, I have analyzed much of his discourse to understand how the components of transformationalist leadership help us understand the substance of this type of leadership.

Personalization of Politics under Vladimir Putin

Transformational leadership in presidential systems gives the individual actor a far greater chance of personalizing their leadership. However, this type of leadership cannot be limited only to presidential systems. On the other hand, President Vladimir Putin, although shifted from Presidency to Prime Minister, his personalization has continuously proceeded, no matter which post he remained in. His strongman leadership was felt even when he was Prime Minister when he declared war on Chechnya in 1999. This event was evaluated as a polishing factor for Putin's charisma. Shortly after, Putin would become the President of the Federation.

In his first speech, V. Putin clearly stated that, "the state will stand firm to protect freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, freedom of the mass media, and property rights—those fundamental elements of a civilized society" (Millennium Speech, December 31, 1999). Although Putin stated the credits of democracy, his term as Prime Minister developed in the opposite. Hence, Putin has developed what Hansen (2011) puts forth as "*gosudarstrennost*" meaning loyalty to the state. Putin executes this power with his inner circle, whom he has an infinite trust; namely, the *Siloviki*[2] (power men) and the only thing Putin expects is loyalty. In 2013, Vladimir Putin clearly demonstrated this as "there should be patriotically-minded people at the head of state information resources" (Speech at the annual news conference, 2013). Or, for example, in a further speech, Putin argues (2000) "from the very beginning, Russia was created as a super-centralized state. Being a super-centralized state is practically laid down in its genetic code, its traditions, and the mentality of its people" (cf. Gevorkyan et al., 2000:167-8). For Putin, whether the issue concerns advancing democracy, improving the economy, or protecting the state, all can be improved with a strong state under the leadership of a strong leader, and thus, personifying himself with the state.

Putin calls himself the "servant of the people and subject of the law" (cf. Fish, 2017:70). Putin did not inherit his strict strongman rule, but he created one in due course. For Putin, it was on New Year's Eve when Boris N. Yeltsin announced his resignation and named V.V. Putin his successor (who was then the prime minister), and this became the country's acting President till the forthcoming Presidency elections. It was a turning point, not just for Putin, but for the whole country, when Yeltsin handed over the power to the new President.

It could be said that obtaining the rule of the Russian Federation was a piece of cake for Putin. Even before Putin received office as President (while still Prime

[2] The concept is known to be the people who belong to the inner circle of Vladmir Putin—a group of current and former intelligence officers from the Federal Security Service (FSB), formerly known as KGB, the Ministry of Interior, or military. See, Andrei Illarionov. (2009). "The Siloviki in Charge" *Journal of Democracy*, 20 (2): 69-72. A study exerts that "people with a security background fill 77% of Russia's top 1,016 governmental Positions." See, Olga Kryshtanovskaya & Stephen White. (2003). "Putin's Militocracy" *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol. 19 (4) pp.289-306.

Minister), a process of rehabilitation of Russia had started, and nobody other than Putin himself was to write down the prescription for progress and development.

In 1999, Putin stated that "Soviet communism was a road to a blind alley, which is far away from the mainstream of civilization" (Millennium Speech, December 31, 1999). This quote exhibits his vision of a fresh start for the country under his upcoming Presidency. As he stated, "the mechanical copying of other nations experience will not guarantee success either, every country—Russia included—has to search for its own way of renewal" (Millennium Speech, December 31, 1999). Also, in his millennium manifesto, Putin emphasized the need for "a successful Russian resurgence, an effective economy, a strong state, and a consolidation of a national idea" was mandatory, and the only man able to accomplish this was him. As Yeltsin (1999) pointed out at his resignation speech, "Russia should enter the new millennium with new politicians, new faces, and new, smart, and energetic people" (Yeltsin, Resignation Speech, 1999), thus indicating the then-Prime Minister Vladimir Putin.

Putin's leadership started to build momentum through his strongman persona in which he represents the 'man of the people.' The ground for his persona to flourish was encapsulated by the huge steps he took in transforming the state. After years of instability, Putin's first objective was to repair the economy. In doing so, Putin re-established a partial state control over the oil industry, which is a vital sector of the Russian economy, in addition to fixing the banking system. All these steps drew the attention of the capital—Moscow, which, to a certain degree, moved back to the country. The economic recovery brought many improvements to other sectors, such as education, health, housing, etc. Russia's gross national product per capita increased from 1.330.751 $ in 1999 to 8.759.036 $ in 2016 (See, The World Bank). All these reforms gained the support of millions of Russians, and the President had begun to prove himself by receiving new names, such as "The Holy Father," "Hero," "The Unique Man," and "The Outstanding Personality." In parallel to these developments and the positive atmosphere, with the rise of living conditions, Putin became a reformist for the country, and the developments opened the way for Putin to become a super-president with wide-ranging popular support.

