

DESIGNING DEVOTION: THE VISUAL MECHANISMS
USED TO BUILD A PERSONALITY CULT

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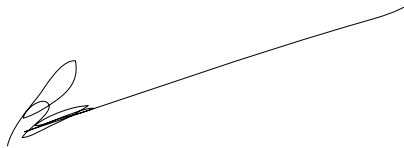
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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
Degree Master of Technology Graphic Design

November 2017

Declaration

I, Ruehl Muller, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and that it has not been submitted for assessment or completion of any postgraduate qualification to another university, or for any other qualification.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'R' followed by a long, sweeping horizontal line that extends to the right.

Ruehl Muller
November 2017

Abstract

This study develops a model that aims to prove that, regardless of socio-political system, where a cult of personality exists, the mechanisms that are used to construct it and to maintain it, from a visual communication perspective, exhibit a methodological sameness. Drawing on Collins' (2004) theory of emotional energy and interaction rituals, and Márquez's (2013; 2017) application of said theory as an explanation of the personality cult phenomenon, the model seeks to identify, with regard to affective-emotional constructions, what is required from leader-based foci to initiate this process. To achieve this, artefacts (visual representations) of Kim Jong-il, Ayatollah Khomeini, King Mswati III, and Saparmurat Niyazov and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow were collated from within North Korea, Iran, Swaziland and Turkmenistan respectively. Analyses of both the design and semiotic components of the artefacts were conducted and the findings used to develop the model. The model was tested through four unique case studies of personality cults not affiliated with its construction.

Keywords: personality cults, social design, political design, social and political agency, propaganda, affective sciences, visual communication, Kim Jong-il, King Mswati III, Ayatollah Khomeini, Saparmurat Niyazov and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow.

Disclaimer

Due to the authoritarian nature of the states examined in this study, as described on pages 68-73, several sources have had to remain anonymous for their own safety.



This artwork, entitled *Waving not drowning* (2017), by Taiwan-based artist Leora Joy, was inspired by this research and is presented in lieu of a Foreword.

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Abbreviations

DPRK	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea
ISIS	Islamic State (of Iraq and Syria)
UX	User experience (design)
VPM	Value Progression Model

Information sources:

BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CGTN	China Global Television Network
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNN	Cable News Network
eNCA	eNews Channel Africa
IOL	Independent Online
KCNA	Korean Central News Agency
NBC	National Broadcasting Company
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
RWB	Reporters Without Borders
TASS	Russian News Agency

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and purpose of study

1.1. Introduction

When a cult of personality is considered in the political context, it is usually envisioned as bizarre and exotic idiosyncrasies spawned from the aspirations of an eccentric, totalitarian demagogue. A cursory observation of the eccentric effusions and extravagant representations of leaders found in most personality cults seemingly substantiates that they are constructed purely through the lens of megalomania and narcissism. As a result, personality cults are rarely examined as phenomena in their own right, but rather as an extension of narcissistic autocracy and dictatorship.

Hallmarked by courageous feats of design, such as gilded statues revolving to always face the sun (Saidazimova, 2008), giant mosaic representations created through the precise choreography of over one-hundred-thousand participants (Harris, 2012:44), or immaculate portraits adorning the entrance of nearly every building and lapel of every citizen (Lankov, 2002:22-48), one could easily be mistaken into thinking that personality cults were colossal artworks rather than functioning countries. The extravagant – and equally imposing – nature of some of these leader representations have inadvertently led many to regard them as being instruments of control in their own right (Heller, 2008:1-13).

However, these visually-based examinations are “at the very least, hopelessly incomplete”, as they are viewed primarily through the lens of persuasion (Márquez, 2013:1). In this sense, leaders are able to persuade their subjects of their legitimacy through highly effective propaganda – in some instances, seemingly capable of successfully reaching and influencing entire populations of hundreds of millions of people. However, this naïve view is consistently contradicted by historical instances wherein those within personality cults by no means truly believe the hyperbolic rhetoric surrounding their leader (Márquez, 2013:1; Márquez, 2017:144), with even the most excessively flattered leaders subverted in private (Preda, 2010:284). However, this “astounding absurdity of personality cults fails to undermine their effectiveness” (Svolik, 2012:81).

Similarly, when an attempted explanation of personality cults overlooks their visual elements, it is routinely forced to rely “uncritically on Weberian categories of ‘charisma’ and ‘legitimacy’ [...] even as these categories have had to be stretched considerably in the process” (Márquez, 2013:1). As with the notion of highly persuasive propaganda, this notion is consistently contradicted by historical instances (see page 12) and remains equally implausible. Furthermore, to disregard the visuals of personality cults is to disregard their most profound and consistent manifestation and, perhaps, their most fundamental element. Such similar and consistent visual manifestations, from fascism to communism, Islam to atheism, Africa to Latin America, cannot simply be put down to coincidental extensions of such vastly different ideologies, religions and cultures.

With this understanding, to what is the extent of the role that the visual components of personality cult play in their establishment? If they are mere results of other factors, why does – at least upon cursory examination – a pattern seem to exist, regardless of the socio-political systems? And, beyond that, if this pattern can be identified, can it be used in the identification and examination of past, existing, and emerging personality cults? These questions lead on to the aims and objectives of this study.

1.2. Aims and objectives

This study aims to prove that, regardless of socio-political system, where a cult of personality exists, the mechanisms that are used to construct it and to maintain it, from a visual communication perspective, exhibit a methodological sameness. This will be achieved through four research objectives, namely

1. the collation of relevant artefacts from functioning personality cults,
2. the identification of what design techniques are used to establish and maintain leader-based foci,
3. the identification of what semiotic mechanisms are used to establish and maintain leader-based foci, and

4. the proposing and testing of a model capable of describing a personality cult and thereby exhibit a methodological sameness.

1.3. Significance of the study

As of this year, nearly 1.7 billion¹ people (or roughly 23% of the world population) participate in personality cults. Within this research lies an opportunity to help identify, predict, quantify, and, most importantly, understand the true mechanisms used to establish and maintain personality cults, and therefore foster a better understanding of their leaders and participants.

1.4. Delimitations

This study will only engage with personality cults in terms of the definition ascribed to them in Chapter 2 (section 2.2, page 6).

1.5. Chapter division

Chapter 1 Introduction and purpose of study

This chapter serves as the introduction to this research, highlighting the significance of the study and the delimitations regarding its construction.

Chapter 2 Theoretical frameworks

This chapter presents the structure of the theoretical framework that supports the theory and development of this research study. The chapter defines the cult of personality phenomenon, reviews paradigms that seek to explain this phenomenon, and identifies and investigates contemporary instances.

¹ The combined population of all the contemporary personality cults identified in the following chapter (section 2.4, pages 32-33).

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology of this research and explains the research paradigm, research strategy and approach, and the method of research. The frameworks used in the design and semiotic analyses of the data are also established and explained.

Chapter 4 Analyses and results

This chapter presents brief summaries of the findings of ten cases from twenty-two artefacts analysed. These cases are presented for their ability to best contextualise the Value Progression Model in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 Constructing and maintaining a personality cult: the Value Progression Model

This chapter presents the Value Progression Model, developed from the design and semiotic analyses conducted in the previous chapter. The model is tested using four case studies not previously analysed herein.

Chapter 6 Summary and conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the preceding chapters, the findings of the research including areas for further research, and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical framework

2.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the structure of the theoretical framework supporting the theory and development of this research study. The chapter consists of three sections: (1) defining the cult of personality phenomenon, (2) a review of paradigms that seek to explain this phenomenon, and (3) the identification and investigation of contemporary instances.

The first section will examine the etymology of the term “cult of personality” and attempt to define more accurately the term as it is used in the context of this study. It is this understanding of what a personality cult is that will determine the boundaries of this study.

The second section will introduce two paradigms that seek to explain the personality cult phenomenon. The first paradigm will briefly examine the popular theories of Weber (1958), as well as the work of House (1977), Meindl (1995), Conger and Kanungo (1998), and Gardner and Avolio (1998). These theories posit that a personality cult emerges as the direct result of a leader’s personal attributes – primarily charisma. The second paradigm will examine Collins’ (2004) theory of emotional energy and interaction rituals, and Márquez’s (2013; 2017) application of said theory as an explanation of the personality cult phenomenon. This paradigm, abandoning Weberian theory, posits that a personality cult emerges as a result of sets of ‘interaction rituals’, linked in chains, wherein leader-based foci serve as spectacles.

The third section will identify twenty-two instances of contemporary personality cults, and justify the criteria used for this choice. Four cults of personality of differing regions, regnal periods, and systems of governance will be selected for further analysis. Historical summaries of the establishment of agency, leading to the creation of each of these cults of personality, will then be presented.

2.2. Defining a *cult of personality*; from Marx to Mao

The origin of the term 'cult of personality' can be dated back to the 1800s where it, in its original French and Germanic context, had no political association but worked as a synonymous term for the Romanticist 'cult of genius' (Heller, 2004:33). In this regard, the implied worship was not for people who *were* geniuses, but people who *had* geniuses, as in this sense, a genius was a tutelary god or spirit given to every person at birth whereby any creative value or skill possessed by a person was a result of a supernatural, unseen force existing inside them (Shenk, 2014: para.3).

The political context of the term was coined in 1877 by Karl Marx in a letter to Wilhelm Blos, a German political worker:

Neither of us cares a straw for popularity. Let me cite one proof of this: such was my aversion to the '*personenkultur*' that at the time of the International, when plagued by numerous moves — originating from various countries — to accord me public honour, I never allowed one of these to enter the domain of publicity, nor did I ever reply to them, save with an occasional snub. When Engels and I first joined the secret communist society, we did so only on condition that anything conducive to a superstitious belief in authority be eliminated from the Rules (Marx in Dixon, 1991:288).

In 1956, three years after the death of Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev delivered *On the cult of personality and its consequence*, a four hour long speech criticising Stalin's fostering of a personality cult – or, in its original Russian form: *kul't lichnosti*. The report was so scathing and critical of Stalin that, as reported by Soviet sources, some audience members suffered heart attacks, while others committed suicide afterwards (Rettie, 2006; Smith, 1996:32). This was perhaps the first use of the term in the context applicable to this study, though Robert Service, a professor of Russian history and biographer of Stalin, notes that Khrushchev's term, '*kul't lichnosti*', translates more accurately as 'cult of the individual' (Service, 2004:362). While 'cult of personality' and 'cult of the individual' are synonymous in definition, cult of the individual held a more pejorative flavour in the communistic context, not only for its inability to work in conjunction with communist principles, but for the religious-like nature it placed on the iconography surrounding Stalin.

According to Márquez (2013:19), the spread of Krushchev's speech over the border disrupted the equilibrium held by Mao Tse-tung's personality cult in China, where the Communist Party had managed to produce relatively high and steady social pressures on the public and their expected devotion to Mao. Krushchev's speech "fed into a process of liberalisation of the public sphere which had begun somewhat earlier [with criticisms] of the cult and other forms of dogmatism [being] aired in high places, and support for collective leadership expressed" (Márquez, 2013:20). As a result, the Party relaxed its control over the population with attempts at liberalisation, such as the 1957 Hundred Flowers Campaign (Leese, 2011:62). However, these efforts were often thwarted by Mao himself, who, in one instance, described the Hundred Flowers Campaign as a means to "lure snakes out of their holes" and routinely attempted to regain any lost control over the distribution of his image in China (Márquez, 2013:20).

To circumvent the now apparent negative reality of personality cults raised by Krushchev, Mao constructed a distinction between what was to be deemed a correct and incorrect personality cult: '*geren chongbai*' and '*geren mixin*' respectively (*ibid.*). *Geren chongbai* can be loosely translated as the "worship of the truth", and *geren mixin* as "worship built on superstition", though, as noted by Leese (2011:69), this distinction was explicitly a consequence of Mao's belief that a cult of personality was a source of extra-bureaucratic power and was not reliant on Party elites. In this sense, Mao insisted that if a personality cult were to occur, it ought to be centred around himself as only he represented "the truth", stating that,

some people are very interested in opposing personality cults. [...] There are also two aims behind opposing personality cults: one is to oppose incorrect cults, and one is to oppose the worship of others, demanding own worship instead (Mao in Leese, 2006:78).

Mao went on to quote Lenin, "it is better for me to be a dictator than it is for you" (*ibid.*).

As the term *geren chongbai* already preceded Mao's differentiations of cults, being used as the translation for *kul't lichnosti* from Krushchev's speech, Party propagandists were tasked with reinterpreting the term to clarify its quasi-religious nature (Leese, 2011:83). To accomplish this, Lin Ling, a writer for *People's Daily*, singled out expressions that did not

precisely match the original Russian term (and therefore did not successfully denote their exact object of reference), and the new definition of *kul't lichnosti* was declared to be “the transforming of an individual into a worshipped icon” (*ibid.*). This definition, although biased in its construction, still serves as the contemporary understanding of cult of personality: a social phenomenon wherein a political leader, most often autocratic in nature, garners extreme levels of societal devotion and adulation through the use of mass-media.

This understanding eliminates the contemporary non-political, metaphrasal use of the term: any pop-culture celebrity or famous individual with a large or very devoted fanbase, such as Justin Bieber, Steve Jobs, or Charles Manson. Perhaps, within the context of this study, the best aversion to this bastardisation can be found in the archaic pejorative ‘god-king’: an absolute ruler who, through the fostering of a state religion, is worshipped as a demigod (Weddle, 2004:6). While the leader, whom the personality cult is centered around, may not always cultivate the pretense of being godlike – although this is still present in some contemporary personality cults (see pages 131-132) – the level of societal “worship” remains similarly extreme.

To assist further in identifying instances of this phenomenon, the following two defining characteristics are observed: (1) where focal symbols relating to the leader occupy a significant fraction of the public space of a polity, and (2) where “rituals” (see Collins’ definition on page 13) around these focal symbols occur.

Based on these observations and the Ling-Mao definition, in the context of this study, a cult of personality is defined as a social phenomenon wherein a political leader, most often autocratic in nature, garners extreme levels of societal devotion and adulation through the use of leader-based foci, occupying a significant fraction of the public space of a polity, and where rituals around these foci are observed.

2.3. Explaining the personality cult phenomenon: existing paradigms

This section will briefly examine two differing paradigms that seek to explain the personality cult phenomenon, namely the charismatic leadership paradigm, and the interaction ritual paradigm.

2.3.1. The charismatic leadership paradigm

Weber (1958:212) recognises domination as the “probability that certain specific commands (or all commands) will be obeyed by a given group of persons”. In this sense, every genuine form of domination implies a minimum of voluntary compliance², namely an interest in obedience based on ulterior motives or genuine belief. Weber recognises three ideal pure grounds of validation of legitimate political dominance and authority:

1. Charismatic grounds (such as familial and religious),
2. Traditional grounds (such as patriarchal, patrimonialistic, feudalistic), and
3. Legal grounds (such as bureaucratic modern law and state).

These three ideal pure types appear in a hierarchical development order where developing personality cults progress from an initial “charismatic authority”, to “traditional authority”, before achieving state of “rational-legal authority” (Weber, 1958:219). In Weber’s views, leaders who are naturally charismatic foster personality cults to boost their legitimacy thereby increasing their hold on power. Weber’s view is therefore generally observed through the lens of persuasion, whereby techniques and symbols are used to persuade a population to accord the desired level of legitimacy to the leader (Heller, 2008:34).

However, even cursory investigation shows that the accepted definition of charisma (the act of possessing a compelling charm capable of inspiring devotion in others) cannot consistently be applied to cults of personality. Writing on Paraguayan president Alfredo Stroessner,

² Weber’s definition of domination eliminates instances of power achieved through force, as force may not lead to any real acceptance of the dominator or any voluntary compliance with their orders.

Nickson (2015:547) states that “[a] strong personality cult developed around the figure of Stroessner, despite his singularly uncharismatic personality”. Nickson (2015:548) further notes that his personality cult manifested in the observable hallmarks one might come to expect from a successful cult: the media praised him to excess, his image was disseminated across the social landscape, and thousands would partake in an annual pilgrimage to the presidential palace on his birthday. The anomaly, however, was that “[t]he Stroessner cult emphasised [...] his dull persona” (Nickson, 2015:547).

Weber defines charismatic leadership as “the devotion to the exceptional sanctity, heroism or exemplary character of an individual person, and of the normative patterns or order revealed or ordained by him” (Bendix, 1977:294), while defining charisma as:

a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he (sic) is set apart from ordinary men (sic) and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader (Bendix, 1977:297).

However, even with the large number of creditable translations and prefaces of his work, Weber’s definitions and formulations still remain ambiguous. Since the early 20th century, scholars have debated the meanings of many Weberian concepts, including the definition of charisma, the degree of social compliance of those observing the charismatic leader, and the extent of supernaturalism as an ingredient (Clifford, 1977:150).

Furthering the definition on charismatic leadership, House (1977:194) observes four defining qualities in the charismatic leader. To House, the charismatic leader is (1) dominant, (2) has a strong desire to influence others, (3) is self-confident, and (4) has a strong sense of own moral values. Similarly, Conger and Kanungo (1998) describe the charismatic leader as having five behavioural attributes: (1) vision and articulation, (2) sensitivity to their environment, (3) sensitivity to member needs, (4) personal risk taking, and (5) unconventional behaviour.

In line with that of House and Conger and Kanungo, Gardner and Avolio (1998) present a dramaturgical interpretation of the charismatic relationship model, characterising charisma as theatrical. In this sense, charismatic leadership is an impression management process

enacted theatrically in acts of framing, scripting, staging and performing. Gardner and Avolio share a reasoning established by Banaji and Prentice (1994) as to why charismatic leaders evoke such adulation, observing a positive connection between leaders' self-enhancing motives and the high degree of effective response they garner. In this view, the "enhancing [of] identification with a leader and/or his or her collective vision serves as an especially powerful source of emotional arousal" (Gardner & Avolio, 1998:51), so that the positive effects towards the leader become more prominent when the observer's self-esteem and self-efficacy are upraised by the empowering confidence the leader imbeds within them.

As an alternative to the leader focused lens of charisma, Meindl (1995) presents what he terms a "social contagion" model, by putting the focus on the observers of the leader and omitting leader-based variables. In Meindl's model, the charisma of the leader is a socially produced phenomenon, resulting entirely from the observers of the leader. Meindl maintains that the charismatic effects, as proposed by House (1977), are "symptoms of a syndrome", in which the charismatic accreditations are modelled by the observers and spread to others like a contagious disease (Meindl, 1995:330). In this sense, Meindl (in Cummings, 1990:197) affirms that,

[for] those who are exposed to the [...] preachings of [the leader], the experience and attributions of charismatic leadership may have less to do with what is happening up at the podium or pulpit, and more to do with what is being witnessed off-stage, in the audience, among the individuals who are each other's witnesses.

A significant volume of the existing work on cults of personality have tended to rely uncritically on the stretched Weberian classifications of charisma and legitimacy to explain their emergence and maintenance. Apor, Behrends, Jones, and Rees (2005) use the supposed charismatic nature of Stalin to explain his transcendence into iconic cult status, while Svoblik (2012:80), referring to Suny's (1998) observations of Stalin, notes that he was in fact a short, mediocre speaker and the "ultimate man of the machine" who did not project the image of a leader until one was tailored for him. The application of Weber's theories and appeals to charisma as an explanation of this phenomenon often exist with no clearly defined figurative boundary between cause and effect, as the beliefs surrounding the charisma of the leader

are, as Márquez (2013:2) states, in many instances easily observed as an effect rather than a cause.

Despite the widespread usage in academia, Weberian theories of charisma and persuasion are not feasible explanations of the phenomenon of personality cults, as historical evidence clearly supports the notion that personality cults are able to generate and maintain power without the need of charisma or persuasion. Wedeen (2015:24) writes on the cult of Hafez al-Assad:

Enthusiasm may not go very deep; even party members cannot be forced to believe the slogans they chant [...]. Lack of inner conviction is acceptable as long as every single party member and official is prepared to demonstrate publicly [their] commitment to party and president.

However, this study recognises the crucial role that Weber's theories played as a significant theoretical platform upon which both models (the charismatic leadership model, and the interaction ritual model to follow) evolved. The work of Gardner and Avolio (1990), and Meindl (1990; 1995), with respect to their studies on the "emotional arousal" of those witnessing acts of charismatic leadership, leads on to the next model.

2.3.2. The interaction ritual paradigm

Drawing on Goffman's (1958) sociological studies of physical interaction and socialisation, on Durkheim, Cosman, and Cladis' (2001) hypothesis of sacralisation, and on Thomas Scheff's (1990) and Jack Katz's (1999) studies of human emotion, Collins (2004) presents the interaction ritual model. Collins theorises that successful rituals create symbols of group membership and emotionally amplify individuals, a phenomenon he calls "emotional energy", whereby the coupling of behaviour within the ritual synchronises the participants' nervous systems to the point of generating a collective effervescence, observable in the common focus and emotional state. With the unconscious understanding that successful rituals amplify emotion while failed rituals drain emotion, each person is drawn from one situation to another based on where their cultural capital is able to give them the best emotional energy reward.

As previously stated, Collins theorises that human emotions are amplified as a result of successful rituals, however, this is not the accepted understanding of a ritual: a religious or cultural ceremony consisting of stereotyped actions, such as singing, traditional dancing or wearing certain costumes. Instead, drawing on Goffman (1958), Collins (2004:48) understands a ritual as any practice involving two or more people physically assembled in the same place, within boundaries to outsiders (giving the participants a sense of who is taking part and who is excluded), focusing their attention upon a common spectacle or object, mutually aware of each other's shared focus of attention, and sharing a common emotional experience. This definition therefore presents a much broader meaning of the term, encompassing a wide range of situations that one would not normally consider a ritual, from small scale momentary social encounters, such as a smoke break with colleagues or a smile from an alluring stranger, to much larger elaborate ceremonies, like North Korea's 100,000-participant Arirang Festival.

These rituals work as emotional amplifiers (or drainers, as will be explained), whereby those participating within them experience a "collective effervescence", a term used by Durkheim to describe the action of a society simultaneously communicating the same thought and participating in the same activity (Durkheim, Cosman & Cladis, 2001:162). In the case of successful rituals, there are four discernible results (Collins, 2004:235): (1) participants feel a sense of unification and solidarity; they observe themselves as members of a mutual undertaking, (2) participants are charged with emotional energy (see page 14), (3) there is the production of "sacred" symbols (for an example, see page 23), considered the "lenses through which we see" by Collins (2004:374), and (4) there is a strengthening of the notion that those violating the sacredness of the symbols should be denounced or punished.

Those participating within successful rituals feel a positive, unifying fervour – perhaps the Ancient Greek term *enthousiázō*, the antecedent of 'enthusiasm', holds the best, albeit metaphorical, description of the feeling: the act of being possessed by the essence of a god (Liddell & Scott, 1940:480). To describe a successful ritual, Márquez (2013a) presents the illustrative examples of an enthralling lecture, a sporting event taking place to a massive crowd in a colossal stadium, a fire-and-brimstone sermon in church, or, to break away from Márquez's more sanguine instances, Hitler's rally at Nuremburg. These successful interactions

not only amplify one's emotional state but motivate one in the sense that they impel one to act beyond the immediate enclosure of the ritual and move into a more private space: (to return to the previous examples) to further research the topic discussed in the lecture, to flaunt one's sporting team's badges away from the stadium, to make a financial sacrifice for one's church, or to kill the perceived enemy. However, not every ritual is successful, and even within those that may appear to be, they are rarely equally successful for all the participants involved, with unsuccessful rituals producing the opposite results and "draining" one's emotional state, demotivating and depressing one (Collins, 2004:53).

Collins coins emotional energy as the encompassing term to describe the emotions that motivate (such as pride, elation, righteousness, or anger) and the emotions that demotivate (such as sadness, boredom, or depression). According to Collins (2004:157), all humans are effectively "emotional energy seekers" with the majority of one's social interaction observed as a generally unconscious attraction to available ritual situations from which one perceives maximal emotional energy charge results. This involves a reimagining of the notion of choice, in the sense that one is unconsciously pulled along situational "chains", drawn to those with perceived high levels of emotional energy, and repelled by those with low levels of emotional energy. As Collins (2004:181-182) states:

[H]uman behaviour may be characterised as emotional energy tropism. Social sources of emotional energy directly energise behaviour; the strongest energising situation exerts the strongest pull [...] and individuals do not experience such situations as controlling them; because they are being filled with energy, they feel that they [are the ones who are in] control.

Consider this process like a coin-operated slot machine, tampered with by a generous third-party: the third-party (the interaction ritual) has altered the machine (the foci) to be much more in one's favour than normal – doubling, tripling, and even quadrupling the amount of coins (emotion) that one puts in. In this regard, interaction rituals charge foci with emotional energy – but one cannot play the slot machine without a coin; there cannot be an amplification of emotion if there is no emotion to begin the interaction with. But where does this emotion come from, and how does it work? Here, 'emotion' is used as a synecdoche, encapsulating three components: affect, feeling, and emotion – of which both feeling and emotion are grouped under the singular term 'emotion'. Affect is a fundamental element of

one's sub-consciousness; a "moment of unformed and unstructured potential" (Shouse, 2005: para.5), operating as a constant undercurrent throughout one's life, whether asleep or awake (Barrett, 2017:72). As affect cannot be fully realised in language and exists prior to and outside of one's consciousness (Shouse, 2005: para.15), it is perhaps best described as a means in which one's brain adds quantitative dimensions to qualify an abstract experience. These quantifiable dimensions are "valence" and "arousal". Valence refers to how positive (pleasant) or negative (unpleasant) the feeling is, while arousal refers to how motivating (high arousal) or demotivating (low arousal) the feeling is (Barrett, 2017:72). Psychologist James A. Russell (1980) developed a circumplex model to track affect in a two-dimensional space (Figure 2.1).

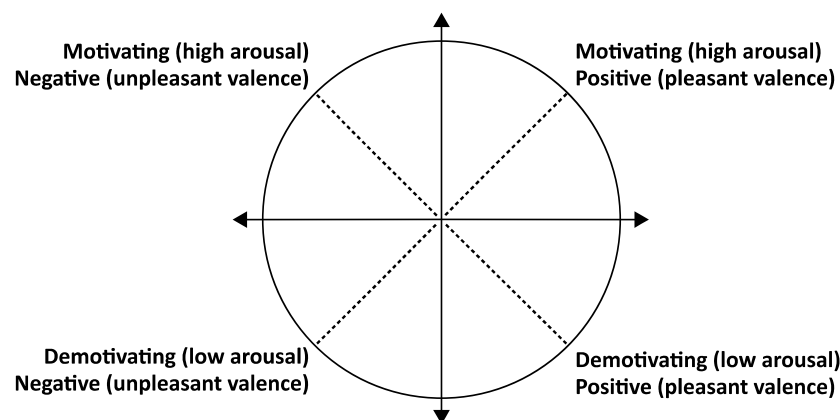


Figure 2.1: Circumplex model of affect. The x-axis represents valence, whereas the y-axis represents arousal. Distance from the origin represents intensity. Source: Russell (1980:1165).

For the purpose of this research, the term 'emotion' is used to encompass both emotion and 'feeling', where a feeling is a personal, biographical sensation that has been internally compared and contrasted against previous experiences and "labelled", and an emotion is the projection or display of said feeling (Shouse, 2005: para.3). In this sense, over the course of their life, every human builds a bespoke library of previous sensations from which they are able to draw to help interpret and label their feelings. As an example, consider Figure 2.2, Russell's (1980:1168) plotting of twenty-eight labels on the affective circumplex. Shouse (2005: para.4) notes that the distinction between feeling and emotion was highlighted by Paul Ekman during an experiment in which the expressions of American and Japanese subjects were analysed as

they watched films depicting facial surgery. When the subjects watched the films alone, both groups displayed similar expressions, however, when they watched in groups, a noticeable difference in expression was observed (*ibid.*). Like propaganda, emotion can be considered as a public broadcast of an inner ethereality – or feigned, consciously or not, to fulfil societal expectations.

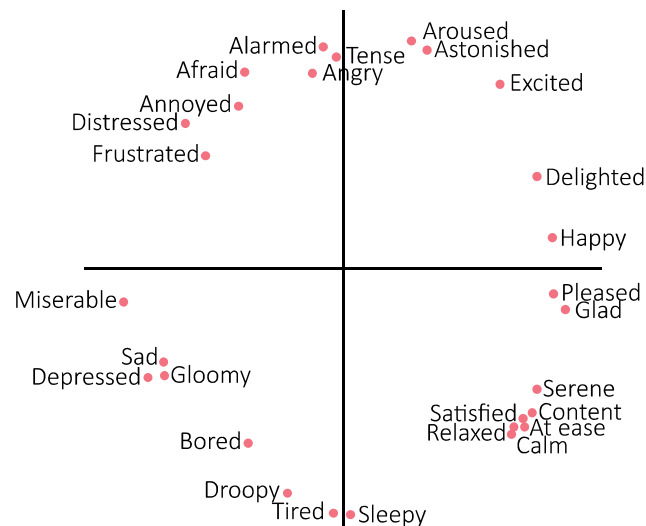


Figure 2.2: Direct scaling coordinates for twenty-eight affect labels (emotions) on Russell's (1980) circumplex. Source: Russell (1980:1168).

In this sense, this established emotion is the emotion which is most likely to be amplified as a result of the interaction ritual (if it is successful). However, it does not mean that this initial starting emotion is the emotion which will always be amplified, as the emotional tone of the ritual can change, for example: the annual Reed Dance in Swaziland, a largely positive spectacle with the King at the centre, was met with tragedy in 2015 when four trucks collided en route to the royal festival, killing between ostensibly 11 and 38 young girls as reported by local sources, though foreign sources have reported the number as high as 65 (eNCA, 2015: para.2). To prevent the ritual from producing a negative and demotivating emotional output, and thus attributing negative and demotivating qualities to the spectacle, means are required to amend the emotional tone from a negative-demotivating frame of reference to a positive-motivating frame of reference – in the previous instance, the tragedy was re-contextualised where the victims were portrayed as heroes and celebrated, as can be seen in Figure 2.3 on the following page.



Figure 2.3: Front page article of the *Sunday Observer* presenting the victims as “fallen heroes”. Photo credit/source: Sunday Observer (2015).

The redesigning of death as martyrdom is a common tactic used to re-contextualise a negative-demotivating instance (one’s own fear of death, or the sadness felt in the loss of another) into a positive-motivating instance (death is now a sign of loyalty or patriotism, or the dead “are in a better place”, and death now becomes an encouragement rather than a fear). Similarly, Islamic State (ISIS) propagandists routinely use social media and official magazines to share images of the bloodied corpses of their own fighters (as seen in Figure 2.4 on the following page), with their faces often posed in a smile, advertising “the paradise that awaits”, and implying that, for them, death is something positive and motivating rather than negative and demotivating.



Abu Umar @AbuUmar8246

"A martyr will see his place in Paradise at the point of death"
(Tirmidhi & Ibn Maajah) (#KhilafaRestored #Islam #IS)
pic.twitter.com/Ly3gucmeSz



Figure 2.4: An ISIS-affiliated Twitter account sharing an image of a killed ISIS fighter implied to be smiling after being greeted by paradise following his death. Photo credit: unknown.

Source: Umar [Twitter] (2015).

Lisa Barrett, a neuroscientist and professor of psychology at Northeastern University, is of the opinion that the classic view³ of emotion is not a feasible explanation for the phenomenon. Instead, she presents the theory of constructed emotion. Drawing on the broader constructivist science tradition which holds that one's experiences and behaviours are created in the moment by biological processes within one's brain or body (Barrett, 2017:32), the theory of constructed emotion posits that at any given moment, one's brain is using past experiences, organised as concepts, to guide one's actions and give one's sensations meaning – when the concepts involved are emotion-based, one's brain constructs an instance of emotion (Barret, 2017:31). Simply, an emotion is not *triggered* but *constructed*, as will be

³ The classic view dictates that the brain is pre-wired with specific neurons that are dedicated to specific, universal emotions which are triggered to produce a universally identifiable "fingerprint" that denotes said emotion, such as a frown on one's face when angry (Barrett, 2017:1-24).

explained in the following. Consider Figure 2.5 below, a seemingly random arrangement of formless shapes.



Figure 2.5: A seemingly random arrangement of formless shapes. Source: Muller (2017).

If this is one's first time viewing the formless shapes, one's brain is attempting to "make sense" of them; neurons process the lines and edges in the visual cortex of the brain, while other regions analyse past experiences to determine if one has encountered a similar situation, or what the best action to proceed should be (Barrett, 2017:25-26). If one's brain has not "solved" the image already, one may be seeing abstract streaks of yellow paint from a dry brush, or the continental makeup of an alien world. However, it is most likely that one is experiencing a phenomenon called "experiential blindness" (Barrett, 2017:26), seeing only formless shapes with no clear defining properties. Now, see Figure 2.6 attached to the end of this chapter on page 56.

One's brain has now altered one's perception; neurons in one's visual cortex have changed their firing patterns to create lines that are not visually present and linking the shapes into an image that is not physically there (*ibid.*). In this sense, one's brain has added the elements of the photograph into its library of previous experiences and constructed the image. Barrett (2017:26) notes that the entire process of construction occurs invisibly, and one is unable to experience oneself constructing the image. One only consciously experienced the shift from unknown to known because one had observed Figure 2.5 before and after observing Figure 2.6, and thus storing the relevant knowledge needed to draw on, called a "concept" (Barrett, 2017:26). This process occurs so habitually that one may never be able to experience that

instance of experiential blindness again and un-see the image (see formless shapes rather than Donald Trump's hair).

This phenomenon, known as “perceptual completion”, is a form of hallucination (Brown, 2007:115), and is not limited to visual data but applies to all of one's senses, such as having a song stuck in one's head – an auditory hallucination. According to Barrett (2017:27), perceptual completion is

[one's] brain's guesses of [what is] happening in the world. In every waking moment, [one is] faced with ambiguous, noisy information from [one's] eyes, ears, nose, and other sensory organs. [One's] brain uses [one's] past experiences to construct a hypothesis – [a] simulation – and compares it to the cacophony arriving from [one's] senses. In this manner, [perceptual completion] lets [one's] brain impose meaning on the noise, selecting [that which is] relevant and ignoring the rest

Barrett (2017:28) posits that emotion works in the same manner: the purely physical sensations inside one's body have no objective psychological meaning (much like the formless shapes in Figure 2.5) until a concept is created and/or drawn upon to explain them. For example, if one were to experience an ache in their stomach while sitting at a table in a restaurant, awaiting the arrival of a blind date, it could be understood as hunger or anxiousness. To understand what one is feeling, one would need a pre-experienced concept to draw from. In this sense, it is no longer the full image of Trump that has been stored/retrieved, but the conceptualising of anxiousness – uniquely unconsciously plotted through affect. “Human beings are not at the mercy of mythical emotion circuits buried deep within animalistic parts of [their] highly evolved brain[s]” (Barrett, 2017:40), but rather the architects of their own bespoke emotions, created through the quantification of subconscious abstraction, and more tangible variables like environment and culture. This explains how different cultures can seemingly possess different emotions, such as *gezellig*, a Dutch word used for the comforting feeling created when in the company of good friends (Barrett, 2017:38), *pena ajena*, a Mexican-Spanish word for the physically painful embarrassment felt for another (Daue, 2016: para.6), or *backpfeifengesicht*, a German word for “a face in need of a fist” (Barrett, 2017:112).

It is these emotions that permeate (“charge”) focal-objects as a result of interaction rituals. Once a focal-object is emotionally charged, it propagates across a society in chains, moving into more private settings, what Márquez (2013:5) refers to as secondary rituals, whereby there is only a single participant involved in the ritual. A symbol or object of power holds a high level of emotional energy charge, however, this charge is determined and maintained by the success of the primary rituals in which the symbol or object is the spectacle, and if these rituals cease, the charge of the symbol slowly drains. For example, both the swastika and the Christian cross are significantly charged symbols, and become more charged and therefore more powerful to those who regularly participate within their respective rituals, such as attending church services or Nazi rallies, until they achieve a level in which secondary rituals begin to manifest, such as the wearing of the symbol, or creating certain handling and displaying procedures around the symbol.

The emotional energy charge experienced, according to Collins (2004:227), is a result of the subconscious attention to rhythmic synchronisation between humans, such as maintaining eye contact during a conversation, or simultaneous laughter at a comedy show, or the rhythmic harmonisation of call-and-response techniques and physical gestures displayed at a sporting event or a religious homily. In these circumstances, individuals become consistently receptive, generally subconsciously, to the physical activity and the emotional state of the fellow participants within the ritual, whereby one’s physical activity and emotional state becomes shared and thus amplified (Collins, 2004:228). This phenomenon occurs as a result of human sociological evolution as when there is entrainment one can presume – at least in part – that one is thinking alike to the group. Therefore, one feels a reward when there is societal agreement, as humans would be motivated to attain a shared view: a prerequisite for social cooperation. Like Collins, Barrett (2017:196) affirms that humans are a social species, in that they regulate each others nervous systems.

The complication with emotional energy, as Rossner (2011:164) explains, is that

without further positive interaction rituals it is likely to decay. Symbols act as memories that remind [one] of the ritual, which in turn reminds [one] of membership to the group. However, if the ritual is not performed periodically, then the symbol will begin to fade away and the emotional energy generated during the ritual will be drained.

Collins (2004:140) suggests that if a ritual is not continually repeated, the emotional energy may begin draining as soon as a few days after the ritual, speculating that the half-life for most rituals is around a week. Similarly, a draining of emotional energy may occur if the symbols, as previously mentioned with respect to the 2015 Reed Dance accident, become associated with negative outcomes, or the rituals themselves becomes too routinised (Márquez, 2013:14).

Collins and Márquez understand that this theoretical model may appear to come at a very high intellectual cost, as it “involves using emotional energy as [the] central dynamic around which everything else, including material interests, revolve” (Collins, 2004:182). Márquez applies the theory of Collins’ model to explain the emergence and development of cults of personality.

Considering some of the absurd rhetoric generated within personality cults, and understanding natural human experiences of disillusionment, the stories one encounters of genuine absolute devotion to a leader remain difficult to empathise with (Márquez, 2013:30). This phenomenon is more evident when some followers continue to maintain the divine status of their ruler even after his or her death, or within safe environments where punishments for insufficient devotion no longer exist. Plamper (2012:4), writing on the cult of Stalin, begins with a brief story of how a group of young Soviet veterans, “[f]earing the spiritual presence of the leader, turned the Stalin poster on their dormitory wall around in order to feel free enough to talk about their experiences at the front”. He further notes on the death of Stalin how some Soviets, even those who suffered under his tyranny, were so strongly affected by the news that they suffered heart attacks (Plamper, 2012:28), and even three years after his death, as previously mentioned, reports existed of people committing suicide upon hearing Khrushchev’s scathing criticisms of Stalin and his personality cult (Smith, 1996:32). This devotion cannot plausibly be explained as preference falsification wherein one merely understands the workings of the cult, does not feel any specific emotional attachment to the leader and simply “plays along with it”, or seeks to hide one’s true beliefs for one’s own safety (Timur, 1995:41).

In his paper *A model of personality cults* (2013), Márquez presents a framework, largely based on the work of Collins, to explain the production and function of personality cults which does not rely on Weberian theory. Márquez (2013:3) notes that three fundamental requirements are needed to establish and maintain a successful personality cult, namely: (1) the circulation of leader-based foci in interaction ritual chains, (2) the act of “signalling”, and (3) the usage of structures of patronage.

The first requirement, the circulation of leader based foci in interaction ritual chains, recognises Collins’ (2004) theory of interaction rituals as situations of group presence and shared focus whereby two or more people interact while jointly attending to certain symbols (such as objects, actions, or imagery). These symbols are then disseminated across the social-sphere in interaction rituals with similar focal symbols (termed “chains”), where their social value and power is established and maintained through emotional energy generating processes. Márquez (2013:3) observes cults of personality as interaction ritual chains where emotionally charged leader-based objects circulate among a society as focal symbols.

Márquez (2013:5) recognises four types of interaction ritual chains where leader-based foci generate emotional energy. The first type of these rituals are the elaborate mass gatherings where the physical leader is the spectacle, such as the annual Reed Dance in Swaziland, or Ayatollah Khamenei’s leading of the Eid al-Fitr prayers in Iran, or the yearly televised parliamentary processes in Turkmenistan where a “tired” Niyazov would announce that the time had come to search for his successor – only for the People’s Council to theatrically denounce this idea and plead with him to continue leading. Secondly, there are an assortment of coercive small-scale rituals, usually at fixed times and locations, where the leaders image serves as the spectacle, such as in North Korea where it is mandatory for every person (including foreigners) to lay flowers at the feet of the statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il during certain holidays (Worden, 2009:76). Thirdly, there are temporary rituals which consist of the grassroots production of leader foci, where the population create the symbol as a signal of devotion, such as the treatment of Mao’s mangoes as sacred objects, where in one instance a single mango, of around 40 gifted by Mao to loyal workers, was driven to an airport, accompanied by a performing percussion band and cheering crowds, where a chartered plane had been arranged to fly the single mango to Shanghai (BBC News, 2016: para.14). Lastly,

there are the “secondary rituals”, usually involving a single participant in a private space, such as the subjects in Hungarian photographer Bela Doka’s photo-essay *FC Putin*, a documentation of Russian youths who idolise Vladimir Putin.

Consider Figure 2.7, a photograph from Doka’s photo-essay.



Figure 2.7: Bela Doka, *Nadya Toporivskaya's kitchen* (2007). Photo credit/source: Doka (2007).

The woman, identified as Nadya Toporivskaya, has created Putin-based secondary rituals by inserting Putin-based foci into food-based rituals; by placing images of Putin on her fridge, she has introduced Putin as a focal object in the storing, retrieving and preparation of food, and by placing an image of him alongside the table where she eats and socialises (an assumption based on the placement of eating utensils and the second chair), she has introduced Putin as a focal point in any rituals taking place at the table, such as eating or conversing. Notably, food, the most fundamental component of human survival, has manifested its importance in interaction rituals dating back to prehistoric times. Regardless of culture, humans spend a significant portion of time partaking in interaction rituals involving food or completely revolving around food (such as the collecting, storing, preparing, sharing, and eating of it). The utilisation of interaction rituals surrounding food as a vehicle for leaders

is common – in the sense that they can insert themselves as foci in an already established and vital ritual. This has manifested in a wide variety of ways, such as through the dissemination or promises of food – or the thanking of the leader for being the provider of food (see Figure 2.8), or even through personifications in the food items themselves, such as Mao’s mangoes or Holy Communion.