In fact, throughout the years, he has become something above the party, along with his ideology; however, some may argue, such as the United Russia Party (Yedinaya Rossiya), that Putin's ideology lacks coherence. It is no secret that Putin has ever been close to the party. While leading the party during his Prime ministry, Putin did not even become a member of it. As an outcome, the party is generally considered a "party of power," a catch-all-party, or even a "hegemonic party" (Gumuscu, 2013). It is mostly handled in a political centralist manner with a nationalist and conservative flavor. This position is a combination of anti-liberal traditionalism with patriotism, with the aim to unite all sections of the society. It could be fair to describe Putin the same way, though Putin needs no ideology or political motivation to prove himself for that matter—his leadership challenge, which is characterized by his personality, serve this purpose. Putin fits into the definition of a charismatic leader, and more importantly, his ability in presenting and re-presenting a vision for the masses to embrace. For Weber (1978), "charisma is a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural superhuman powers, or at least,

specifically exceptional powers or qualities" (pp.241-242). In the case of Putin, this is about his sincerity, aiming to accomplish the best for the Russian people. This is about the inspiration he possesses as a leader, not an ordinary executive, whether as the President or Prime Minister of Russia.

This is certainly about the leadership character he puts forth: a self-aggrandizing, dominant, aggressive, impetuous personality dominating the political arena. Once defining himself "The biggest nationalist in Russia—that's me. Russia is my whole life." In fact, in Russia, leaders have had always a prominent role in politics. However, what makes Putin different is the way he has become a political hardliner in slow-motion, within what can be called a "hybrid democracy" Zakaria (1997) and Diamond (2002) defined his leadership to be somewhere between democracy and autocracy, due to the criticisms of democratic deficit and, perhaps more importantly, Putin's role in transforming Russia into a complete new system. For Glassman (1975), this is about the charisma, in that "personal charisma is the perfect example of an irrational consent relationship between the leader and the led. Each individual within the charismatizing group feels a special personal relationship with the leader—even if he has never met the leader" (p.57). A leader often well-defined as praiseworthy, Putin is defined as "the father of the nation, the source of inspiration, the one lighting the path into a bright future; strong, powerful, and rather autocratic" (Berdy, 2018).

In his annual address to the federal assembly back in 2003, Putin argues that "during all of its times of weakness … Russia was invariably confronted with a threat of disintegration" (cf. Donaldson & Nogee, 2002:341). Putin marks the difficult times Russia had and continues to have. And for Putin, it is his mission to protect Russia from both interior and exterior threats. As he argues, "they could keep what they had already stolen, but now they have to play clean, pay taxes, make investments, and stay out of politics." This is a clear warning from Putin, not just for his political rivals but also to the capitalist nations. Putin promised to exclude any individual or group who cheated the Russian Federation. In light of this discourse, he declares "the norm of the international community and the modern world is tough competition … nobody is eager to help us. We have to fight for our place under the economic sun" (cf. Tsygankov, 2006:130). These were clear signs of warning from Putin towards the "oligarchs" that needed to be eliminated if he wanted to consolidate his power.

As he has asserted several times, "democracy cannot be exported from one country to another, like you cannot export revolutions or ideology." (V. Putin, Speech, September 18, 2005). In Putin's view, democracy must be a creation of a society's advance with its own distinction. For Putin, the more the state remains strong, the more it forms a democracy. As Putin further emphasized in many speeches, "we are a free nation and our place in the modern world will be defined only by how successful and strong we are" (Putin, Annual address to the nation, April 25, 2005). As demonstrated by the aforementioned quotes, Putin's assertiveness reflects his strong-man persona. Leaving no room for weakness, such as "the moment we display weakness or spinelessness, our losses will be immeasurably greater" (ibid). It is clear that Putin has no patience for weakness, as he and the state have become one body. In delivering a public speech, he argues that, "for us, the state and its institutions and structures have always played an exceptionally important role in the life of the country and the people. For Russians, a strong state is not an anomaly to fight against. Quite the contrary, it is the source and