Figure 2.8: Xin Liliang, *The happy life Chairman Mao gave us* (1954). Photo credit/source: *Chinese Posters* (2016).

The second of the requirements needed to establish and maintain a successful personality cult is the concept of signalling. Márquez (2013:3) argues that interaction rituals produced by the personality cult are first and foremost public signals of support for the leader. In this sense, these methods of support signalling can be observed as inflationary processes that exist to devalue the social merit of existing alternative support signals, and manifest in the creation of grandiose signalling customs that “widen the status gap between leaders and

[their] populations” (Márquez, 2013:3). Following a suggestion in Winterling’s (2011) biography of Caligula, Márquez (2013:3) refers to this procedure as “flattery inflation”, distinguishing two notable forms: managed flattery, and unmanaged flattery.

A rational leader should not encourage social pressures on leader flattery as this could potentially impede his or her view of genuine public adoration. Yet almost paradoxically, autocrats who maintain personality cults often hold the longest tenures, such as King Sobhuza II who ruled Swaziland absolutely for 82 consecutive years, which therefore suggests that these are not irrational individuals capable of being deceived by their own propaganda, nor do they not understand the difficulties posed by immoderate flattery. To substantiate this point, it is worth quoting a June 1966 message from Mao Tse-tung to Hồ Chí Minh:

I advise you, not all of your subjects are loyal to you. Perhaps most of them are loyal but maybe a small number only verbally wish you "long live," while in reality they wish you a premature death. When they shout “long live,” you should beware and analyse the situation. The more they praise you, the less you can trust them. This is a very natural rule (Leese, 2011:168).

Excessive flattery impairs the leaders’ ability to distinguish among their population who exhibit genuine devotion and who are merely opportunists. Márquez (2013:9) states that this problem is notably severe when the leader seeks to reward those who show genuine devotion via the distribution of luxuries which hold value outside that of the ritual situation, such as financial resources, a higher social status, or safety. The solution to this problem, seemingly from the leader’s point of view, is that the emotional value a ritual participant places on the ritual’s focal symbols is evidence of their identification with the leader represented by the symbol, signifying loyalty or devotion (*ibid.*).

Therefore, managed flattery can be observed as when a ritual participant must display compelling commitment to the leader by proxy, by placing what Márquez (2013:9) calls a “price” on symbols (imagery of the leader, in the context of this study) if they wish to receive the luxuries allocated by the leader. The higher the price that one places on leader imagery, the greater the commitment to that leader one signals, as is observable in the more personal spaces of those living under personality cults, such as in North Korea, where every household is required to have the portraits of the leaders hanging on a wall, with law stating that no

other decoration may be on the wall and that the portraits must be cleaned daily with special government-issued cloths (Demick, 2010:316). Party members regularly inspect houses for dusty portraits, whereby if dust is found one can face punishment (*ibid.*). Newspaper pages featuring an image of the leader are not allowed to be discarded or misused, and are collected and returned by party members (New Focus International, 2013: para.8).

However, the allocation of luxury to those who place value on leader imagery attracts opportunists: those who place more value on the luxury than they do on the imagery. In this regard, their valuing of the luxury can imitate the observed devotion of genuine supporters. Márquez (2013:10) presents this situation as a metaphorical auction, wherein people make a bid, their “loyalty bid”, by visibly hyperbolising their commitment to the leader (the value they place on his imagery), and in return, the leader rewards certain luxuries to those supporters who meet a threshold “loyalty price” dependant on the value of the luxury. However, the more one adulates their leader, “the more [willing they are] to engage in altruistic punishment of those individuals who bid too low” (Márquez, 2013:10), as the leader’s imagery is a fundamental element of their own identity and a low loyalty bid within the ritual is understood as an act of disrespect. For example, during the Cultural Revolution, supporters of Mao Tse-tung began wearing Chairman Mao badges as a signal of loyalty (see page 104 for information regarding these badges). Initially, these badges were only worn by hard-line supporters, however, as Mao was genuinely popular, and disadvantages to not being a Mao supporter existed (namely harassment from the Red Guard), almost everyone soon began wearing the badges (Márquez, 2017:149). As both genuine and false supporters wore the badges now, those who wished to show that they were genuinely loyal to Mao attempted to distinguish themselves by wearing more than one badge, bigger badges – some as large as 30cm in diameter, or pinning the badge directly to their skin (*ibid.*; Leese, 2011:216).

Márquez (2013:10) notes that the higher degree of success an interaction ritual has at emotionally charging the leader’s imagery, the higher the likelihood that supporters will punish those perceived as opportunists. It should also be noted that a similar, albeit indirectly proportional, fluctuation exists between the number of supporters and the level of transgression required to receive punishment, whereby the more supporters that exist, the

lesser the level of transgression required for them to punish perceived disrespect. Additionally, genuine supporters are more likely to have better local information on who is a genuine supporter and who is merely an opportunist, explaining how a significant number of those arrested for treasonous or traitorous crimes are informed upon by local sources rather than discovered by authorities (Marx, 1974:24; Pringle, 2015:146).

Márquez (2013), drawing on Winterling (2011), presents a fitting case-study highlighting three different responses to immoderate flattery from the viewpoint of the early Roman emperors. Among Rome's aristocracy, morning *salutatio* was a crucial element of status management. Each morning, friends, patrons and clients would visit each other, and the more visitors one had, the higher their status. Senators in particular were compelled to visit the emperor each morning, as doing otherwise would signal that they were not true friends or genuine supporters, regardless of their private views or feelings. This resulted in hundreds of senators gathering outside the emperor's palace every morning, all pushing and shoving through the crowd in the hope of attracting the emperor's attention. However, as the senators fought to increase their respective status within the aristocracy, they would decrease their collective status. Márquez (2013:17) notes that in a similar fashion,

the senate retained some discretion in allocating honours [...] to the emperor, but individual senators could always sponsor extraordinarily sycophantic resolutions in the hopes of gaining [luxuries, such as higher offices or marriages,] from the emperor [...] and other senators could not afford *not* to vote for such resolutions due to the risk of being made the target of denunciations.

To lessen and manage the increase in senatorial flattery, Augustus responded in exaggerated humility. He did not want to appear as a Hellenistic king and therefore chose not to flaunt wealth or luxury and engaged with his power and status in a much more passive manner, such as occasionally resigning from standing for office, much like Trujillo and Putin. Rafael Trujillo, ruler of the Dominican Republic from 1930 to 1961 and centre of a monumental personality cult, was not always the "official" president. When constitutionally required, Trujillo would have his brother Hector or friends like Jacinto Peynado Reinoso and Joaquín Balaguer elected as president, but continued to attend to all governmental (and presidential) duties from his home office, while "his puppet presidents merely signed documents or endured the most boring ceremonial duties of the presidency" (Márquez, 2017:65; Wiarda, 1968:74). According

to Márquez (2017:65), this façade fooled nobody; all citizens knew that Trujillo was the real head of state and the press “barely bothered to mention the existence of the ‘official’ president while Trujillo was technically not in office”. Similarly, after Putin finished serving his maximum of two terms as president, he was urged by then elected president Medvedev to return to the presidency – an offer he accepted (Ross, 2015: para.6). During his time out of the presidency, Putin served as Prime Minister but remained largely in control of the country – possibly exercising more power than the president himself (Nixon & Swarovskaya, 2008: para.1). Shortly after his re-election in 2012, laws were amended to extend the presidential term from four to six years. Evidence exists of a state-sponsored personality cult forming around Putin (Sperling, 2015:3).

Márquez (2013:17) explains that this strategy allowed “everybody [to] pretend that things remained the same even though they all knew that [Putin, Trujillo, or] Augustus was ultimately in charge”. Although possessing the power, Augustus could not order the senate, as this would greatly decrease the status of the senators, and increase the risk of conspiracy towards Augustus. Instead, to achieve his decrees, Augustus indirectly signalled his intentions by providing the senate with enough subtle guidance that they could know what to vote for or denounce without the need for him to command them.

Unlike Augustus, successor Tiberius was not as skilled at using indirection and signalling to manage the flattery of the senate. This resulted in inflationary pressures on the senate’s flattery of Tiberius, which overwhelmed him, causing him to hate the immoderate flattery. As this flattery continued to increase, Tiberius lashed out in candid methods to mitigate it, such as forbidding senators from approaching his family, banning the senate from endowing him with honours, and leaving Rome to rule from Capreae. In one instance, a suppliant ex-Consul seeking to plead forgiveness to Tiberius attempted to theatrically grab his legs, which caused

Tiberius to retreat so hurriedly that he collapsed backwards. Márquez (*ibid.*) regards this strategy as imposing price controls on certain loyalty bids, however,

by imposing such controls and removing himself from Rome, senatorial energies were instead turned towards denunciations, which were made especially easy by the fact that senators were constantly making “mistakes” about what Tiberius really wanted. The more denunciations, moreover, the less actual conspirators had to lose, leading to a poisoned and dangerous atmosphere.

Succeeding Tiberius, Caligula deliberately encouraged the inflated flattery of the senate. The more the senators called him a god, the more he humiliated them by demanding that they prove it and worship him as one. Caligula’s seemingly insane demands, such as declaring war with the sea and ordering his armies to throw their spears into the ocean at random and collect seashells as spoils of war, were always met with great support from the senate who, even as victims of his apparent madness, were unable to retaliate against his demands as it would mean having to reveal their true feelings.

Caligula’s hatred for the senate’s status was illustrated by his cruelty towards them, such as the plan to name his horse a consul (Suetonius, 2015:56). In one instance, to celebrate the construction of a bridge across the Bay of Baiea, Caligula, on horseback and boasting the breastplate of Alexander the Great, led hundreds of senators and noblemen to the middle of the bridge for a lavish feast and entertainment in the form of mock battles on the river. As the senators and noblemen waited for the show, they became increasingly intoxicated from the abundance of wine, some staggering off the bridge and falling into the river (Suetonius, 2015:34). Caligula ordered that whenever a guest would fall in, his soldiers were to use their oars to prevent them from surfacing (*ibid.*). Apparently pleased by this, Caligula then ordered that all guests be thrown from the bridge into the river (*ibid.*).

This encouragement of flattery, and the degradingly violent response to it, achieved the comprehensive humiliation of the flatterers, which lowered their collective social status in regards to Caligula. Márquez (2013:18) notes that

[in the outcome of this] process, ambiguous language is no longer necessary to manage the relationship between the patron and his clients; their competitive self-abasement has widened their status distance so much that direct orders are no longer out of the question.

Márquez (*ibid.*) presupposes that by encouraging the flattery inflation, Caligula may have aimed to institutionalize the principle of hereditary succession, redirecting power from an aristocratic governing system to one of supreme authority under the emperor, as it appears uncoincidental that personality cults throughout history achieve forms of hereditary succession even within systems that are not hereditary in principle, such as “communist” North Korea. According to Winterling (2011:193), it was the humiliation and abuse of the senators, noblemen and general aristocracy that led to Caligula’s infamy as the “mad emperor” – a reaction from the writers of the time who were usually of an aristocratic background. Thus, representations and symbols of Caligula became artefacts of abhorrence as they were never presented within a ritual context that charged them with positive emotional energy (Márquez, 2013:18).

The final requirement in Márquez’s framework is the argument that, as seen in previous requirements, the emergence of signalling is most probable when interaction ritual chains, using leader imagery as the foci, are embedded within structures of patronage. Established by Martin (2009), “patronage structures” is the term used to describe when low-status individuals are dependent on higher-status individuals for offerings of the pivotal resources they monopolise. Shih’s (2008, in Márquez, 2013:4) studies of flattery within autocratic regimes note that inflationary signalling appears most likely to occur “when personal advancement within a hierarchical organisation is dependent on ties to [the leader] rather than impersonal bureaucratic criteria”.

Field observation

To summarise, consider the following hypothetical situation based on actual observations in North Korea. On their way to work every day, a group of people lay flowers at the feet of a statue of Kim Jong-il. For those who have positive emotions attached to the leader, the ritual acts as an amplifier of that emotion. For those without, an emotional contagion exists within the context of the ritual, unconsciously forcing them to find positive and motivating meaning. However, in both these instances, this emotional energy tends to decay over time resulting in the ritual becoming less and less effective in producing positive or motivating emotion – the laying of the flowers now becomes a tedious and boring task. To counter this, further

rituals are needed to restore the emotional energy – another statue is built nearby, or a large portrait of Kim Jong-il, to which they are required to bow, is placed in the foyer of their workplace. However, not all these rituals are successful as some rituals fail in generating emotional energy and work only in the sense that they produce social pressures to continue to partake - one woman in the group feels that the leader has not delivered on his promises of a wealthy future and therefore no longer supports him, for another the laying of flowers is now boring, but they will continue to lay the flowers daily because they are worried that if they stop, this behaviour would seem suspicious to others, and the group might consider them to be subversives.

2.4. Contemporary personality cults

Following the criteria established within the definition earlier in this chapter and Márquez's (2017:67) thorough identification of "personal rulers"⁴ around the world from 1900–2012, twenty-two functioning 21st century personality cults were identified and are listed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Twenty-two identified functioning 21st century personality cults. Source: Muller (2016) - government types were sourced from the CIA World Factbook (2016).

Leader	Regnal period	Country	Government type
Heydar Aliyev	1993 – 2003 (deceased)	Azerbaijan	Presidential republic
Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck	2006 – ongoing	Bhutan	Constitutional monarchy
Jetsun Pema	2011 – ongoing	Bhutan	Constitutional monarchy
Ramzan Kadyrov	2011 – ongoing	Chechnya (Russia)	Semi-presidential federation
Mao Tse-tung	1949 – 1976 (deceased)	China	Communist state

⁴ Márquez (2017:63) defines personal rulers as "the original 'crazy dictators' – [leaders] who have succeeded in escaping the constraints of norms or institutions, and who are thus able to subject state policy to their whims. [Leaders] who get away with holding farcical 'elections' that make them presidents for life; who can treat the state as their personal patrimony; and whose personal eccentricities or prejudices are magnified by the possession of apparently unlimited power".

Fidel Castro	1976 – 2008 (deceased)	Cuba	Communist state
Teodoro Obiang Nguema	1979 – ongoing	Equatorial Guinea	Presidential republic
Ruhollah Khomeini	1979 – 1989 (deceased)	Iran	Theocratic republic
Ali Khamenei	1989 – ongoing	Iran	Theocratic republic
Kaysone Phomvihane	1955 – 1992 (deceased)	Laos	Communist state
Kim Il-sung	1948 – 1994 (deceased)	North Korea	Communist state
Kim Jong-il	1997 – 2011 (deceased)	North Korea	Communist state
Kim Jong-un	2011 – ongoing	North Korea	Communist state
Mswati III	1986 – ongoing	Swaziland	Absolute monarchy
Bashar al-Assad	2000 – ongoing	Syria	Authoritarian presidential republic
Emomali Rahmon	1994 – ongoing	Tajikistan	Presidential republic
Bhumibol Adulyadej	1946 – 2016 (deceased)	Thailand	Military-affiliated constitutional monarchy
Saparmurat Niyazov	1985 – 2006 (deceased)	Turkmenistan	Authoritarian presidential republic
Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow	2006 – ongoing	Turkmenistan	Authoritarian presidential republic
Islam Karimov	1990 – 2016 (deceased)	Uzbekistan	Authoritarian presidential republic
Hugo Chávez	2002 – 2013 (deceased)	Venezuela	Federal presidential republic
Hồ Chí Minh	1951 – 1969 (deceased)	Vietnam	Communist state

Grey blocks indicate older personality cults wherein the leader has died pre-21st century but the personality cult surrounding them continues with relevant focal symbols continuing to occupy a significant fraction of public space, and a social/political encouragement to observe rituals related to these focal symbols exists.

Table 2.1 excludes personality cults that have ended prior to the 21st century. A personality cult can be considered ended when the public spaces of the cult polities are no longer saturated with leader imagery, and very few – if any – rituals relating to the leader are observed. For example, the personality cults of both Saddam Hussain and Muammar al-Gaddafi existed during this study’s delimited timeframe, but are not present in the table as Iraq and Libya are now almost devoid of foci and rituals regarding Hussein and al-Gaddafi (Farrell, 2011; Kawczynski, 2011). Similarly, emerging personality cults (or seeming instances thereof), such as Turkey’s Recep Erdoğan (Bozkurt, 2015:12), Russia’s Vladimir Putin (Sperling, 2015:3), and possibly the United States’ Donald Trump (Kato, 2017:1; Oates & Moe, 2016:21; Pollak & Schweikart, 2017:6), are excluded as they offer no definitive entrenchment and are subject to change. Additionally, some instances of contemporary monarchies, emirates, sultanates, theocracies, and such that present the typical hallmarks of a personality cult, such as strong levels of devotion and grandiose representations, have not been identified on the table as they can be considered cults of *office* rather than cults of *personality*. Márquez (2013:7) notes that in many cases what is perceived as a personality cult “can be understood as routinised rituals of worship of particular offices, rather than of the particular persons who currently occupy them”. While cults of office function in similar ways to cults of personality, they are outside the scope of this study.

Furthermore, in regard to the government types presented in Table 2.1, “absolute monarchy” is understood as a form of government where a monarch rules unhindered by laws, legal opposition, or a constitution – unlike a “constitutional monarchy” where a monarch is guided by a constitution (The CIA World Factbook, 2016: para.7). A “communist state” is a system of government where the state, led by a single – often authoritarian – party, plans and controls the economy; there is an elimination of private ownership of property or capital (or an attempt to), while progress is made towards a higher social order wherein all goods are equally shared amongst the population (*ibid.*). A “federation” is a form of government where sovereign power is divided between a central authority and a number of constituents whereby different regions can retain management of their internal affairs (*ibid.*). A “theocracy” is a form of government subject to religious authority where a deity is recognised as the supreme ruler but it’s laws are interpreted by ecclesiastical authorities (*ibid.*).

First-hand data was sourced only from 21st-Century personality cults as, within these instances, modern technologies are available and utilised, thus the leaders' use of media can be more obviously observed and recorded. Furthermore, there is no justifiable need to collate data from personality cults existing prior to the 21st-Century as sufficient data can be generated from contemporary cases to make valid findings. Additionally, the collation of data from contemporary personality cults presents the opportunity to offer new and unseen material – especially with regards to the continuous production of leader foci, and the difficulties many face in accessing this data (see pages 68-73).

With this understanding, the following five personality cults were selected for further analysis: the cult of Mswati III in Swaziland, the cult of Khomeini in Iran, the cults of Niyazov and Berdimuhamedow in Turkmenistan⁵, and the cult of Kim Jong-il in North Korea. This selection was made to ensure maximum variety as this research aims to prove that the visual mechanisms that are used to construct and maintain personality cults exhibit a methodological sameness, regardless of socio-political system. In this sense, this selection eliminates any regional socio-political constants, as each case offers a different geographical region and government type: respectively, an absolute monarchy, a theocratic republic, an authoritarian presidential republic, and a communist state. Historical summaries of the establishment of agency leading to the creation (and maintaining) of these five aforementioned personality cults is discussed next.

2.4.1. The sun that shines and the mouth that tells no lie: the cult of King Mswati III in Swaziland

“African politics has been described as a matter of personality, not programmes” (Kpundeh, 1992:16) and with “most African countries [being] colonially created states, hero worshipping [...] has always been justified on grounds of consolidating nationhood” (Chinaka, 1990: para.9), as “oppressed groups tell themselves epic narratives of their history, elaborate their

⁵ Turkmenistan is an example of one personality cult replacing another. In this instance, rather than a symbiotic relationship between a current and pre-existing cult (such as Ayatollah Khomeini and Ayatollah Khamenei, or Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il), Berdimuhamedow has begun a process of replacing imagery of his predecessor, Niyazov, with that of himself. Imagery from both Berdimuhamedow and Niyazov, existing concurrently as of 2016, will thus be analysed.

solidarity in song and ritual, [and] fashion [their leader as a] symbol of their common endeavour” (Eagleton, 1991:192). Exploiting the social aspiration for symbols of solidarity, many African rulers “have tended to encourage personality cults by having their portraits prominently and extensively displayed” (Kpundeh, 1992:16). And as “the idea of the president as the father of the nation, the big man, or being above the law [was] the [perceived] prevailing political culture in Africa” (*ibid.*), personality cults were able to escalate to extraordinary dimensions without being met by any cohesive local resistance, illustrated by how “during presidential campaigns in some rural areas in Benin, the people asked why they [had] to elect a new president when the old one [was] still alive” (*ibid.*).

In early post-colonial Africa, the commonality of political systems which granted absolute power to the leader only exacerbated the construction of personality cults. The Kingdom of Swaziland is often referred to as Africa’s last absolute monarchy in the sense that the King, Mswati III, has the ability to appoint or remove the prime minister and members of all top governmental and traditional posts (US Department of State, 2011:15). Although he restored the nation’s parliament, which had previously been dissolved by his father, he continues to rule by decree (*ibid.*). Swaziland’s self-developed *Tinkhundla* system is a relatively exclusive form of political governance, whereby Swazis elect a representative, usually a chief or important member of the community, on personal merit from each of Swaziland’s 55 *tinkhundla* (plural), an administrative subdivision smaller than a district but larger than an *umphakatsi* [chiefdom], to represent their *inkhundla* (singular) in parliament. These representatives are non-partisan (as political parties are banned), and help to bridge the gap between local workers, NGO’s and government. The King, who appoints the Prime Minister and the majority of the legislative body, maintains the ability to overrule the decisions of parliament, and has immunity from prosecution and taxation (Cropley, 2013: para.19). The system, however, is described as “a confusing mix of elected-but-apolitical [Members of Parliament], tribal chieftains and royal patronage that places the King at the heart of all decisions, from policy to road tolls” (*ibid.*).

The King, who belongs to the Dlamini clan as all Swazi kings are required to, is referred to as the *Ngwenyama*, meaning “Lion” or, more rarely, “Awesome Creature”, but in an honorific sense, distinguished from *libhubesi*, the usual term used for the animal. Similarly, chiefs are

encouraged to refer to Mswati as the biblical Lion of Judah (Swazi Ministry of Justice, 2017), a term representative of Jesus. Swazi tradition dictates that the *Ngwenyama* rules jointly with his counterpart, the Queen Mother, termed the *Ndlovukati* [She-Elephant]. While the King is the administrative head of state, the Queen Mother is seen as the spiritual and national head of state, with duties such as the management of important *muti* [traditional medicine], rainmaking, and the knowledge necessary for certain rites during *Incwala*⁶. As the proclaimed spiritual and national face of the state, one would expect a personality cult to grow more naturally around the Queen Mother as opposed to the King – a generally behind-the-scenes administrative position. However, irrespective of Swazi custom, the influence of the Queen Mother was overshadowed during the reign of Sobhuza II, and the power of her office ultimately dampened as British colonialists failed to recognise her powers – only acknowledging those of the King, and introduced a culture of conservative aristocratic forms of patriarchy to Swazi men, while Sobhuza's growing personality cult provided very little opportunity for the emergence of alternate foci.

Following the death of Sobhuza II in 1982, Queen Mother Dzeliwe assumed the regency and appointed fifteen members to the *Liqoqo* [Supreme Council of State], igniting a power struggle with the Prime Minister, Prince Mabandla, who sought to maintain the authority of the Cabinet over that of the *Liqoqo* and its members. The *Liqoqo* pressured Dzeliwe to remove Mabandla from office and replace him with a *Liqoqo* loyalist. A year later, Mabandla was dismissed from his position as Prime Minister and replaced by Prince Bhekimpi Dlamini, a *Liqoqo* loyalist. For opposing this dismissal, the *Liqoqo* placed Dzeliwe under house arrest and subsequently installed Queen Ntombi Laftwala, who accepted the *Liqoqo* as the supreme body in Swaziland, as the new Queen Mother. In April 1986, her son, 18-year old Prince Makhosetive, was crowned King Mswati III. Less than a month later, Mswati dissolved the *Liqoqo*, consolidating his power. Increasingly, Mswati began to support and strengthen the personality cult that had started to grow around him (Hall, 2003: para.3; Redvers, 2012: para.12-16), maintaining it through efforts some African academics have compared to that of Mao (Oforka, 2015:282).

⁶ *Incwala* is a month-long ceremony wherein the king goes into seclusion to perform traditional rituals, to this day shrouded in secrecy, under the supervision of *inyangas* [witchdoctors]. When he emerges from *Incwala*, he is considered invincible and reaffirmed of his divinity (Bowles, 2012: para.4).

Increasingly, the monarchical system has become the most pervasive element of Swazi culture, with self-aggrandising monarchical symbolism growing considerably under the reign of Sobhuza II and Mswati III. This sentiment is echoed by Princess Sikhanyiso, who, speaking on the observance of Swazi customs, stated that “without the King, [there is] no culture” (Skolnik, 2007). This is perhaps best illustrated by the evolution of the Swazi royal standard. In 1968, King Sobhuza II designed the royal standard, adding the representation of himself as a gold lion above the regimental shield of the national flag (Figure 2.9 below). In 1986, a new royal standard for King Mswati III was created, most likely under the supervision of Mswati himself, to replace the flag used by his father. The new design (Figure 2.10 below) maintained the basic pattern and colour-scheme of the national flag but replaced the lion of Sobhuza with another lion, Mswati, much larger and facing the viewer, which was made the most prominent feature on the flag. The regiment shield of the national flag, its eminence usurped by the representation of the king, was shrunk and placed on the upper hoist and lower fly corners, balanced by traditional Swazi war axes on the lower hoist and upper fly corners. Above the central lion is another monarchical symbol, the traditional ceremonial headdress of the king. The royal cipher, ‘M III R’ [Mswati III Rex], is centred below the lion.

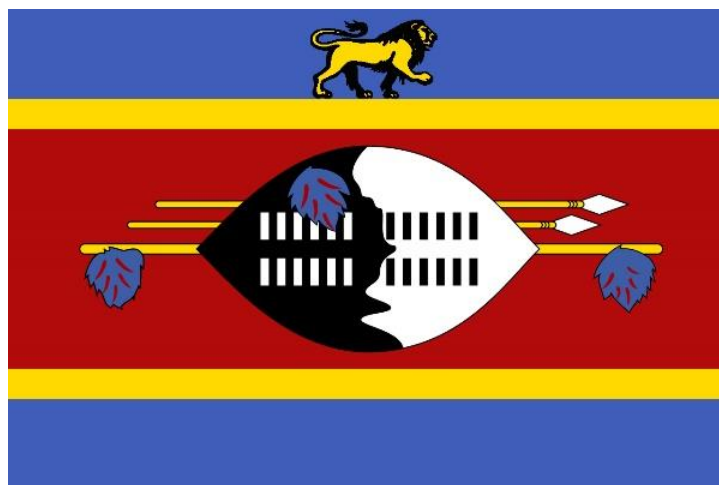


Figure 2.9: Royal Standard for King Sobhuza II (1968-1986).

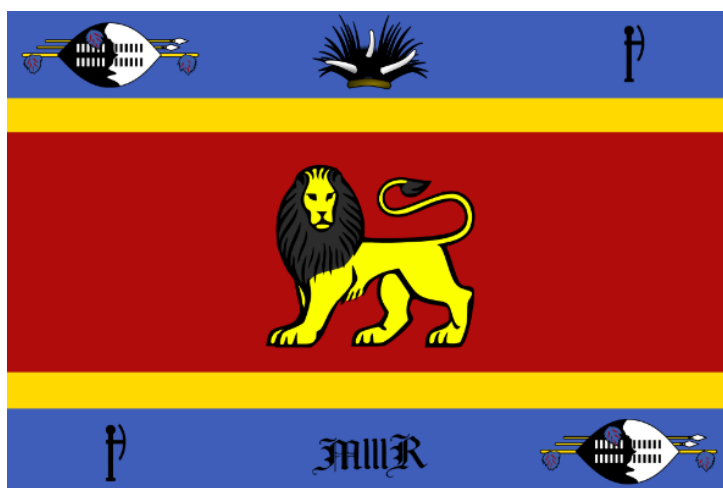


Figure 2.10: Royal Standard for King Mswati III (1986).

Rumoured to have been inspired by King Sobhuza II's establishment of Swaziland as an absolute monarchy, Jean-Bédél Bokassa of the Central African Republic, who had ousted the president and assigned himself control of all important government positions, declared the republic a monarchy and himself emperor. He used the foundation of an absolute monarchy to begin construction of a personality cult (Ikome, 2008:21), starting with a coronation ceremony in 1977 that nearly bankrupted the nation. Two years later, an estimated 100 schoolchildren were killed by Bokassa's security forces after protesting an imperial edict that required all pupils to wear school uniforms bearing an effigy of Bokassa, produced and sold by one of his wives (Decalo, 1989:162). Swaziland, according to Oforka (2015:281), "is no better than [the Central African Republic], nor is the monarch King Mswati III better than Bokassa", though this comparison is more in relation to the stark contrast between the reported lavish expenditure of the monarchs and the abject poverty faced by the majority of their subjects, rather than a comparison of atrocities committed. Nevertheless, rumours and insinuations of kidnapping, murder and even cannibalism circle both Bokassa and Mswati (Bowles, 2012: para.15; Klaas, 2014: para.7; Smith, 2012: para.3), although in the case of Mswati, these claims are notably unsubstantiated.

However, the emergence of such rumours, while highly sensationalistic and of tabloid-inclination, are noticeably the result of the deep-rooted shamanism that remains a crucial element of Swazi culture, sporadically manifesting in more nefarious fashions, such as during election time where those with albinism often call on the government for protection "fearing

[that] their body parts will be harvested [as *muti* for] candidates seeking good luck” (IOL, 2013: para.1). In 2011, *WikiLeaks* released a confidential cable, titled *Witchcraft and more: a portrait of influences on King Mswati III*, from Earl Irving, the American ambassador to Swaziland. In the cable, Irving (2010: para.15) says with notable confidence that “shamanism pervades Swazi culture, and even the King, who is above the law and constitution of Swaziland [...], is not exempted from its grip”. Bowles (2012: para.8), a Western journalist claiming to have achieved unprecedented access to *Incwala*, recounts that “Swazis fear the king and fervently believe in his [magical] power. Their reverence for Mswati is, to a foreigner, jarring”.

In her report, Bowles (2012: para.7) details a conversation with a local, “well-educated” Swazi: “The rest of the world keeps saying [that Swaziland] should have democracy, and we agree,” the man says, “but what they don’t understand is that the King [...] can point a stick at you and you [will] die. We are dealing with someone whose power the world [cannot] understand”. The man later observes that the King possesses the power to “turn into a cat or an ant [...]”. He can be invisible [and standing] right next to [you]”, further noting that he has had friends killed in this manner. “The ancestors make the King as powerful as a god” the man concludes. Bowles (2012: para.3) notes that “many Swazis call *Incwala* ‘[their] national prayer month’ – the deity being Mswati III”.

Similarly, Vilakazi (2013:8), writing from a Zulu perspective, notes that

[the] formation and crystallisation of [Swaziland] in pre-industrial ages resulted in the deification of the Leader of the State. The Leader of the State is portrayed in superhuman terms [...]. In historical times, anyone who was to be regarded and treated as higher than mere mortal [such as a king] was [consecrated] with magical herbal mixtures which [gave] powers of divine forces to that person. This is the process of deification, which magically transformed the person installed.

In the religio-political context of Swaziland, *Incwala* is a continuation of the deification of the King, using the dimensions of secrecy and mysteriousness to sustain the continuity of absolute divine kingship (Kumalo, 2013:44). Vilakazi (2013:9) notes that the deification of the King not only had an intense psychological impact on the personalities and moral compass of Swazis, but on the personality of the King himself.

According to Musa Ndlangamandla, Mswati's former speechwriter, "[the King] believes he is divine [and] believes he is magic [...]. And so do his people" (Bowles, 2012: para.1). Quoting his informant, Irving (2010: para.13) called Mswati "imbalanced", recounting an apparent event in which

[t]he King [...] invited about forty officials and advisors to a basement in one of his palaces, where they all sat on the floor to attend to him. [He] turned up the heater, which warmed the floor first, until the temperature in the room reached about 40 degrees Celsius, and told inconsequential stories to those gathered while they sweated, merely to show them he was in power.

In 1973, King Sobhuza II, the spectacle of his own personality cult, imposed a State of Emergency decree on Swaziland. This decree suspended the constitution, gave absolute power to the monarchy and banned the formation of any opposition to royal rule. Although new constitutions have been drafted, the State of Emergency is still in place, now the world's longest, giving Mswati absolute power to control dissidence. In 2011, protests erupted in Swaziland over the 40-year ban on political parties, and the economic collapse amidst Mswati's lavish spending, including the purchasing of a R6.3-million DaimlerChrysler Maybach (one of the most expensive cars in the world) and a host of other cars including 20 Mercedes Benz S600 Pullman Guards, costing around R3.2-million each (Oforka, 2015:281). These protests, and further calls for democratisation, were suppressed by police crackdowns, earning Mswati the reputation of a tyrant amongst some South African critics rather than the usual Western media (Ferim, 2012:6; Redvers, 2012: para.3). A spokesman for the lobby group Swaziland Coalition of Concerned Civic Organisations said "the regime has normalised abnormality. [...] This is not a totalitarian regime. This is an authoritarian regime. It [does not] have an ideological purity like North Korea" (Smith, 2012: para.6).

However, Sam Mkhombe, who was private secretary to Mswati until his removal from office for his involvement in the promotion of political parties, maintains that the foreign media's portrayal of the King is misguided and unfairly "fed by his detractors" (Redvers, 2012: para.10). Speaking to the *BBC*, Mkhombe insisted that "the King is very important to the Swazi nation because he is their symbol of unity and their identity [...]. The people love their King and they believe that he was given to them by almighty God" (Redvers, 2012: para.13). Mandla Hlatshwayo, a former royal advisor now active in Swaziland's pro-democracy

movement, agrees that the King is held in very high esteem with “Swazis normally [referring] to [him] as the sun that shines on the land or the mouth that tells no lie” (Redvers, 2012: para.16). “The deeper meaning of this,” Hlatshwayo explains, “is that the King is not just a king for himself or his family or those who agree with him but a king for all the people of Swaziland, regardless of their political or religious persuasion, including those who disagree with him” (Redvers, 2012: para.17). Smith (2012: para.28) notes that three out of four Swazis live in rural areas where loyalty to the king remains intense, and children are taught stories of his magical powers.

Field observation

Irrespective of external reports and publications regarding Swaziland, it is important to note that during the researcher’s fieldtrip to the country, many Swazi’s were very aware of the un-democratic nature of the country but maintained Mswati a benevolent autocrat. While little evidence was found to prove that Swaziland is not a “culture of state surveillance” (Smith, 2012: para.27), maintained through plainclothes operatives and tapped phone calls (Swazi Ministry of Justice, 2017), many of the Swazis who contributed towards this research felt comforted by the situation. Whilst accrediting the low crime rate of Swaziland to the King (in a region plagued by extremely high levels of violent crime), one source stated, “I would rather be watched by the King than murdered by [a criminal]”. When the researcher confidentially raised criticism around the high rate of poverty and lack of service delivery, and who was to blame for it, complaints were always directed at the government or, in fewer cases, the Prime Minister, but never towards the King. It should be indicated however that even though these questions were raised in confidence, criticism of the King can be regarded as an act of terrorism (Smith, 2012: para.14).

2.4.2. The spirit of God: the cult of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran

Ayatollah Khomeini’s personality cult, considered on par with that of Hitler, Mao, Mussolini, and Stalin (Rubin, 2015:427; Abrahamian, 1989:255), started from humble beginnings. Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, whose name means “the spirit of God”, enrolled as a religious

scholar early in his life and in the 1920s succeeded in becoming an Ayatollah, a leading Shia scholar. In 1962, after publicly denouncing the Shah, the authoritarian monarchical ruler of Iran, Khomeini was arrested by his security forces. His arrest, an act of pseudo-martyrdom, portrayed him a social hero, and riots, strikes, and mass demonstrations occurred as a result across Iran. In 1964, he was exiled to Turkey, from where he soon relocated to Iraq for fourteen years before being expelled to France by Vice President Saddam Hussein.

Civil unrest intensified in Iran, referred to as the Islamic Revolution, and in January 1979, the Shah's government had collapsed and he and his family fled into exile, leaving his duties to a regency council. One month later, Khomeini was invited to return to Iran, and upon his return was instantly transformed into a near mythical, semi-divine figure (Moin, 2015:257). According to Moin (2015:253), Khomeini's fifteen-year exile in Paris had fostered a "frenzied atmosphere" in Iran, wherein he had become regarded as a living symbol of hope, capable of serving as the sole personification of Islam, freedom, independence, and justice. As a result, "Khomeini's flight from Paris to Tehran was, for many of his followers, like the Prophet Mohammad's flight from Mecca to Medina in [CE] 622" (Moin, 2015:257).

A few days after his return, armed skirmishes took place and rebel troops overwhelmed the remaining troops loyal to the Shah, bringing Khomeini to power officially. On the 1 April 1979, Iran voted by national referendum overwhelmingly in favour of becoming a theocratic republic wherein Khomeini would serve as Supreme Leader. Khomeini promised a vaguely defined liberal utopia, specifically designed to unite the variety of people that followed him, from leftists to the staunch Islamist groups that opposed the Shah (Moin, 2015:255). The Islamic Revolution transformed Iran from a 2,500-year-old absolute monarchy to an Islamic republic stemmed from the principle of *Walayat al-Faqih al-mutlaqah* [absolute rule by the Theologian] (Taheri, 2011: para.11). According to Adib-Moghaddam (2014:305), Khomeini fostered his growing personality cult by allowing, and perhaps encouraging, his supporters to liken him to the Prophet Muhammed and the Imams – a heretical act within the Shi'i orthodoxy. In the first (and so far, only) historical instance, Khomeini, a Grand Ayatollah, was bestowed with the institutionalised title of *The Imam*, a religiously significant term intended to suggest that Khomeini was the Hidden Imam: the awaited saviour of mankind in the Quran (Moin, 2015:255). Khomeini often likened himself to a god; in one instance replying to

criticism over the hundreds-of-thousands of Iranian deaths in the Iran-Iraq War, "do you also criticize God when he sends an earthquake?" (Nasr, 2006:120). His Islamist supporters routinely called him "prophetlike", crediting him with ending the "age of ignorance" and introducing the "light of Islam" (Moin, 2015:257).

Khomeini's cult of personality was strengthened and propagated through publications, tailored for domestic and foreign consumption (Friedman & Sivan, 1990:68), attracting followers from around the world. Adib-Moghaddam (2014:305) notes that "Khomeini's mausoleum near Tehran's international airport (also named for him) [continues to be] a major site where many [followers] from faraway places [...] continue to visit". This site of pilgrimage, still considered by some to be of more importance than Mecca, is adorned with his portraits (Leick, 2013:236). Unusually, these portraits depicted Khomeini not with his typically stern expression but a smile, showcasing him as a benevolent father rather than a strict revolutionary (*ibid.*).

During the revolution, devoted followers of Khomeini painted portraits of him, but over time, these spontaneous likenesses were replaced by official artworks either commissioned or confiscated from renowned Iranian artists, and eventually with vinyl billboards and digital prints (Rubin, 2015:428). As Rubin (2015:427) notes,

[t]hroughout the last decade of his life, the adulation of Ayatollah Khomeini via urban landscape meant to foster his image as the unequivocal father of the revolution, Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic [...], infallible source of emulation [...] for the true believers, and righteous Muslim defender against the oppressing powers of Western imperialism and their messengers. [...] Khomeini's image acquired a forceful impact [elevated from] being a symbol of the Shah's opposition to a feared and revered iconic figure.

Following his death in 1989, imageless banners bearing his sayings, expressions, and poems could be found in all the cities of Iran, while his image and portrait continued to decorate billboards, multi-storey murals, and the walls of mosques, schools, homes and most public buildings (Rubin, 2015:427). Khomeini's posthumous image came to represent not only his revolutionary legacy but the power his likeness still possessed, such as a 2012 re-enactment of his return from exile, conducted by the state using a large cardboard replica of him, seen in Figure 2.11 on the following page, wherein soldiers, accompanied by a playing marching

band, saluted the cardboard replica as it was carried from the plane into an awaiting vehicle, before being escorted away by security (Fisher, 2012). The troops stood solemnly as the cardboard replica “inspected” them (*ibid.*).



Figure 2.11: A large cardboard replica of Ayatollah Khomeini is carried from an Iranian plane whilst “inspecting” the awaiting regiment. Photo credit: *Mehr News Agency* (2012). Source: Fisher (2012).

Khomeini’s “immortality” remains apparent as his portrait continues to appear alongside those of newly appointed leaders – often in an attempt to legitimise their authority (Rubin 2015:427). Even Ayatollah Khamenei, who, much like his predecessor did, maintains a

prophet-like aesthetic (Taheri, 2015: para.3), is often depicted against the backdrop of a heavenly Khomeini peering down from the clouds, bequeathing a divine authority (Rubin, 2015:428). Ayatollah Khamenei, whose image has come to bedeck as much of the Iranian landscape as his predecessor, is similarly portrayed as an extension of Khomeini, even though Grand Ayatollah Golpaygani has claimed that Khamenei, a descendent of the third Imam of Shi'ism, should be regarded "on par with the Prophet" (Taheri, 2015: para.5). Newspapers report that the sun shines brighter and flowers bloom in cities in anticipation of Khamenei's impending visits (Taheri, 2011: para.14), and objects he has touched are collected and sold as icons (Taheri, 2010:235).

2.4.3. The *Land of Oz*: Niyazov and Berdimuhamedow's Turkmenistan

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, "the communist leaders emerged as the nation and state builders [of the post-Soviet republics, opening] the door for the creation of [...] cult[s] of personality through nationalism as a state ideology" (Dagiev, 2013:83), and the establishing of 'superpresidential' "political systems in Central Asia [whereby] leaders personify their state" (Cummings, 2013:30). "In Central Asia, presidential portraits are often seen on the facades of government and public buildings [and] hang on the office walls of [...] every government official", but, with the exception of North Korea, "the portrait and statue extravaganza during Niyazov's 21-year rule was virtually unmatched" (Saidazimova, 2008). Of all the post-Soviet states, the personality cult of Saparmurat Niyazov, self-titled Turkmenbashi [Father/Leader of All Turkmen], is the most extreme (Cummings, 2004:11).

In January 1990, Niyazov became Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic, a post equivalent to that of president. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union a year later, the Turkmen Supreme Soviet declared Turkmenistan an independent nation and presidential elections were held the following year. Niyazov, being the only candidate, won with 99.5% of the vote and was appointed as the country's first president (Seddon, 2013:663). In a 1994 referendum it was decided that Niyazov's five-year term would be extended by another eight years, and in 1999, the parliament decided that Niyazov would serve as president for life (Nohlen, Grotz, & Hartmann, 2001:480).

One of Niyazov's initial priorities as president was to promote Turkmen culture which had been suppressed under the Soviet Union. He introduced a new Latin alphabet in preference to the traditional Cyrillic, and an oath of loyalty to be recited every day at school and most workplaces. The oath, printed along the top of daily newspapers, reads in translation:

Turkmenistan, my homeland, you are always with me in my thoughts and heart.
For the slightest evil against you – let my hand be cut off!
For the slightest slander about you – let my tongue be cut out!
At the moment of my betrayal of my motherland, her sacred banner, or
Saparmurat Turkmenbashi the Great, let my breath stop (Niyazov, 2004:iv)!

Similarly, the first line of the national anthem referred to Turkmenistan as “the great creation of Turkmenbashi”. Niyazov used the guise of cultural revival to begin the development of his personality cult, renaming schools, villages, towns, a sea gulf, a meteorite, and more after himself (Hem, 2012:40). He further renamed months of the year after himself, his mother, the National Flag Day (which fell on his birthday), and his quasi-holy book: the *Ruhnama* (*ibid.*).

The *Ruhnama* [the Book of the Soul] was written by Niyazov as the professed spiritual guidance of Turkmenistan, the basis for the nation's art and literature, and the intended moral, social, and religious norms for modern Turkmen. The *Ruhnama* did “not present an ideology or a political doctrine per se, but [...] a disparate patchwork of borrowed elements from the [Quran], communist literature, and traditional Turkmen epics” (Peyrouse, 2015:93), including a revisionist autobiography of Niyazov and a reimagining of Turkmen history, alongside proposed spiritual and moral guides.

Niyazov gradually, albeit pervasively, introduced the *Ruhnama* into the nation's schools, universities and governmental organisations, eventually making its reading mandatory for most aspects of Turkmen life. Official ceremonies were conducted “where hundreds of singing Turkmen performed choreography with the book in hand” (Halford, 2010: para.2), and those applying for drivers' licenses were required to have a sixteen-hour course on the book (Peyrouse, 2015:93). The state ordered all bookstores and governmental offices to display it prominently, and all mosques to hold and display it on par with the Quran (Corley, 2005: para.1-2), with Niyazov himself decreeing before the People's Assembly that it be regarded

as “the second holy book after the Quran” (Peyrouse, 2015:93). After some imams refused to comply with the order, alleging that any compliance would be blasphemous, the state reportedly demolished their mosques (Hann, 2006:136).

In 2005, the Ruhnama was attached to a Russian Dnepr launched from Kazakhstan, so that “[t]he book that conquered the hearts of millions on Earth [could] now [conquer] space” according to the official *Neytralny Turkmenistan* newspaper (BBC News, 2005: para.8). “With this, [Niyazov’s personality cult] extolled Turkmenistan’s entry into the space club” (Peyrouse, 2015:93), and the following year, with Earth and space “conquered”, sights were set on the afterlife as Niyazov announced that any student who read the Ruhnama three times a day would automatically be allowed into Heaven (Los Angeles Times, 2006: para.2). In Ashgabat, a monumental replica of the Ruhnama was erected. Every night at 8 pm, the covers of the book open via motors, and an audio recording of a passage is played, along with a video projection of the many accomplishments of Turkmenistan – and Niyazov (Halford, 2010: para.1).

Gold plated statues of Niyazov were raised across Turkmenistan, with most located in Ashgabat, a city considered one of the great architectural curiosities of the world (Page, 2016: para.12). The eccentric construction witnessed in Ashgabat under Niyazov was funded by Turkmenistan’s massive oil and gas reserves. “Some have argued that these [construction projects were] little more than vanity projects for [Niyazov]” (Page, 2016: para.9), who in turn inspired his successor to do the same. During the construction frenzy, “Ashgabat [picked] up a host of obscure records [...]: the largest enclosed Ferris wheel; the largest architectural star; [...] the most fountain pools in a public place” (*ibid.*), and the highest density of marble-clad buildings in the world, with nearly one-fifth of all buildings in the capital clad in white marble (Page, 2016: para.3). “Ashgabat became well known for Niyazov’s gold-plated statue atop the capital’s highest building, [the Monument of Neutrality], which rotates so that it always faces the sun” (Saidazimova, 2008: para.4). David Remnick (2006: para.1), editor of *the New Yorker* and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for his work regarding the Soviet Union, called Turkmenistan “a cruel blend of Kim [Jong-il]’s North Korea and L. Frank Baum’s *Oz*”.

Niyazov routinely said that he did not want a personality cult, but would not interfere with “what the people wanted” (Saidazimova, 2008: para.5), adding that

if I were a worker and my president gave me all the things they have here [for free] in Turkmenistan, I would not only paint his picture, I would have his picture on my shoulder or on my clothing (*ibid.*)

As reported by *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (RFE/RL), shortly before his death, Niyazov ordered all hospitals outside of Ashgabat shut, and replaced the Hippocratic Oath with a pledge to the Ruhnama. Further, he ordered the shutting of all libraries outside Ashgabat, believing that the only books Turkmen needed to read were the Quran and Ruhnama.

Following Niyazov’s death in December 2006, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow became acting president, and, following a vote from the People’s Council to remove Article 60 of the Turkmen Constitution stipulating that the acting president may not stand for election to the presidency, won the 2007 presidential election with 89% of the vote. While yet to claim a president for life title, he was re-elected in the 2012 presidential election with 97% of the vote, and again with 97% in the 2017 presidential election where he was re-elected to a third term (Lopes, 2012:8). At his first inauguration, Berdimuhamedow placed his right hand on the constitution of Turkmenistan, and respectfully bowed before the Quran and Ruhnama (Fitzpatrick, 2012: para.4). This broke tradition as although respect was shown to the Quran (and Ruhnama) one would normally place their left hand on the Quran simultaneously to their right on the constitution. At his second inauguration however, he placed his *left* hand on the constitution, and ignored the Quran – there was no Ruhnama present (*ibid.*).

The personality cult of Niyazov began to diminish under Berdimuhamedow. In his first few years of office, Berdimuhamedow had reversed many of Niyazov’s eccentric decrees; restored the traditional names of the months; removed mention of Niyazov from the national anthem; reduced the requirement of knowledge of the Ruhnama in everyday life; reintroduced classes to the national curriculum that had been replaced with studies of the Ruhnama; and more (BBC News, 2008: para.4; BBC News, 2012: para.8; Saidazimova, 2008: para.3; Walker, 2015: para. 9).

During a RFE/RL interview with Rahim Esenov, a prominent writer in Ashgabat, Esenov was reported as saying:

I don't see Niyazov's portraits anymore. [...] In a clinic where I usually go, his pictures used to cover all the walls completely. Now, they are gone. However, you can still his busts and statues on the streets (Esenov in Saidazimova, 2008: para.7).

However, “[i]n recent months, numerous reports from Turkmenistan have said that portraits of [Berdimuhamedow] are replacing those of Niyazov in many places around the capital and elsewhere” (*ibid.*). In 2011, Niyazov's Monument of Neutrality was successfully moved to the outskirts of Ashgabat (Orange, 2011: para.8), and, three years later, Berdimuhamedow was honoured with a monument of himself, over twenty-metres in height. Cast in bronze and plated in 24-carat gold leaf, the statue of Berdimuhamedow – which depicts him riding a stallion – is perched upon a stylised cliff-face carved from white marble. According to *the Guardian*, the monument was only officially commissioned after “public clamour”, to which Berdimuhamedow insisted that his “goal is to serve the people and motherland [and] will listen to the opinion of the people and do as they choose” (Walker, 2015: para.6).

This case highlights an interesting phenomenon: rather than maintaining a symbiotic (or exploitative) relationship with the cult of Niyazov, Berdimuhamedow is disassembling it while simultaneously building his own. Many leaders maintain the existence of pre-existing personality cults, even for decades after the death of said leader, as a means of garnering populist capital, which is why idiosyncrasies (such as the dynastic nature of North Korea in contrast to its proclaimed communist ideology) often arise in situations of multiple simultaneous personality cults.

2.4.4. We envy nothing: the cult of Kim Jong-il in North Korea

Kim Il-Sung's social popularity began to emerge during his time as a guerrilla leader, in which he fought against the Japanese occupation of Korea in the 1940's, and subsequently led the North Korean Forces in the Korean war in 1950 (French, 2007:50). The Soviets, who occupied the North after the end of World War II, attempted to legitimise the rule of Kim Il-Sung via

idealised image-making through myth and folklore (French, 2007:50), and redesigning him as a “Korean Stalin” (Jae-cheon, 2015:3). French (2007:53) recounts,

[d]espite some misgivings among the crowd [the day Kim Il-sung was presented to North Korea], the [...] *Pyongyang Times* displayed none, describing Kim as “the incomparable patriot, national hero, the ever victorious, brilliant field commander with a will of iron, [...] the greatest leader that our people have known for the last several thousand years, [...] a man equipped with exceptional powers”.

According to Tertitskiy (2017: para.1-5), there are three basic traits in a Stalinist personality cult: (1) the ruler is portrayed as an “exceptional genius” and is therefore worthy of their power, (2) the future victory of the state is a result of the “scientific laws of history discovered by Marx”, and (3) the leader is presented as the loyal and “spiritual” successor to his predecessors. Although these characteristics were intentionally transplanted to the cult of Kim Il-sung, over time the personality cult deviated from this strategy (Tertitskiy, 2017: para.8).

The ideology of *Juche* was developed by Kim Il-sung as a Korean variant of Marxism-Leninism and adopted into a set of national principles for the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea). The ideology itself is based on three fundamental principles: political independence, economic self-sustainability, and military self-reliance (Cummings, 2005:404). Some foreign observers regard the ideology as Racist-Focused Nationalism, similar to that of Shōwa Japan (Lankov, 2009: para.11), or resembling European Fascism (Armstrong, 2011:358). It was also during this time that Kim Il-sung purged all political opponents (Jae-cheon, 2015:3), and fostered himself as “a great military leader who single-handedly led the defeat of US imperialism (French, 2007:53)”. French (2007:50) also speculates that Kim Il-sung deliberately designed and encouraged his personality cult as a result of his experience in the Soviet Union, where he had witnessed the power and possibility it had in mobilising the masses. The cult of Kim Il-sung is said to have matched, and possibly even exceeded, that of Mao Tse-tung during the Cultural Revolution (Morgan, 2017:327).

To consolidate his control of information, Kim Il-sung closed the nation’s borders (Post, 2014:185). This allowed near complete management and propagation of North Korea’s image to the outside world, and the outside world’s image to North Korea. Citizens were routinely

affirmed that North Korea was a paradise in comparison to the rest of the world (Kang, 2007: para.7), and children's songs like "we envy nothing" were taught (Demick, 2010: para.8). This image of paradise was equally advertised to the rest of the world, often through extensive and bizarre methods, such as the constructing of an entire fake town on the South Korean border to give the illusion of prosperity (Tran, 2008: para.2). This national isolation further allowed Kim Il-sung to manage his image, often to beyond what was truthful, with no criticism from the international community able to reach North Korea.

While starting as an extension of Kim Il-sung's personality cult, a smaller but similar personality cult began forming around his son, Kim Jong-il (Jae-cheon, 2015:3). In a calculated move to preserve the dynastic rule, the relatively quiet but consistent cult of Kim Jong-il started escalating in the early 1970s (Metzler, 2014:97), and became a "full-blown campaign" by the 1980s (Tetitskiy, 2017: para.7). These new personality cults no longer resembled their Stalinist beginning; the success of North Korea was no longer attributed to the laws of history or the writings of Marx, but entirely on the leaders (*ibid.*). In this sense, Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il became the sole justification for the existence of North Korea (*ibid.*).

Following Kim Il-sung's death in 1994, a three-year period of national mourning was declared and Kim Jong-il was officially named his father's successor. However, Kim Il-sung posthumously maintained the position of Eternal President, leading some to label North Korea a "mausolocacy" (Hitchens, 2010: para.6). Kim Jong-il did not encourage his own personality cult – nor discourage it (Frank, 2012:112), but allowed society to dictate its direction while he focused on increasing the personality cult around his father to epic proportions (Cha, 2013:73). During this time Kim Jong-il developed the political philosophy of Kimilsungism (Leick, 2013:90). According to Leick, (2013:90), Kimilsungism does not only amount to the political philosophy formulated by Kim Il-sung himself – *Juche* – but to a "spiritual revitalization movement". The deification of Kim Il-sung transferred agency to Kim Jong-il in that he was interpreter of *Juche*, and, under Kim Jong-il, references to Marxism,

Leninism, and communism were dropped and *Juche* manifested itself as a system of “faith”, rather than a tangible guide to practice (Leick, 2013:90).

[W]ith some artistic pretensions himself, Kim Jong-il personally orchestrated the visual manifestations of his father’s cult. In fact, he subordinated all artistic practice and architecture to the mandate of serving *Juche* and glorifying the person of Kim Il-sung (*ibid.*).

A great deal of resources was invested into the building of the personality cults (Jae-cheon, 2015:3), with more than 40,000 statues of Kim Il-sung recorded in 1992 (Cha, 2013:73). The Korea Institute for International Economic Policy placed the cost of leader image production at 38.5% of North Korea’s budget in 2004 (AsiaNews, 2007: para.7), with *the Daily Telegraph* estimating the cost in 2012 at around \$100 million (Firn, 2012: para.11). Both Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il had been elevated to the status of deities, with the cult of personality attaining such a level of fanaticism that it could be likened to early Christian societies (Jae-cheon, 2015:3). During a tour of Pyongyang in 1979, Martin (2007:1) observed that to North Koreans, “Kim Il-sung was more than just a leader, [...] he might even be immortal, able to provide his followers eternal life”. As Jae-cheon (2015:3) notes,

North Korean people revered [Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il] as sacrosanct figures. Through their long-standing leadership cult, the state elevated the two Kims to the level of demigods. From childhood to adulthood, the people were educated to know no other leaders but the two Kims. All symbols of the two leaders, such as badges, statues, and portraits, were to be treated with extreme care. Whatever the two leaders said was believed to be right and true. Moreover, all state institutions were demanded to fulfil the leaders’ commands, and all organizational meetings were initiated by quoting the two leaders’ instructions as if they were religious doctrines.

According to Tan (2015:86), the ‘state religion’ of North Korea is the *apotheosis*: the deification of the only individuals who have ruled the country. This explains the extreme level of leader devotion witnessed in North Korea, such as the death of Han Hyon Gyong, a 14-year-old schoolgirl who drowned while trying to save portraits of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il during a flood by holding them above her head (Taylor, 2012: para.2). As Martin (2007:1) recalls, all North Koreans “sprinkled [their] speech with straight-faced references to ‘our Respected and Beloved Leader’” and “wore a portrait of [...] Kim Il-sung [...] pinned to [their] left breast. Larger portraits and statues of the Leader were everywhere. It gradually became apparent that this was a religion”.

Field observation

During a 2016 fieldtrip to North Korea, the researcher was told by a guide that “the Dear Leaders are our universe”. This may be accurate in the utmost sense as, in North Korea, the personality cults surrounding Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il dominate both the society’s space and time.

The birth year of Kim Il-sung marks Juche 1, the unit for year numbering on the North Korean calendar (Hy-Sang, 2001:221). There are no “before Juche 1” years (KCNA, 1997: para.1). In terms of image-scape, North Korea is dominated by the portraits and representations of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il on a near-insurmountable scale, wherein one is literally unable to walk thirty metres without encountering their likenesses (Hunter, 1999:18).

Following the death of Kim Jong-il in 2011, his son Kim Jong-un inherited his position as Supreme Leader. By extension of his heritage, a personality cult is developing around Kim Jong-un, although he has been known to discourage it (Korea International Travel Company, 2016). As Kim Jong-il expedited and intensified the personality cult surrounding Kim Il-sung as a means of legitimisation, Kim Jong-un is equally intensifying the personality cults surrounding his father and grandfather, however, he “does not care about the cult nearly as much as his father did [and] this new cult was constructed faster, and is much less creative” (Tetitskiy, 2017: para.4). In this sense, it would appear that Kim Jong-un is more focused on building North Korea into a functioning nation, rather than the gigantic mausoleum it resembles. As Kim Il-sung is Eternal President of North Korea, Kim Jong-il is Eternal Chairman of the National Defence Commission, as well as the Eternal General Secretary of the Workers’ Party (Tetitskiy, 2017: para.6). As this was impractical, rather than demoting Kim Jong-il, Kim Jong-un had the National Defence Commission renamed to the State Affairs Commission and the Secretariat of the Workers’ Party was renamed the Administrative Council, allowing the deceased leaders to continue presiding over two, now non-existent, institutions (*ibid.*).

It would be an impossible task to condense and present the relevant information required for this summary, as the North Korean cult of the Kim Dynasty remains one of the strongest personality cults in human history – if not the strongest (Morgan, 2017:327). To understand the magnitude of this information, consider the following: there are 365-days’ worth of

materials relating to Kim Il-sung taught in North Korean schools (Fifield, 2015: para.12), similarly, according to the North Korean Education Committee's *Compulsory Education Outline*, high-school students must complete a three-year course on the Kim Dynasty, alongside a 160-hour course on Kim Il-sung, 148-hour course on Kim Jong-Il, and an 81-hour course on Kim Jong-un (*ibid.*). The sixty-seven years of consistent and intense personality cult fostering has created a society so imbued with their leaders (and their imagery) that, as previously stated, they may be the sole justification for the existence of the country.

2.5. Chapter synthesis

From its roots in the Romanticist “cult of genius”, this chapter explored the evolving definitions and usage of the term ‘personality cult’. This exploration, drawing on Marx (1877), Khrushchev (1956), and Ling and Mao (1969), ended with the defining of a personality cult as a social phenomenon wherein a political leader, most often autocratic in nature, garners extreme levels of societal devotion and adulation through the use of leader-based foci, occupying a significant fraction of the public space of a polity, and where rituals around these foci are observed.

Two paradigms were introduced and examined, in an attempt to explain the personality cult phenomenon. The first paradigm was that of the popular and widely accepted theory developed by Weber (1958), wherein a personality cult emerges as the direct result of a leader's charisma, ability to persuade, and other personal attributes. The second paradigm was that of Collins' (2004) theory of emotional energy and interaction rituals, which Márquez (2013; 2017) applies as an explanation of the personality cult phenomenon; a personality cult emerges as a result of sets of interaction rituals, linked in chains, wherein leader-based foci serve as spectacles. It was found that the first paradigm, Weber's charisma-based theory, cannot be considered a feasible explanation for the phenomenon of personality cults, as historical evidence clearly supports the notion that personality cults are able to generate and maintain power without the need of charisma or persuasion.

Twenty-two instances of contemporary cults of personality were identified, according to a predetermined set of criteria. From the twenty-two identified, five personality cults were selected for further research, namely that of King Mswati III in Swaziland, Niyazov and Berdimuhamedow in Turkmenistan, Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, and Kim Jong-il in North Korea. This selection was made to ensure maximum variety so as to prove that the visual mechanisms that are used to construct and maintain personality cults exhibit a methodological sameness, regardless of socio-political system.

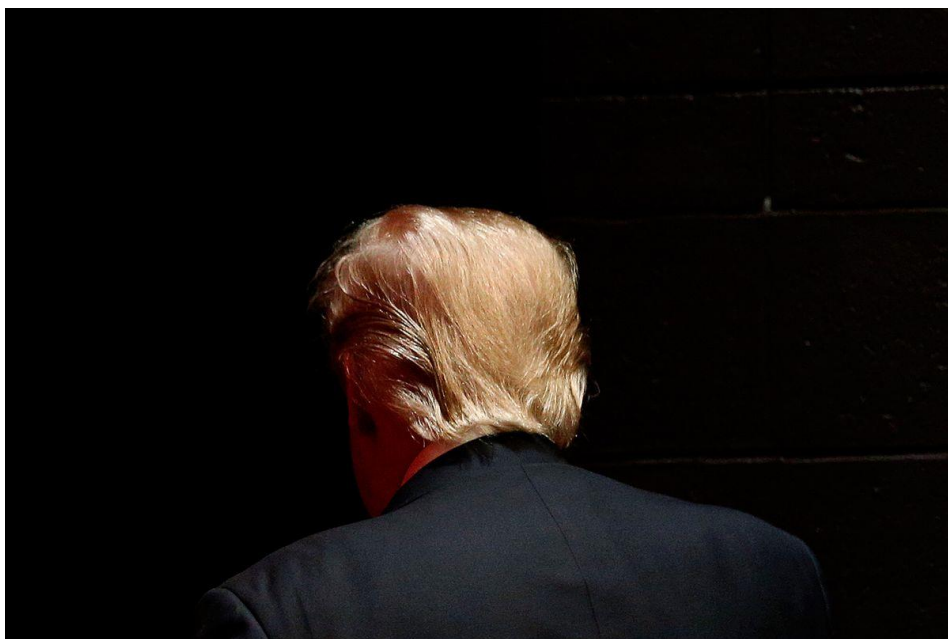


Figure 2.6: Donald Trump exiting the stage after a 2016 campaign event. Photo credit: Patrick Semansky. Source: Green (2017).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology of this research and consists of three sections: research design, research methods, and data analysis.

The first section explains the pragmatic-symbolic interactionist paradigm of the research, as well as the qualitative, ethnographic-universalistic research strategy, and the inductive research approach. The second section presents the four-phase sequence in which this research was orchestrated and completed. This methodological sequence also further clarifies the role of each chapter. The final section discusses the frameworks used in the design and semiotic analyses of the data. The design analysis was undertaken using a bespoke framework, whereas the semiotic analysis was undertaken using Du Plooy's (1996) non-verbal communication framework and, where needed, Leech's (1974) framework.

3.2. Research design

Until only recently, social sciences have been considered "disciplines of words" (Mead, 1975:1), in which there is no place for imagery aside from supporting characters. However, a transformation within anthropology, sociology, and even psychology is occurring wherein visual analysis is starting to be seen as a critical component, "mediating and constituting human social relationships" (Banks & Zeitlyn, 2015:1), rather than merely serving as addenda. Seeing is not a natural (or God-given) talent but a learned experience (Nelson, 1977:7). It is around this notion that the research design for this essay has been tailored.

The research design develops along the sequence of: paradigm, strategy, and approach. The guiding research philosophy is ontologically subjectivist as this view holds that social phenomena are created from the perception and consequent actions of those social actors

concerned with their existence (Collins, 2010:37). This philosophy allows the researcher to take an interpretive position in the evaluation of social phenomena.

The research will follow a pragmatic-symbolic interactionist paradigm. Pragmatism is a lens through which an ideology or proposition is considered accurate if it works satisfactorily, and that the meaning of a proposition is to be found in the practical consequences of accepting it, whereas ideas deemed impractical are rejected. Symbolic interactionism poses that human beings actively engage in the creation of meaning, and understands consciousness as being made possible via an internalisation of social gestures (Collins, 2010:41). This paradigm postulates that a culture can only truly be respectfully understood from within, and therefore follows a qualitative ethnographic-universalistic research strategy. For this reason, the visual data from the four selected examples was sourced using an on-the-ground approach, inside the countries.

3.2.1. Research strategy

This research will follow a qualitative ethnographic-universalistic research strategy. This will be deconstructed in the order of qualitative component, ethnographic component, and universalistic component.

Qualitative component

The qualitative approach allows for the analysis of unstructured data, and focuses on observations, perceptions, beliefs and less tangible concepts (Christensen & Johnson, 2013:300). This is particularly relevant when attempting to identify, or at least observe, *which* emotions are produced initially by the artefacts, before their state is amplified by the interaction ritual.

Ethnographic component

Ethnography is the holistic study of cultural phenomena from within, acknowledging the point of view of the subject of the study (Moore, 2011:3). However, this study will engage with this component slightly differently, taking on both an emic and etic perspective, for the collation process and theoretical components of this study respectively. The emic ethnographic strategy promotes the engagement with an environment from within, allowing the researcher to be immersed within the environment of the personality cult, and experience the phenomenon first hand. As the etic perspective relates most to the universalistic component of the research strategy, it will be clarified later in that context.

It should be noted that the researcher is not native to the countries in question, and understands that it is not logistically possible for a full cultural, ideological and religious immersion – understanding that one's experience is mediated by one's own context.

However, as this study examines personality cults through an ontological lens, and regards the visual environment of a personality cult as the primary element of its establishment, the act of the researcher 'being there' – observing the extreme levels of public devotion to the ruler via leader-related focal symbols saturating the environment, and the partaking of rituals around these focal symbols – is as close to 'immersion' within the personality cult as an outsider is likely to get under the circumstances. Similarly, as per findings in the theoretical framework, a personality cult is a participatory phenomenon, whether voluntary or not, wherein 'participation' (the visual inundation and inherent emotional susceptibility of leader-based foci; the participation in leader-based rituals) results in membership.

In this sense, the researcher engages with the *langue* of the personality cult, but, as an outsider, understands that it would be impossible to fully grasp the *parole* of the cult populace (Barthes, 1977). For example, in the context of this study, the researcher is required to recognise that the personality cult surrounding Ayatollah Khomeini presents a strongly Islamic aesthetic (the *langue*), but the researcher is not required to understand

Islam itself (the parole). This does require that the research paradigm and ethnographic approach need to be viewed differently to the way in which they are usually understood. Therefore, a universalistic approach is required.

Universalistic component

As an academic observer of others, the researcher takes a universalistic approach to the semiotic analysis of cult imagery, studying the personality cult from “a position outside the system, examining two or more cultures and comparing them, imposing a structure created by [him/herself], and using criteria that are considered absolute or universal” (Miller-Loessie & Parker, 2006:532). In this sense, the collation process of this study takes on an emic ethnographic approach, whereas the theoretical component, the semiotic analysis of the visual data and showcasing of the findings, takes on a more universalistic etic approach.

3.2.2. Research approach

An induction approach is used for the study as the focus lies within the understanding of the context (Collins, 2010:43). An inductive approach “involves the search for pattern from observation and the development of [theories] for those patterns through a series of hypotheses” (Bernard, 2011:7). In this regard, no set theory applies during the beginning of the study, allowing the researcher to alter the direction of the research once the process has begun. However, this does not mean that the researcher was prevented from using existing theory to formulate the research objectives, but rather that the inductive approach seeks to generate meaning from collated data, to further identify recurring relationships, and in turn, build a theory.

3.3. Research methods

Research was conducted and completed in four phases. The following flowchart in Figure 3.1 illustrates the process adopted.

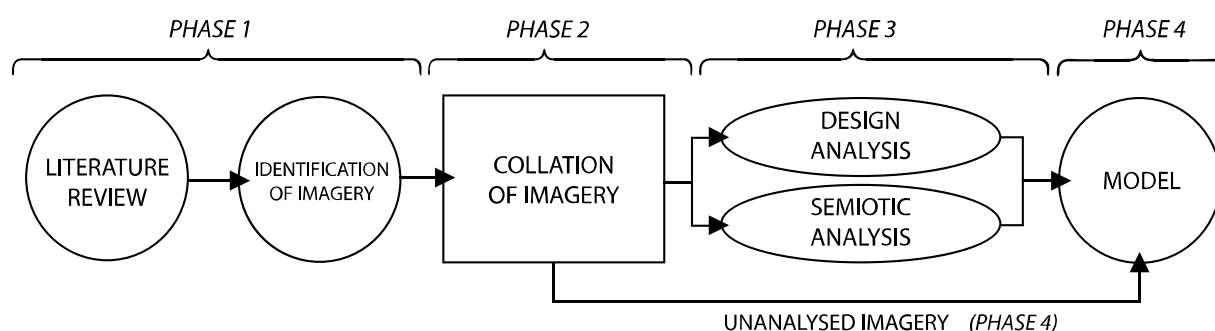


Figure 3.1: Flowchart depicting the four phases in which the methods of the research were conducted. Source: Muller (2016).

3.3.1. Phase one: literature review and identification of imagery

The first phase of research consisted of a literature review of secondary sources, scanning scholarship for similar research to clarify the scope of this project, and to develop the theoretical framework needed to proceed. The literature review highlighted two key models, namely that of Collins (2004) and Márquez (2013) which serve as the foundation for this research.

In accordance with the definition established in the theoretical framework (see Section 2.2, page 6), twenty-two examples of functioning contemporary (21st century) personality cults were identified. Following identification, these personality cults were categorised based on their region, regnal period, and system of governance. This was done to highlight the largest variety attainable. The findings of this phase are reflected in Chapter 2.

3.3.2. Phase two: data categories

Once the frameworks and personality cults of interest were identified, all sourced data was assigned to five categories: (1) official portraits, (2) paraphernalia, (3) monuments, (4) billboards and murals, and (5) digital media. This categorisation grouped similar artefacts to aid in the process of comparing and contrasting. Brief rationales for using these five categories are presented below.

Official portraits

“Official portrait” is the term used to identify the state-produced representation of the leader, usually in the form of a photograph, which often serves as the standard for other visual representations of the leader. Official portraits are generally the most abundant and unprocessed image of the leader allowed for public consumption. Thus, due to the varying practical delimitations they face, such as size and content, they offer the opportunity for one to observe the rawest form of the leader (that is permitted) and a base-point from which to observe the magnitude of visual hyperbole regarding the leader in other artefacts. In this sense, official portraits can be viewed as the minimum requirement needed for representing the leader; the official starting bid upon which the loyalty bids of the society fluctuate.

This does not mean that the official portrait should be in any way considered natural or unprocessed, as was evident in the case of Romania’s Nicolae Ceaușescu. In the early-80s, almost all the ubiquitous representations of Ceaușescu referenced his official portrait in which he was shown in half-profile, showing only one ear (Preda, 2010:284). Following a joke about his image being “in one ear”, a Romanian idiom meaning to be insane, a new official portrait, in which both Ceaușescu’s ears were clearly visible, as seen in Figure 3.2 on the following page, was unveiled and usage of the old one was deemed improper (*ibid.*). Similarly, Kim Il-sung developed a large calcium deposit growth on the right side of the back of his neck which forced North Korean reporters to always photograph him while standing from his same slight-left angle to hide the growth (Cumings, 2003:xii). This angle is even present in his official portrait (Figure 3.3 on the following page).

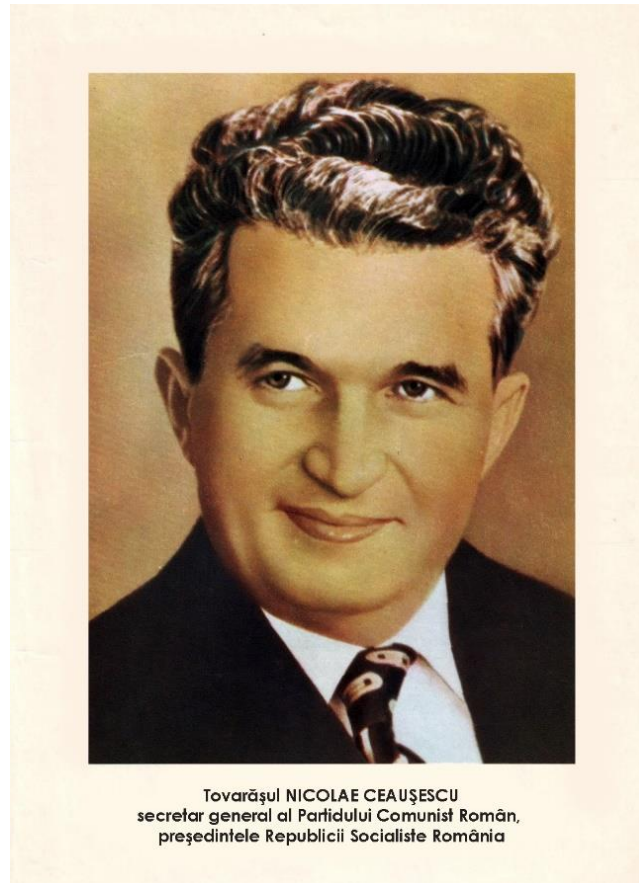


Figure 3.2: Official portrait of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Photo credit/source: Muller (2017).



Figure 3.3: Official portrait of Kim Il-sung. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

Paraphernalia

“Paraphernalia” is the term used to define miscellaneous articles and ephemera, depicting or representative of the leader, that require a certain level of physical interaction from the subject. Unlike the other categories, artefacts deemed paraphernalia are tactile items frequently utilised by those within the personality cult, such as Mao Tse-tung’s *Little Red Book* during the Cultural Revolution, as can be seen in Figure 3.4.



Figure 3.4: A crowd of people holding copies of Mao Tse-Tung’s *Little Red Book*, in front of the large portrait of Mao that dominates Tiananmen Square (circa 1966-1976). Photo credit: unknown. Source: *Back China* (2014).

Monuments

“Monument” is the term used to define a three-dimensional structure created to depict or commemorate the leader, or a structure which has come to represent the leader. In this sense, a monumental depiction is not limited to a figurative statue or effigy, like that of Mao Tse-tung in Figure 3.5 below, but any building or structure commemorating the leader, including mausoleums.



Figure 3.5: A statue of Mao Tse-tung in Dandong, China. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

Billboards and murals

“Mural” is the term used to define any two-dimensional representation or commemoration of the leader, painted or applied to a wall, fence, panel, billboard, or permanent surface. The dissimilarity between a mural and billboard in this regard, is that a mural involves the artwork harmoniously incorporated within its surrounding architectural elements, and often with reference to its social environment, whereas with

a billboard, however, the public surface upon which it is applied primarily serves as a means for mass communication, with little or no consideration applied to harmonising the artwork with its environment. Figure 3.6 presents an example of a billboard, whereas Figure 3.7 presents an example of a mural.



Figure 3.6: A large billboard in Manzini, Swaziland, wishing King Mswati a happy birthday.

Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).



Figure 3.7: A mural in Sariwon, North Korea, depicting Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il at the summit of Mt. Paektu. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

Digital media

“Digital media” is the term used to define any non-static representation of the leader. This generally manifests in video form, as seen in Figure 3.8.

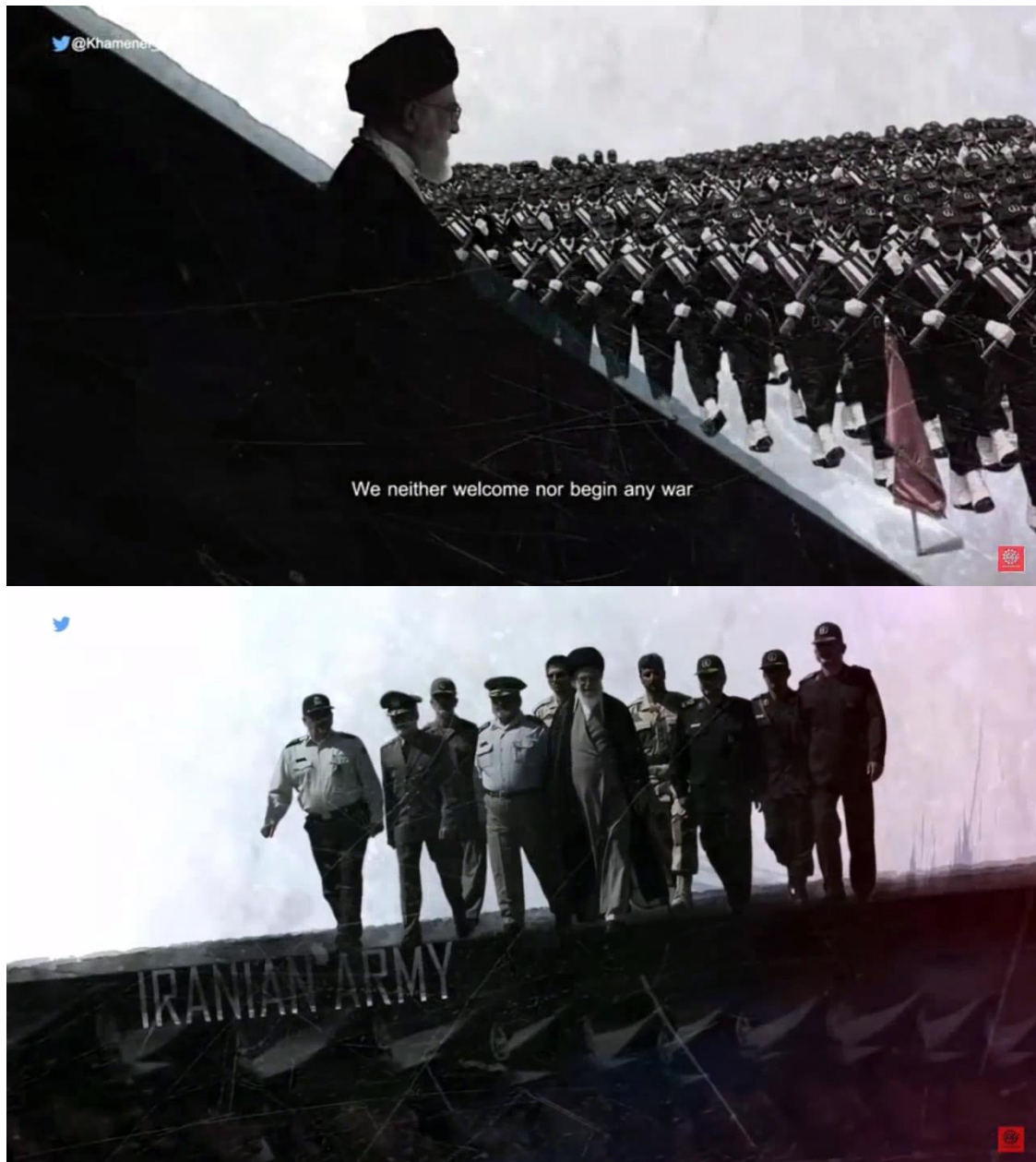


Figure 3.8: Two frames from an Iranian anti-US imperialism video. Source: *Khamenei.ir* (2015).

As this study aimed to analyse the state-produced or approved representations of the leaders, representations from independent sources not aligned with the state, could potentially have skewed findings. In this regard, it should be noted that due to the repressive nature of the selected countries, any representation of the leader publicly displayed in a polity – especially one obvious to a foreigner – has received the “blessing” of the leader or state. To illustrate this proposition, consider the following case: in 2011, graffiti allegedly denouncing Kim Jong-il was found on a wall in Pyongyang (Park-jun, 2011: para.1). As a result, regulations and inspections targeting Pyongyang’s residents and visitors went on for three days, while military road blocks were established on the roads linking Pyongyang Station and West Pyongyang Station, Pyongyang-Pyongsung, Pyongyang-Wonsan and Pyongyang-Kanri, and all those passing were interrogated (Park-jun, 2011: para.6). To stop the spread of rumours, the movement of North Koreans between provinces was temporarily restricted (Park-jun, 2011: para.7). Therefore, while an artefact may not have necessarily been produced by the state, its mere existence with the polity means it has received statutory endorsement, allowing for its inclusion within the study.

Similarly, as the leader representations within a polity are tailored to sustain the status quo, so is the information entering and leaving the countries. According to Reporters Without Border’s (RWB) 2017 World Press Freedom Index, out of 180 countries surveyed, North Korea ranked 180th – the least free nation in the world. As reported by RWB (2017: para.1),

North Korea’s totalitarian regime continues to keep its citizens in [...] fear of being sent to a concentration camp for listening to radio broadcasts from outside the country. The *Korean Central News Agency* (KCNA) is the sole source of official news for the print and broadcast media. [...] The regime continues to exercise meticulous control over the information available to the foreign media.

Turkmenistan ranked 178th with RWB (2017) describing it as an “ever-growing information black hole”, while Iran ranked 165th and Swaziland 152nd (*ibid.*).

With this understanding, the following subsections highlight the difficulties in research gathering regarding each selected country, and the process used to overcome these difficulties and acquire high quality, impartial data from the country.

3.3.3. Phase two: collection of data

Data collection regarding North Korea

Very strong biases exist within the available information regarding North Korea. Information coming from North Korean sources is heavily embellished so as not to portray the leader, country, ideologies, or people in a negative light, while information coming from Western sources runs the risk of being unsubstantiated or exaggerated.

South Korean media experts and journalists have confirmed that the ongoing political hostility has manipulated foreign media coverage of North Korea (Ha-young, 2015: para.1), with factually incorrect and false reporting a relic from the Cold War-era state of war that continues to exist between North Korea and the United States (Broinowski, 2015: para.3).

In popular and academic writing, North Korean defectors are generally considered the key source of information as they provide first-hand accounts and information that would not be made available by the country itself, or would not be accessible by other countries. However, there is increasing scepticism in the academic community over the accuracy of information given by defectors (Fragkiska, 2016: para.20). Abt (2014:117), a Swiss economist who spent seven years living in Pyongyang, argues that North Korean defectors carry an inherent prejudice towards the North, and that 70 percent of North Korean defectors living in South Korea are unemployed and chastised by South Korean society, forcing them to sell exaggerated or sensationalist stories as a means of financial income. Abt (2014: 118) further argues that, over time, the reintegration process for North Koreans in South Korea tailors and encourages the defectors' accounts to take on a more propagandistic than prosaic tone, a rationalisation shared by Lankov (2015: para.14), a graduate of Pyongyang's Kim Il-sung University, who notes that North Korean defectors faced considerable incentive to exaggerate their accounts.

Without verifiable information, mostly as a result of the harsh limitations on reporting within the country, many reports carried by established media sources and presented as factual are based on sensationalised claims, rumours and even parodies (O'Carroll, 2014: para.4). Fisher (2014: para.10), of the *Washington Post*, has stated that,

almost any story [regarding North Korea] is treated as broadly credible, no matter how outlandish or thinly sourced. [There is] no other country to which we bring such a high degree of gullibility. [...] We know so little about what really happens inside the country, and especially inside the leader's head, that very little is disprovable.

With this understanding – and in accordance with the ethnographic component of the research strategy – the data pertaining to North Korea was sourced from within North Korea during a fieldtrip in May 2016. Data was collected by means of photography over a weeklong period in Pyongyang, Panmunjom, the Demilitarised Zone, Nampo, Songnim, and Sariwon. Thus, data collection in North Korea, although of necessity, at times done surreptitiously, was rich and comprehensive with 710 photos and videos captured.

Data collection regarding Swaziland

According to RWB (2017: para.1),

[in] King Mswati III's Swaziland [...] journalists cannot work freely and access to information is difficult. The courts cannot [pursue] cases involving the monarchy, any criticism of the government is liable to be prosecuted, and self-censorship is routine.