guarantor of order, the initiator and the main driving force of any change" (V. Putin, Millennium Speech, December 31, 1999). From the previous quote, it is clear that Putin identifies himself with the state. In that sense, the more the Presidency—meaning himself—gains strength, the stronger the state will become. In order to secure this strength, Putin altered the functioning of the state, which he termed the "power vertical" concept. This meant grasping more power from other institutions, not all of which exist within the state, as the primary goal is not only about the executive and legislative control, but rather, to seize authority over the civil society via the mass media. The power vertical concept marked a re-institutionalization of the Presidency, or to put it differently, a process of de-institutionalization (Kolesnikov, 2018) of other institutions, thus making the Presidency the only functioning institution in control of everything in the Russian Federation. Under the Russian constitution, the Presidency has far-reaching powers, such as assigning and dismissing ministers, vetoing right to legislation acts, calling on referenda, dismissing the parliament, etc. However, Putin managed to extend these powers with amendments; for example, Putin pulled back power to the center by appointing super-governors to the seven regions in order to control them directly from Moscow, while he also reshaped the Federation Council (the Senate). The members of the Council—formerly elected regional governors—were replaced with nominated members by Putin himself.

Although not becoming an official party member (due to his Presidency), Putin worked hard for the achievement of the United Russia party. The success of the party was important, and its presence in the Duma is valuable to dominate the Parliament and to act according to the interests of the President. As Putin stated, "If the people vote for United Russia, it means that a clear majority of the people put their trust in me, and, in turn, that means I will have the moral right to hold those in the Duma and the cabinet responsible for the implementation of the tasks that have been set today" (Public Speech, November 14, 2007).

These transformations lead to a single individual representing the state with a self-presentation style. Putin emphasized this back in 1999 when he said, "fruitful and creative work which our country needs so badly today is impossible in a split and internally-disintegrated society; a society where the main social sections and political forces have different basic values and fundamental ideological orientations" (Millennium Speech, December 31, 1999). His ambition regarding the function of the state rests in this speech made well before his Presidency, when he intended to amass all the institutions of the state within a single body; namely, the Presidency. In this way, Putin believes the state will be a success by representing the society, which varies due to political and social values. For Putin, it is to blend all the divergences under a single shelter, and that is a state-oriented narrative. In his 2004 inauguration speech after taking the oath, Putin emphasized that, "Now I would like to stress the main idea of the oath and say: the President's obligations to look after the state and faithfully serve the people will henceforward be sacred to me, and will be above all else, as before" (Putin Inauguration Speech, May 7, 2004).

Putin has a strong oratory in convincing the followers to commit to a shared vision. He remains a strong public speaker, and certainly controls any political or social debate in Russia. This is called "idealized influence" and is an important component of transformational leadership. Putin is particularly admired for acting as a role-model, and hence, is trusted by the masses. For Putin, this is about laying down the idealized influence, which is to combine his

strong leadership image with a collective sense of mission. No matter if the debate is centered on loss, trauma, hate, pride, joy, anger, or sadness, he manages to put these together with strength.

For Foxall (2013), this is about Putin's "highly masculinized political narrative" (p.151). The political environment he tries to create, requires attention, as his departure is laying down a narrative for the respective nation. With the beginning of the 2000s, when Vladimir Putin came to power, his leitmotif was to win back the glory of the state and people via rescuing Russia from the Soviet trauma (dissolution) as he emphasized in the following quote: "...the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century. As for the Russian nation, it became a genuine drama. Tens of millions of our co-citizens and co-patriots found themselves outside Russian territory. Moreover, the epidemic of disintegration infected Russia itself" (Annual address to the Federal Assembly, April 25, 2005). For Putin, this was a promise to re-establish the glory Russia once owned in the international arena. During this speech, he made references to the Tsarist era, and at certain points, also to the Soviet. His identity project mainly rests on a combination of the Orthodox Church and patriotism. It is interesting to analyze how Putin re-narrates the nation and locates himself as the very great symbol of the national will. For instance, Putin states "…patriotism is a source of the courage, staunchness, and strength of our people. If we lose patriotism and national pride and dignity, which are connected with it, we will lose ourselves as a nation capable of great achievements" (Millennium Speech, December 31, 1999). Putin calls himself a patriot, and often references his love for his country. In the above quotation, he illustrates the importance of patriotism for the integrity of the society, stressing the lack of it to be very hazardous for all.