"All [publications] in Swaziland employ a great deal of self-censorship" (Ekine & Manji, 2012:157), with even the only independent newspaper in the kingdom, the *Times of Swaziland*, routinely accused of engaging in acts of self-censorship (BizCommunity 2012: para.1; AllAfrica, 2016: para.1). Richard Rooney, a former associate professor at the University of Swaziland, recounts: "I found that during the three years I have lived in Swaziland that if I wanted to know [what was] going on in the kingdom, I should not bother with the Swazi media (Ekine & Manji, 2012:157).

Insulting the King is legally defined as an act of terrorism (Smith, 2012: para.14). Any publication or study that may portray the King in a negative light is either heavily

censored, altered with little to no regard for the factual findings, or simply unpublished (AllAfrica, 2016: para.3). The publications that are altered “are likely to play up the importance of the King and report that his subjects unreservedly love him” (BizCommunity 2012: para.7).

Seemingly a testament to the national motto *Siyinqaba* [We hide ourselves away], publications and studies pertaining to Swaziland in the context of this research are extremely limited. Swazis face difficulties in publishing as most do not have access to international media or publications (Freedom House, 2013:6), and even South African publications “are carefully screened [and] if [found to contain] information that is unfavourable to the King [...] the government [...] destroys all copies” (Freedom House, 2013:7).

With this understanding, the data pertaining to Swaziland was sourced from within the country during a fieldtrip in April 2015. Data was collected by means of photography over a weeklong period in Mbabane, Lobamba, Piggs Peak, Manzini, and Siteki. Altogether, 682 photos and videos were captured.

Data collection regarding Turkmenistan

As with Swaziland, foreign information pertaining to Turkmenistan is limited “as the country remains extremely repressive and is virtually closed to independent scrutiny” (Human Rights Watch, 2015: para.1). Similarly, foreign information regarding Turkmenistan remains very difficult to verify.

To almost the same degree as North Korea, information entering and leaving Turkmenistan is heavily vetted by the state to maintain the status quo. According to *Human Rights Watch* (2015: para.1), the Turkmen government “imposes harsh restrictions on media [...] freedoms and exerts total control over access to information”.

Policies of state licensing prevent the creation of information outlets, including scholars, who do not reflect official views, as Turkmen authorities “continue to impose informal

and arbitrary travel bans on various groups, including students leaving for study abroad” (*ibid.*). As publishers deemed critical of Berdimuhamedow or Turkmenistan “face constant threat of government reprisal [in the form of] imprisonment and bans on foreign travel” (*ibid.*), they routinely engage in self-censorship (Deibert, 2010:244).

The researcher planned to undertake a fieldtrip to Turkmenistan in March 2016 but was denied a visa without explanation. Dylan Harris and James Finnerty, guides and escorts specialising in Turkmenistan, were entrusted with collecting the data from within the country on behalf of the researcher. Following stringent instructions from the researcher, research commenced on August 2016 and data was collected, by means of photography, over a five-day period in Ashgabat, the capital. It is unknown how many photographs or videos were taken as many were deleted by the authorities upon leaving the country. Fortunately, around 50 photographs ‘survived’ and the research was able to proceed.

Data collection regarding Iran

In 2008, Hossein Saffar Harandi, Iran’s Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, urged writers and academics to censor their own writing if they hoped for publication in Iran (Van Gelder, 2008: para.1). All publications in Iran must be approved by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, with censorship reportedly reaching an all-time-high in 2005 (*ibid.*).

Callamard (2006:49), editor of *Unveiled: art and censorship in Iran*, a report by Article 19, a campaign working for international freedom of expression, notes that within Iran,

control of the arts [...] is a multi-layered affair, with artists facing a long sequence of hurdles, designed to censor and suppress artistic endeavours at every turn, to filter art that is not deemed consistent with ‘Islamic values’. But as [...] seen, there is no uniformity in the interpretation of ‘Islamic values’ and art that has been rejected by conservatives can be resurrected under the authority of reformists. Such is the schizophrenic nature of censorship in Iran. Perhaps most concerning, however, is the *extent* of censorship in Iran, which has by all accounts, far surpassed governmental control. Iranians themselves have become the arbiters of morality and police the views which challenge the status quo.

Due to the historical animosity between some Western powers and Iran, Western – particularly American – publications pertaining to Iran can often take on a propagandistic or biased tone (Byung-jong, 2009:24). This biased tone, in conjunction with a fascination for the anti-American aspect of Iranian culture (such as the infamous “death to America” mural, or “death to America” chant⁷) often forms the threshold for American-centric reporting on Iran, and can often result in unintentional typecasting. For example, in 2006, *CNN* was temporarily banned from Iran after the news channel mistranslated a live broadcast of Iranian President Mahmoud Amadinejad. Amadinejad was quoted as saying “the use of nuclear weapons is Iran’s right”, when in fact he had said “Iran has the right to nuclear energy”, even further stating that “a civilised nation does not need nuclear weapons, and our nation does not need them” (The Guardian, 2006: para.10).

Due to difficulties posed by the refusal of entry into Turkmenistan, the researcher was further unable to conduct a fieldtrip to Iran. Instead, as with the previous case, data was collected via traveloguer Tim Lally and a source who wished to remain anonymous. The data in question was captured by means of photography in Tehran. Approximately 200 photographs were captured.

In instances where photographs and videos of artefacts were captured of a lower quality – often when done surreptitiously – images of these artefacts not found in publication were sourced through ‘non-academic’ channels such as blogposts or forums. In this sense, regardless of the source, the data had been verified and was therefore eligible for inclusion.

3.3.4. Phase three: design and semiotic analysis

Personality cults establish and maintain themselves via the management of emotional energy produced through interaction-rituals where leader-based foci serve as the spectacle (see page 12). Existing cults of personalities were identified and, through fieldtrips, twenty-two instances of leader-based foci were collated. Having defined emotional energy as the amplification of a pre-existing, generally motivating, emotional state which is yet to be

⁷ Ayatollah Khomeini himself ordered Iranian media to remove the “death to America” chant from television and radio (Iranian Students’ News Agency, 2013: para.4).

constructed, it remained to determine what is needed from the artefact to “force” the construction of this emotion.

To provide an explanation for this phenomenon, two separate analyses – one of the design principles and one of the semiotics – were conducted on each artefact collected from the selected cases. The design analysis was conducted through a bespoke framework inspired by Graves’ (1942) and Evans and Thomas’ (2012) elements of design, whereas the semiotic analysis was done through Du Plooy’s (1996) non-verbal communication framework and, where necessary, Leech’s (1974) textual framework. This is covered in more detail in sections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and 3.4.3. The findings of this phase are reflected in Chapter 4.

3.3.5. Phase four: the Value Progression Model

As the final phase of research, a model, titled the Value Progression Model, was constructed from the findings of the design and semiotic analyses. Data from personality cults (not of the five that were analysed) were input into the model to test it. The hypothesis being that, if data from personality cults not involved in the creation of the model can be successfully input into the model, it would prove that the mechanisms that are used to construct and maintain a personality cult, regardless of socio-political system, exhibited a methodological sameness. The findings of this phase are reflected in Chapter 5.

3.4. Data analysis

As previously established, this study includes an analysis of the design principles evident within leader-based imagery, as well as a semiotic analysis. This section discusses the manner and tools used in the achieving of these analyses.

3.4.1. Design analysis framework

The design analysis framework used in this study is best understood as an adapted formal analysis framework wherein the user experience, akin to that within user experience design

(UX), is considered. Drawing on Graves' (1942) understanding of the materials "from which all designs are built", and Evans and Thomas' (2012) elements of design, four key elements regarding the design analysis framework required for this research, were identified: size, interaction, colour, and substrate. These elements are explained in the following.

Size

Size refers to the overall dimensions or magnitude of the artefact.

Interaction

Interaction refers to the participatory relationship between the observer and the artefact. In this regard, Crawford (2002:128) defines interaction as a conversation between two or more actors who "listen, think and speak" to each other. In this sense, interaction revolves around the process of giving and taking, where one of the actors may be the artefact itself.

Colour

Colour refers to the property possessed by an object in producing different sensations on the eye as a result of the way the object reflects or emits light.

Substrate

Graves (1942:4) originally understood texture as the tactile characteristics a surface has, or is perceived to have, while Evan and Thomas (2012:25) believe that texture cannot function as a design element on its own. The researcher believes that texture *can* function as a design element on its own in that it offers engagement through a sense other than sight, and, to avoid confusion, has re-termed texture as substrate.

An analysis of the Mansu Hill Grand Monument, seen in Table 3.1 on page 77 and Figure 3.9 on the following page, is an example of the framework used for the design analysis. It shows how the design framework was applied to an artefact. A brief discussion of the Mansu Hill Grand Monument is offered to help contextualise the ensuing analysis.



Figure 3.9: Mansudae Art Studio, *Mansu Hill Grand Monument* (2011). Source: Muller (2016).

Built by the Mansudae Art Studio, one of the largest art production centres in the world and primary producer of North Korean monuments and propaganda, this artefact consists of two 22-metre tall statues of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, and a roughly 60-metre wide background mosaic of Mt. Paektu. The figures are scrubbed bronze, while the mosaic is made up of smoothed brick and stone. Mansu Hill Grand Monument is considered by some to be the most sacred place for North Koreans (Lankov, 2007:46) – with the spiritual exception of Mt. Paektu, an active volcano considered sacred throughout Korean history. In Korean mythology, Dangun, the founder of the first Korean kingdom (around 2,300 BCE),

was born on the mountain to Hwanung, the Son of Heaven, and a bear Hwanung had transformed into a woman. All following Korean kingdoms have worshipped the mountain. In modern history, the mountain was used as a base for Kim Il-sung's armed resistance against the Japanese occupation, and again for communist fighters during the Korean War. North Koreans are taught an apocryphal history wherein Kim Jong-il was born on Mt. Paektu, heralded by a swallow, the illumination of a star, an immediate change of season, and a double rainbow (Jasper, 2005:91). However, Soviet records indicate that he was born in Vyatskoye, a small fishing village in the Soviet Union where Kim Il-sung was stationed as a Captain in the Red Army (*ibid.*). The mountain is celebrated in North Korean art and propaganda, lending its name to a wide variety of the nation's accomplishments, such as the Paektusan Rocket, and North Koreans regularly visit the mountain in a pilgrimage-like fashion. Article 169 of the North Korean Constitution defines Mt. Paektu as "the sacred mountain of the revolution" (Socialist Constitution of the DPRK, 2013:35), and the mountain range is featured on the National Emblem (Figure 3.10).



Figure 3.10: National Emblem of North Korea.

Table 3.1: A design analysis of Mansu Hill Grand Monument. Source: Muller (2017).

Size	The figures stand 22m high. The background mosaic, measured from satellite imagery, appears to be roughly 60m in width.
Interaction	Observers, both foreign and local, are to bow to the figures from roughly 10m away, and optionally, flowers can be purchased and placed near the feet of the leaders, but the observer must then return to a 10m distance before bowing. Formal clothing is to be worn when visiting the monument, and headwear removed before approaching the monument. Observers are expected to conduct themselves in a very stern and formal manner at the site of the monument, and any touching or disrespecting of the monument could result in extremely harsh penalties. The figures are not to be viewed from behind. Photography is generally permitted to foreigners but both figures are to be uncropped and shown in their entirety in the image, and may not be smaller (by perspective or proportion) than any other figure in the image – thus photography of the monument from anywhere other than the designated site is forbidden.
Colour	<p>The finish of the initial monument (built in 1972, featuring only the figure of Kim Il-sung) was scrubbed bronze, but in 1977 the figure was gilded in gold leaf. This act of ostentatiousness displeased Deng Xiaoping, then leader of China, who threatened to sever China's much-needed aid and subsidisation of North Korea, and soon the gold leaf was removed and the monument returned to its scrubbed bronze finish (Burdick, 2010:140). It is therefore important to note that gold may have been the intended finish for the figures, with scrubbed bronze being the closest alternative. In 2011, the figure of Kim Jong-il was erected with the same bronze aesthetic.</p> <p>The Paektu mountain range depicted in the background mosaic are of varying shades of grey and white (representative of snow), while the sky is a darker tan, similar to the bronze of the figures.</p>
Substrate	The figures are smoothed bronze, while the mosaic is made up of smoothed brick and stone.

3.4.2. Semiotic analysis framework

A semiotic analysis of leader-based imagery is also undertaken to support the findings from the design analysis. This analysis has been undertaken using Du Plooy's (1996) non-verbal communication framework and, when necessary, Leech's (1974) textual framework. Du Plooy's non-verbal communication approach to the semiotic analysis of an image examines both the connotative meaning (the signifying range) and the denotative meaning (the signified range). Du Plooy's suggested codes are grouped into five categories: signs, interpersonal communication, codes of content and form, and field forces.

Signs

"Signs" are considered something physical and perceivable by one's senses (Fiske, 1982:44), dependant on the recognition by viewer that it is a sign. Du Plooy lists three types of signs: iconic signs, indexical signs, and symbolic signs. Iconic signs visually resemble the object they are used to represent, for example, a signboard in a game-park stating that one should proceed with caution, alongside an image of a lion that represents and looks like an actual lion. Indexical signs offer a direct link between the sign and the object, to return to the previous example, in a video clip filmed in the same game-park, a loud roar is heard in the distance – although the lion is not depicted, the roar allows the viewer to be made aware of the presence of a lion. Lastly, symbolic signs offer no logical connection to the object they represent and rely primarily on the observer having a pre-understanding of the connection between the sign and the meaning (Crow, 2003:33), for example, a Swazi may recognise a painting of a lion as a representation of King Mswati III.

Interpersonal communication

"Interpersonal communication" can be understood as the relationship between the depiction of the body, its clothing, or physical structures, and the overlying meaning of the composition. The semiotic framework for this study will utilise three of Du Plooy's

interpersonal communication types: kinesics, proxemics, and artefacts. Kinesics is communication by means of bodily movements. Proxemics relates to the usage of space when communicating via four spatial zones: intimate, personal, social, or public (Du Plooy, 1996:115). Artefacts refer to fixed features such as architectural structures, and semi-fixed objects such as furniture or clothing.

Codes of content

“Codes of content” are receivable information presented in a visual form. The codes used in this semiotic analysis framework are: volume duality, graphic depth, size, and perspective and viewing distance. “Volume duality” refers to the use of positive and negative space to create the illusion of depth, while “graphic depth” refers to the creation of the illusion of depth via the use of the elements in a composition, such as position certain elements to overlap, or depicting certain elements in different sizes, or blurring certain elements. As with the design analysis framework, “size” refers to the overall dimensions or magnitude of certain elements within the composition. “Perspective and viewing distance” refers to the size and position of certain elements in contrast with the viewer, and what the viewer regards as the correct size and position, in conjunction with the position and distance the design is viewed from.

Force fields

“Force fields” clarify or intensify meaning (Du Plooy, 1996:122) using six factors: main directions, figure-ground perception, psychological closure, and vectors. “Main directions” refer to where emphasis is placed in the vertical or horizontal plane within the composition. “Psychological closure” is based on the Gestalt principle that one tends to naturally “fill in the missing parts [of a composition] to obtain a full image” (Du Plooy, 1996:127), for example, from a photograph of a shark’s dorsal fin protruding from a body of water one can be certain that a whole shark exists under the surface of the water. “Vectors” are “directional forces, such as objects, people or lines, that are placed within the [composition] in such a way that, when viewing [...] one’s eyes are led from one point

or another or some directional orientation, inside or outside the frame” (Du Plooy, 196:127). Three types of vectors are observable, namely continuing vectors (when two or more vectors point in the same direction), converging vectors (when two or more vectors face each other), and diverging vectors (when two or more vectors face away from each other).

Returning to the previous example of the Mansu Hill Grand Monument (Figure 3.9 on page 76), Table 3.2 serves as an example of the application of Du Plooy’s framework.

Table 3.2: A semiotic analysis of Mansu Hill Grand Monument using Du Plooy’s (1996) framework. Source: Muller (2017).

	Codes	The referent/signifying range	The possible signified range
Signifier referent relationship	Iconic signs	The figures resemble leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.	The figures are leaders Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.
	Symbolic signs	The mosaic of a mountainous landscape behind the statues.	The mountains represent Mt. Paektu, one of the most sacred sites in North Korean folklore, and proclaimed birthplace of Kim Jong-il.
	Indexical signs	The figures are very large.	These were the great leaders.
Interpersonal communication	Kinesics	1. Kim Il-sung extends his arm and hand outwards. 2. Kim Jong-il has his hand in his pocket.	1. Kim Il-sung is indicating the “bright future” of communism. The outstretched arm suggests forward movement, by pointing in the direction of the future (Bonnell, 1997:145). In the Soviet Union and China, the metaphorical indication of the future located ahead, held

			<p>special status in connection with the communist vision of a utopian future (Gibbs, 2008:483).</p> <p>2. During the last four years of his life, Kim Jong-il was rarely, if ever, seen with his left hand out of his jacket pocket. It is rumoured that his left hand might have been affected by paralysis after suffering a stroke in August 2008 (Jae-soon, 2008: para.6). North Korea denies this rumour. This signature trait further strengthens the resemblance of the statue to Kim Jong-il, ensuring positive identification.</p>
	Proxemics	Public.	<p>The observer will usually interact with the monument (such as bow, or photograph) from a distance of 5 to 10 metres, unless placing flowers at the base of the monument, which is then done fairly quickly before returning to the preferred distance. This distance promotes a formal and authoritative atmosphere.</p>
	Artefacts	<p>1. Kim Il-sungs Western-style suit.</p> <p>2. Kim Jong-il's anorak.</p>	<p>1. Kim Il-sung was originally depicted in a <i>Zhongshan</i>-suit, but in the mid-1980's his imagery was modified to depict him wearing a</p>

Codes of content		3. Kim Jong-il's zip-up tunic-suit.	<p>Western-style suit. This was done to signal the relative openness of the regime (Lankov, 2007:26).</p> <p>2. The anorak is seen as a signature element of Kim Jong-il's attire. The <i>Korean Central News Agency</i> hailed the "threadbare and discoloured" anorak as a "symbol of the revolution [...] a witness to history" (Phillips, 2013: para.2). Further stating that "the parka will be remembered forever by the Korean people" (<i>ibid.</i>). The jacket can further be seen as signifying his humility and humbleness, and Kim Jong-il's tireless efforts in service of the Korean people.</p> <p>3. Kim Jong-il's zip-up tunic-suit strongly resembles a modernised <i>Zhongshan</i>-suit. The suit, most notably worn by Chariman Mao, is considered a symbol for socialism.</p>
	Volume duality	The statues represent <i>positive</i> volume, while the mosaic represents <i>negative</i> volume.	The negative volume delegates a foreground position to the subject.
	Graphic depth	The figures are larger than the mountains.	From the point of view of <i>relative size</i> , this could indicate that the leaders are standing at a renowned

			<p>viewpoint of Mt. Paektu.</p> <p>Otherwise, it could exaggeratedly portray the leaders as being taller than mountains, with the gigantic size of the leaders emphasising their metaphorical might.</p>
	Size	<p>1. The figures are the same size and are on the same plane to each other.</p> <p>2. The figures are not the same size nor on the same plane to the observer.</p>	<p>1. Shows that the two leaders are considered equal to each other in status and power.</p> <p>2. Shows that the two leaders are considered vastly superior in status and power to observers (their subjects).</p>
	Perspective and viewing distance	Long distance.	Allows the viewer to observe the full figure of the leaders, their gestures, and the mountains behind them.
	Main directions	Both the x-axis and y-axis are prominent.	A sense of power is conveyed. The solid and planted statues indicate a sense of enduring.
Force fields within the image	Psychological closure	-	-
	Vectors	Continuing vectors – the figures both face forwards.	A sense of harmony is conveyed between Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.

3.4.3. Textual analysis framework

As Du Plooy's framework primarily caters for a visual-based semiotic analysis, another framework is required to understand the semiotics of textual instances. In this regard, Leech's (1976) approach to the semiotic analysis of a textual approach was used. This paradigm posits that language contains seven types of meaning: conceptual, connotative, stylistic, affective, reflective, collocative, and thematic. These seven types of meaning are discussed below.

Conceptual meaning

Sometimes referred to as the cognitive or denotative meaning, "conceptual meaning" serves as the basis and central meaning in linguistic communication (Fourie, 1996:69). It is the first meaning a word will suggest when presented in isolation, with its meaning learnt early in life and likely to have reference to a physical situation (Larson, 1984:100). For example, in English-speaking Western cultures, the word "woman" may be understood in the following hierarchical structure:

Woman	=	+ Human	or	Woman	=	+ Human
		– Male				+ Female
		+ Adult				+ Adult

Whereas, the word "boy" may be realised as

Boy	=	+ Human	or	Boy	=	+ Human
		+ Male				– Female
		– Adult				– Adult

Connotative meaning

According to Leech (1976:41), "connotative meaning" is the communicative value a phrase may have, by context, beyond that of its conceptual content. Often a real-world experience, connotative meaning is the culturally based lexical meaning related to the

certain thing it refers to. Connotative meanings play a significant role in the linguistics of literature, politics, and advertising. To continue the previous example, the word “woman” may be understood by someone from Saudi Arabia in the following hierarchical structure:

Woman = + Maternal instinct
 + Headscarf
 – Agency

Stylistic meaning

“Stylistic meaning” is the role a piece of language communicates about the circumstances of its use (Fourie, 1996:69). Stylistic meaning is usually based on the language of the communicator, the topic communicated, and the manner in which the communication is presented. For example, a phrase like “*Sieg Heil!*” tells one that the speaker is most likely a Nazi.

Affective meaning

“Affective meaning” is the role of the “language that reflects the personal feelings of the speaker, including [their] attitude to the listener or [their] attitude towards [the subject they are] talking about” (Fourie, 1996:69). In verbal communication, factors such as intonation and voice timbre are regarded as affective meaning. For example, “I’m sorry to interrupt, but would you be so kind as to lower your voice a little?” and “will you shut up?” both present the same request, but one conveys an irritation in a scaled down manner for the sake of politeness, while the other shows annoyance and aggravation.

Reflected meaning

“Reflected meaning” consists of a lexical interconnection, as it is the meaning which arises from multiple conceptual meanings when one sense of a word forms part of a response to another. For example, pre-20th-Century, the word “gay” was frequently used

to mean joyous or carefree, but has now come to mean homosexuality. Reflected meaning can also be found in many taboo words. As Bloomberg notes, many non-sexual words, such as “cock” (a rooster) or “erect” (building of a structure), are eschewed in order to avoid the unwanted reflected meaning (Trilestari, 2012:19). Often, the taboo sense of the word is so dominant that its non-taboo form dies out (*ibid.*).

Collocative meaning

“Collocative meaning” consists of the associations a word acquires in the company of other words (Trilestari, 2012:20). For example, both “pretty” and “handsome” indicate good looking. However, in most English-speaking Western countries, “pretty” generally collocates with female properties and “handsome” with male.

Thematic meaning

“Thematic meaning” is the meaning that is conveyed by the order in which the speaker organises the words, in terms of focus and emphasis. For example, an active sentence, such as “Supreme Leader blessed them”, has a different meaning from its passive equivalent, “they were blessed by the Supreme Leader”, although they are alike in conceptual content (Leech, 1976:19).

To illustrate these seven types of meaning, a textual analysis is undertaken of an Eternal Life Tower that stands at the entrance to a co-op farm in Nampo, North Korea (Table 3.3 on page 90, and Figure 3.11 on the following page). This, preceded by a brief explanation of Eternal Life Towers, will serve as an example of how Leech’s framework has been applied to the collated artefacts of a textual nature.



Figure 3.11: An Eternal Life Tower in Nampo, North Korea. Source: Muller (2016).

Long Life Prayer Towers were built in every major settlement in North Korea for people to pray for Kim Il-sung to live a long life (Yonhap News Agency, 2003:198). The practice was continued under Kim Jong-il. Following the death of Kim Il-sung, the towers were renamed Eternal Life Towers and North Koreans were encouraged to pray for the *eternal* lives of the leaders (Yonhap News Agency, 2003:199). The towers can vary dramatically in size and design, with some akin to Soviet-remnants and others technologically sophisticated with digital or neon-lit lettering (*ibid.*), but all present the common message of well-wishing upon the eternal lives of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.

This artefact in question is a carved white stone obelisk with red painted characters proclaiming: “Great Comrades Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il will forever be with us”. The characters for ‘Kim Il-sung’ (김일성) and ‘Kim Jong-il’ (김정일) are presented slightly larger and bolder than the rest of the text. The façade of the monument is smooth and polished, while the back is unhewn and rugged, giving the aesthetic of order pushing through chaos. The unhewn reverse also harmonises the piece with the rocky (and unurbanised) landscape of its location – in contrast to the wholly smoothed and polished Towers in Pyongyang, such as those presented in Figure 3.12 below and Figure 3.13 on the following page. The pinnacle of the tower features a carved star emblematic of the *Wonsu*, a marshal-rank in the Korean People’s Army held by all the Supreme Leaders of the country (Chung-in, 1998:105; Ho-min, 2006:38). The base of the tower features a carved symmetrical floral crest of Kimilsungia and Kimjongilia (see page 119) in a disc, reminiscent of a Japanese *mon*. Unlike the older Soviet-styled Eternal Life Towers of the early Kim Il-sung-era, a level of consistency is present in the newer Kim Jong-il-era designs with the beforementioned characteristics of the *Wonsu* and floral crest a common trait throughout (and can be seen in Figures 3.12 and 3.13).

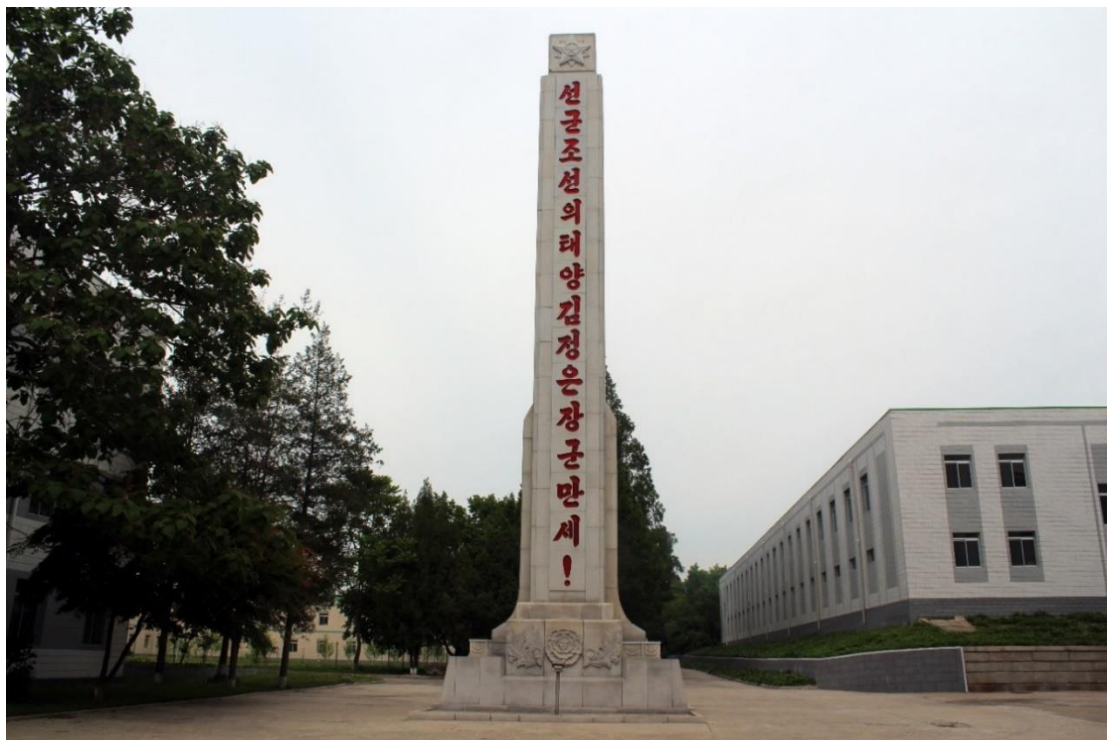


Figure 3.12: An Eternal Life Tower near the Korean Film Studio, outside Pyongyang. Source: Muller (2016).



Figure 3.13: A man pausing before a large Eternal Life Tower in Pyongyang. Source: Muller (2016).

Table 3.3: A textual analysis of an Eternal Life Tower using Leech's (1976) framework (Muller, 2017). All definitions were sourced from the Oxford English dictionary (2017).

Phrase	Great Comrades	Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il	will forever	be with us
Conceptual meaning	<p>Great – Of an extent, amount, or intensity considerably above average.</p> <p>Comrades – A fellow socialist or communist (often as a form of address).</p>		<p>will – Expressing a strong intention or assertion about the future.</p> <p>forever – For all future time; for always.</p>	<p>be with – Exist in the company of.</p> <p>us – Used by a speaker to refer to themselves and one or more other people as the object of a verb or preposition.</p>
	Great Comrades –		will forever be with us – North	

Connotative meaning	North Koreans are obligated to hold the Kims in exceptionally high esteem for their valuable contributions to their country.		Koreans are obligated to hold the memory and ideologies of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il with them until death. There is also the implication that North Koreans are obligated to continue the struggle for these ideologies for the rest of their lives.
Stylistic meaning	The tone is formal and seemingly conveyed from authority.		
Affective meaning	While the conveyed message may be sincere, the artefact speaks to a strongly authoritarian tone due to its nature: a state produced piece of socialist architecture requiring respect and obedience from the observer.		
Reflected meaning	Comrades – A friend or ally.		<p>will – This evokes a sense of inevitability in the observer. The observer can find comfort in the assertion.</p> <p>forever – This implies a seemingly infinite outcome, imbuing the observer with a sense of security one could liken to the concept of an afterlife.</p> <p>be with us – This elicits a sense of closeness and intimacy between the great leaders, who are of utmost importance, and with the observers, who, due to the location of the artefact, are most likely to be North Korean peasantry.</p>

Collocative meaning	<p>Great – Officially, when Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, or Kim Jong-un is mentioned in media, a minimum of one special title is required to precede the name (Williams, 2011: para.3).</p> <p>Comrades – A common form of address in North Korea for those who played important roles in the North Korean struggle, or those who have endeavoured to uphold North Korean ideologies.</p>		<p>will forever – North Korean propaganda tends to be hyperbolic in order to provoke an emotive state in the observer.</p>	<p>us – The people of North Korea.</p>
Thematic meaning	<p>The forming of the phrase places emphasis on the Kims as the principal foci as most of the body of the phrase, including the entire first line, is dedicated to them.</p>			

3.5. Chapter synthesis

This research was undertaken through a pragmatic-symbolic interactionist paradigm, qualitative, ethnographic-universalistic research strategy, and inductive research approach. Initially a desktop study was conducted wherein relevant data was identified. This data was then collated through the identification of five categories that best encapsulate the artefacts, namely (1) official portraits, (2) paraphernalia, (3) monuments, (4) billboards and murals, and (5) digital media. The collated data was analysed using bespoke design and semiotic frameworks based on the work of Graves (1942), Evans and Thomas (2012), Du Plooy (1996), and Leech (1974). These findings led to the assembly and testing of the Value Progression Model.

CHAPTER 4

Analyses and results

4.1. Introduction

The methodology discussed the design and semiotic analysis frameworks, based on the work of Graves (1942), Evans and Thomas (2012), Du Plooy (1996), and Leech (1974) respectively, used to analyse the artefacts. Of the twenty-two artefacts that were analysed in accordance with these frameworks, the results of ten selected cases are discussed in this chapter. These cases are presented because they most effectively highlight the principles that underpin the Value Progression Model that is presented in Chapter 5.

4.2. Analyses of artefacts

The ten cases analysed, listed in Table 4.1, have been divided into the five categories identified in the previous chapter (see page 61), namely, official portraits, paraphernalia, monuments, billboards and murals, and digital media.

Table 4.1: The ten artefacts whose design- and semiotics-based findings are presented in this chapter. The table is organised by the artefact's name, country of origin and category type.

Source: Muller (2017).

	<i>Artefact name</i>	<i>Country of origin</i>	<i>Category</i>
1.	Official portrait of Kim Jong-il	North Korea	Official portrait
2.	Official portrait of Mswati III	Swaziland	Official portrait
3.	Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il lapel pin	North Korea	Paraphernalia
4.	The Ruhnama	Turkmenistan	Paraphernalia
5.	Enghelab Square monument	Iran	Monument
6.	<i>Ngwenyama</i> and <i>Ndlovukati</i> mural	Swaziland	Billboard/mural
7.	Hajj Pilgrimage Affairs billboard	Iran	Billboard/mural
8.	Kimilsungia and Kimjongilia mural	North Korea	Billboard/mural
9.	Berdimuhamedow on horseback LED billboard	Turkmenistan	Billboard/mural
10.	Swazi public screen	Swaziland	Digital media

4.2.1 The official portraits of Kim Jong-il and Mswati III

The official portraits of Kim Jong-il and Mswati III were chosen as they are the only two cases where a single, specific image is required to be displayed in the format of an official portrait. In Iran and Turkmenistan, there are no strict regulations regarding which image of the leader is to be used – often delimited by societal and governmental loyalty bids “forcing” the chosen image to conform to certain criteria, such as being respectful, or free of any blemishes. Notably, in Turkmenistan, portraits of Berdimuhamedow often depict him in attire or environments relevant to the location of the portrait, for example, either wearing military uniform near military institutions, traditional attire near ceremonial sites, or smiling from behind a work-filled desk in governmental offices.

Official portrait of Kim Jong-il

This artefact, seen in Figure 4.1 on the following page, consists of the official state-produced portrait of Kim Jong-il. Unlike most of the official portraits around the world, it is a photorealistic illustration rather than a photograph. The portrait consists of a smiling Kim Jong-il, glancing slightly ahead to the left rather than directly at the observer, wearing his signature glasses and a zipped-up *Zongshan*-suit. He is depicted on a plain white, light grey, or light blue background.

The official portrait of Kim Jong-il always hangs alongside that of his father Kim Il-sung, and together are some of the most – if not the most – ubiquitous portraits in history (Hassig & Oh, 2015:34). The official portrait hangs, by law, in every building, including homes; adorns the façade of most public or important buildings; is presented in the form of thousands of enormous mosaics and murals around the country; is worn on lapel pins by all 20 million adult citizens; and decorates Kim Il-sung Square, a large public square in the centre of Pyongyang, with great cultural significance as the gathering place for mass rallies, dances and military parades. This current official portrait replaced the pre-existing one (Figure 4.2 on the following page) in 2011 following the death of Kim Jong-il. In the pre-existing official portrait, a photorealistic

illustration as well, Kim Jong-il was depicted far more solemn, younger, without glasses, and wearing a darker buttoned up *Zongshan*-suit.



Figure 4.1: Official portrait of Kim Jong-il. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).



Figure 4.2: Pre-2011 official portrait of Kim Jong-il. Photo credit/source: Cunningham (2010).

The soft focus of the illustration in Figure 4.1 hides any blemishes and presents a pseudo-glow one might liken to an angelic or divine atmosphere – with the light, plain background further suggesting an ethereal sense of purity. Furthermore, as far as the posthumous release of the portrait is concerned, soft focus often connotes a sense of nostalgia (Bignell, 1997:142).

Kim Jong-il's signature glasses contribute in positive identification as does his zip-up tunic, resembling a modernised *Zhongshan*-suit (the zip replacing the buttons of his earlier portrait). The *Zhongshan*-styled suit, most notably worn by Mao Tse-tung, is considered a symbol of communism, with the zip serving as a rich but simple visual metaphor for utilitarianism. According to Lee (2011:95), North Korea's leaders rule through three factors: *Juche*, perceived "structural violence" (defined as nonphysical violence similar to oppression that results from rigid class structures), and utilitarianism. The creaseless material and immaculate stitching on the suit emit a sense of precise order and perfection.

The zip further assists in associating Kim Jong-il with the aesthetic of the worker. The worker took on the role of hero in communist society – the ones who keep the machine moving – often described as a "cult of labour" (Andreescu, 2013:83) for their idealised, heroic portrayals by the state and the societal worship that followed. The workers were always depicted as humble and useful, whereas the bourgeoisie were exploitative and useless (Bogdanova & Vihavainen, 2015:9-10). This "humble worker" aesthetic can also be seen as a means to cover the "exploitative bourgeoisie" aesthetic of Kim Jong-il, as reported by South Korean news agencies, the "former North Korean leader [...] enjoyed the luxury lifestyle of parties and gourmet food on [his] expensive yacht" (Yonhap News Agency, 2016: para.8) while many starved from chronic food shortages.

Unlike the more solemn expression in the pre-2011 portrait, Kim Jong-il appears joyful and approachable, smiling enthusiastically. In fact, his smile is so significant that one could presuppose that the designers may have felt that the positive impact of its inclusion outweighed the risk of having to depict the leader's crows-feet – arguably

the only symbol of mortality on the portrait. Caryn Jewitt and Theo van Leeuwen (2001:31), director at UCL Knowledge Lab and editor of the *Visual Communication* journal respectively, regard the smile as an interaction in which the observer is asked to enter a relationship of social affinity with the smiler. “The smile saves us when the words become powerless; its action is similar to that of music, they both imply an infinite [polysemy]” (Hess-Lüttich, 1982:78).

The portrait of Kim Jong-il, as with that of Kim Il-sung, is generally mounted in special frames, as can be seen in Figure 4.3. The depth of the top of the frame is wider than that of the bottom, causing the top of the portraits to protrude from the wall at an angle of about 15-degrees. This allows the ground-level observer to see the full portraits with little to no distortion when they are placed high, and equally for the leaders to *look down* upon their subjects. The portrait, without the environmental factors taken into account, conveys an overall informal atmosphere – an irony in that it imbues the strictest and most fiercely policed statutory requirements of any portrait in the world (Tan, 2015:144).



Figure 4.3: A framed photograph of Kim Il-sung alongside the official portraits. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

Official portrait of Mswati III

This artefact, seen in Figure 4.4 below, is the official portrait of King Mswati III in Swaziland. The portrait, is printed on glossy paper and consists of photographic and textual elements. The photographic element depicts Mswati, staring directly at the observer, in the traditional attire of the King, with a natural setting in the background. The photograph is mounted on black, surrounded by a thin gold border, with white text below stating “HIS MAJESTY KING MSWATI III – INGWENYAMA OF THE KINGDOM OF ESWATINI / SWAZILAND”. The black mount differentiates the King’s portrait from that of the Queen Mother and Prime Minister, both of whom are portrayed on white mounting without a printed border. The portrait’s unframed size is generally A3 (as are the other two portraits), though this does vary from A4 (usually found in small businesses with minimal wall space) to much larger sizes, such as the 1.5m tall set found in King Mswati III International Airport.

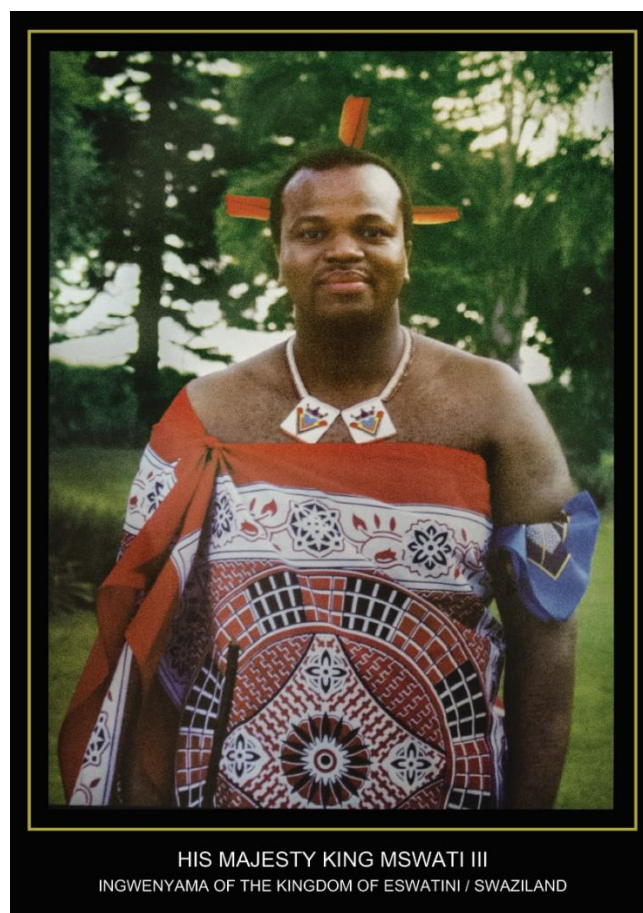


Figure 4.4: Official portrait of King Mswati III. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

In Swaziland, nearly all public buildings and businesses display three official portraits: the King, the Queen Mother, and the Prime Minister. Unlike North Korea where the official portraits of leaders are freely distributed by the state (Demick, 2016:316), in Swaziland the A3 portraits are printed by the state and delivered to distribution points around the country where they are framed and then purchased by locals (Swazi Ministry of Public Service, 2015), as of 2015, for around R800 for Mswati, R700 for the *Ndlovukati*, and R500 for the Prime Minister – costly assets within a nation where around two-thirds of the population live below the poverty line (World Food Programme, 2016: para.1). The researcher was told by staff at one of these distribution points that it is against the law to purchase or display the portraits unframed, although custom prints and newspaper cut-outs of the King were observed being displayed by vendors in informal market places. The researcher, with the assistance of a high-ranking member of the judiciary, could not find any documentation to ascertain whether the displaying of the official portraits was a lawful requirement – a presumption considering the state production of the portraits. However, the source noted an anecdotal instance in which a governmental office accidentally placed the portrait of the Prime Minister on par or higher than that of the King. The instance was reported and arrests, by the police, were made. The source did not know the outcome of the arrests and information from Swazi news sources regarding the instance could not be found.

While the researcher found no official regulations requiring the portraits to be displayed, let alone in any form of hierarchy, loyalty bids have no doubt created societal requirements, often manifesting as customary requirements, to display the portraits in certain hierarchies. In all instances where all three portraits were displayed, the King was always positioned higher than any other portrait or decoration on the wall, and the portraits were always positioned with the King on the left, the Queen Mother in the middle, and the Prime Minister on the right.

The researcher recorded two forms in which visual hierarchies were established, as follows. Form one (Figure 4.5 on the following page): All portraits are the same size. The King's portrait is the highest. The Queen Mother's portrait is hung lower than the

King's portrait, at roughly one-third of the King's portrait height. The Prime Minister's portrait is hung lower than the Queen Mother's portrait, at roughly one-third of the Queen Mother's portrait height, and two-thirds of the King's portrait height. However, in a few instances, whether deliberate or not, the Prime Minister's portrait is positioned slightly lower, with the centre of the portrait roughly in line with the bottom of the Queen Mother's portrait. The spacing between portraits varies depending on wall space. For examples, see Figure 4.6 below and Figure 4.7 on the following page.

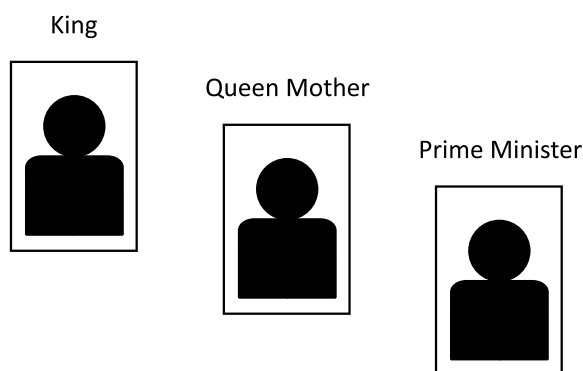


Figure 4.5: Hierarchical placement of Swazi official portraits in form one. Source: Muller (2016).

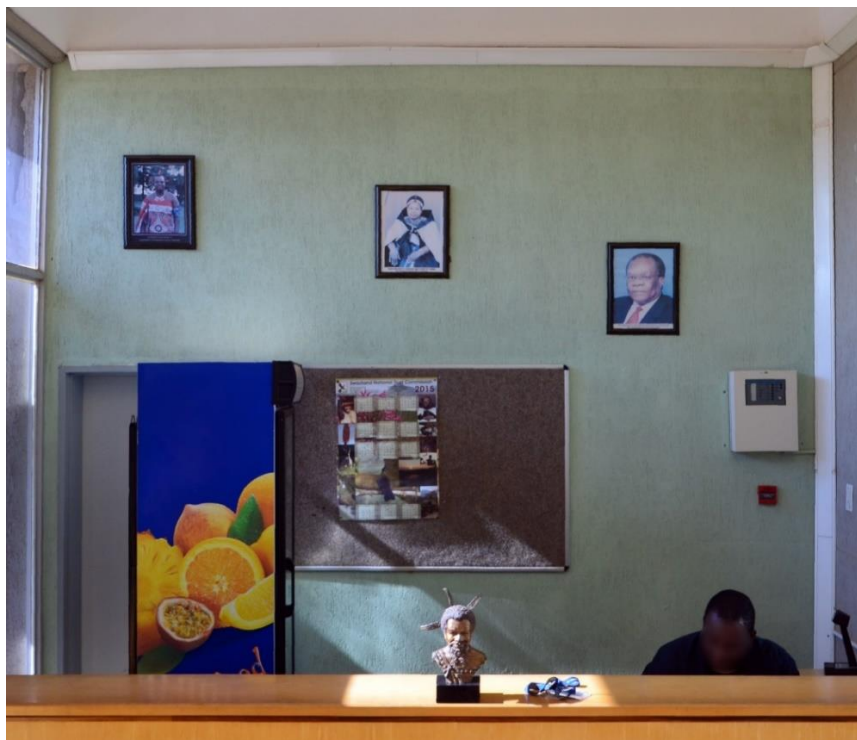


Figure 4.6: Official portraits hanging in form one. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).



Figure 4.7: Official portraits hanging in form one with limited space. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

Form two (Figure 4.8 below): The portrait of the King and Queen Mother are the same size, but larger than that of the Prime Minister. The King's portrait is the highest. Again, the Queen Mother's portrait is hung lower than the King's portrait, at roughly one-third of the King's portrait height. The Prime Minister's portrait is positioned with the centre of the portrait roughly in line with that of the Queen Mother's portrait. The spacing between portraits varies depending on wall space. For an example, see Figure 4.9 on the following page.

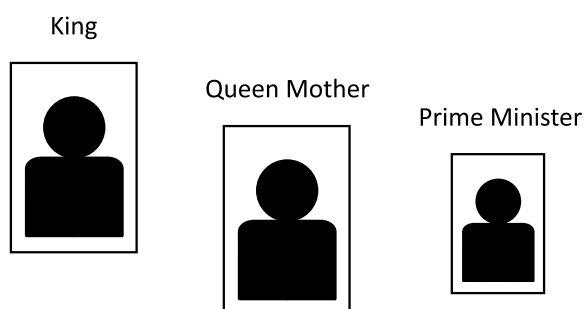


Figure 4.8: Hierarchical placement of Swazi official portraits in form two. Source: Muller (2016).

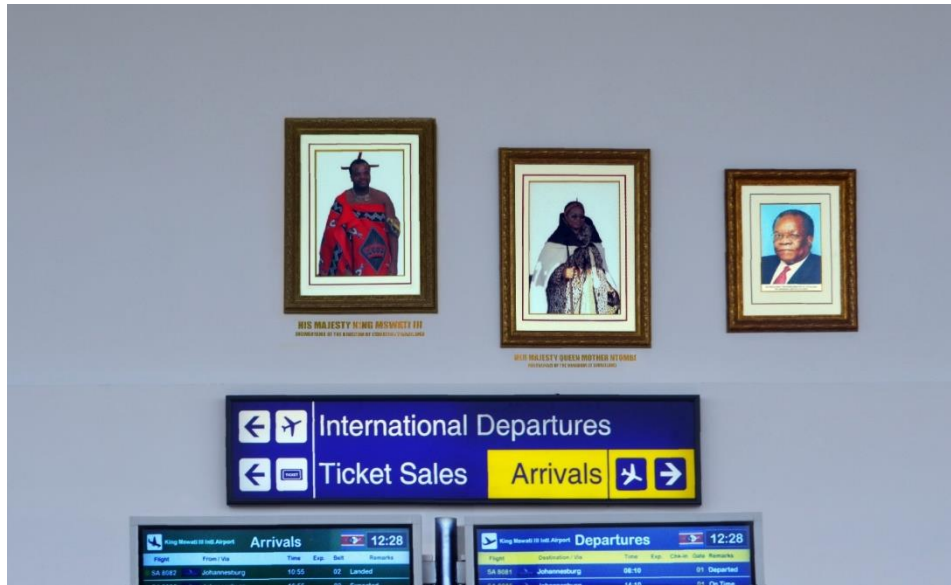


Figure 4.9: Large portraits hanging in form two. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

In a few instances, only a portrait of the King was displayed, usually with an honorific plaque below the frame commemorating his birthday or achievements.

4.2.2 The Kim Il-sung-Kim Jong-il lapel pin and the Ruhnama

The Kim Il-sung-Kim Jong-il lapel pin and the Ruhnama were chosen primarily for their unique and ubiquitous nature (in an international and local context respectively). The lapel pin, an object of Western intrigue (Morton, 2016), was chosen for its parallels with artefacts from other personality cults, such as the badges of Joseph Stalin, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and, most predominantly, Mao Tse-tung. Similarly, the Ruhnama, Turkmenistan's pseudo-holy book, holds parallels with other personality cult "holy books" like Mao Tse-tung's *Little Red Book*, al-Gadaffi's *Green Book*, Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and Nicolae Ceaușescu's *Builder of Modern Romania and International Statesman*, among others.

The Kim Il-sung-Kim Jong-il lapel pin

This artefact, seen in Figure 4.10 on the following page, consists of a 28x20mm red plastic flag-shaped lapel pin with a gold coloured aluminium frame. The lapel pin bears the official portraits of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.

All citizens of North Korea above the age of 16 are required by law to wear lapel pins, outside of their homes, featuring either Kim Il-sung or Kim Jong-il or both, while children under 12 (the age that they become eligible to wear the lapel pin) generally wear the Korean Children's Union badge, or, less commonly, pins showing the national flag or Worker's Party flag (Lankov, 2014:53). Produced and distributed by the Mansudae Art Studio, the lapel pins are made of red plastic with an aluminium frame, usually gold or bronze coloured. The implementation of the lapel pin was inspired by the "Chairman Mao badges" (Figure 4.11) which surged in popularity with the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966. The Chairman Mao badges, originally commemorative and ceremonial items worn by an elite few, suddenly changed function with the Cultural Revolution, becoming symbols of loyalty to Mao worn by nearly all Chinese citizens – although unlike North Korea, it was never a lawful requirement, but the loyalty bid had reached such extremes during the Cultural Revolution that it became a social requirement (see page 27).



Figure 4.10: Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il lapel pin. Photo credit/source: Muller (2017).



Figure 4.11: Chairman Mao badges. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

By 1969, billions of Mao badges had been produced and the vast quantities of aluminium being used resulted in severe repercussions for the Chinese industry

(Wang, 2008:21). This intense escalation led to Mao's proverbial "give me back my planes" proclamation, stating that "it would be far more useful to make planes to protect the nation out of the metal being expended in the production of Mao badges" (Tu, 2011:141), and soon the Party issued a statement forbidding the production of any more badges.

Similar to the Chairman Mao badges, the original North Korean lapels were round and featured a portrait of Kim Il-sung (as seen in Figure 4.12), before being remodelled into the standard flag-shaped lapel featuring the red Worker's Party flag, adorned with Kim Il-sung's portrait.



Figure 4.12: Older examples of Kim Il-sung lapel pins from Thomas Hui's extensive collection.

Photo credit: Yip. Source: *Reuters* (2016).

Although no longer the standard, round badges continue to be produced and worn. Badges bearing the image of both Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il, then with stern expressions, appeared in the late-1980s, but were soon discontinued after Kim Jong-il allegedly remarked "how can I be presented on the same level as *our sun* [Kim Il-sung]?" (Shin, 2013: para.6). This scenario presented an interesting example of how a loyalty bid can manifest. In 1992, as a ceremonial gesture for Kim Jong-il's 50th

birthday, lapel pins featuring only his image were distributed. As his reluctance to be depicted on par with his father had become clear (and the loyalty bid set), few North Koreans chose to wear the lapel pin (*ibid.*). In the same way that the Chairman Mao badge was worn as a signal of loyalty to Mao, the disinclination to wear the Kim Jong-il lapel pin was a signal of loyalty to Kim Jong-il. However, shortly after his death in 2011, newsreaders on KCNA appeared ‘debuting’ red lapel pins that showed the current official portraits of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il (Morton, 2016: para.3), reportedly given only to high-ranking executives and military leaders (RFA, 2015: para.7).

The lapel pin, perhaps the smallest state-produced representation of the leaders, serves as “an identity symbol showing that North Koreans belong to their leader, thus distinguishing themselves from [foreigners]” (Lim, 2015:32). The wearing of the lapel pin, deliberately positioned close to the heart (Goodspeed, 2012:6), produces feelings of personal belonging, patriotism from the sense of nationalist affiliation, and greater solidarity with a community as even if one interacts with an enemy, they are visually reminded of their loyalty to a shared cause. The lapel pin, “unlike other leader symbols, [...] is portable, [entrenching] the idea that the leaders are always with the people” (Lim, 2015:32).

The Ruhnama

This artefact, seen in Figure 4.13 on the following page, consists of the cover (front, spine, and back) of the original hardcover Turkmen Ruhnama – the most common copy available in Turkmenistan. The artefact’s principle colour scheme makes use of garish kelly green and bubblegum pink. The green is the same shade used on the national flag, representing green pastures, prosperity and peace (Advantour, 2016: para.1). Green also has several traditional associations in Islam, such as the Quranic association of green with paradise. The use of bubblegum pink is unclear, but may reference or serve as homage to the Yangykala Canyon’s polychrome escarpment: extravagant bands of green and pink rock (Elliott *et al*, 2014:857). A leaked cable from

the American embassy in Ashgabat, titled *A primer on the wrecking power of the Ruhnama*, called the Turkmen cultural sphere “awash with pink and green”, further stating that

Ruhnama-centric obligations extend to the arts institutions of Turkmenistan. The art [favoured] by the Niyazov regime tends toward a bright, static and fantastic style and lays heavy emphasis on the historical events, places and people described in the Ruhnama. The [colours] on the cover of the Ruhnama – bubblegum pink and kelly green – are presented in loud, glittering glory through routines of traditional dance and song, public readings of the Ruhnama, and performances of new songs created from quotations from the Ruhnama. Likewise, all girls’ school uniforms are now green (US Embassy Ashgabat, 2006: para.16).

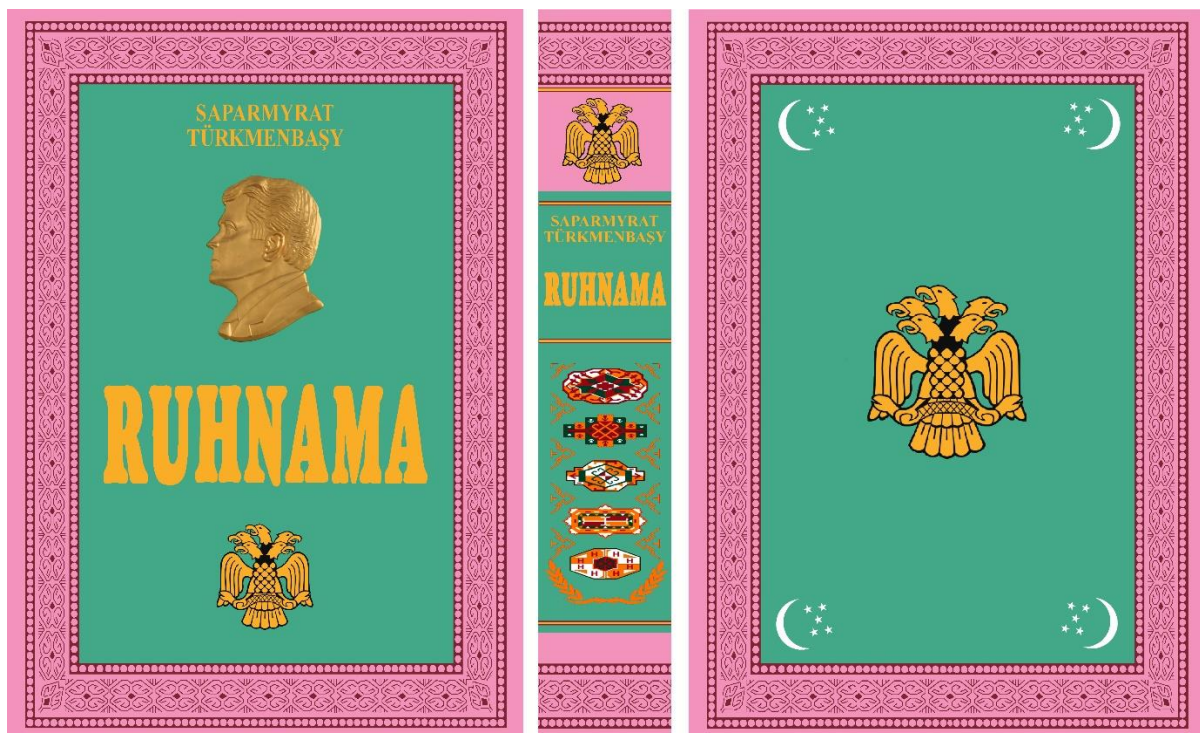


Figure 4.13: Ruhnama cover - front, spine, and back. Photo credit/source: Muller (2017).

The design of the front cover will be read from top to bottom. At the very top, in gold-leaf print, is Niyazov’s self-given name: Saparmurat Turkmenbashi [Father/Leader of All Turkmen]. Below is an embossed gold leaf portrait of Niyazov in profile. Niyazov’s plump face has been replaced with a more socialist-realist interpretation with a sharper jawbone and cheekbone. The use of Niyazov’s image in profile lends itself to the aesthetic of currency – akin to his left-facing profile presented on every Turkmen

coin (for an example, see Figure 4.14). The act of gilding *only* the portrait (as opposed to the instance of the coin where the portrait exists as a relief on a silver substrate) resembles that of the Chairman Mao badges where only Mao's (left-facing) portrait was gilded, as seen in Figure 4.15. Below the portrait, in large vertically stretched gold-leaf lettering is the title. Beneath that is the Turkmen presidential seal: the golden five-headed eagle. An embossed border featuring traditional Turkmen carpet patterning frames the cover.



Figure 4.14: 20 Teňňe (1993) coin. Photo credit/source: Muller (2017).

Figure 4.15: Chairman Mao (and mangoes) badge. Photo credit/source: 50 Museums (2015).

The spine, read from top-to-bottom, features another presidential seal, followed by the gold-leaf text “SAPARMURAT TURKMENBASHI” and “RUHNAMA”. The five patterns, similar to those depicted on the national flag, represent the traditional carpet designs of the five major Turkmen tribes (Tekke, Yomud, Saryg, Choudur, Ersary) and the five provinces of Turkmenistan. The four colours used in the patterns – orange, white, red and navy – are representative of the elements, respectively, of earth, air, fire and water (Brummell, 2005:52). The laurel branches beneath the patterns are of the same model as those in the United Nations flag. According to a Dutch diplomat, the laurel branches refer to the 1995 United Nations General Assembly resolution which stated that Turkmenistan is a permanently neutral state – a move celebrated by Niyazov and the Turkmen people (Poels & Sensen, 1997: para.1). An embossed border featuring traditional Turkmen carpet patterning runs along the top and bottom of the spine.

The back cover features a large centred presidential seal. The crescent moon and five stars of the Turkmen flag, symbolic of Islam and the five major tribes and provinces of Turkmenistan, is present in all corners with those on the left-hand-side inverted. An embossed border featuring traditional Turkmen carpet patterning frames all three designs.

Prior to Niyazov's death in 2006, nearly every citizen of Turkmenistan had a copy of the *Ruhnama* (Tourism Committee of Turkmenistan, 2016). Of all the books in Turkmenistan, including the Quran, the *Ruhnama* (and its consistent cover design) is certainly the most seen and engaged with. Hadjimurad Pirmuhamedov, a vice-chairman of Turkmenistan's Youth Union, has described the *Ruhnama* as "the spiritual torch of the Turkmen people [laying] down the priorities in [their life]. [T]he textbook of life [which] everybody should learn [from]" (Ingram, 2002: para.11).

4.2.3 The Enghelab Square monument

As the design and semiotic results of the Mansu Hill Grand Monument and the Nampo Eternal Life Tower presented as examples in the previous chapter (see pages 76 and 88) already offer the reader two examples of different forms of monuments, namely a set of effigies and a text-based obelisk, the Iranian Enghelab Square monument serves as the only example of a monument in this chapter. This selection was made as it provides the reader with the instance of an abstract⁸ sculpture while holding historical and conceptual merit as the first sculptural representation of Ayatollah Khomeini (Adelvand, 2016:75).

The Enghelab Square monument

This artefact, seen in Figure 4.16 on the following page, consists of a single cylindrical copper panel, with the height of the panel gradually increasing in a smooth slope, from the lowest point to the highest point, where the plate is then reconnected. Upon the

⁸ "Abstract" here is used in terms of its geometric form rather than non-figurative or theoretical form. While Iran does offer many abstract non-figurative monuments (often due to the aniconic nature of Islam), those that depict the Ayatollahs are nearly always figurative (Adelvand. 2016: para.3).

copper panel is a relief paying homage to “the symbols of the Revolution recorded in the minds of the Iranian people” (Ahmadi, 2012: para.3), including martyrs, soldiers, Mohammad Beheshti, and on the tallest panel, Ayatollah Khomeini. An anti-clockwise reading of the relief is consistent with the right-to-left reading of Arabic and Persian script, although the relief may equally be read in a left-to-right descending manner as the narration does not depict any specific timeline.

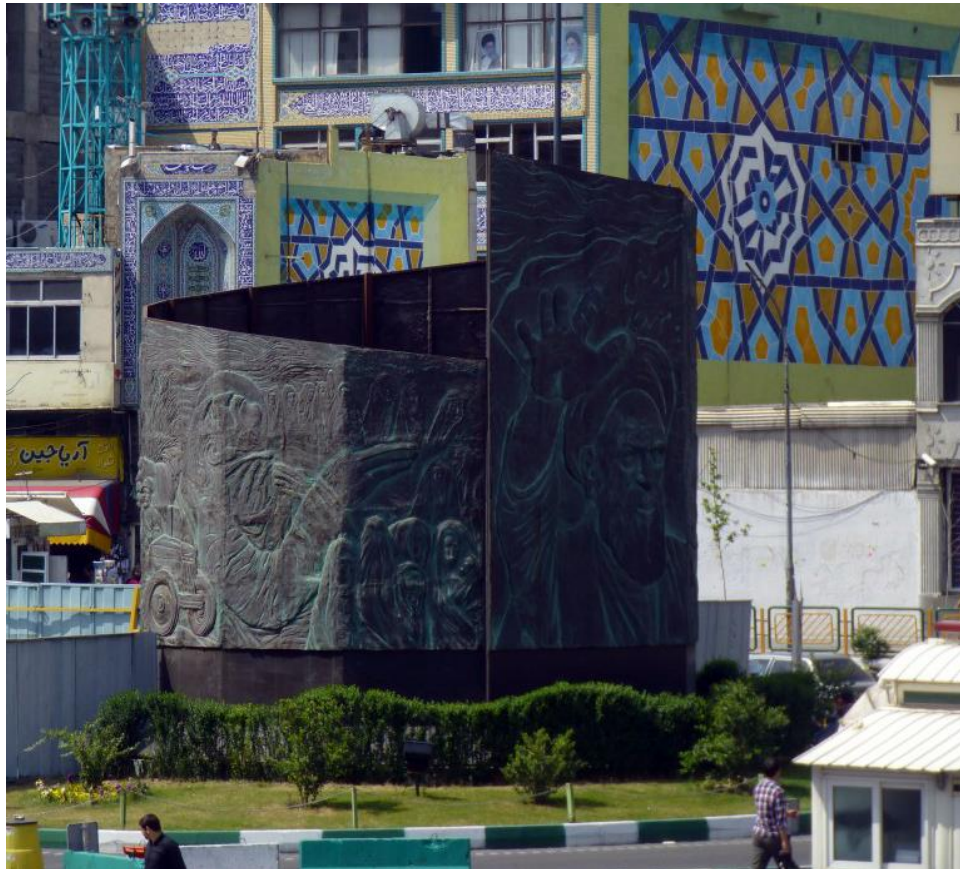


Figure 4.16: Enghelab Square monument, with portraits of the Ayatollahs displayed in a nearby windowsill. Photo credit/source: Lally (2015).

The site of the artefact, Enghelab [Revolution] Square, was originally named 24 Esfand [15 March] – the birthday of the then Shah of Iran. For this reason, a statue of the Shah dominated the central island. During the Islamic Revolution, the square gained iconic status as the site of many pro-Khomeini protests and armed confrontations. During one instance, the statue of the Shah was pulled down and destroyed. Following the Islamic Revolution, the square was renamed Enghelab and the artefact was given

the position on the central island where the Shah previously stood. According to *Mehr News Agency*, a Tehran-based news agency owned by the Islamic Ideology Dissemination Organization, the monument was moved in 2011 from the central island to the western corner of the square as it was “preventing surrounding advertising from being seen” (Ahamdi, 2012: para.5). The “advertising” comprised more current-affairs-inclined murals and posters of the Ayatollahs (*ibid*; Bright New Century, 2013).

This artefact “served as the first narrative presentation of the Islamic Revolution and martyrdom concept in urban sculpture” (Adelvand, 2016:75), highlighting

the revolutionary struggles [and martyrdom] of different groups of people during the revolution and demonstrations. [It depicts] the presence and role of women and ethnic groups [with] a little overexpression in the form of hands, especially [those] of Imam Khomeini [–] referring to [his] leadership role and support of [the] people during the revolution. [The artefact] narrat[es] the eight years of imposed war and the leadership of Imam Khomeini at the time (Adelvand, 2016:76).

Mohammad Beheshti, pictured in the relief alongside but behind Khomeini, was an Iranian jurist, cleric and politician regarded as second-in-line in the political hierarchy of post-Revolution Iran (The New York Times, 1981: para.1). On 28 June 1981, Beheshti was assassinated when a bomb exploded during a party conference. Murals honouring Beheshti are common around Iran and an annual commemoration ceremony takes place on the day of his assassination. Beheshti is officially recognised as a martyr (Imam-khomeini.ir, 2013: para.1) and holds the official title of *Shahid* [Martyr], present in the many institutions and places named for him, such as Shahid Beheshti University and Shahid Beheshti, a village in central Iran. Khomeini has said that “Beheshti was himself a nation for [the people of Iran]” (*ibid.*).

Iran has often been labelled “obsessed with martyrdom” (Kifner, 1984: para.2) for its abundance of portraits, posters, monuments and murals paying homage to those killed in its conflicts – a permeation of public visual space almost on par with that of the Ayatollahs. Flakerud (2012:23) suggests that the iconographic depiction of

martyrdom in Iran conveys meta-historical truths and presents revisionist interpretations of emulated martyrdom. In Iranian politico-religious discourse, the infatuation with martyrdom is “less a reflection of the apparent suicidal fanaticism of Iranians and more an issue of [personal interests and] semantics” (Grotto, 2009:54) – in the same manner the United States encourages a societal commending of veterans. This is illustrated by Iran’s recognition of “living martyrs”: individuals injured in conflict who receive various state-sponsored privileges for their services to the cause (Flaskerud, 2012:28). In this sense, the context of martyrdom serves as a strong catalyst for positive emotional energy.

Similar to the Kim Il-sung figure in the Mansu Hill Grand Monument (and near countless other statues of Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il, Mao Tse-tung, Joseph Stalin, and Vladimir Lenin), Khomeini has an outstretched right arm with an open hand, seen in Figure 4.17. While this may be indicative of the bright future of Iran or Islam, it is more than likely a depiction of Khomeini waving – a homage to a popular early post-revolution photograph of a waving Khomeini, returned from exile (Figure 4.18 on the following page), that was similarly recreated on the cover of an issue of *Time* in 1987 (Figure 4.19 on the following page).



Figure 4.17: Closeup of EngheLab Square monument. Photo credit/source: Saidi (2014).



Figure 4.18: Photograph of a waving Khomeini. Photo credit: Chauvel. Source: *Time* (1979).



Figure 4.19: “Iran Vs. The World” *Time* magazine cover (1987). Photo credit: unknown.

Source: *Terapeak* (2016).

Viewing the open hand as a symbol of recognition, the acknowledgment of different genders and ethnicities in the relief implies a greater recognition for all Iranians (and

foreigners) viewing the artefact. This presents a more personalised-opportunity for the observer to be recognised both explicitly by Khomeini, and contextually by their represented gender or ethnicity.

4.2.4 The Hajj Pilgrimage Affairs and Berdimuhamedow billboards, and the *Ngwenyama-Ndlovukati* and Kimilsungia-Kimjongilia murals

In this instance, two billboards and two murals were chosen as examples. The Iranian and Turkmen billboards are examples of a governmental public service announcement and a literal photographic portrait, respectively. The North Korean and Swazi murals, both painted, depict the leaders through symbolic non-human forms.

The Ngwenyama-Ndlovukati mural

This artefact (Figure 4.20) consists of a large painted mural decorating the side of King Mswati III International Airport, visible to anyone arriving at or leaving the airport. The semiotic aspect of the mural is comprised of four components: a light and dark blue geometric design on the left, a central pictorial representation of an elephant and lion, a patterned red, white and black band above the central representation, and a red, yellow and blue geometric design on the right.



Figure 4.20: *Ngwenyama* and *Ndlovukati* mural. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

The light and dark blue geometric design on the left depicts a colour scheme consistent with that of the 1894 – 1902 colonial flag of Swaziland (Figure 4.21), although the Nguni shield is not depicted. While the bands maintain the original colour scheme, they are not arranged in the vertical pattern of the colonial flag, but rather a diagonal ray-like pattern. The principal assumption for the restructuring is that the colonial flag is still considered an offensive symbol by some Swazis, and many would feel there is no place for the old flag in the new Swaziland, especially at an airport where it could draw unnecessary attention from foreign visitors. The red, yellow and blue geometric design on the right depicts the exact design and colour scheme of Swaziland's current flag. However, as with the previous design, the Nguni shield has been removed.



Figure 4.21: 1894 – 1902 colonial flag of Swaziland.

The central component of the piece depicts the silhouettes of a male lion and elephant, backlit by a rising sun. The background mountain, framed between the lion and elephant, and encircled by the sun, is Execution Rock, a historically significant site where Swazi royal graves are situated – and traitors were executed (The Kingdom of Swaziland Tourism, 2013: para.2). The lion is portrayed as proportionally the same height and length as the elephant on the same plane, which is a physical impossibility. The lion stands in front of the elephant, evidentially leading the way. Across the top of the central piece runs a red, white and black band depicting traditional Swazi

patterning, commonly found on *emahiya* (a traditional Swazi cloth – see page 126), prompting nationalist and cultural emotion from any Swazi observer.

Reading the artefact from left-to-right, the message presented suggests: the oversized *Ngwenyama* (the King), followed by the *Ndlovukati* (Queen Mother), leads the progression of the nation from British rule to independence. This is further implied by the rising sun, presenting a ‘new dawn’. The sun may hold more symbolism however, as mentioned earlier, Swazis often refer to the King as the sun that shines on the land (Redvers, 2012: para.16).

The Hajj and Pilgrimage Affairs billboard

This artefact (Figure 4.22) is comprised of three billboards in Enghelab Square, Tehran. Like the previous *Ngwenyama* and *Ndlovukati* mural, the semiotic aspect of this artefact is organised into three components (in this instance, each billboard): the square portrait of Ayatollah Khomeini on the left, the central collage of imagery, and the square portrait of Ayatollah Khamenei on the right.



Figure 4.22: Hajj and Pilgrimage Affairs billboard. Photo credit/source: Lally (2015).

The square billboard on the left displays a printed photograph of a typically stern Khomeini, surrounded by an almost divine white aura, on the backdrop of Persian patterning and the Iranian flag. Khomeini, with his signature sombre expression, stares forward into the distance. Similarly, the square billboard on the right, displays a printed photographic portrait of Khamenei, seemingly in thought, on the backdrop of the Iranian flag with the Tawhid visible. Khamenei casts a black shadow in contrast to the white aura of Khomeini.

The rectangular, central billboard features a printed collage of paradisiacal and Hajj-related imagery. Pictured on the left of central billboard are white doves flying above Masjid-an-Nabawi, a mosque established and built under the guidance of the Prophet Muhammad in Medina (Fitzpatrick & Walker, 2014:45). Alongside it on the right, the Kaaba, the most sacred site in Islam. The Arabic text along the top, a Quranic verse, states

...and proclaim to the people the Hajj; they will come to you on foot and on every lean camel; they will come from every distant pass... (Al-Hajj 22.27, in the Quran).

The red flag states in Persian “Ya Hussain”, a phrase used to invoke the memory or intervention of Hussain ibn Ali, grandson of the Prophet Muhammed, and third Shi’ite Imam (Simpson, 2007:72). The phrase is most used in the context of the Mourning of Muharram, a set of rituals associated with both Shia and Sunni followers (*ibid.*). The text along the bottom of the billboard, in Persian, states: “Supreme Leaders Representative on Hajj and Pilgrimage Affairs”, the governmental department tasked with matters relating to the pilgrimage.

As mentioned earlier on page 46, the Grand Ayatollah Golpaygani affirms that Khamenei, a descendent of Hussain ibn Ali, should be regarded “on par with the Prophet” (Taheri, 2015: para.8). This divine recognition undoubtedly applies to Khomeini as well. This poses a religious dilemma as if the Ayatollahs are indeed divine (or on par with the Prophet Muhammed), the aniconic narrative in Islam may contradict their visual representations – especially when done alongside imagery of something as emotionally important to a Muslim as the Hajj.

While the Quran does not explicitly forbid visual depictions of prophets or divine figures, there are hadiths which do. While adherence to these hadiths may not be a quality shared by all Iranians, there is evidently a significant number who do strongly adhere. In 2005, *Jyllands-Posten*, a Danish newspaper, published a series of offensive editorial cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammed. As a result, international protests were organised, including in Iran where hundreds of protesters attacked the Danish embassy (The Guardian, 2006: para.5). Ayatollah Khamenei called the cartoons an “insult of Islamic sanctities”, and it was announced that Iran would suspend all trade and economic ties with Denmark (*ibid.*). The question remains, why is the saturation of the proclaimed *Islamic* Republic with portraiture and representations of the deific Ayatollahs so uncontentious?

This artefact perhaps best illustrates the answer. The requirement for leader foci to be viewed through an emotionally positive and motivating lens remains so fundamental to the establishment of a personality cult that any hindering factor must be discarded, irrespective of the major role it may play in the cult’s very own identity. In this sense, a sanctimonious Khomeini garnered support as a devout Muslim leader, striving to build Iran into a theocratic Islamic republic – to then disregard a narrative of the Prophet Muhammed, especially to the magnitude seen in the iconising of himself, appears highly hypocritical.

The aim of this artefact, it appears, is more than simply paying recognition to the Ayatollahs alongside a Supreme Leaders’ Representative’s Hajj notice. The primary motivation of the artefact is to present the leaders on par with the emotional value of paradise, the Hajj, and the Kaaba (and perhaps through these potent representative instances, Islam itself), or the hopeful conditioning of a Pavlovian association between the emotions generated by the Hajj/Kaaba and the Ayatollahs – regardless of the religious hypocrisy it might present.

The Kimjongilia-Kimilsungia mural

This artefact (Figure 4.23) consists of a screen-print of an original paint-on-canvas work. The original painted canvas appears to be in one of the restaurants in the Yanggakdo International Hotel in Pyongyang. Larger prints can be found on murals and billboards around North Korea. The artefact depicts bright, blossoming Kimilsungia, Kimjongilia, and azaleas, along with some flies and three butterflies.



Figure 4.23: Kimjongilia and Kimilsungia mural. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

Kimilsungia is a hybrid orchid created by Indonesian orchid breeder, Bundt, and named for Kim Il-sung in 1964 (Arditti, Soediono & Soediono, 2010:3). According to North Korean media, and Kim Jong-il himself, Kim Il-sung noticed the flower while touring the Bogor Botanical Garden in Indonesia with President Sukarno (Arditti *et al*, 2010:4). Sukarno suggested that the plant be named after Kim Il-sung, but he declined the offer (*ibid.*). After much imploring from Sukarno, and the breeder himself, Kim Il-sung accepted the offer, to which Sukarno affirmed that Kim Il-sung had “rendered enormous services to mankind” and therefore “deserved a high honour” (Arditti *et al*, 2010:6). However, before the orchid could be further propagated and sent to North Korea, the director of the Bogor Botanical Garden and florist who had bred the orchid “disappeared without a trace”, prompting Kim Jong-il to send a team to Indonesia in 1974 to find the flower (Arditti *et al*, 2010:7). Through the assistance of locals, the

team traced and found the flower, bringing it back to North Korea the same year (Arditti *et al*, 2010:8).

Kim Jong-il has further described Kimilsungia as

a flower that symbolises the greatness of President Kim Il-sung, who illuminated the road ahead for the world by means of his *Juche* idea, and a flower that has bloomed in the hearts of the people in the era of independence in honour of a great man (In-gi, 2007:i).

Kimjongilia, a hybrid tuberous begonia, was cultivated in 1988 by Japanese botanist Kamo Mototeru as a token of friendship between Japan and Korea, in commemoration of Kim Jong-il's 46th birthday (Lankov, 2007:22). It is designed to bloom every year on the national Day of the Shining Star: Kim Jong-il's birthday (Glyn & Kwon, 2008:98). The flowers, proclaimed "national treasures of the Korean nation and common riches of mankind" (In-gi, 2007:30), are managed by the Korea Kimilsungia-Kimjongilia Committee, a "state administrative guidance organ in charge of cultivating, propagating and [dispersing] information [regarding the flowers]" (In-gi, 2007:29). The committee publishes a quarterly periodical entitled *Immortal Flower* (In-gi, 2007:30).

The two flowers, although not the national flowers of North Korea, play a significant role in the personality cults surrounding Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung. They are prominently displayed in propaganda videos, art, murals, and sculptures across the country (see Figure 4.24 on the following page) – and are seen growing in most gardens and apartment windows, under inspection by the committee. The azalea, alongside the magnolia, is considered a national flower of North Korea (Willoughby, 2008:115). Therefore, while in this artefact the azaleas may be symbolic of the nation, they have come to acquire other symbolic meanings in North Korean works, such as the seventy azaleas that frame the Arch of Triumph, each one representing a year of Kim Il-sung's life (*ibid.*).

Whether the inclusion of the flies and butterflies holds any symbolic merit – other than to add life and movement to the idyllic scene – is unclear. The three butterflies may serve as homage to a fable ostensibly attributed to Kim Il-sung. The fable, *the butterfly and the cockerel*, tells a story of how a cockerel (symbolic of the United

States) attempts to destroy an idyllic garden and bully its inhabitants, but three young butterflies (symbolic of North Korea) working together, fight back and kill the cockerel (Flood, 2014: para.8; Gee, 2014: para.13). A state-produced animated adaption of the fable depicted the butterflies with the same colour scheme as those in the artefact (Stimme Koreas, 2013).



Figure 4.24: A mural in Pyongyang depicting Kimilsungia. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

The Berdimuhamedow on horseback LED billboard

This artefact (Figure 4.25 on the following page) consists of three LED billboards occupying a central focal point of the Ashgabat Hippodrome. The LED screens are encased in marble frames, upon marble columns decorated with gold-plated embellishments.

The two landscape-orientated billboards (on the left and right) display slideshows and video footage of Turkmen and horse-related imagery. The central portrait-orientated billboard – taller than the rest – displays a noticeably photoshopped image of a smiling Berdimuhamedow, dressed in traditional Turkmen attire, waving while riding his Akhal-Teke horse. The Akhal-Teke, bred almost exclusively in Turkmenistan, is

considered a national symbol – quite literally in the case of Yanardag, Niyazov’s personal Akhal-Teke which he had depicted on the Turkmen Coat of Arms in a Caligulan fashion. The central billboard, although digital, only displays the single image of Berdimuhamedow.



Figure 4.25: An LED billboard of a waving Berdimuhamedow, in traditional attire, while riding an Akhal-Teke, in the Ashgabat Hippodrome. Photo credit/source: Finnerty (2016).

Hozak and Polese (2016:170) note that Berdimuhamedow

spent a great deal of [effort] in portraying himself as an active sportsman [such as being] awarded the highest rank in karate for [his] “outstanding contribution to the development of national sport in contemporary Turkmenistan” [according to *Neytralny Turkmenistan*]. However, [P]resident Berdimuhamedow's personal hobby in horses and his art of horse-riding is demonstrated often [to] the public or in propaganda films about Turkmenistan. [According to *Neytralny Turkmenistan*, Berdimuhamedow] demonstrated his “outstanding skills for amazed citizens” during the first spectacle in the re-opened circus in Ashgabat.

Berdimuhamedow is depicted wearing a white astrakhan *telpek*, a traditional hat. The *telpek* plays an important societal role in Turkmenistan and “serves as an original criterion of [a] man’s [...] beauty, personifies pride and nobleness, [and] helps to develop a handsome bearing and graceful movements” (Traveler, 2008: para.3). Berdimuhamedow’s *telpek* is made of white astrakhan fur, considered “a symbol of [a] high secular or holy order” (*ibid.*), with white considered the rarest variety (Oakes, 2012: para.11).

In stark contrast to the always solemn Khomeini, Berdimuhamedow’s smile and, to a lesser extent, wave, is a common trait in nearly all representations of him, signifying a benevolent recognition of the observer. Similarly, this specific depiction of Berdimuhamedow in traditional attire and on horseback is common throughout Turkmenistan, whether in the form of statues, portraits or billboards – many apparently from the same photoshoot (for an example, see Figure 4.26). This is unsurprising due to the rich cultural history surrounding horses in Turkmenistan and Berdimuhamedow’s personal love for them. In 2015, he awarded himself the honorific title of “People’s Horse Breeder”, and is the author of *Akhal-Teke: Our pride and glory*, a literary tribute to the popular Turkmen breed (Wilczewska, 2015: para.3).



Figure 4.26: A large photo-portrait of a waving Berdimuhamedow, in traditional attire, riding an Akhal-Teke while doves circle around him. Photo credit/source: Tørrissen (2015).

4.2.5 The Swazi public screen

A public screen in Swaziland was chosen as the sole example for digital media as it succeeds in incorporating many of the findings from the other digital media cases analysed.

The Swazi public screen

This artefact (Figure 4.27) consists of an LED screen situated on an arch approaching the King Mswati III International Airport. Other screens can be found at busy intersections in Manzini and Mbabane. These screens generally show local static advertisements and text-based news and weather reports in-between video segments pertaining to Mswati – with the exception of the screen near the airport which only displays video segments pertaining to Mswati. Three video segments, all pertaining to Mswati, were recorded and will be discussed. The colourful block on the upper-right-hand corner of each video segment is a cluster of dead pixels and not part of the intended designs.

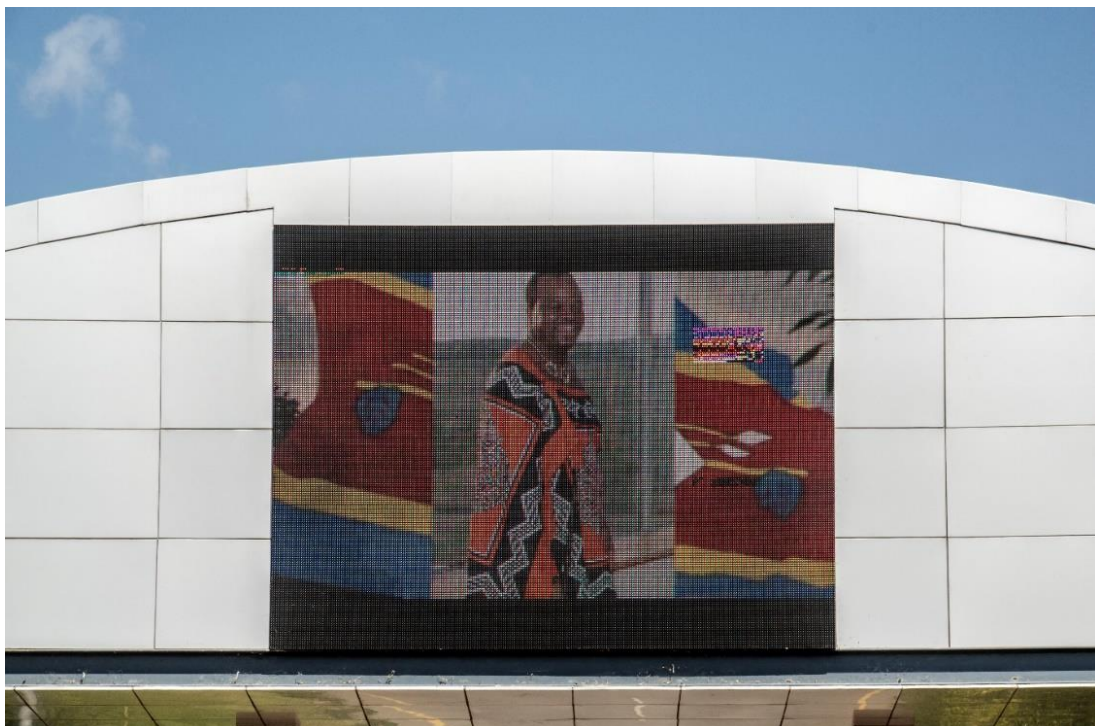


Figure 4.27: Public screen (Swaziland) - first video segment. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

The first video segment consists of an immaculate CGI flag of Swaziland blowing with trees visible in the background (a setting similar to that of the official portrait). A photograph of the King, wearing his traditional attire and smiling at the observer, pans out from the observer's point of view, overlapping the centre of the flag where it pauses once fully in frame. The background of the photograph again shows a nature-based setting – with the exception of what seems to be a lamppost curiously cropped in frame. The photograph of the King takes precedence over that of the flag. The composition of this segment is almost identical to that of another public screen found in Turkmenistan (Figure 4.28), where the image of Berdimuhamedow appears to similarly take precedence over that of the national flag as well.