The success of this narrative lies behind the full control of the mass media, through which the population receive information that is allowed, or at least censored by the Kremlin. His political journey rests on the ambition to become not merely a political persona, but rather an everlasting icon. Moreover, Putin knows how to blend facts into narratives, or at least make use of every event as an instance to strengthen the narrative in the first place. As he emphasizes, "we need to develop respect for our history, despite all of its flaws and love for the motherland. We need to pay the utmost attention to our common moral values and consolidate Russian society on this basis. I think that this is an absolute priority." For Laqueur (2014), Putin's vision for the Russian Federation rests on "the triad" of Orthodoxy, Autocracy, and Nationality (p.71). Despite agreeing on the first two, the third element should, in my view, be replaced by patriotism.

As soon as he came to power, Putin established close ties with the Russian Orthodox Church and began to blend Orthodoxy into his political discourse, thereby supporting the Church more than any other leader in Russian history. The reason for aligning too closely to the church is that Putin believes an important part of Russian identity rests in the Orthodox belief and thinking. Coyor (2015) defines this vision as "to sacralize the Russian national identity" and "to strengthen the Russian state based upon a theologically-informed vision of Russian exceptionalism."

On the other hand, Dugin summarizes this alliance by arguing that "Moscow is the capital of an essentially new state: not national, but imperial, soteriological, eschatological, and apocalyptical" (2014:12). In laying down this political vision, Putin's expectation is loyalty to this project. The second component of the triad remains Putin's autocracy. This is a combination

of Putin's dominant personality and the excessive powers given to the President of the Russian Federation with the constitution accepted in 1993. It is clear that Putin has emasculated the checks and balances in the name of restoring a cohesively working state. He made great use of "rally around the flag" (Rogov & Ananyev, 2018:150), building every issue around the discourse of Russian survival.

In his latest inauguration, Putin stated that "we all remember well that, for more than a thousand years of history, Russia has often faced epochs of turmoil and trials, and has always revived as a phoenix, reaching heights that others could not" (May 7, 2018). Before Putin, the Russian people were fed up with the weakening of the state after having faced painful experiences during the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, many cannot comprehend Putin's power-hungry behavior in negative terms, and hence, evaluate it as the strengthening of the state. According to Pipes (2004) "precisely because Putin has re-instated Russia's traditional model of government: an autocratic state" (p.15). The third component remains Putin's patriotic discourse. As he once stated, "I was a pure and utterly successful product of Soviet patriotic education" (Putin, 2000). Much of his personality built during his career serving the Soviet Union reveals his loyal personality. It is clear that Putin wants to extend the patriotic feeling to all Russians. As a multi-ethnic society, Putin refrains from using nationalist slogans, but is patriotic when describing his love for the country.

Putin makes great use of patriotic, and to some degree, nationalistic sentiments, which drive his intellectual stimulation. According to Bass and Steidlmeier (1999), intellectual stimulation rests as an important aspect of Transformationalist leadership. In Putin's case, this is closer to an instinctive rather than intellectual stimulation. As for Putin, he transforms and combines most of the political issues with a religious well-being rhetoric, stimulating the soul of his followers with a synthesis in a patriotic and religious way. At this point, Putin confronted harsh criticism for violating secularism, as he makes wide use of religious terminology in the public discourse. For instance, when interviewed by *Time Magazine*, as the person of the year, Putin states, "First and foremost, we should be governed by common sense. But common sense should be based on moral principles first. And it is not possible today to have morality separated from religious values…" (Interview, 2007). Like the previous quote, Putin tends to speak from the heart to instil a team spirit in his followers by penetrating into their beliefs, values, and morals. For instance, in an interview, Putin states, "I am the wealthiest man, not just in Europe, but in the whole world. I collect emotions" (Interview, 2016).

In doing this, Putin challenges the status quo, which is to approach (old) issues in new ways, offering tactics like loading responsibility to the followers to stand up against everything coming across the national will, and to carry on their political struggle. As Putin argues, "we will not allow the past to drag us down and stop us from moving ahead" (Interview, 2005). Blaming the Soviet-era mistakes for today's failures, the narrative he pushes mostly includes a blame-shifting discourse. For instance, in scapegoating the oligarchs, Putin was "… determined to steal and remove capital and who did not link their future to that of the country; the place where they earned their money" (Putin Speech, September 19, 2013). Or, for other economic reasons, Putin has often blamed the west for a plot, and once compared Russia to a bear, when he argued, "they will always try to put it on a chain, as soon as they succeed in doing so they will tear out its fangs and claws. That would leave it nothing but a stuffed animal" (Putin Speech,

December 18, 2014). For Putin, no matter what kind of disaster Russia faces, they are all foreign plots created by outside forces; namely, the western powers with the help of their inside collaborators. For Putin, it is always the western countries who stab Russia in the back, trying to contain and weaken Russia, via mostly 'economic wars.'