Figure 4.28: Public screen in Ashgabat. Photo credit/source: Finnerty (2016).

The second video segment, seen in Figure 4.29 on the following page, consists of a black screen with the phrase “BAYETHE WENA WAPHAKATHI” appearing with a strike of pinkish lightning, and slowly rotating while giving off pinkish electric discharges. The word “*Bayethe*” is significantly larger than the rest of the text. The phrase “*Bayethe Wena Waphakathi*” loosely translates to “we bow to His Majesty”, semantically akin

to the Western phrase “Hail [His/Her Majesty]”, with *Bayethe* serving as the verb. The phrase is frequently used throughout Swaziland and, although directly related to the King, commonly used as a celebratory exclamation. The lightning effect does not appear to play a major semiotic role other than add vibrancy to the propagation of the phrase. However, the royal family are believed by some to possess weather-altering abilities, with the creation of rain and lightning storms in particular (Bowles, 2012: para.1). Similarly, Mswati has claimed that God speaks to him through lightning (The Economist, 2013: para.1).



Figure 4.29: Public screen (Swaziland) - second video segment. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

The third video segment, seen in Figure 4.30 on the following page, consists of a black screen with a symmetrical square *lihiya* design in the centre. The *lihiya* is a traditional Swazi cloth, similar to the *Kitenge* or *Kanga* of East, West and Central Africa. In Swaziland, the *lihiya* is still worn regularly in day-to-day life and mandatory for formal events and cultural festivals like *Incwala* and the Reed Dance. The way the *lihiya* is worn conveys specific information about the wearer, such as their age, gender, and

marital status. *Emahiya* (plural) tend to be durable, colourful, and “typically featuring a portrait of a youthful Mswati” (Unwin, 2012:83), as will be seen in the following chapter (particularly in Figure 5.10, page 142). The design, initially illegibly large, pans out from the point of view of the observer, starting with the eyes of the lion, and pauses once it is fully in view. The design, created by S’buko Sesive, a local advertising agency, depicts a chiaroscuro photorealistic illustration of a male lion in the centre – the *Ngwenyama*. “Swaziland” is centred above the lion, and “Africa’s new promise” below. The portrait is encircled by the traditional Swazi floral patterning used on the King’s *emahiya*. This is further framed by a square border depicting a symmetrical blue, cloudy sky. The silhouettes of four jets are present in each corner.

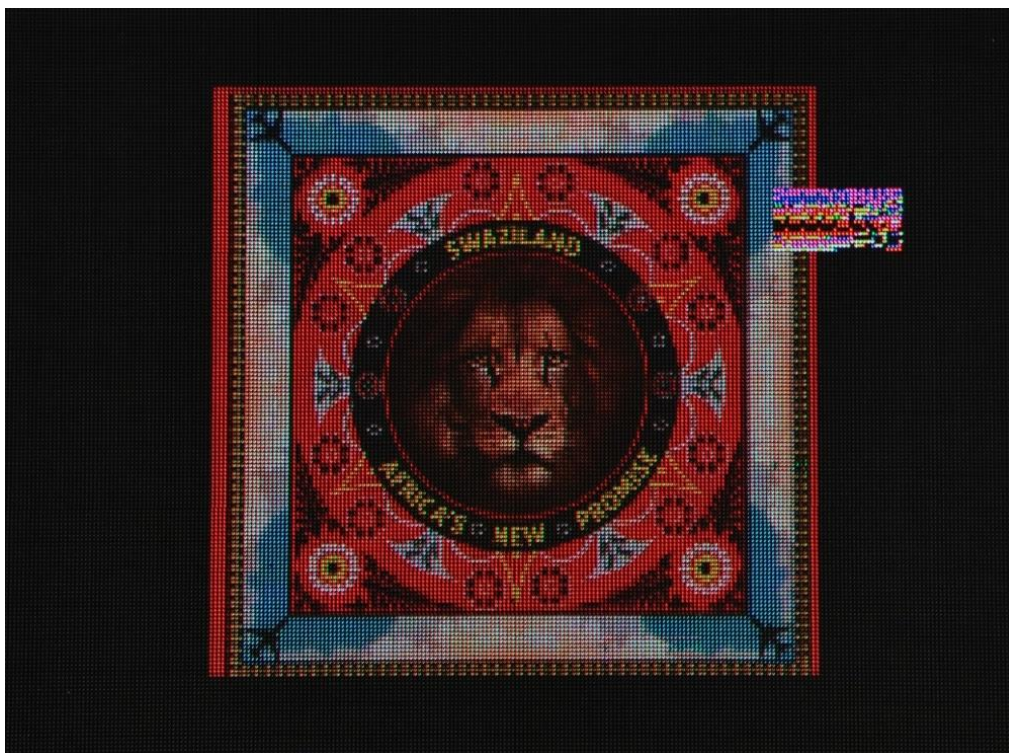


Figure 4.30: Public screen (Swaziland) - third video segment. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

In 2010, “His Majesty the King and *Ingwenyama* presented [...] his vision that Swaziland should be a first world country [...] by 2022” (His Majesty’s Government, 2013:1), prompting the government to establish frameworks and investments to make this vision a reality. “Swaziland: Africa’s New Promise” is the official self-titled slogan

of the foreign investment-seeking brand *Africa's New Promise*, launched by Mswati in 2012 in conjunction with his Vision 2022 campaign. This further coincides with the opening of the King Mswati III International Airport – referenced through the jets and sky in the design.

CHAPTER 5

Constructing and maintaining a personality cult: the Value Progression Model

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter the model developed from the design and semiotic analyses conducted in Chapter 4, named the Value Progression Model, is presented and tested. Four unique cases, not previously analysed herein, are used, namely; the cult of Qin Shihuangdi in Ancient China, the emerging personality cult surrounding Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck in Bhutan, the hypothetical invisible leader – examined in a brief analysis of ISIS through the lens of a personality cult, and the ongoing deconstruction of the cult of Mao Tse-tung in China.

5.2. Patterns in personality cults: the Value Progression Model

The Value Progression Model (VPN) is comprised of two components. The first component of the model posits that any official⁹ leader-based artefact is comprised of one or more of three “values”: symbolic value, material value, and focal value. Here, “value” is a metonym used to define the inherent stimulus for the construction of emotion – which, following Collins’ (2004) theory of interaction rituals, is then amplified during the ritual process. In this sense, the values serve as “triggers” of instinctive, special sensations – prerequisites for self-preservation and social cooperation – which are conceptualised as emotions.

The second component, a prototype and work in progress, hypothesises that during the emergence and establishment of a personality cult, a pattern in the production of artefacts is observable: in a natural progression, artefacts of (or of mostly) symbolic value are likely to be produced first, followed by artefacts of (or of mostly) material value, followed by artefacts of (or of mostly) focal value, whereas in an unnatural progression, the leader may attempt to

⁹ Here, “official” goes further than simply referring to state-produced artefacts, but encompasses grassroots artefacts which have received the “blessing” of the leader or state.

accelerate the establishment of the personality cult by introducing material or focal value earlier than what a natural progression may have yielded. Similarly, it hypothesises that the deconstruction of a personality cult is likely to occur in the reverse order to that of its construction.

In established personality cults, adherence to this model is generally involuntary and any failure in adherence results in punishment by the state (through authoritative policing) and/or the public (through altruistic punishment of those whose loyalty bids are deemed too low). Sun Mu, a North Korean artist and ex-propagandist who defected to South Korea, affirms during an interview that North Koreans can face execution for merely drawing the leaders, even in a seemingly inoffensive manner, recalling an instance from his childhood:

I [drew] Kim Il-sung once. It was when I was in high school. If I got caught, I would have been killed. So, I locked my door and drew [him]. I thought I could draw him well too. Even my parents didn't know. I proved to myself that I have the skills to draw Kim Il-sung exactly like his portrait. But before it was even dry I burned it (in Sjöberg, 2015).

In this sense, what may seem like the grassroot production of leader-based foci is not necessarily the reality. While this grassroot production may often produce a significant percentage of the artefacts – possibly even the vast majority, and it may appear to be entirely the free will of those producing it, the leader will inevitably control this production through the quantity (via means such as flattery management) and the quality and content (via the raising or lowering of loyalty bids).

In order to observe the model from the leader's perspective – to what extent the leaders are aware of the inner mechanisms of this phenomenon – the researcher worked closely with a significant source within one of the examined personality cults. The anonymous source, the leader's child and possible successor, maintains a strong and personal relationship with the leader, and is an important member of the group in which power is consolidated within the totalitarian state. It was found that, in this instance, the model was – in all regards – adhered to, but the process was followed without conscious thought, seemingly a reflexive progression of events. The leader was aware of the personality cult surrounding him and,

evidently, did not encourage it. However, little to no official management¹⁰ of the personality cult existed and the waxing and waning of the phenomenon depended almost entirely on the dictates of the leader himself – generally his personal views and advice from officials unrelated to the personality cult, regarding matters of basic governance.

5.3. Understanding symbolic value

Symbolic value refers to the means in which emotion is constructed in the moment of observing or interacting with an artefact which references (whether literal or not) the ideological creed underpinning the leader. Leaders strengthen their image through the foundation of ideologies, and present themselves as the helmsmen, saviours, or living embodiments of these religious, political, and/or customary ideologies (The Economist, 2004:70). This often results in leaders becoming multi-faceted, sometimes contradictory, personifications, such as North Korea's communist dynasty, or the Ayatollahs' Islamic iconography. Often, but not always, a single totalitarian leader gains societal association with a populist and/or radical ideology seeking to transform society, and once the society has been transformed, becomes the guide for the transformed society without whom the transformation could not have been established – or be continually maintained. This has been the primary reason for the emergence of most 20th century personality cults, observable in the cases of Adolph Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Francisco Franco, Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, Kim Il-sung, Saddam Hussein, and Ayatollah Khomeini amongst others. Although pejorative, the best simplification may reside in a quote from Orwell's (1949:220) dystopian novel *1984*:

Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship.

François "Papa Doc" Duvalier, President for Life of Haiti, accumulated much of his support through populist *noiriste* [Afro-Haitian nationalism] tenets and fuelled the antagonism of the socially and economically oppressed black Haitians towards the few mulatto elite that governed the country. This nationalistic identity took on a more ethereal nature with Duvalier

¹⁰ In this sense, no body or organisation, whether public or undisclosed, existed with the sole purpose of observing or managing the personality cult.

claiming that he was an “immaterial being” and the living flag of Haiti (Ndiva, 2006:261). He later claimed to be the physical embodiment of the country (*ibid.*). Duvalier, seemingly unsatisfied with his personality cult grounded solely on Haitian nationalism, began expanding into religious realms by reviving Vodou, a syncretic religion practiced in the country, and claiming to be a powerful *houngan* [Vodou priest] (Dubois, 2012:330). Duvalier carefully modelled his image on that of Baron Samedi, one of the *lwa* [spirits] of the dead in Haitian Vodou, copying his distinct characteristics of wearing black suits, darkened glasses and speaking in a deep nasal tone (Time, 2011: para.2). On one occasion, Duvalier ordered that the severed head of an executed rebel be packed in ice and delivered to him so that he could use his supernatural powers to communicate with the dead man (Lentz, 1994:357). Catholicism, the most prevalent religion in Haiti, was also utilised with Christian-based imagery of Duvalier propagated around the country. The most popular image of the time, as recorded by Nicholls (1996:16), was of Jesus Christ standing behind a seated Duvalier, his hand on Duvalier’s shoulder with the caption “I have chosen him”. Regime propaganda constantly reported that Duvalier was “one with the *lwa*, Jesus Christ and God himself” (Ndiva, 2006:261), and published a catechism with the Lord’s Prayer reworded to pay tribute to Duvalier:

Our Doc, who art in the National Palace for Life, hallowed be Thy name by present and future generations. Thy will be done in Port-au-Prince as it is in the provinces. Give us this day our new Haiti and forgive not the trespasses of those antipatriots who daily spit on our country; lead them into temptation, and, poisoned by their own venom, deliver them from no evil (*ibid.*).

Similar tactics were used in the building of Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo’s personality cult in Equatorial Guinea, with state radio declaring Obiang “the country’s god [...] with all power over men and things” and stating that he was “in permanent contact with the Almighty [...] and can decide to kill without anyone calling him to account and without going to Hell” (BBC News, 2003: para.5). His predecessor, Francisco Macías Nguema, also proclaimed himself a god (Sundiata, 1990:129) and changed the country’s national motto to “There is no other God than Macías Nguema” (Human Rights Watch, 2009:7). Similarly, under the regime of Trujillo it became compulsory for all churches in the Dominican Republic to display

colourful banners stating “Trujillo on Earth, God in Heaven” (López-Calvo, 2005:11). At the apogee of Mobutu’s personality cult in Zaire, the nation’s Minister of Interior explained

God has sent a great prophet, our prestigious guide Mobutu – this prophet is our liberator, our Messiah. Our church is the [Popular Movement of the Revolution]. Its chief is Mobutu. We respect him like one respects the Pope. Our gospel is Mobutuism. This is why crucifixes must be replaced by the image of our Messiah (Young, 1985:169).

It should be noted that claims of divinity are not simply the result of leaders driven to delusions by their own power, nor blinded or deceived by their own propaganda; image management remains one of the leader’s most important tools. The imagery of Saddam Hussein that pervaded Iraq reflected the premeditated extent of his efforts to appeal to the various social components of the divided and tribalistic nation. In the nomadic regions of Iraq, Hussein was depicted, usually in portrait photography, wearing the costumes of the Bedouin (Göttke, 2010). In impoverished areas, he was depicted wearing the traditional clothes of the Iraqi peasant (*ibid.*). In the north, a predominantly Kurdish region, he was dressed in traditional Kurdish attire (*ibid.*). In mosques and holy sites, he was pictured as a devout Muslim, wearing full headdress and *thawb*, and usually praying toward Mecca (*ibid.*). In areas frequented by expats and foreigners, such as airports, he appeared in expensive well-fitted Western suits (*ibid.*), designed and crafted by his personal tailor who, in an interview with *The Guardian*, described Hussein as being “very fussy about what he wears, like a model” (Traynor, 2005: para.3).

It remains highly unlikely (and of great contradiction) that Hussein genuinely juggled the multiple narratives told by his imagery. Contrary to his portrayal as a devout Muslim, Hussein’s religious devotion still remains a matter of speculation with many scholars arguing that he was in fact not very religious and only used Islam as a means of strengthening his rule (Sada, 2009:89). In a 1978 speech following a clash between Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims, Hussein argued that his government should “oppose the institutionalisation of religion in the state and society” (Karsh & Rautsi, 2007:142). His depiction as a Kurd, or even Kurdish sympathiser, also remains highly contradictory after a 1988 attempt to annihilate the Kurdish race that resulted in the deaths of over 50,000 civilians and the destruction of thousands of villages (Wong, 2006: para.1).

As observed in the cases of Iran, North Korea, and Turkmenistan, many cults of personality build on the foundation of a pre-existing cult, either working symbiotically with it (as observed in Iran and North Korea) or replacing it (as observed in Turkmenistan). Hitchens (2010: para.2), writing on an instance in which North Korean media declared Kim Jong-il to be the reincarnation of Kim Il-sung, termed the country “a necrocracy, or [...] mausolocacy, in which a living claimant [has] assume[d] the fleshy mantle of the departed”. Similarly, Hafez al-Assad was proclaimed to be the Saladin of the 20th Century (Wedeen, 1999:1), while Hussein’s regime called him the new Nebuchadnezzar (Karsh & Rautsi, 2007:152). In the Soviet Union, state propaganda reimagined the relationship between Stalin and Lenin, depicting Stalin as Lenin’s heir, then equal, and then superior – even though historical accounts described Stalin as an insignificant “grey blur” during the Revolution (Brendon, 2002:11). This reinterpretation of reality manifested in some of the posters of the time, where initially Lenin was portrayed as the dominating figure, towering over Stalin, but as time progressed, shrank, becoming Stalin’s equal, then smaller and ghostlier, until finally he was reduced to a name on the book in Stalin’s hand (Overy, 2006:115; see Figure 5.1 below and Figures 5.2, and 5.3 on the following page).



Figure 5.1: Naum Karpovskiy, *Long live the Komsomol generation!* (1948). Photo credit/source: Oliphant (2015).



Figure 5.2: Pravdin Vladislav, *Long live the Bolshevik Party, the Lenin-Stalin Party, the Vanguard of the Soviet People Forged in Battle, the Inspiration and Organizer of Our Victories!* (1950). Photo credit/source: Pisch (2017).

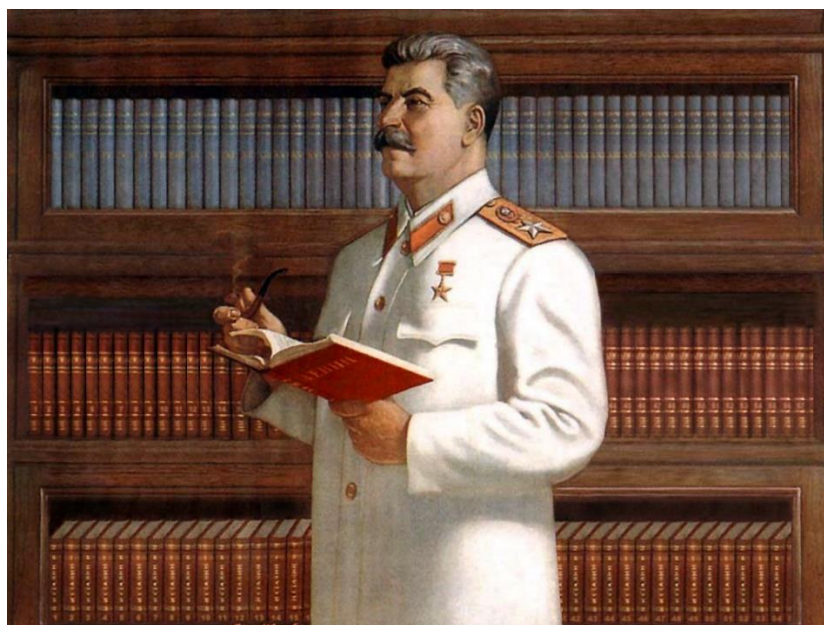


Figure 5.3: Viktor Ivanov, *The Great Stalin is the flaming torch of communism!* (1952). Photo credit/source: Red Avantgarde (2015).

One of the richest visual illustrations of ideological personification can be observed in Donald Trump's propagation of an image depicting himself as a cartoon frog. Trump's rise to power bore the hallmarks of populism (Wilkinson, 2017: para.1) and garnered the loyalty and

support of the emerging Alt-right movement (Cook, 2016: para.5). The Alt-right movement, offering no fixed ideological doctrine, fluxes as if it were a philosophy, encompassing tenets of isolationism, protectionism, nativism, Nazism, white supremacy, right-wing populism, Islamophobia, antifeminism and homophobia (Benjy, 2016: para.3; Hess, 2016: para.2; McAfee, 2016: para.4), and manifests primarily online (Cook, 2016: para.11). The movement permeated popular online forums with self-serving motivational foci, mostly in the form of internet memes with the most popular being Pepe the Frog. Pepe, a cartoon anthropomorphic frog created by cartoonist Matt Furie and posted in a series of blogposts in 2005, became a popular internet meme over time as internet users appropriated and placed him in new esoteric circumstances.

In early 2015, Pepe was appropriated by members of the Alt-right on the popular online forums *Reddit*, *4chan*, and *8chan*, and websites dealing with far-right and white supremacist content (Know Your Meme, 2016: para.7). These renditions of Pepe often included Nazi symbolism and racist, sexist, anti-Semitic, and/or Islamophobic situations, often violent in nature, such as those in Figure 5.4.



Figure 5.4: Alt-right appropriation of Pepe memes (circa 2015-2017).

Pepe soon became the logo-esque mascot of the Alt-right – even worn as a lapel pin by founder and white nationalist Richard Spencer (Murphy, 2017). In October 2015, Trump re-tweeted an image depicting himself as Pepe, as seen in Figure 5.5. In an article for the *Washington Post*, focusing on Trump’s “obsession” with image, Givhan (2017: para.1) writes that “Trump believes in the power of image. The new president believes that a single photograph, re-tweeted *ad nauseam*, can form the basis of a narrative”. It seems unlikely that Trump, an individual so image-conscious that he asked media not to publish unflattering photographs of himself (Wanshel, 2016: para.1), would re-tweet an image of himself depicted as a frog if not to propagate (or at least acknowledge) his perceived personification of a beneficial ideology. In 2016, the Anti-Defamation League added Pepe to their database of hate symbols (ADL, 2016). Trump has yet to remove the re-tweet.



Figure 5.5: Trump's re-tweet of a self-styled Pepe meme. Source: Trump [Twitter] (2015).

Although an ideological personification gives legitimacy to the leader, it can often limit their agency. As a hypothetical example, a leader who has risen to power through the embodiment of an atheistic ideology may attempt to curb any societal or institutional deification of

himself/herself in fear of appearing hypocritical and losing public loyalty, or in fear of negating the very atheistic ideology they embody. To prevent this, the leader may be required to tailor a bespoke self-serving ideology – essentially cutting out the ‘middleman’ that is the previously embodied ideology. This is often done through the creation of pseudo-holy books, such as Mao’s *Little Red Book*, al-Gadaffi’s *Green Book*, Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, and, most observably, Niyazov’s *Ruhnama*. The Little Red Book, formally *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung*, is a collection of Mao’s speeches and writings often referred to as the “Chinese Bible” (Han, 2004:1), and, beaten only by the Christian Bible, is the second most printed book in the world with 100 million more copies than the Quran (*ibid.*). Like the *Ruhnama* for the Turkmens, al-Gadaffi’s *Green Book* was intended to be required reading for all Libyans, with schoolchildren studying the book as part of their curriculum (Tremlett, 1993:214). Some of the book’s memorable slogans were displayed on billboards and murals across Libya, and extracts broadcast daily on radio and television (Tremlett, 1993:220).

Generally, symbolic value occurs first, during the emergence of the leader, as a by-product of the ideological creed serving as the leader’s foundation. In this sense, as a community (be it political, religious, economic, or cultural) gains socio-political momentum, so does the emotional capital within its sphere – which is easily exploited or redirected if the leader serves as a tangible personification of the movement. Artefacts containing symbolic value will continue to be produced so long as the leader remains at the helm or a personification of the community, irrespective of the transformations the community experiences. It is important to note that in some instances the community may be entirely centred around hero-worship and offer no fixed political or economic tenets. However, as a leader’s status and adulation expands, so does their “grip” on different realms of rule, progressing from a social leader into a governmental leader (by winning the war, revolution, or election)¹¹. This progression is both metaphysical and palpable; metaphysical in that the leader affirms their social worth to their subjects through an advancement of titles, ranks, or positions, becoming more and more valued, and palpable in that the leader is physically assigned a greater range of powers (such as control of the military or means of production). In this sense, once the leader is affirmed

¹¹ This may not always be the case however, as many dynastic leaders are simply born into this position or inherit it.

of this governmental power, they may have access to a much wider range of means of production and distribution, which is generally from where material value arises.

5.4. Understanding material value

Material value refers to the manner in which emotion is constructed in the moment of observing or interacting with an artefact which possesses a material worth, financial worth, or a similar requirement for survival (whether literal or social). Artefacts subscribing to this value are generally tactile, require physical interaction, and are commonly used in day-to-day life, such as the most universal examples: banknotes, coins, food items, ration cards, or stamps (Figure 5.6). In this instance, one should regard the artefact as consisting of two elements: the representation of the leader, and the vessel. For example, in the case of a coin, the copper or nickel flat disc (and its monetary nature) can be considered the vessel, and the relief of the leader as the representation. Both elements can imbue the artefact with material value; the vessel can give value to the representation (and pseudo-value to the leader by proxy), or, alternatively, the representation can give value to the vessel.

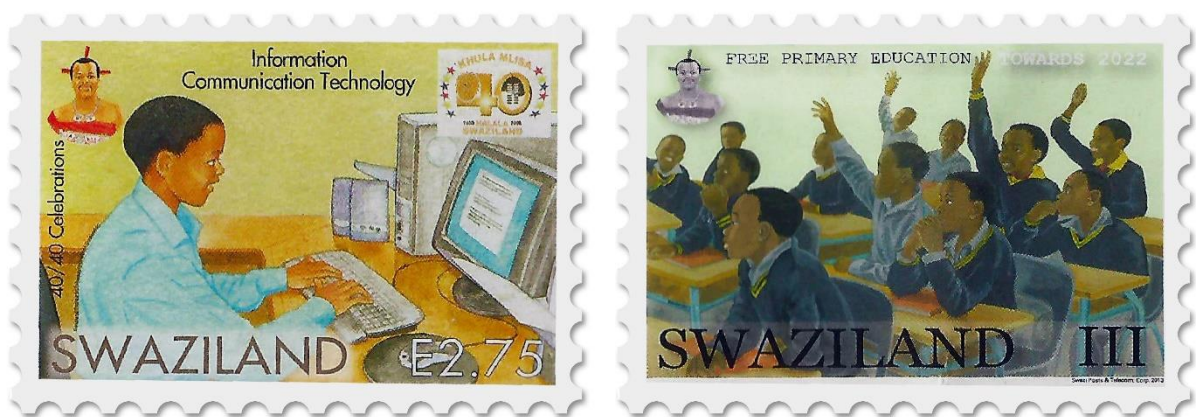


Figure 5.6: Swazi stamps bearing the portrait of Mswati in the top left. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

Instances where the vessel gives value to the representation are often the result of “forced” foci. In this sense, non-leader-based rituals that are generally required for survival (such as buying food) are hijacked by leader-based symbolism. For example, a banknote does not need the portrait of the leader on it, however, the rituals relating to banknotes – where the vessel

serves as the focal object – are socially unavoidable and therefore especially useful to leaders (as they need as many mandatory rituals as possible, wherein they serve as the foci, in order to sustain the personality cult). Therefore, these mandatory non-leader-based rituals are often commandeered.

Although money is utilised by almost all personality cults, often more culturally appropriate cases are observable where the material value may not be entirely monetary. Turkmenistan, suffering from a boom in vodka-related alcoholism known as “vodka terrorism” (Sylvester, 2015: para.6), has vodka branded with the portrait of Niyazov (Cummings, 2013:89). In Swaziland, phonecards required for international calls featured imagery of Mswati, as seen in Figure 5.7 below. William Krehm (1999:170), recounting his trip through the Dominican Republic in 1945, reports a few of the public inscriptions he observed:

On a home for the aged: “Trujillo is the only one who gives us shelter.” On the most insignificant village pumps: “Trujillo alone gives us water to drink.” On a hospital: “Only Trujillo cures you.” On a very ordinary town market in Santiago: “This structure will bear witness through the centuries of the grandeur of the Era of Trujillo.” On a fortress near the new harbour in the capital, where a small area was reclaimed from the river: “Trujillo, *Hacedor de esta Tierra*” (Creator of this Land) – the ambiguity of the phrase was, of course, perfectly deliberate.



Figure 5.7: Swazi phonecards from 1998. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

The hijacking of these kinds of rituals also provides the often mnemonic opportunity to condition one to equate the importance or need for the vessel with the importance or need for the leader (in the same sense that an immense statue implies a mighty leader). In 1941, to devalue the power of Hitler, the British forged German stamps (all of which consisted of Hitler's portrait) and altered them to depict a dead, skeletal portrait of Hitler (Volkman, 1996:248; Figure 5.8). These stamps were attached to fraudulent, but properly addressed, German mail and airdropped in the vicinity of bombed mail trains, where they were confused with real mail by the postal clean-up service and disseminated (Volkman, 1996:249). Similarly, following the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the new government stamped every banknote with a pattern to cover the portrait of the Shah, who until then had dominated every banknote (Figure 5.9).



Figure 5.8: Operation Cornflakes, *Futsches Reich* (1942).



Figure 5.9: 100 Rials (1979) with the Shah removed. Photo credit/source: *Banknote World* (2016).

However, as mentioned, in some instances it is the representation which gives value to the vessel as in the following case.

Field observation

While conducting a fieldtrip to Swaziland in 2015, the researcher visited the main lihiya producer and retailer in the country. Here, a price discrepancy was observed between two emahiya, identical in material, cut, quality, and design except for the portrait of Mswati, one of which was a black and white photograph of a slightly younger Mswati (like most of the emahiya – see Figure 5.10 below) and the other a colour illustration of present-day Mswati (see Figure 5.11 on the following page).



Figure 5.10: *Emahiya* designs. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

When the researcher queried why the lihiya with the colour illustrated portrait was cheaper than the black and white photographed version, a shop assistant answered that it was because the King appeared more attractive in the other. The role of the lihiya is primarily to offer protection from the elements, and secondarily to communicate a societal acknowledgement as a Swazi and the further details conveyed through its manner of wearing. However, the addition of the King's image introduces

the dimension of acknowledgement of loyalty directly to the King. This further introduces loyalty bids whereby the quality of the King's image that one wears is regarded as being equivalent to the quality of loyalty one shows to him. This results in a change in the recognised value of the item (manifesting monetarily) as the price is no longer based on its production and distribution costs (as is expected for a staple item in a poor country) but on the quality of the depiction of Mswati.



Figure 5.11: Unfavoured *lihiya* design. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

A similar case of where value was added through the addition of the leader's representation is the prison tattoos of Soviet convicts. Some Soviet prisoners would get tattoos of the portrait of Stalin, often on their chest, believing that a firing squad would not follow orders to execute them in fear of damaging the portrait (Arkady, 2014:69). Similarly, the material value of an artefact also serves as a means of self-preservation for the artefact – an evolutionary development spurred on by the feeble nature of some artefacts (a worn banknote handled by dirtied hands, a fabric creased and muddied from toiling fields, or Krehm's (1999:170) "insignificant village tap"). If one were to protest a leader by means of defacing or destroying their image, one may be disinclined to target artefacts with material value as they may be required for one's survival, acquisition of resources, or protection. Furthermore, in terms of

defacing or destroying a representation of the leader, the most practical and easily available (and destroyable) representation will most likely carry material value.

Field observation

Within both of the personality cults visited by the researcher, the societal perception was held that the might of the representation equates to the might of the represented, a notion which one may extrapolate to include most established personality cults. If a representation exists where the might of the artefact does not equate to that of the leader, a form of material value is required to counterbalance this difference.

During a 2016 fieldtrip to the Nampo West Sea Barrage, considered a major engineering accomplishment in North Korea, the researcher observed two large adjacent monuments, dedicated to Kim Il-sung: a mural depicting his official portrait, and a tablet bearing a quote and his signature (Figure 5.12 on the following page). Inside a nearby visitor centre, the researcher was shown a scale model of the West Sea Barrage. The model was extremely comprehensive, with attention in design paid to everything from ornate detailing on fences to individual windows – some only a few millimetres in size – creating a near identical miniaturised replica. However, regarding the miniaturised Kim Il-sung monuments, both portrait and signature, were replaced with solid red blocks, as can be seen in Figure 5.13 on the following page. With the attention to detail shown in every other aspect of the model it is without doubt that it would have been possible for the designers to produce a miniaturised portrait and signature of Kim Il-sung, however, the might of the miniaturised works would not equate with the might of Kim Il-sung, and as there would be no way to correct this through the endowment of social or monetary value, it would not be possible. Yet, seemingly idiosyncratically, the miniaturised monuments were roughly the same size as the portrait-bearing lapel pins.



Figure 5.12: Monuments at entrance to Nampo West Sea Barrage. Photo credit/source: Codrington (2009).



Figure 5.13: Scale model of Nampo West Sea Barrage. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

The lapel pins, however, do illustrate the often adverse outcomes that can arise if a “weak” artefact is left unmanaged and begins to naturally produce its own material value. According to Radio Free Asia (RFA), “North Koreans are illegally buying highly sought-after lapel pins of [...] Kim Il-sung and [...] Kim Jong-il and using them in lieu of cash to pay for accommodations, meals and drinks” (Sung-hui, 2015: para.1). The duel-portrait pins, worth around R400 on the

black market (Sung-hui, 2015a: para.7) are manufactured for significantly less than the established trade value and distributed for free to party officials. An RFA source in North Hamgyong province reports that to meet demands, smugglers are circulating Chinese imitations of the double-portrait and single-portrait pins (Sung-hui, 2015a: para.10). As a result, worker patrols conduct extensive inspections to find them (*ibid.*). The source further reported that the Party, calling the phenomenon a “commercialisation of supreme dignity”, ordered that those using the lapel pins as a form of currency be “[found] and punished” (Sung-hui, 2015a: para.3). The source affirmed that “[b]uying and selling insignia pins with the images of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il is a political crime” (*ibid.*).

One could say that the nature of the artefact (and its ease in transactability) almost *obligates* it to take on a material value. The ease in transactability is a result of its size and durability¹², established familiarity, and established (non-monetary) worth. The worth of the artefact refers to its emotional worth (the symbolic representation of absolute devotion to the portrayed leaders – similar to how a devout Christian might wear and value a cross) and societal worth (certain lapel pins communicate certain ranks within the Party and therefore North Korean society, allowing those with high-ranking pins to receive high-ranking privileges).

This “obligation” to acquire material value is also the result of loyalty bids introduced by the aforementioned self-preservation ability of its value. In this sense, if it is established that the might or importance of the representation equates to the might or importance of the leader, and all *weak* representations of the *great* leader possess some form of monetary value to counterbalance this indifference of might, it is one’s loyal duty to correct any weak and unimportant leader representation by endowing it with monetary value. This behaviour is often encouraged by the conferring of leader-based foci as rewards for those who meet or exceed threshold loyalty prices. To illustrate one such instance, consider the following excerpt, titled *To translate people’s ideals and dreams into reality*, from Supreme Leader Kim

¹² Notably, the durability has little to do with the quality of the artefact itself and more with the preservation treatment it is bound to receive from North Koreans, as even mere scratches or dirt on the leaders’ portraits could constitute a sign of disrespect and result in harsh punishment.

Jong-un in the year 2013, an annual North Korean publication that hyperbolically showcases Kim Jong-un's weekly activities.

For the first time in the history of the Worker's Party of Korea, [the] awarding [of a] watch inscribed with the name of Kim Jong-il in his own handwriting was instituted. Instituting and awarding this decoration has been a desire cherished long by the Korean people, and this desire was realised by the measures taken by Kim Jong-un. [...] Kim Jong-un [...] awarded the watches to service personnel, scientists, technicians and labour innovators, who had performed brilliant feats in national defence and building a thriving socialist country. The ceremony of awarding watches inscribed with the name of Kim Jong-il, who had performed outstanding exploits for his country and fellow people, proved a meaningful occasion for further encouraging the service personnel and people, who, rallied firmly behind the Central Committee of the Worker's Party of Korea headed by Kim Jong-un, had turned out in the struggle for final victory in building a thriving country and for national reunification (Chol-won, Jong-hwa, Song-gum & Un-sun, 2004:111).

5.5. Understanding focal value

Focal value is the most easily observable hallmark of the romanticised personality cult, what Márquez (2017:63) refers to as "the original crazy dictators": the mass visual commanding (and commandeering) of public attention through physical extravagance and ubiquity. This value generates motivating emotions in two ways, termed permeation and grandiosity.

5.5.1. Permeation

"Permeation" seeks to disseminate leader imagery on a mass scale, effectively flooding the image-scape, such as the examples presented in Figure 5.14 and Figure 5.15 on the following page. Márquez (2013:14), drawing on Wedeen's (2015) examination of the cult of Hafiz al-Assad, explains that this tactic may not produce any notable level of motivating emotion as the monotony of a landscape wallpapered with leader foci could prove wearisome or boring, emotionally devaluing the imagery. However, what it does achieve is the impeding of the emergence of alternative visual foci, and eases the ability to determine the principled opponents within the cult polity, namely those who do not meet the minimum loyalty bid.



Figure 5.14: Posters of President Xi Jinping in Shanghai. Photo credit/source: Song (2016).



Figure 5.15: Workers in China parade portraits of Stalin (1949).

Another illustration of permeation can be found in a 1974 Zairian media prohibition instated by Mobutu that made it illegal to mention any government figure by name – other than

Mobutu (Turner & Young, 2008:169). Saidazimova (2008: para.1) recorded that “Turkmenistan was once littered with so many pictures and statues of Sapamurat Niyazov that outsiders might be forgiven for thinking the country looked like a personal portrait album of the late leader”. Similarly, Hunter (1999:18) notes that “[i]n Pyongyang, where Kim statues abound, one literally cannot walk [thirty metres] without encountering his likeness – in statues, mosaics, wall paintings, [...] billboard posters, or even [one hundred metres] underground on the walls of subway stations”.

Field observation

*This level of saturation can often result in seemingly fatuous outcomes. During a field trip to North Korea in 2016, the researcher recounts encountering a framed photograph of Kim Jong-il inside a building near Panmunjom. The large (approximately A2) photograph showed a smiling Kim Jong-il greeting troops inside a hall-like room at a presumably nearby army barracks. Kim Jong-il is positioned to the left of the picture, smiling with his hand outstretched to a group of overwhelmed soldiers (some crying with joy) positioned on the right – coincidentally similar to Michelangelo’s *The Creation of Adam*. On the wall behind the soldiers was an older framed photograph of a younger Kim Jong-il on a previous visit to the (assumedly) same barracks. In that photograph, on a wall, only a few centimetres in size, were the ubiquitous official portraits of Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung cropped just in frame. Unfortunately, due to the military nature of the location, the researcher was unable to photograph the image. A similar Russian-doll-like image of Kim Il-sung was recorded in a museum in Nampo (Figure 5.16 on the following page), however, in Panmunjom, a public display-case exhibited a smaller print of the beforementioned Kim Il-sung image with the portrait in the background edited out (Figure 5.17 on the following page), alongside an image of Kim Il-sung seated before a large portrait of himself while speaking to Kim Jong-il who wears a lapel pin bearing his image too.*



Figure 5.16: A portrait of Kim Il-sung pictured in a portrait of Kim Il-sung. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).



Figure 5.17: Portraits publicly exhibited in Panmunjom. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

It is notable at this point that permeation is more a means of visual quantifiability than a standalone typology, as the image-scape will generally be permeated by a variety of artefacts of differing value propositions.

5.5.2. Grandiosity

“Grandiosity” is the term used to refer to the seemingly excessive extravagance one might come to expect from an established personality cult, whereby, within leader representation and imagery, there is a focus centred primarily on the formidable nature of the piece, with specific attention to the piece’s large size and/or lavish substrate. This term subsumes the larger-than-life replicas of leaders towering over public spaces, building-sized banners and murals, the gold leaf gilding on their portraits, and, less tangibly, the state manufactured lore produced with the intent to aggrandise the leader.

Gold and other materials deemed lavish or beautiful (such as marble in Turkmenistan) appear to be the mediums of choice for fashioning representations of the leaders. In 1977, as part of an elaborate celebration for Kim Il-sung’s sixty-fifth birthday, the 22-metre tall bronze statue of him, that dominated Mansu Hill, was covered with gold (Hunter, 1999:18). Hunter (1999:18) reports that even North Korean defectors spoke “of the feeling of pride and, even more than that, the actual thrill that they experienced in seeing Kim Il-sung’s towering presence in gold”. Statues of the leader, particularly oversized replicas, are almost always cases of grandiosity, with prime examples being Niyazov’s gold-plated figure which revolves to always face the sun, Berdimuhamedow’s 24-carat gold figure on a horse, perched upon a cliff-face, carved from white marble (Figure 5.18 on the following page), and its similar counterpart in North Korea, pictured in Figure 5.19 on the following page.



Figure 5.18: Monument of Berdimuhamedow on horseback with stylised cliff face, Ashgabat.
Photo credit: Alexander Vershinin. Source: Walker (2015).



Figure 5.19: Monument of Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il on horseback with stylised cliff face, Pyongyang. Photo credit/source: Muller (2016).

An aggrandising nature, however, is not limited to that of murals and statues but can extend to even lore and nomenclature. Joseph-Desiré Mobutu formally changed his name to Mobutu

Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu wa za Banga [Mobutu the omnipotent warrior who, through his endurance and inflexible will to win, goes from conquest to conquest, leaving fire in his wake], but not before he conferred a multitude of titles upon himself, including “*Mulopwe*” [the Demigod] and “the Messiah” (Edgerton, 2002:209). It has been reported that in North Korea, when a member of the Kim family is mentioned in local media or publication, a minimum of one special title is required to precede their name, which itself is emphasised by a larger or bolder typeface (Williams, 2011). It is estimated that there are 1,200 official titles bestowed upon Kim Jong-il, including “World Leader and Guiding Star of the 21st Century” and “Guardian Deity of the Planet” (The Economist, 2010:41).

Superhuman feats have long been attributed to leaders to enhance their reputation and merit, beyond what is justified by scientific fact. One may expect such irrational statements to drive the population to question the sanity of the leader, or more threateningly, question their ability to lead. However, the portrayal of supernatural power plays an effective role, similar to that of permeation, whereby it offers a strong and easily monitored increase in loyalty bids, and further devalues weaker foci, as when “an established autocrat boasts of supernatural powers, everyone else fades into anonymity” (Svolik, 2012:80). In 1966, amidst persistent rumours that Mao Tse-tung had suffered a heart attack, a media event was staged to demonstrate that he was still robust and capable of leading China (Harding 1997:176). Mao was reported to have swam nearly fifteen kilometres in sixty-five minutes, four times faster than the world record, at seventy-three years old (*ibid.*). In a far more literal endeavour, after what was reported to be a failed assassination attempt on Gnassingbé Eyadéma, the government circulated a comic book that depicted him as a superhero with the powers of invulnerability and super strength (Lamb, 1984:48).