Another point is the way Putin establishes a vision for the future for Russia. The way he inspires the people is built on a strong image for the present and future. In building this, his first pace is to slam and disregard the past, and to become the respective father of the country. Putin phrases the Soviet era as to be a "mistaken," one.

In 2012, Putin made it clear in stating that "…Russia did not begin in 1917, or even in 1991, but, rather, that we have a common, continuous history spanning over 1,000 years, and we must rely on it to find inner strength and purpose in our national development." (Address to the Federal Assembly, December 12, 2012). His perception of the history of the nation lies far beyond the establishment of the modern nation-state. In the transformational leadership theory, motivating the followers to do more than they can, and even more than they can imagine, remains very important. As a result, the leaders put forth challenging expectations to make the followers more committed. They push to inspire the masses via motivating them with even utopic or exaggerative dreams. However, for Putin, his vision mostly meets reality. And that is mostly about convincing the followers that the state is struggling with the inside and outside threats to serve the Russian people.

Individualized consideration is the last component of transformational leadership. In Putin's case, this rests on his vision, strategy, and finally, his behavior. The vision he pushes is no different from that of the Russian people, as success lies where the vision is shared by the people, not on behalf of them. His strategy is to make the vision become a reality, and the only way for Putin is to exhibit an authoritarian style of management, which is the main reason why he demonstrates masculinity and his combative personality.

Finally, Putin's behavior comes to play an important role, as becoming highly people-oriented is to make the people think of him as to be one of them. He knows how to drive the emotions of the masses. He doesn't even need to control his emotions; whether anger, hate, or arrogance, the people will always find him sincere. Further, Putin does not sell people irrelevant issues, while ignoring the real ones. He doesn't approach the people as electorates but rather as followers. His intention is to make his followers believe that they are all on the same boat, and their mission is to work together for the well-being of the country. He believes that his high discipline and loyal character makes him a role model to the Russian people, as he once stated, "We have travelled a great and difficult road together, believing in ourselves and our strength and ability. We have strengthened our country and returned our dignity as a great nation. The world has seen a Russia risen anew, and this is the result of our people's hard work and our common effort, to which everyone has made their personal contribution" (V. Putin, Inauguration Speech, May 7, 2012). This vision is all about loving Russia, working for Russia, and not betraying Russia, which sums up V. Putin's patriotism.

Conclusion

The personalization of politics is becoming more prominent in international relations than ever before. The decline of party politics and the deepening of mutual interdependence among states requires more

attention on how sole individuals re-shape and re-make policies that not only affect their beloved countries, but also others. In this case, the personal character of the politician, together with the statehood, becomes nested as a single body. In the case of Russia, the sole decision-maker in most of the issues is clearly Vladimir Putin. His ambition to make Russia strong again motivates both himself and his followers. In this paper, I have shown that the personalization of politics, and Putin's success, lies in his transformational leadership character.

Putin's leadership style becoming prominent around the world, in which the leadership performance is only about a leader's personal character. More importantly, Putin makes his followers adhere to this personality rather than to ideology or party. Becoming the sole representative of the people, his speech and acts suit him as the father figure of the nation; that is, to understand the way Putin is embraced as a leader, rather than a mere politician. His rhetoric plays an important role in both motivating and stimulating the masses around his cause, both of which are important elements of Transformationalist leadership.

Throughout his leadership, Russia began to show signs of development. This success is related with Vladimir Putin's personal character, who forms a good example of handling and influencing politics with a combination of assertiveness, responsiveness, and competence, all of which make up his "strong man" persona. Putin's assertiveness lies in the strong and charismatic style he portrays in front of the public. His discourse runs directly to the people, thanks to his communication skills, which also allow him to infuse what he believes is of utmost importance for the Russian people. In the name of convincing his followers, he puts forth a very confident type of responsiveness to every issue by eliminating the oppositional voices in the name of survival for benefit of the all. Re-narrating the Russian Federation alongside his personal character, what Vladimir Putin has managed so far is to promise both economic and political stability within the country plus Russian greatness abroad.

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