Similarly, in 2006, *Nodong Sinmun*, the official online newspaper of North Korea, published the article *Military-first teleporting*, claiming that “the extraordinary Master Commander who has been chosen by the heavens”, Kim Jong-il, possessed the ability to teleport between locations “like a flash of lightning” – so quickly that even American satellites were unable to track his movements (Hassig & Oh, 2015:33). Kim Jong-il was not the only member of the family to possess superhuman powers as Kim Il-sung could reportedly control the weather by

his mood (Svolik, 2012:80) – a trait some believe is shared by the King and Queen Mother of Swaziland (Bowles, 2012).

As with material value, grandiosity is entirely determined and defined by the socio-political and economic lens through which it is created. The approximately two-metre tall marble *Ngwenyama* statue in Swaziland, seen in Figure 5.20, cannot reasonably compete in size or grandeur with the twenty-metre plus gold-plated statues of Turkmenistan and North Korea, however, in one of the poorest nations on earth, where only a handful of monuments exist, it is unparalleled. In this instance, however, grandiosity is not only manifested in the medium or scale but in the content. As Nelson (2017:61) notes

Lions [...], as the top predators in their class, are seen on coins, government seals, flags. Their popularity is based on the simple fact that Man, top predator of *his* class, knows a real pro when he sees one.



Figure 5.20: *Ngwenyama* statue. Photo credit/source: Muller (2015).

Scale often plays an important role in grandiosity and is likely the most easily observed characteristic when one is ascribing values to cult artefacts – as the scale usually serves as a tangible recognition of the perceived might of the leader, in some cases even surpassing physical practicality, as is evident in Figure 5.21.



Figure 5.21: Gigantic portrait of al-Gadaffi. Photo credit: Ismail Zitouni. Source: *Al Jazeera* (2011).

However, this may not always be the case. First impressions of Saddam Hussein's large-scale murals, the most predominant cult artefact during his reign, may suggest grandiosity simply due to their magnitude. However, these murals (during the early emergence of the cult) were significantly symbolic. Their imagery – national flags, Islamic symbolism, historical figures and

battles, idealisations of the Iraqi people, and military endeavours – often overshadowed the image of Hussein himself. Hussein’s premiere muralist, Shakir Khalid, has noted

My murals nearly always dealt with Iraqi history. The symbol of the former president was of secondary importance. It was really a very small part of it (Sipress, 2017: para.11).

However, over time, all non-Hussein imagery disappeared and the ubiquitous murals depicted nothing more than portraits of Hussein, often on blank backgrounds (for examples, see Addendum B). This can be regarded as a graduation from symbolic to focal value irrespective of the unchanged medium.

5.6. Understanding the emotional component of the VPM

As was established in the theoretical framework (see pages 12-32), personality cults are established and maintained through sets of interaction rituals, linked in chains, where leader imagery serves as the focus. These leader-based rituals are often embedded within structures of patronage, resulting in inflations of flattery. Within these rituals, the emotional state of the ritual participants is amplified to extreme levels through collective effervescence, which in turn results in the unconscious flow of the participants to similar leader-based rituals. In regard to the VPM, the values serve as “triggers” for instinctive, sensations – prerequisites for the survival of self and community – which are conceptualised as an emotion. In this sense, the most “irresistible” inherent sensations, before manifesting as emotions, are biologically and psychologically designed to protect oneself and one’s community.

As symbolic value references the ideological creed underpinning the leader (and therefore the community, be it political, economic, religious, or cultural), the emotion constructed when observing or interacting with an artefact rich in symbolic value is generally going to exist in the affective region where one may plot strong group-related emotions, such as solidarity, unity, or patriotism. Similarly, material value targets an instinctual need to satisfy one’s most natural requirements – often only attainable through interactions with the vessel imbued with the value. The emotion constructed when observing or interacting with an artefact rich in focal value is usually going to be affectively synonymous with awe-like emotions, which

promote altruistic behaviour and encourage social cooperation (Dietze, Feinberg, Keltner, Piff & Stancato, 2015:889).

While the perceived emotions constructed are biographically, contextually and situationally dependent (Barrett; 2017:xii), this does not necessarily mean that they vary dramatically within their affective region; if one were to be punched in the face, the emotion that would be constructed as a result, whether it be perceived as shock, fear, or rage, would still be within the same negative-motivating affective region¹³, or the upper left quadrant in terms of Russell's (1980) circumplex. Therefore, while it is challenging – if not impossible – to discuss the emotions constructed from these instinctive, sensations, it is assumed, in the instance of leader-based artefacts, that the majority of the constructed emotions are motivating in nature, as if they were not, the personality cult would be unsuccessful or cease to exist.

To illustrate this, consider Table 5.1, an unfinished table, originally planned to catalogue perceived emotions, constructed by members of a variety of contemporary personality cults. Due to multiple inconsistencies with data verification this was not used to support the findings. In this instance, however, the table still reveals an important observation that will be discussed following a brief explanation of how it came into being.

During this research process, eighteen anonymous sources from Bhutan, China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Swaziland, and Vietnam¹⁴ were asked to identify the emotions that they felt regarding certain artefacts. These artefacts are not identified, as in many of the instances the participants were guides, often assigned to said artefact and therefore identifying the artefact may inadvertently identify the participant. Little consistency was applied in the gathering of this information for a variety of reasons. The primary being that the majority of participants were not available to observe a wide enough variety of artefacts. In this sense, in some cases only one participant observed one artefact of one value, whereas in other cases, one participant observed multiple artefacts from all three values. Secondly, answers were very

¹³ The constructed emotion would most likely be negative as being punched in the face is not a pleasant experience, and motivating in the sense it would impel an equally vibrant reaction, such as running away or fighting back.

¹⁴ One source from Bhutan, two from China, one from Cuba, two from Iran, six from North Korea, five from Swaziland, and one from Vietnam.

brief and limited due to the informal manner in which the questions were asked. These questions were posed in casual conversation so as not to ‘force’ an answer from the subject. Furthermore, English was not the home language of any of the sources who contributed to this table, although their answers were mostly in English to accommodate the researcher. Therefore, it is possible that certain emotions were presented as the closest English alternative known by the subject. Similarly, when the emotions were explained rather than ascribed a term, such as “a feeling of great love and respect”, the researcher ascribed the closest English term, such as adoration. All participants affirmed that they were supporters of the leaders in question.

Table 5.1: The perceived emotion of eighteen participants from seven countries, constructed in relation to the value type of multiple artefacts. ‘Px’ represents the participant and their assigned number. Source: Muller (2016).

		Symbolic value	Material value	Focal value
Bhutan	P1	- Loyalty		
China	P2	- Camaraderie - Familiarity - Patriotism	- Dependability	- Impressed - In awe - Predictability
	P3	- Servitude (to the government)	- Excitement - Empowered	- Located - Submissiveness
Cuba	P4	- Solidarity - Unity	- Happiness - Protected	- Comfort - Familiarity - Pride
Iran	P5	- Anger (to enemies) - Religious fervour	- Attentiveness	
	P6	- Righteousness	- Stability - Reliability	
North Korea	P7	- Adoration - Patriotism		- Adoration - In awe

	P8	- Anger (to enemies)	- Comfort	- Anger (to enemies) - Powerful
	P9	- Devotion (to the leader)	- Familiarity - Rewarded	- Protected - Reverential
	P10	- Protected		
	P11	- Tenseness (to enemies)	- Stability	
	P12			- Tenseness (to enemies)
Swaziland	P13	- Fear (of not conforming) - Patriotism		
	P14		- Sadness (for others)	- Prosperous
	P15	- Loyalty - Pride	- Acquisitiveness - Security	
	P16	- Sense of identity	- Servitude (to the system)	
	P17	- Protective	- Success	
Vietnam	P18	- Unity	- Fulfilment	- Inspired

While Table 5.1. may be incapable of cataloguing perceived emotions, especially as it was later established that these emotions had countless variations, manifesting entirely differently depending on the culture or situation, the table did reveal a pattern in the affect of the participants. Like the case of the stomach ache on page 20, which manifests as hunger or anxiousness depending on the situation, what was described as religious fervour, patriotism, and devotion may all be the same abstract sensation of intense love, but the subject is dependent on the situation: whether that intense love is for one's god, one's country, or one's leader. However, the affective pattern reveals that the majority of emotions constructed are of a positive-motivating nature. To further illustrate this, see Figure 5.22 on the following page, where the data from Table 5.1. has been presented using Russell's (1980)

circumplex model of affect. The plotting of this data was done in correlation with the findings provided by Russell (1980:4-15).

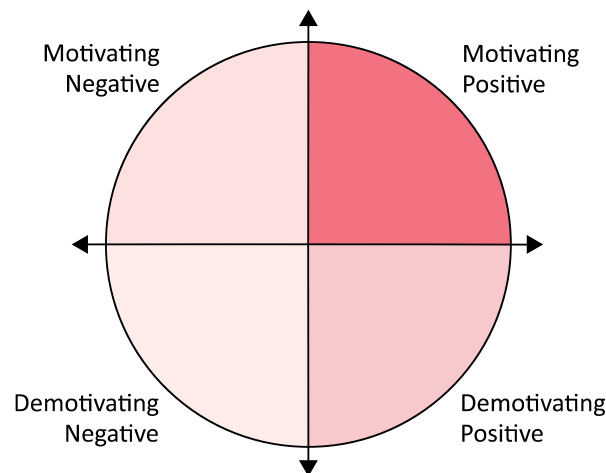


Figure 5.22: The emotions from Table 5.1. presented via Russell's (1980) circumplex model of affect, whereby the colour saturation of each quadrant is indicative of the relative concentration of data points contained therein. In instances of duplications within values, only one instance has been plotted. Source: Muller (2017).

Figure 5.22 reveals that the majority of emotions were motivating and positive in nature (49%), followed by emotions that were demotivating but positive (25,5%), followed by emotions that were motivating but negative (19,6%), and lastly, emotions that were both demotivating and negative (5,9%). This result is expected as if the majority of emotions felt were not motivating in nature, the personality cult would not be successful. Likewise, it is understandable that the second most common emotions would be of a positive but demotivating nature as, although it is in the best interest of the personality cult to keep rituals motivating and positive, there is inevitably a decay of emotional energy wherein participants become bored or comfortable with certain rituals (but still view the leader/ritual through a positive lens). Similarly, emotions that are both demotivating and negative are expectedly low as if they were not, the personality cult would collapse in a Caligulan fashion (see page 31).

For a more tangible observation of this, consider a scene in Álvaro Longoria's (2015) North Korean documentary *The Propaganda Game*, wherein a North Korean tour guide, named Kim Ji Hye, becomes visibly upset during an interview regarding a monument when she is asked

by Longoria about her love for Kim Jong-un in comparison to that of Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung. While answering the question, she begins crying and is unable to continue the interview. Her reaction, as it seems and from what she briefly explains, is the result of an emotion being constructed around a strongly motivating affect: her absolute love for the leaders, the sudden bereavement stemming from the loss of her much loved “father” Kim Jong-il, and gratitude that she, and the country, has the equally-loved Kim Jong-un to fill this void.

5.7. Understanding the *progression* component of the VPM: the construction and deconstruction of a personality cult

The second component of the VPM posits that as a personality cult emerges, artefacts that consist of symbolic value are likely to be produced first, followed by artefacts consisting of material value, followed by artefacts consisting mostly of focal value. The production of these artefacts is consistent with the sense that it does not end when another value begins. For example, although originating first, artefacts that hold mostly symbolic value are still produced alongside those that hold mostly material value, and artefacts that hold mostly symbolic and/or material value are still produced alongside those that hold mostly focal value. See the following diagram, Figure 5.23.

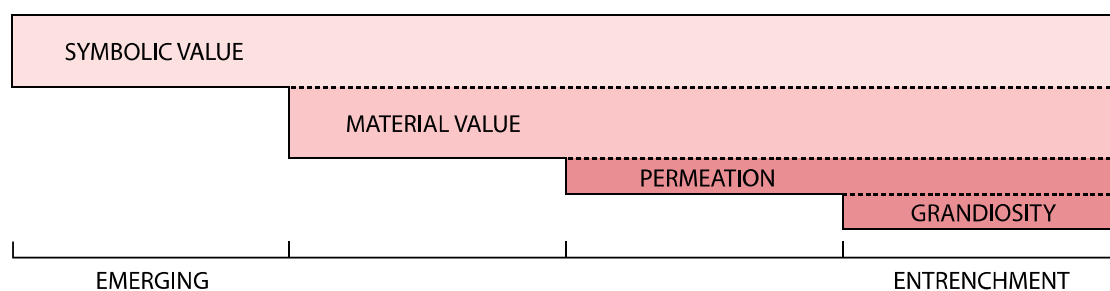


Figure 5.23: Model of the progression of a personality cult from emergence to entrenchment via symbolic value, material value, and focal value. Source: Muller (2017).

In Figure 5.23, the scale (from “emerging” to “entrenchment”) is not a representative measurement of time, but rather an order of progressions. The timing between these progressions is not consistent and varies greatly depending on the context of the personality cult (anything from a matter of months to many years). It is important to note that artefacts

are often non-distinct regarding the value that they hold as they rarely hold a single value and therefore should be imagined more so as a spectrum (emphasised in the diagram by the dashed lines separating each value). This progression of value stages may be indiscernible in regard to the speed in which a graduation of values takes place (often through the setting of unnaturally high loyalty bids, such as introducing high-focal value artefacts during the symbolic value stage). In instances where loyalty bids wax and wane, it is common for exceptions to arise, such as an artefact of mostly focal value produced during the symbolic value stage, prior to the material value stage. This is the result of loyalty bids being set unrealistically high, either by a fervid group or the leader himself wishing to accelerate the process during a stage in the process where society is unable to meet the bid. These instances may promote the arising of further exceptions and succeed in accelerating the process and move on the next stage, or settle until being met by a natural rise in bidding.

In this sense, if the leader is seeking to establish a personality cult around himself/herself, it would be in their best interest to find means of accelerating the progression. This is often accomplished through the conveying of emerging cult value information through established cult value mediums. This is observable in the previous case of Saddam Hussein, who, in the symbolic value stage, presented symbolic value-centred artefacts using high focal value mediums, allowing him to introduce the production of focal value artefacts far earlier than what a natural progression may have resulted in. Continuing with this example, the conveying of symbolic value *information* via a material and/or focal valued *medium*, imbues the populous with a pre-existing familiarity of the impending progression/s, allowing for a far more natural introduction to the next progression.

Consider the following hypothetical example, loosely based on an instance in which Julius Caesar supposedly had the head of a large statue of Alexander the Great replaced with his own (Byrne & Tutill, 2017:2). Leader A, seen as the helmsmen or personification of Ideology A, an “anti-” ideology with the fundamental aim to oppose Ideology B, has, through a revolution, ousted and executed Leader B, a strong proponent of Ideology B. In a city square is a large statue of Leader B, memorialising himself and his ideology. Leader A removes the head of Leader B’s statue and replaces it with his own. This new artefact, rich in symbolic value, is publicly celebrated as a metaphorical symbol of Ideology A’s triumph over Ideology

B. The development of Leader A's personality cult is still in early stages, namely the symbolic value stage. The act of replacing the statue's head is mainly of symbolic value, and therefore feels natural at this stage in the emerging personality cult, however, Leader A has introduced elements of focal value (such as permeation through the destruction of competing foci, and grandiosity through the formidable nature of the large statue) earlier than what a natural progression may have yielded, effectively familiarising the public with focal value allowing for an acceleration in the progression of his personality cult.

This notion of value progression is illustrated and supported by Figures 5.24 and 5.25, diagrams sampling the cases of Joseph Stalin and Saddam Hussein. The first diagram plots fifty representations of Stalin collected during the building of the theoretical framework from various sources (Addendum A). These artefacts were collected at random with the only criteria for inclusion being that they were of an official (see footnote 9, page 129) nature from within the personality cult and representative of Stalin. The timeline of the collected artefacts falls between 1930 and 1955 – from the start of Stalin's personality cult (Gill, 1980:167) to the beginning of the de-Stalinisation process following Khrushchev's speech.

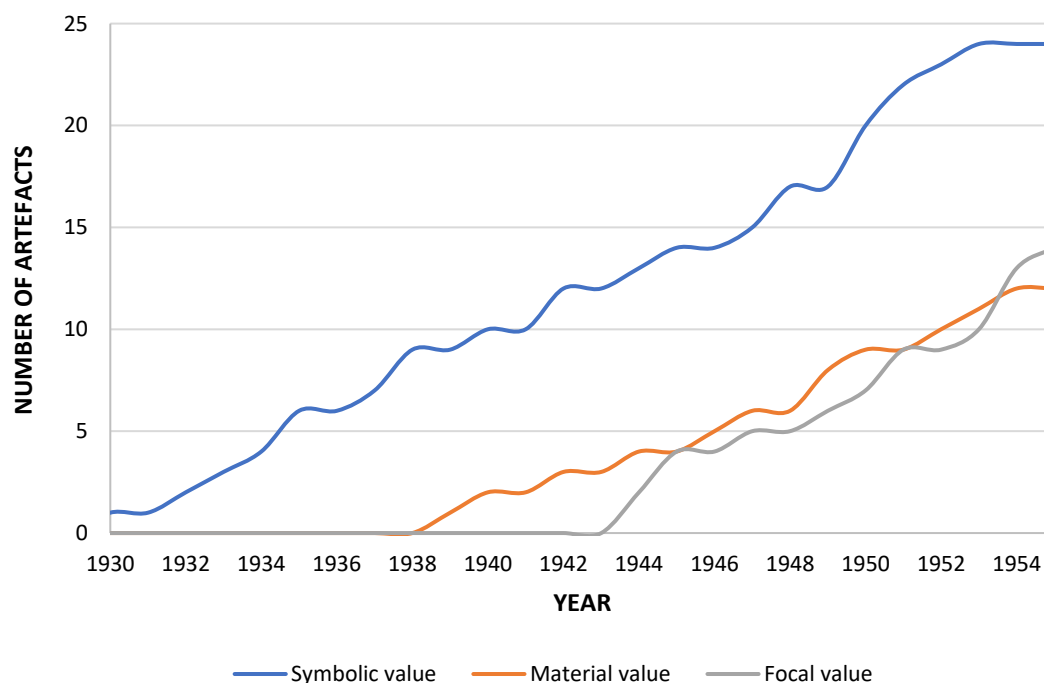


Figure 5.24: The frequency of fifty Stalin-based artefacts of predominantly symbolic value, material value, and focal value produced from 1930-1955. Source: Muller (2017).

From Figure 5.24, one can see that artefacts of symbolic value are produced from what is historically regarded as the start of Stalin’s personality cult – a lavish celebration for his 50th birthday in December 1929 from where his image became a prominent aspect of Soviet society (Gill, 1980:167). A brief examination of Figure 5.24 reveals that artefacts of material value are not recorded until 1939, from where their production appears to continue fairly frequently. The same is observable with artefacts of focal value which appear in 1944, towards the end of the war, and then consistently reoccur.

The second diagram, Figure 5.25, plots thirty-five representations of Saddam Hussein (Addendum B). The data was collected in the same manner as that of the previous diagram. The collected artefacts fall between 1979 and 2002 – from the start of Hussein’s presidency to one year prior to the Invasion of Iraq and his ousting as president.

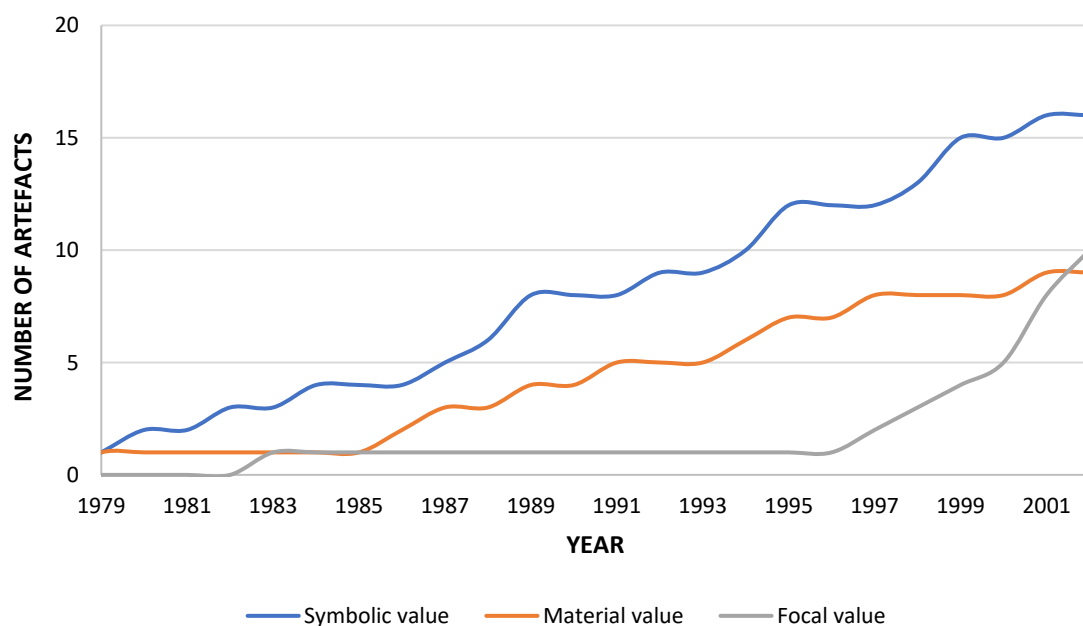


Figure 5.25: The frequency of thirty-five Hussein-based artefacts of predominantly symbolic value, material value, and focal value produced from 1979-2002. Source: Muller (2017).

From Figure 5.25, one can observe a similar pattern to that of 5.24, regardless of the smaller sample. The symbolic value stage begins with the start of Hussein’s presidency, where “[o]nce in power, Saddam was actively involved in creating the ideal image of a single leader who would rule [and replace the collective leadership that preceded him]” (Simon, 2004:165). The

production of symbolic valued artefacts continues frequently throughout the duration of his reign. Save for one idiosyncrasy in 1979, artefacts of material value seem to gain production momentum from 1986, and then continue in production somewhat consistently. Likewise, aside from an exception in 1983, artefacts of focal value start becoming more consistently frequent from 1997.

5.8. Cases to test the VPM

To illustrate the VPM's applicableness to a variety of personality cults and stages of development, data from a variety of personality cults sourced from the literature review and verified through publication, and raw data collated from countries not selected for the analysis were input into the model. This is presented through four brief cases: (1) the personality cult that surrounded Qin Shihuangdi in Ancient China, (2) the emerging personality cult surrounding one-year-old "Dragon Prince" Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck in Bhutan, (3) the hypothetical invisible leader, examined in a brief analysis of ISIS through the lens of a personality cult, and (4) the ongoing deconstruction of the cult of Mao Tse-tung in China.

5.8.1. Case one: the cult of Qin Shihuangdi in Ancient China (247-210 BCE).

As the VPM was developed primarily through the data of functioning, contemporary personality cults, this case study seeks to illustrate the model's applicableness to a personality cult which no longer exists, namely the cult of Qin Shihuangdi in Ancient China.

Qin Shihuangdi, born Ying Zheng – a prince of the Qin state, became the King of Qin at the age of thirteen. At thirty-eight, he became China's first emperor after conquering all warring states and unifying the country in 221 BCE (Duiker & Spielvogel, 2006:78). Rather than using the inherited 'King' title, borne by the preceding Shang and Zhou rulers, he ruled under the self-invented title of '*Shǐ Huáng Dì*'. *Shǐ* meaning 'first' (in the context of "the point from where everything begins"), *Huáng* an epithet of Heaven meaning 'shining' (Mark, 2009:52), and *Dì* the Supreme Deity of the Shang (Chang, 2000:5). '*Huangdi*' also served as the title for the

Yellow God, a deified emperor, who reigned approximately between 2697 and 2597 BCE, traditionally credited with godly powers, numerous inventions and innovations, and regarded as the initiator of Chinese civilisation (Chang, 1983:2).

Qin, credited with founding the first police state (Ambrose, 2010:20), used merciless rule to command the reverence from those subjects who were sceptical of his symbolic value: nationalist and divine personifications. Qin's divinity, or desire thereof, was marred by fears of death and obsessive aspirations to become the True Man, an immortal figure from Chinese mythology. Qin desperately sought the fabled elixir of life, which he believed resided on the mystical Penglai island after supposedly speaking with Anqi Sheng, a then-thousand-year-old Chinese immortal and Penglai islander (Pregadio, 2013:199). In 219 BCE, Qin sent Xu Fu, a trusted Taoist alchemist from Zhifu Island, along with three thousand virgin boys and girls to find Penglai and Sheng (Fogel, 2013:24), but they never returned, and are often accredited with colonising Japan instead (Chey, 2011:28). Qin's obsession with the elixir was well known by his subjects, as was the massive expenditure on this endeavour, and as such, his obsession may offer the opportunity for a reanalysis of the infamous mass book burnings during his reign: instances of loyalty bids rather than sheer despotism. The purge may have targeted literature considered useless (that which offered little or no help towards Qin's endeavour – now, *everyone's* endeavour) and helped focus the direction of Qin's best scholars on the discovery of the elixir.

If one understands the case of material value as a representation of the leader presented via an item needed for survival (whether literal or social), Qin fabricated the most substantial artefact: language. Under Qin, the different spoken languages, dialects, and writing systems across China were replaced by a single uniform language. Imposing a standardised language allowed for far greater ease in the dissemination of Qin's propaganda (Chiu, 2017: para.6), and served as a representation of Qin himself. Usage of his birthname 'Zheng' – and its homophone – were forbidden (Mansvelt, 1987:69). *Zhèn*, the commonly used first-person Chinese pronoun, was commandeered exclusively for Qin's use. This prompted his subjects to develop the pronoun *wǒ* [this worthless body] for conventional use (Yau, 2004:4).

As language was standardised, so were weights, measurements, and the legal code – all of which Qin served as the central legitimiser of. In one of the most blatantly observable cases of material value, Qin introduced a unified system of coinage. It is important to note that while it is almost customary nowadays for tender to serve as a canvas for leaders' imagery, "unlike latter-day tacticians [...] Qin Shihuangdi conceived and executed his design feats entirely instinctively" (Rawsthorn, 2014:12). According to Kampmann (2016: para.6), "[t]his coin was a perfect embodiment of the imperial power. Both – coin and emperor – connected Heaven and Earth, yin and yang". Rawsthorn (2014:11) notes that the coins

had a symbolic importance in helping to persuade the new emperor's subjects, many of whom had fought against his army in battle, or had family or friends who had died doing so, that they had a personal stake in his immense domain. [...] Every time a farmer or a carpenter used them, they saw a tangible reminder that they themselves were part of a dynamic new empire, and had good reason to feel grateful to its visionary founder and ruler.

In regard to permeation, it is not known whether the image of Qin was as ubiquitous within his polity as those of contemporary leaders, but his understanding of the importance of achieving a focal monopoly is evident. To prevent the emergence of alternate foci, Qin targeted religion and the past for the ideological threat it posed in scholarly contrasts between his reign and that of the more "benevolent" rulers, such as the Yellow God, whose aesthetic he sought to imitate. In 213 BCE, Qin ordered the mass burning of historical and religious books, the execution of their authors, and supposedly had 460 scholars buried alive (Wilson, 2007:2). "History was restarted [and] all historical writings from more ancient times were deemed illegal and [...] burnt if discovered" (Stallard, 2007: para.5). It became "illegal just to mention historical events in everyday conversation" (*ibid.*).

In perhaps one of the most extravagant instances of the recognition of advertising space, Qin had mountains inscribed with descriptions of his great achievements and character (The British Museum, 2017: para.2), even in the most remote regions of China (Rawsthorn, 2014:11). But Qin's greatest case of grandiosity, and application of design as a medium of self-expression, was the construction of his mausoleum. Constructed over a 38-year period using over 700,000 labourers (Dorling-Kindersley, 2016:56), the tomb, a 76-metre tall truncated pyramid, consisted of an inner and outer city (modelled on the Qin capital Xianyang and complete with palatial replicas) with the overall complex approximately 98-square-kilometres

in size (Williams, 2016: para.6). The Terracotta Army, over 8,000 life-sized terracotta and bronze soldiers, 130 chariots with 520 horses and 150 cavalry horses, served as a garrison to the mausoleum (Roach, 2015: para.10). The tomb, which had crystal and pearl ceilings depicting constellations illuminated by candles carved from the fat of 'mermaids' for its ability to burn without extinguishing, and over 100 rivers of mercury running through hills and mountains of bronze (Qian, 94BCE: Chapter 6; Roach, 2015: para.13). The tomb was filled with rare and valuable artefacts and treasures, gold, and animal and human sacrifices – including Qin's concubines and 100 officials (Qian, 94BCE: Chapter 6). To protect these treasures, the inner passageway was blocked and the outer gate lowered with the workers, craftsmen and architects trapped inside (Man, 2010:232).

Just as Qin Shihuangdi had deployed design with extreme efficiency to amass wealth and power during his life, he used it to secure what he believed would be an equally resplendent death, by creating the afterlife of his fantasies, which served a practical purpose too. Building such an outlandishly extravagant burial site was so eloquent a testimony of his might that it reinforced it as effectively as his celestially planned palaces, mountain inscriptions and the new imperial currency. But it was also a physical manifestation of the inner world of his imagination, a material expression of how China's first emperor saw himself, and wished to define his place in history, which presaged contemporary design spectacles such as [...] the Arirang Festivals in North Korea (Rawsthorn, 2014:11).

5.8.2. Case two: the emerging personality cult of Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck in Bhutan

This case study seeks to analyse an instance of an emerging personality cult. As the personality in question is that of Bhutan's Prince Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck, born last year, this case study is very brief and much more preliminary in character.

Contrary to its name, the "Thunder Dragon Kingdom" of Bhutan is perhaps the most un-draconian cult of personality currently in existence. Rather than Gross National Product (GNP), the democratised Kingdom focuses on Gross National Happiness (GNH), an indigenous concept enshrined in the constitution which states that "the State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness" (Maxwell & Schuelka, 2016:138). The generally benign monarchy relinquished its totalitarian status in

1998 (BBC News, 2006: para.2). In many ways, the small kingdom can be viewed as a less totalitarian Swaziland, however, to compare the permeation of the cult of Mswati III in Swaziland and the cult of Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck in Bhutan would, at the risk of an unnecessary pun, be like comparing a lion to a dragon.

The Dragon King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and his wife, Dragon Queen Jetsun Pema, dominate the image-scape (and ritual-scape) of Bhutan on a North Korean-esque level, as seen in Figure 5.26 below. In Bhutan, “[the King’s] image smiles out from posters and billboards everywhere” (Buncombe, 2011: para.5), “[one] will not see a single advertisement [...]. The only posters [one] will see are of the King [or] the Royal Couple” (Sharma, 2016: para.3). The Royal Family is revered, and as a result any criticism of royalty remains “unthinkable” (Harris, 2013: para.7). As Sharma (2016: para.1) recounts,

[u]nreal is the only word to explain [the people of Bhutan’s] connection with their leaders. In my brief visit to the dragon country, almost everyone [...] I came across visiting many markets, and sites, had one badge. They wore it like their badge of honour. It was often a picture of the current King, the Queen, [or] both of them together [as seen in Figure 5.27 on the following page]. I asked over fifty people, whether they were wearing the badge willingly. Each one of them were very happy to tell me that they wore it with pride.



Figure 5.26: A school assembly takes place in front of large portraits of the Bhutanese Royal Family. Photo credit/source: *Wangdue Chhoeling Lower Secondary School* (2013).



Figure 5.27: A man wears a badge depicting the Bhutanese King and Queen. Photo credit/source: Finnerty (2016).

Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck, the first child and heir apparent of King Jigme Khesar, was born in February 2016, known only as the *Gyalsey* [Dragon Prince] until his name was released two months later on the anniversary of the death of Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, a Tibetan Buddhist Lama and the unifier of Bhutan (Palden, 2016: para.1). His birth was marked by a five-day prayer festival (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2017: para.1) and the planting of 108,000 trees by tens of thousands of volunteers (BBC News, 2016a: para.2). According to *Kuensel*, Bhutan's national newspaper, the Prince's birthday – which took place during the Monkey Year, the same as the King and Guru Rinpoche, the second Buddah – was a very auspicious occasion wherein “the earth and water elements met” (Kinga, 2017: para.4). The article continues,

[a]ssuming that the *Gyalsey* succeeds his royal father at age 29, he would reign for 36 long years. For Bhutan and the Bhutanese people, this is good news. It ensures political stability by way of continued national leadership over an extended period of time. [...] As the direct heir to the golden throne, the *Gyalsey* further ensures both the continuity of the lineage as well as the political dynasty. The continuity of this political dynasty is a symbol of the continuity of the nation. Therefore, the *Gyalsey* is the symbol of future Bhutan (*ibid.*).

Artefacts of the Prince are not limited to symbolic value however, as the production of material valued artefacts was observed just days after his birth, such as the portrait of the Prince being featured on stamps and a state-distributed religious calendar (Yellow, 2017). In February 2017, a redesign was released for the 100 Ngultrum banknote, commemorating the Prince's first birthday, as seen in Figure 5.28 below. An indication of permeation is apparent too as his portraits are starting to become commonplace in Bhutan (see Figures 5.29 and 5.30 on the following page). This highlights an incredibly fast value progression (or attempt thereat), especially when compared to personality cults like that of Mao Tse-tung or Joseph Stalin which took many years to establish. This fast value progression could be the result of a variety of reasons, such as an instance in which the Prince inherits an already established set of values, such as symbolic (as he is effectively born with symbolic value) and is therefore able to bypass that step in the process. Alternatively, an attempt at an unnatural progression could be taking place wherein the situation (the celebratory atmosphere at the birth of a Prince) is utilised to put forward artefacts of values a natural progression may not have achieved yet.

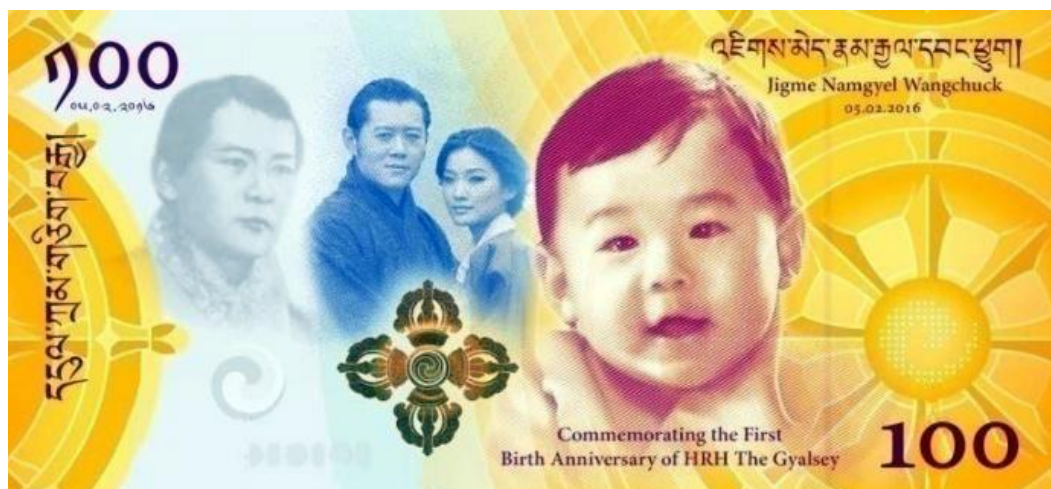


Figure 5.28: 100 Ngultrum (2017) commemorating the first birthday of Prince Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck. Photo credit/source: *Coin Week* (2017).



Figure 5.29: A group of people gather below a large portrait of Prince Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck. Photo credit/source: *Bhutan Today* (2017).



Figure 5.30: A service being delivered at a shrine to Prince Jigme Namgyel Wangchuck. Photo credit/source: *Wangdue Chhoeling Lower Secondary School* (2017).

If this fast-emerging personality cult *is* merely a result of celebratory times in which the excitement has yet to die down, it may prove irrelevant when the excitement fades in that loyalty bids relating to the image of the Prince have already been established, as have multiple interaction rituals wherein he serves as the foci.

5.8.3. Case three: The hypothetical invisible leader; ISIS as a personality cult

Understanding that the circulated foci (leader-based artefacts) are the principle force in the establishment and maintenance of a personality cult, this case study highlights how a personality cult can arise in a situation where little to no representations of the leader are available within the polity. This will be achieved by examining ISIS, under the rule of “the Invisible Sheik” al-Baghdadi (Kooiman, 2017:7), through the lens of a personality cult.

Originating in 1999 under the name *Jama'at al-Tawhid wal-Jihad* [Organisation of Monotheism and Jihad], the militant jihadist group pledged its allegiance to al-Qaeda (and General Emir Osama bin Laden) in 2004, renaming itself *Tanzim Qaidat al-Jihad fi Bilad al-Rafidayn* [Organisation of Jihad's Base in Mesopotamia]. This organisation would later come to be known as ‘the Islamic State of Iraq’. Around this time, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, a cleric about whom little is known, was arrested for his allegiance to al-Qaeda. He was detained as a “civilian internee” and “low level prisoner” in Abu Ghraib (Arango & Schmitt, 2014: para.12), a United States’ prison complex in occupied Iraq, from where he was transferred to Camp Bucca, “the birthplace of ISIS” (McCoy, 2014: para.1). He was described as a “disciplined and charismatic leader whose followers marched in lockstep with his every instruction” (Hassan & Weiss, 2016:12), and soon began fostering a personality cult as an asset during his incarceration (*ibid.*).

Following his release in 2009, al-Baghdadi was announced as leader of the Islamic State of Iraq, succeeding Abu Omar al-Baghdadi who had been killed in a missile strike. In June 2014, amid seizing large swathes of territory in Iraq and Syria, the group officially renamed itself the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria/the Levant and proclaimed its captured territory a caliphate, naming al-Baghdadi as Caliph. As of early 2017, outside of Iraq and Syria, ISIS controlled territories or had allegiances in Afghanistan, Algeria, Egypt, Indonesia, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Nigeria, Pakistan, occupied Palestinian territories, the Philippines, Somalia, and Yemen, and had carried out attacks in 29 countries (Bixler, Hogenmiller, Lister, O’key, Sanchez & Tawfeeq, 2017).

Al-Baghdadi's growing personality cult has not gone unnoticed amongst those with high-ranking positions in ISIS, who he has begun to replace with allies from his inner circle, "raising concern that [their] caliphate [may] soon become a personality cult rather than the long-awaited greater Islamic State" (Luck, 2014: para.11). As Todenhöfer (2016:154) notes, senior members of ISIS are seeking to avoid the establishment of a personality cult around al-Baghdadi, primarily for the logistical difficulties it poses¹⁵, but also for the "insurmountable task" the council would face in designating a new Caliph if al-Baghdadi were to die (Winter, 2014: para.6). Similarly, Aymenn Jawad al-Tamimi of the Philadelphia-based *Middle East Forum* told *Think Progress* that "other leading figures within ISIS are far too obscure to have the aura and personality cult of a caliph that is essential to ISIS" (Salhani, 2015: para.17). However, upon al-Baghdadi's death, analysts who have studied ISIS do not expect any notable transformation in the organisation, stating that there is a high probability that his successor may be even more ruthless and expansionist in order to prove his mettle against that of his predecessor (NBC News, 2014: para.4).

While it is apparent that al-Baghdadi is fostering a fast-growing personality cult, there is an anomaly: only one video and three grainy mugshots of al-Baghdadi exist, of which only two are confirmed (Kooiman, 2017:7). In this sense, al-Baghdadi is seemingly constructing a personality cult with no self-imagery. Unlike other jihadists, he avoids appearing in videos (Khalaf, 2014: para.8). Representations of al-Baghdadi, composed from the same handful of images, are known to occasionally circulate on social media, such as that seen in Figure 5.31 on the following page, however, while these artefacts may bear all the creative hallmarks of personality cult imagery (as compared with Figures 5.32 and 5.33 on the following page), these instances are rare and generally very isolated; nowhere near enough required to maintain successful chains of interaction rituals. Similarly, al-Baghdadi-centric artefacts are occasionally produced *by proxy*, such as a widely distributed video produced in 2014 by *Abu Sayyaf*, a Filipino jihadist militant group, in which they pledged their allegiance directly to "Caliph" al-Baghdadi, rather than the Islamic State (Vice News, 2016). Presumed audio-recordings of him also continue to spread, even though on multiple occasions he has been reported to have been killed in airstrikes (Kooiman, 2017:8).

¹⁵ Al-Baghdadi's only public appearance captured on video took three months to prepare for, a timely expense considering ISIS was at war with sixty different nations (Todenhöfer 2016:154).



Figure 5.31: Frame from an ISIS propaganda video showing combatants marching under the illuminated image of al-Baghdadi (2015).



Figure 5.32: 1969 poster depicting Mao Tse-tung as the sun. Source: *Historia* (2017).



Figure 5.33: Poster from the Syrian Ministry of Information depicting the people and army of Syria coming together, under the glowing image of al-Assad, to fight terrorism. Source: *Syrian Free Press* (2015).

With this understanding, how do al-Baghdadi-centric foci, imbued with symbolic, material, and focal value circulate around the caliphate if such little imagery of him exists? This case study will attempt to highlight instances of artefacts imbued with symbolic, material, and focal value, demonstrating that rather than an exception to the value progression model, ISIS may exist as an obscure personality cult centred around Caliph al-Baghdadi.

Al-Baghdadi has acquired much of his symbolic value via his military credentials, but primarily through his questionable lineage, a result of his 'official' biography written by senior religious leader (and ISIS official) Turki al-Binali (Zelin, 2014: para.7). The biography claims that al-Baghdadi is a direct descendent of Prophet Muhammed's Quraysh tribe – a key qualification in becoming a Caliph, and, historically, leader of all Muslims (*ibid.*). Furthermore, al-Baghdadi, and perhaps ISIS as an organisation, have acquired a prophetic aesthetic through the exploitation of weak and inauthentic interpretations of extracts from hadiths (Marshall, 2016:127), such as,

...then the black banners will come from the east, and they will kill you in an unprecedented manner [...] and when you see the black banners, pledge your allegiance to them even if you have to crawl over the snow, for among them is the Caliph of Allah (Sunan Ibn Majah 4084).

By fixating on these extracts (and self-serving interpretations of them) during *khutbahs* [regular public sermons], a meta-physical artefact is created whereby the Quran becomes a symbol (or personification) of al-Baghdadi, without the need for his literal likeness. Similarly, this could highlight an instance of material value as the Quran, which one could presume to be commonly available and utilised, serves as the dictator and legitimiser of most day-to-day interactions within the caliphate.

Seemingly paradoxically, al-Baghdadi's invisibility may be one of the principle forces in his permeation (the focal value component), and the overall establishing of his personality cult (Khalaf, 2014), effectively manifesting in the same manner as Schrödinger's cat; while the caliphate may not be saturated with representations of al-Baghdadi, he is *potentially* everywhere. Many of his followers believe that he occasionally fights alongside them – or secretly oversees them – in a mask or disguise (Khalaf, 2014; Kooiman, 2017:7), irrespective

of the multiple reports of him being dead. “Just as Allah is unrepresentable, al-Baghdadi fosters in a presence beyond sight” (Kooiman, 2017:8). As noted by Foucault (1975:210),

power [has] to be given the instrument of permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it [can] itself remain invisible. It [has] to be like a faceless gaze that [transforms] the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere, mobile attentions ever on alert.

In many ways, al-Baghdadi may present an indication of what might have been if Cambodia’s Pol Pot (born Saloth Sar) had chosen to foster a personality cult. Although Pol Pot was consistently pressured by his supporters (mostly beneficiaries of his revolution) for deification (Chandler, 1999:175), he eschewed the establishment of a personality cult as he wanted people to “obey him from fear, not from love” (Marlay & Neher, 1999:335). Like al-Baghdadi, Pol Pot ruled invisibly, and as a result, unlike the many other communist revolutionaries of the time, no personality cult around him ever existed. Courtois (1999:606) notes that it was only after his overthrow that many Cambodians finally saw an image of Pol Pot, many only learning his real name for the first time (Ghosh, 2010:12).

Everything happened as though he were the supreme anonymous deity of the organisation, at once absent and present in every village, inspiring everyone who held the smallest position of authority (Courtois, 1999:606).

Much like Mobuto and Qin sought to gain legitimacy (and permeation) through the elimination of competing foci, (Turner & Young, 2008:169; page 148), al-Baghdadi has done the same in an iconoclastic purge of historical sites across Iraq, Syria, and Libya. While the majority of these sites were non-Islamic, and therefore destroyed under the guise of religious duty, many of the sites ordered by al-Baghdadi to be destroyed were of Islamic relevance, such as frescoes and mosaics containing Quranic verses that mention Allah (TASS, 2016: para.9), or the destruction of the Great Mosque of al-Nuri, where al-Baghdadi himself declared the establishment of the caliphate (BBC News, 2017: para.1).

A significant portion of ISIS’ infamy, at least within nations not under physical threat from them, stems from their intensely violent and widely distributed visual propaganda. Surpassing footage of ‘simple’ executions by firing squad or beheadings, ISIS has come to produce some of the most high-quality, harrowing footage of murders and massacres in history. These

professionally produced videos, often with theatrical pauses, slow motion scenes, and Hollywood-styled visual effects, feature such bizarre executions as being crushed by a slow-moving tank, burnt alive whilst suspended from a child's swing set, shot by a toddler in a carnival ball-pit, pushed out to sea on a boat rigged with explosives, lowered into a swimming pool whilst trapped in a cage, drowned in a fish tank, and explosively decapitated via detonation cord (Clarion Project, 2017). The video showing the decapitation via detonation cord (Figure 5.34 below) presents an almost Tarantino-like style of direction, and includes a scene where a decapitated head is shown spinning through the air in slow motion.

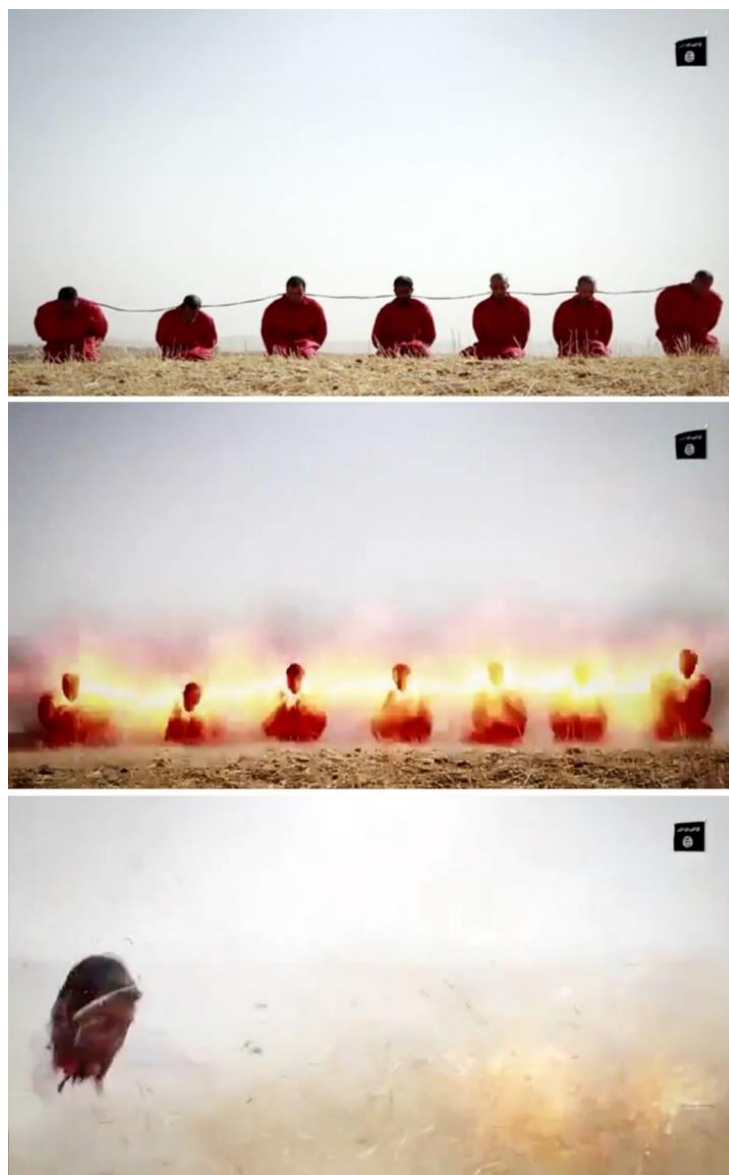


Figure 5.3410: Frames from a 2015 Hollywood-styled ISIS propaganda video showing prisoners executed via a detonation cord around their necks. One scene depicts a prisoner's decapitated head flying across the screen in slow motion.

As these videos continue to be produced, the violence depicted becomes increasingly more barbarous and sadistic, but, at the core, more creative. The generally established reason for ISIS producing these videos is that they are utilised as a form of psychological warfare against foreign enemies (Rose, 2014: para.1; Rosen, 2016: para.16), “designed to evoke fear” (Araújo, Fernández, Freire & García, 2016:58). However, one could say that perhaps this has changed, and that the new purpose of these videos is simply to *outdo* the last. This could equally be said about their off-camera attacks (Bixler *et al*, 2017; Moore, 2017: para.14; Stern, 2017: para.8).

Voice recordings presumed to be from al-Baghdadi, ordering followers to “wreak havoc in [infidel] lands and make their blood [flow] like rivers” (Chmayelli & Hashem, 2016: para.4), are distributed amongst al-Baghdadis followers and loyalists, setting an official loyalty bid. To fulfil this bid, true loyalists, inherently decentralised due to the structural nature of ISIS (Majeed, 2016:189), produce their own al-Baghdadi-based artefacts in the form of creative executions or public massacres, and thus raise the loyalty bid. As Maoist loyalists competed during the Cultural Revolution by wearing more than one Chairman Mao badge, or wearing larger ones, or wearing them in unique manners (see page 27), so do al-Baghdadi loyalists in the quantity and *quality* of violence within their attacks (artefacts). These artefacts are circulated through video and news amongst those within and outside the caliphate, creating interaction rituals. Consider the following extract from a transcript of a *Vice News* (2016a) interview with Ali Qahtan Abdulwahab, a captured ISIS fighter accused of beheading eight people, some on video.

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
| Seb Walker (interviewer): | When you were doing those things yourself, when you were slaughtering these people, how did it feel? Did it feel like you were doing something wrong in any way? |
| Ali Qahtan Abdulwahab: | No, I didn't feel. It was an order. When the Emir al-Baghdadi commands me to do something, I execute it immediately. I don't feel anything. |

As established in section 5.6, the emotion manifested when observing or interacting with an artefact rich in focal value is generally going to be affectively synonymous with awe. However,

it should be noted that this awe-like sensation is not only achieved by extravagant construction, but by extravagant *destruction* too. In this sense, these gratuitous acts of violence and destruction, “personifications” of al-Baghdadi through the visual presentation of his wishes and identity, are no different to the grandiose leader representations one might find in Turkmenistan or North Korea, whereby the mediums of gold and marble have been replaced with fire and blood, but the scale remains similar. Writing on the destructive sublime in regard to the 9/11 attacks, Orvell (2006: para.13) notes that

[c]learly, the effect of the attack was to produce what we can only call ‘shock and awe’ on the viewer [...]. What, we might ask, is the ‘awe’ component of ‘shock and awe’? I am trying to understand not the exaltation of Al Qaeda in the face of the destruction of human life; that is a simple (and despicable) matter of exaltation at the death of one’s enemy, not unlike our own exaltation at the destruction of Baghdad. I am trying to understand remarks that were attributed to Karlheinz Stockhausen at the Hamburg press conference in 2001, when he reputedly said that the collapse of the towers was ‘the greatest work of art.’ The remarks were shocking because they suggested a stark separation between an aesthetic and a moral response, one that the world could not accept, when so bluntly stated. [...] British artist Damien Hirst was similarly quoted, as saying that the destruction of the towers was ‘visually stunning,’ and then adding, by way of clarification and retraction: ‘I value human life.’

5.8.4. Case four: the deconstruction process of the cult of Mao Tse-tung in particular, and personality cults in general

The irony with most personality cults is that while the greatest attempts are made to saturate landscapes with leader-based foci, when the inevitable end comes, be it through war, revolution, or plain democracy, a significant amount of these artefacts are often destroyed and lost with very little record (Farrell, 2011: para.4; Kawczynski, 2011: para.19; Fortin, 2017: para.8). This is perhaps best encapsulated in Percy Shelley’s (1826:100) sonnet *Ozymandias*:

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert... near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:

And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

Although the priority of this research lies within the construction and establishment of personality cults, based on historical observation, the researcher presents the presupposition that the deconstruction of a personality cult generally occurs in the reverse order to that of its construction. This presumption maintains that the first stage of deconstruction will target artefacts with mostly focal value, followed by those with mostly material value, and finally, those with mostly symbolic value; statues of the “despised despot” are theatrically torn down signifying the start (or often and misguidedly the triumph) of the revolution, then, once the new government is affirmed of its official power, creates a new currency for a new society (erasing the imagery of the ex-leader in the process) , and, finally, as this new society progresses ideologically, the ex-leader is openly criticised and soon they no longer serve as a personification of an ideology but a flawed individual exploiting it. As focal value tends to be solely based on the leader (in the most literal case: a statue of them), and symbolic value is based on an esteemed ideology with the leader serving as a personification, guide, or helmsman, this progression is logical as the deconstruction process targets the *personality* rather than the ideology (which may still receive overwhelming support from those seeking to deconstruct the cult). This section will be explained through the lens of the personality cult surrounding Mao Tse-tung in contemporary China.

In 2013, on Mao’s 120th birthday, Xi Jinping told the public that they “cannot worship [revolutionary leaders] as gods just because they are great people, not allowing others to point out and correct their errors and mistakes” (Yu, 2015: para.7). Hu Ping, chief editor of *Beijing Spring*, notes that

the authorities have concerns about commemorating Mao. On one hand, the Communist Party does not want to cast Mao aside because it is afraid that this would arouse questions on their legitimacy. On the other hand, the Party knows about Mao’s numerous crimes. So, after considering different factors, they have chosen a very contradictory route. That is, on the surface they still maintain Mao as the Party’s idol, but in fact they take actions to diminish his influence (China Forbidden News, 2011).

Ping further notes that some figureheads use the guise of Maoism to further their own agendas – a practice strongly disliked by the Party (*ibid.*). As the legitimacy of the Party is dependent on Maoist theory and symbolism, they cannot directly attack these people and are forced to resort to “indirect methods, including forced demolition [of Maoist imagery], to suppress this practice” (*ibid.*). Similarly, the personality cult surrounding Hồ Chí Minh in Vietnam was constructed almost entirely posthumously as a means of legitimising the ruling Communist Party (Brocheux, 2007:180; Smith, 2014:341).

In January 2016, a 36-metre tall gold statue of Mao (Figure 3.35) was constructed near Zhushigang village in Henan province, one of the areas hardest hit by the famines of Mao’s Great Leap Forward. Liu Jianwu, dean of the Mao Tse-tung Research Centre, reported that entrepreneurs and residents of the village funded the construction in order to commemorate Mao (Phillips, 2016: para.6). He added that “[i]n contemporary China, Mao [...] represents the embodiment of fairness and justice [and therefore] people hold these kinds of emotions towards him” (*ibid.*).



Figure 5.35: 36-metre tall golden Mao statue. Photo credit: *China Stringer Network*. Source: Phillip (2016).

However, less than a week later, the statue was demolished by the state after reportedly failing to receive government approval (CGTN News, 2016: para.2). “Relevant county government departments did not answer [a] reporter’s question on whether building a statue in a village needs government approval” (*ibid.*). During the destruction of the statue, a large black cloth was draped over Mao’s head, hiding his likeness, as can be seen in Figure 5.36.



Figure 5.36: Destroyed Mao statue. Photo credit: unknown. Source: Phillip (2016).

However, new Mao-centric rituals are still being constructed, such as a R330-million solid gold statue – and its “thoughtfully placed [...] cushions on the floor [...] for people to fall to their knees [upon]” (Moore, 2013: para.7-8) – unveiled in Shashoan, Mao’s hometown, in 2013. However, more Mao statues (and therefore Mao-centric rituals) are destroyed than are constructed each year (China Forbidden News, 2011). As reported by an employee at a tourist concession in Shoashan, Xi Jinping himself told local leaders that on Mao’s birthday there should be no events or festivities, including any gala, singing, or dancing, demonstrating the state curbing of Mao-centric rituals (Moore, 2013: para.4).

The most internationally renowned representation of Mao, the grandiose 6-metre tall portrait that dominates Tiananmen Square (facing his mausoleum), has come under attack from the public on numerous occasions (Cheng, 2015:282). On two occasions, the attacks managed to damage Mao's image: on May 23, 1989 during the June Fourth Incident where paint and ink was thrown, as seen in Figure 5.37 below, and on May 12, 2007, during an arson attack (*ibid.*). In 2010, an individual attempted to throw ink over the portrait (Foster, 2010: para.1), and in 2013, an Islamic extremist suicide attack that killed five bystanders may have been targeting the portrait. Cheng (2015:282) affirms that, "based on discussion with Chinese artists, there have been more plans to deface this symbol [...] and Mao's status at the heart of Beijing than is publicly announced".

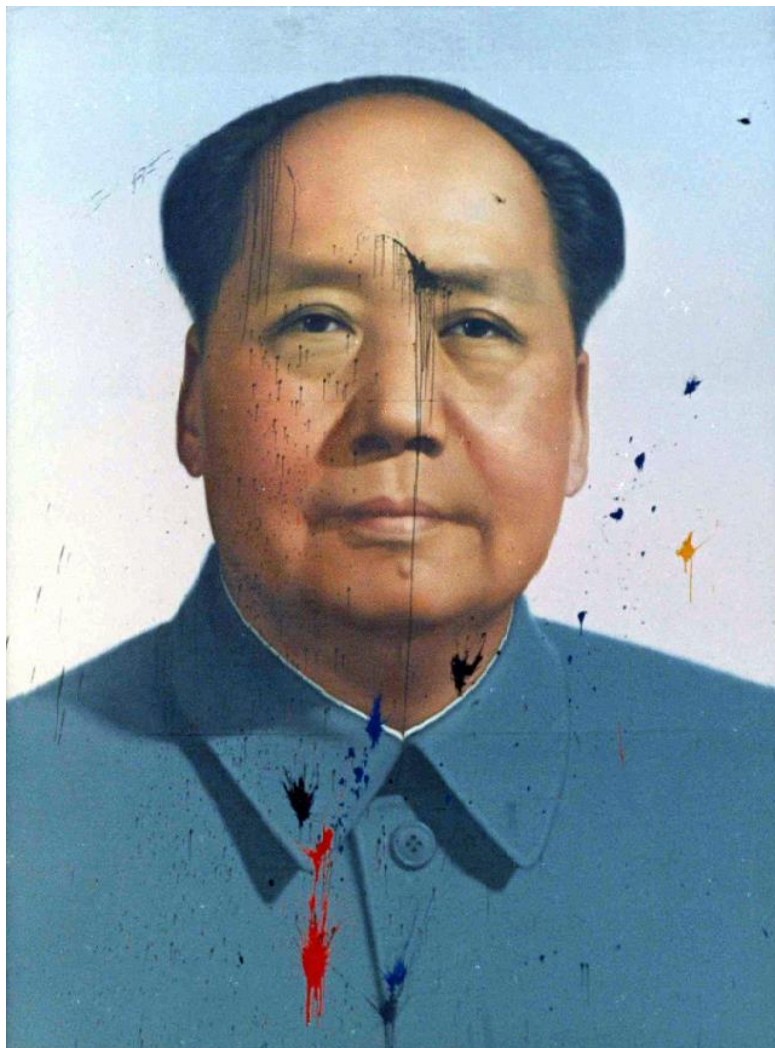


Figure 5.37: Mao's Tiananmen Square portrait defaced during protests. Photo credit: unknown (1989). Source: Meredith (2014).

This case illustrates how the public and the Party have begun dismantling the cult of Mao seemingly only through the removal of artefacts relying on focal value. This view is further strengthened as, almost counter-intuitively to the deconstruction process, in 2013, ten newly designed stamps featuring different portraits of Mao were released in China, one of which is titled *A surge of emotion* (Zixuan, 2013: para.3; Figure 5.38 below). Similarly, Mao's portrait still dominates every denomination of banknote in China. Maoist artefacts that hold symbolic value have also yet to face any significant form of dismantling as the legitimacy of the Party (a creation of Mao) inadvertently depends on the ideology of which Mao still serves as the face for.



Figure 5.38: Ma Gang, *A surge of emotion* (2013). Photo credit/source: Muller (2017).

This order is often mistaken, however, as the destruction of artefacts with strong focal value is usually presented by media (and seen by society) as the symbolic end of the personality cult. This is most likely the result of the elaborate nature of the spectacle, such as the toppling of Hussein's statue in Baghdad (see Figure 5.39 on the following page). However, in reality, this may merely signify the start of the deconstruction process, which has no fixed timeframe and no certainty of succeeding, as is observable with al-Assad in Syria who continues to maintain a strong personality cult despite the violent protests in 2011 that led to the civil war – and the destruction of many of his monuments.



Figure 5.39: British newspapers showing the toppling of Hussein's statue. Photo credit/source: Brady (2003).

In such instances of violent deconstruction, such as revolution, artefacts of material value can generally only be eliminated or replaced once some form of stability has occurred, as they hold real-world value and would require some alternative to be established before they would be willingly relinquished. The establishment of that alternative, however, will no doubt require a level of bureaucratic organisation, production, and distribution, unavailable during, or even some time after, the revolution. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, following the

Islamic Revolution, rather than simply redesigning and reprinting Iran's currency to be rid of the image of the Shah, the government was forced to hide his portrait under a stamp as a complete currency overhaul would not have been feasible at that point in time. In this sense, the deconstruction of focal value relies mainly on social mobilisation – mob organisation, whereas the deconstruction of material value relies mainly on governmental¹⁶ organisation. However, the deconstruction of symbolic value relies on individualistic internal organisation.

Symbolic value tends to reside in the identity of the population and unlike toppling a statue or reprinting a currency, destroying this instance requires a minimum of self-observation, as while the leader may no longer be supported, the ideology may remain a crucial aspect of one's life. For example, if Duvalier's personality cult had been deconstructed through revolution, Christian Haitians may have found themselves disinclined to tear up posters of Duvalier posed with Jesus, out of respect for Jesus rather than Duvalier.

5.9. Chapter synthesis

The VPM, expounded from the analyses of the previous chapter, demonstrates that, regardless of socio-political systems, where a personality cult exists, the mechanisms that are used to construct it and to maintain it, from a visual communication perspective, exhibit a methodological sameness. The model itself consists of two components: (1) the three values underpinning leader imagery, and (2) the observable pattern of progression through production regarding each of these values.

The first component posits that all state-sponsored leader-centric artefacts consist of one or more of three "values" (emotion generators). These values, symbolic value, material value, and focal value, seek to trigger emotional and effectively motivating responses in participants.

The second component hypothesises that the construction of a personality cult follows a pattern wherein leader-centric artefacts are introduced in the order of those of mostly

¹⁶ Here, "government" is used to refer to the body which is tasked with or has taken it upon themselves to manage social affairs. Whether this body is recognised by their subjects is irrelevant.

symbolic value, followed by those of mostly material value, and finally, those of mostly focal value. Furthermore, it hypothesises that the deconstruction process follows a reverse pattern to that of its construction: artefacts of mostly focal value are removed first, followed by those of mostly material value, and finally, those of mostly focal value.

CHAPTER 6

Summation, findings and recommendations

6.1. Summary of the preceding chapters

The theoretical framework underpinning this study, presented in Chapter 2, developed a definition for the cult of personality phenomenon, tracing its history from the Romanticist cult of genius through to its current meaning in contemporary politics, drawing on Marx (1877), Khrushchev (1956), and Ling and Mao (1969). A cult of personality is defined as a social phenomenon wherein a political leader, most often autocratic in nature, garners extreme levels of societal devotion and adulation through the use of leader-based foci, occupying a significant fraction of the public space of a polity, and where rituals around these foci are observed.

Two paradigms, attempting to explain the personality cult phenomenon, were introduced and explored. The first paradigm that was examined was that of the popular and widely accepted theory developed by Weber (1958), wherein a personality cult emerges as the direct result of a leader's charisma (and other personal attributes) or use of extremely persuasive propaganda. It was found that the first paradigm, Weber's charisma-based theory, cannot be considered a feasible explanation for the phenomenon of personality cults, as historical evidence clearly supports the notion that personality cults are able to generate and maintain power without the need of charisma or persuasion.

The second paradigm examined was that of Collins' (2004) theory of emotional energy and interaction rituals, and Márquez' (2013; 2017) application of said theory as an explanation of the personality cult phenomenon. In this sense, a personality cult emerges as a result of sets of interaction rituals, linked in chains, wherein leader-based foci serve as spectacles. It is this paradigm that served as a foundation for this research, seeking to explain, with regard to affective-emotional constructions, what is required from leader-based foci to start this process. In this regard, twenty-two instances of contemporary personality cults were identified, from which five instances were selected for further research, namely that of King

Mswati III in Swaziland, Saparmurat Niyazov and Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow in Turkmenistan, Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran, and Kim Jong-il in North Korea.

The methodology applied to this research was conducted through a pragmatic-symbolic interactionist paradigm, as well as a qualitative, ethnographic-universalistic research strategy, and the inductive research approach, explained in Chapter 3. A four-phase sequence was established in which this research was orchestrated and completed, namely the (1) literature review and identification of data, (2) collation of data, (3) design and semiotic analysis, and (4) the development of the Value Progression Model. Frameworks used to analyse the design techniques and semiotics of the data were established. The design analysis was undertaken using a bespoke framework based on the work of Graves (1942) and Evans and Thomas (2012), whereas the semiotic analysis was undertaken using Du Plooy's (1996) non-verbal communication framework and, where needed, Leech's (1974) framework.

Following the design and semiotic analyses, the summarised results of ten of the twenty-two artefacts analysed were presented. These artefacts, organised into five categories, namely (1) official portraits, (2) paraphernalia, (3) monuments, (4) billboards and murals, and (5) digital media, served as a contextualisation for the Value Progression Model.

The Value Progression Model, presented in Chapter 5, was extracted from the analyses in the previous chapter. This model was split into two distinct components: (1) the three values underpinning leader imagery, and (2) the observable pattern of value-progression in the production of leader imagery. Here, "value" serves as a metonym used to define the inherent stimulus for the construction of emotion. In this sense, the values trigger instinctive sensations, prerequisites for self-preservation and social cooperation, which one then conceptualises as emotions, which, following Collins' (2004) theory of interaction rituals, is then amplified during the ritual process.

The first component of the VPM hypothesises that all state-sponsored leader imagery consists of one or more of the three values: symbolic value, material value, and/or focal value. The second component of the VPM, a prototype and work in progress, hypothesises that during the emergence and establishment of a personality cult, there is an observable pattern in the

production of leader-based foci. In a natural progression, artefacts of mostly symbolic value are likely to be produced first, followed by artefacts of mostly material value, followed by artefacts of mostly focal value. This differs from an unnatural progression wherein the leader may attempt to accelerate the establishment of the personality cult by introducing artefacts of material or focal value earlier than what a natural progression may have yielded. Similarly, it hypothesises that the deconstruction of a personality cult is likely to occur in the reverse order to that of its construction.

6.2. Findings

The VPM, while serving as a model of *explanation*, can also function as a model of *prediction*, in that it can assist in recognising the fundamental elements required in the early formation of a personality cult. The recognising of a personality cult's emergence in the early stages could potentially prepare citizens such that they were able to inhibit, or at least undermine, the phenomenon. The VPM also provides a means to combat established personality cults in that the fundamental requirements for their existence can be targeted or manipulated. As a hypothetical example, widely-disseminated propaganda ardently encouraging the personality cult of al-Baghdadi among ISIS supporters may decrease membership. The higher the loyalty bid, the more willing fervent supporters are to engage in the altruistic punishment (or eradication) of those individuals who bid too low, effectively attacking their own comrades and polarising the organisation. Similarly, the encouragement may result in the creation of grass-root leader foci, such as statues and monuments, ultimately undermining the isolated organisation by redirecting their funds from much-needed weaponry and food aid. Again, it should be noted that this is simply a cursory hypothetical example to emphasise that the VPM can provide creative solutions to scenarios that may not usually be viewed through the lens of a personality cult.

Alternatively, the VPM could offer the tools required to build rather than destroy. The VPM could provide the understandings needed to strengthen and maintain a personality cult – a not so implausible scenario considering the benignity and protection brought on by some personality cults like that of Bhutan. Similarly, the political temperature of a polity not overtly

tending towards personality cult status could be tested through the application of the VPM, proving very useful on a local level. For example, the 2017 *coup d'état* in Zimbabwe which ousted Robert Mugabe (who showed evidence of encouraging his own personality cult, but never truly achieved one due to his inability to provide *motivating foci*), presents the ideally conducive void needed for an individual to begin fostering a personality cult.

Further findings of this research are as follows:

- A personality cult emerges (and garners extreme levels of societal devotion and adulation) primarily through the use of interaction rituals, linked in chains, wherein leader-based foci serve as spectacles.
- Personality cults are able to generate and maintain power without the need of charismatic leadership or “persuasive” propaganda.
- All state-sponsored leader-centric artefacts will consist of one or more of three “values”: symbolic value, material value, and/or focal value.
- These values, serving as emotion generators, generally seek to be affectively motivating.
- The construction of a personality cult generally follows a pattern wherein leader-centric artefacts are introduced in the order of mostly symbolic value rich artefacts, followed by those of mostly material value, and finally, those of mostly focal value.
- The deconstruction of a personality cult generally follows a reverse pattern to that of its construction: artefacts of mostly focal value are removed first, followed by those of mostly material value, and finally, those of mostly symbolic value.

6.3. Further research and recommendations

The opportunity for further research lies in the testing of the Value Progression Model, particularly the second component (the construction/deconstruction process). Further testing could affirm the hypothesis and ultimately affirm how personality cults can be constructed and deconstructed. Ideally, this could be achieved through the long-term observation of artefacts and rituals produced by emerging (and entrenching) personality cults identified early into their development. However, this may not be viable due to the amount of time and financing it would require and the need for unprecedented access to said artefacts

in “hard to reach” places and repressive societies. Similarly, an on-the-ground observation of artefacts and rituals during the collapse of any of the five personality cults analysed in this research could potentially assist in the affirmation of the hypothesis regarding the deconstruction component of the study.

I propose the establishment of a politically neutral body, preferably online, tasked with the collation and verification of existing personality cult artefacts around the world. One of the major hindrances encountered during this research process was the immense lack of access to or record of leader-based imagery in post-revolution/war scenarios, or a means of verification, especially of an academic standard. By building a global database, these complications can be alleviated and potentially result in an increase in quantity and quality of personality cult-based research.

Furthermore, within existing (and emerging) personality cults, I propose the establishment of personality cult-based “politburos”: centralised creative committees with the sole duty of observing and maintaining the personality cult through policymaking – especially in regards to the management of loyalty bids, flattery fluctuations, and the value progression within artefacts. In this sense, a much firmer level of control can be sustained, offering a greater chance of preventing fervent expenditures of resources or innocent lives, such as the severe repercussions the vast production of Chairman Mao badges had on the Chinese industry (Wang, 2008:21), or the gilding of the statue of Kim Il-sung which almost resulted in China severing its much-needed aid to famine-stricken North Korea (Burdick, 2010:140).

6.4. Closing comments

George Nelson (1977:7), a renowned industrial designer and founding member of American Modernism, affirmed that “seeing is not a unique God-given talent, but a discipline. It can be learned”. This does present a situational irony in that the Value Progression Model, underpinned by this notion, posits that within personality cults, the learned discipline of seeing is almost precisely “god”-given, only, in this sense, the gods are earthbound. And,

much like their heavenly counterparts, personality cults have existed since the dawn of man's ambitions to govern, and will continue to exist seemingly indefinitely.

Whether we choose to respect personality cults or prevent them is entirely dependent on the *zeitgeist*. For this reason, the point of view that personality cults are something "bad" has deliberately not been addressed in this research. Personality cults are a polarised phenomenon, having the ability to spawn unparalleled levels of social cohesion and mobilisation, offering a chance to create benign utopias or violence on an insurmountable level. While the VPM provides the understandings needed to build or destroy a personality cult, it is the understanding itself, in its most impartial format, which I consider the most valuable outcome. To quote Mao Tse-tung,

it is well known that when you do anything, unless you understand its actual circumstances, its nature and its relations to other things, you will not know the laws governing it, or know how to do it, or be able to do it well (1936:179).

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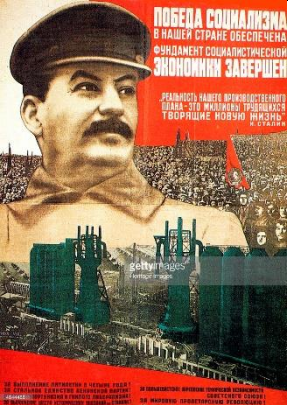

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(Figure 5.30)









ADDENDA:

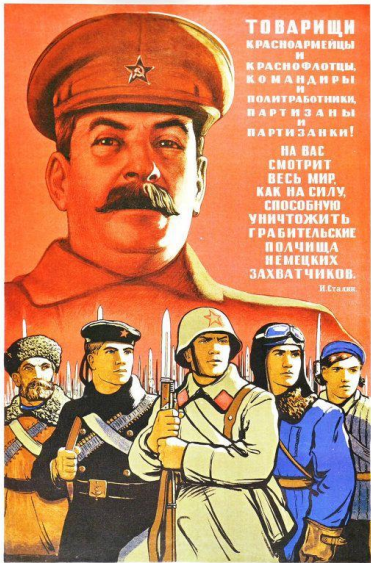



Addendum A: fifty representations of Stalin




Yr.	Image	Val.	Reference
30		S.V.	Unknown, <i>I.V. Stalin. Comrade. Stalin (Dzhugashvili) Iosif Vissarionovich</i> (1930). Photo credit/source: Pisch (2016). [online] Available at: https://properganderpressblog.wordpress.com/2017/02/14/stalin-poster-of-the-week-i-v-stalin-1930/
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33		S.V.	G. Brylov, <i>Giants of the Five Year Plan</i> (1933). Photo credit/source: International Institute of Social History (2000). [online] Available at: www.iisg.nl/exhibitions/chairman/sov29.php




34		S.V.	<p>Gustav Klutsis, <i>Life's getting better. Stalin</i> (1934). Photo credit/source: <i>Propaganda</i> (2015).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://propaganda.silk.co/page/Life's-Getting-Better.-Stalin-1934.</p>
35		S.V.	<p>Prozhektor. <i>Cover page</i> (1935). Photo credit/source: <i>QED Rarities</i> (2014).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://qedrarities.com/shop/soviet/prozhektor-1935-stalin/</p>
35		S.V.	<p>Gustav Klutsis, <i>Long live Red Army of workers and peasants - the true guard of the Soviet borders!</i> (1935) Photo credit/source: <i>Pictorial Press</i>.</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-joseph-stalin-left-on-a-1935-poster-next-to-marshal-kliment-voroshilov-38433463.html</p>




37		<p>S.V. Dmitri Grinec, <i>Thank you party, thank you dear Stalin, for our happy, happy childhood</i> (1937). Photo credit/source: <i>Propaganda World</i> (2016).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://propagandaworld.nl/wp-content/uploads/8ce9137ff7f26873f8b0302fc2831742-201x300.jpg</p>
38		<p>S.V. E. Mirzoev, <i>5 December 1938</i>. Photo credit/source: <i>International Institute of Social History</i> (2003).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://www.iisg.nl/exhibitions/chairman/sov32.php</p>
38		<p>S.V. Sirocenqo, <i>Long live the great Stalin!</i> 1938. Photo credit/source: <i>International Institute of Social History</i> (2003).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://www.iisg.nl/exhibitions/chairman/sov33.php</p>




39		M.V.	Unknown, <i>Shock Worker Award Badge</i> (1939). Photo credit/source: Krivtsov (2008). [online] Available at: https://www.collectrussia.com/DISPITEM.HTM?ITEM=26712
40		M.V.	Unknown (1940). Photo credit/source: <i>Alamy</i> . [online] Available at: http://c8.alamy.com/comp/BHN6MF/money-finance-banknotes-china-banknote-for-cremation-without-actual-BHN6MF.jpg
40		S.V.	Vladimir Kaidalov, <i>Departing from us...</i> (1940). Photo credit/source: <i>Russian State Library</i> . [online] Available at: http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/n2129/html/ch02.xhtml?referer=2129&page=8





42		S.V.	<p>Unknown, <i>Forward to victory</i> (1942). Photo credit/source: Unknown.</p> <p>[online] Available at: https://1.bp.blogspot.com/-kKNltR_XDgk/VY2AddZT-8I/AAAAAAAAQVM/omH5WdHWtgI/s1600/stalin-poster.jpg</p>
42		M.V.	<p>Unknown, <i>30k brown, Lenin and Stalin</i> (1942). Photo credit/source: <i>Stamp Russia</i> (2003).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://www.stamprussia.com/850b.jpg</p>
42		S.V.	<p>Unknown, <i>Wwii: Russian Poster, 1942</i> (1942). Photo credit/source: Granger (2014).</p> <p>[online] Available at: https://fineartamerica.com/featured/wwii-russian-poster-1942-granger.html</p>
44		M.V.	<p>Unknown, <i>30k red-orange, Lenin and Stalin</i> (1994). Photo credit/source: <i>Stamp Russia</i> (2003).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://www.stamprussia.com/908b.jpg</p>



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44		F.V.	<p>Unknown (1945). Photo credit/source: <i>Framepool</i>.</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://footage.framepool.com/en/shot/270424151-2nd-armored-division-harry-truman-winston-churchill-josef-stalin</p>





45		S.V.	Unknown (1945). Photo credit/source: <i>Alamy</i> . [online] Available at: http://l7.alamy.com/zooms/3ee430f23c1049708305b9fa5274dbec/stalin-communist-party-poster-1945-b3ed77.jpg
45		F.V.	Unknown (1945). Photo credit/source: <i>LAPI/Roger Violett/Getty Images</i> (2015) [online] Available at: http://media.gettyimages.com/photos/huge-portrait-of-joseph-stalin-unter-den-linden-avenue-in-the-soviet-picture-id92424051
45		F.V.	Unknown (1945). Photo credit/source: <i>Guttman</i> (2015). [online] Available at: https://www.flickr.com/photos/32368051@N08/18260610755

46			<p>M.V. Unknown, 60k red, <i>Soviet soldier, Kremlin</i> (1946). Photo credit/source: <i>Stamp Russia</i> (2004).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://www.stamprussia.com/1023b.jpg</p>
47			<p>S.V. Irakli Toidze, <i>Stalin's kindness illuminates the future of our children!</i> (1947). Photo credit/source: <i>Russian State Library</i> (2016).</p> <p>[online] Available at: https://properganderpressblog.wordpress.com/2016/11/05/stalin-poster-of-the-week/</p>
47			<p>M.V. Unknown (1947). Photo credit/source: <i>iOffer</i> (2014).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://www.ioffer.com/i/1947-soviet-lenin-stalin-october-revolution-comm-badge-549199724</p>

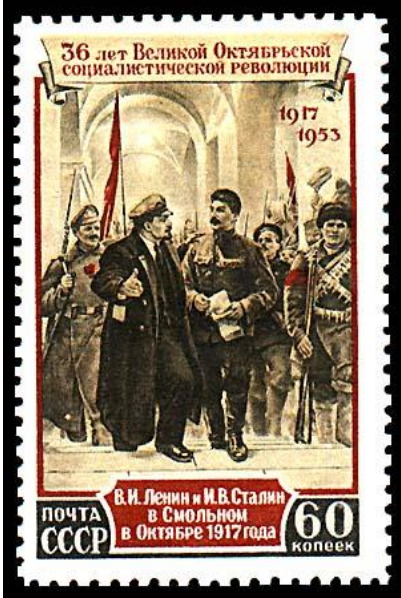



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49		M.V.	<p>Photo credit/source: <i>Apmex</i> (2017).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://www.apmex.com/product/101634/1949-czechoslovakia-silver-50-100-korun-stalin-set-avg-circ</p>
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52		<p>M.V. Unknown, <i>1r brown-red, Lenin and Stalin</i> (1952). Photo credit/source: <i>Stamp Russia</i> (2002).</p> <p>[online] Available at: http://www.stamprussia.com/1698b.jpg</p>

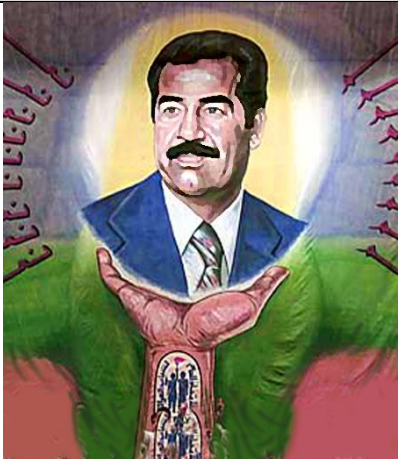
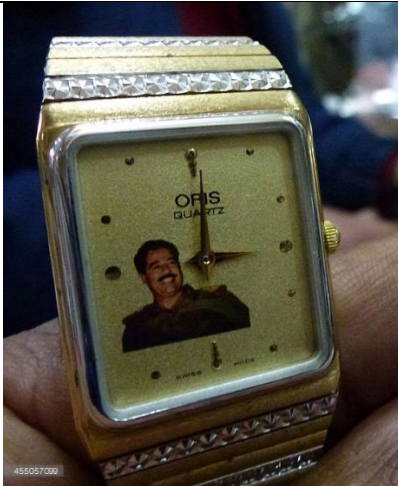


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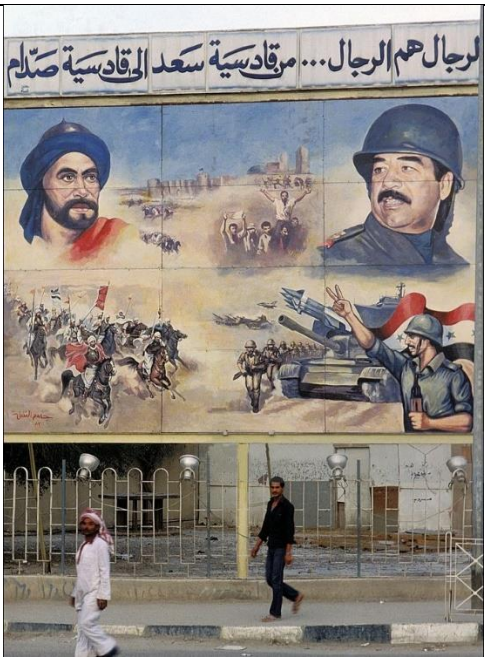

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54	 <p><small>Quelle: Deutsche Fotothek</small></p>	F.V.	<p>Unknown, <i>Statue of Vladimir Lenin and Stalin at the Leipzig Trade Fair of 1954</i> (1954). Photo credit/source: Rössing (1954).</p> <p>[online] Available at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fotothek_df_roe-neg_0006713_005_Plastik_Lenins_und_Stalins_auf_der_Leipziger_Herbstmesse_1954.jpg</p>
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Addendum B: thirty-five representations of Hussein

Yr.	Image	Val.	Reference
79		S.V.	Unknown (1979). Photo credit/source: <i>Pacific Monograph</i> (2009) [online] Available at: http://www.pacificmonograph.com/media/saddam3.jpg
79		M.V.	Unknown (1979). Photo credit/source: Arar/ <i>Getty Images</i> (2013) [online] Available at: http://media.gettyimages.com/photos/man-holds-watches-bearing-the-portrait-of-late-iraqi-dictator-saddam-picture-id455057099
80		S.V.	Unknown (1980). Photo credit/source: <i>Pacific Monograph</i> (2009). [online] Available at: http://www.pacificmonograph.com/media/saddam9.jpg
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83		F.V. Unknown (1983). Photo credit/source: Sárdi (2008). [online] Available at: http://www.panoramio.com/photo/16174488
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86		M.V. Unknown (1986). Photo credit/source: Scripophily (2017). [online] Available at: https://sep.yimg.com/ay/scripophily/iraq-bond-100-dinar-1986-saddam-hussein-vignette-28.gif

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89		S.V.	Unknown (1989). Photo credit/source: <i>Stoddart/Getty Images</i> (2015) [online] Available at: http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/license/57258344
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99		F.V.	Unknown (1999). Photo credit/source: Kazemi/ <i>Getty Images</i> (2015). [online] Available at: http://www.gettyimages.co.uk/license/109858485
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01		M.V.	Photo credit/source: <i>Banknote World</i> (2013). [online] Available at: https://www.banknoteworld.com/iraq?&no=100#banknotes

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