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Russian Aspiration to Democracy: A Rhetorical Comparison of Boris Yeltsin's Inaugural and Resignation Speeches

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Abstract

This study compares the inaugural and resignation speeches of Boris Yeltsin, the first democratically elected president of the Russian Federation. It responds to the present call for interdisciplinary research on presidential politics in Russian post-Soviet history. The aim of this comparison is to link the speeches to their historical context by showing how textual similarities or differences may contribute to our understanding of the political environment in Russian post-1991 history. To this end, the study examined the rhetorical situation in the English transcripts of Yeltsin's speeches following a brief historical discussion of his presidency. Within the framework of this study, the rhetorical situation consists of circumstances and the historical context that affect the speech and speaker. In this process, the study identified and compared five components which were audience, purpose, topic, speaker and context. Emphasis was given to the historical context behind these speeches and how Yeltsin's utterances were historically significant. Following a discussion of similarities and differences between these texts, the comparison concluded that Yeltsin's speeches corresponded rhetorically to the historical context in which they were delivered and therefore reflected the trajectory of Russian democracy from 1991 to 1999. Furthermore, the comparison suggested that Boris Yeltsin viewed this trajectory as progress rather than process. In the end, the article discussed how these conclusions could be relevant to presidential politics in contemporary Russian history.

Research Background:

The current study compares Boris Yeltsin's inaugural speech in 1991 and his televised resignation speech in 1999. With an emphasis on historical context, the objective of this research is to examine the similarities and differences between these two speeches which were made within the space of eight years. Such an effort reflects the present call for interdisciplinary research on Russian post-Soviet history during Boris Yeltsin's presidency. Indeed, many historians have seen the roots of Russia's fledgling democracy and its political trajectory in Yeltsin's era (see, for instance, McFaul, 1993; McFaul & Markov, 1993; Medvedev, 2002; Sakwa, 2002). Hence, this rhetorical comparison complements the historical and current debates on the condition of politics and leadership in the Russian Federation. The following is a review of the historical background for Yeltsin's presidency.

Extensive research has been done on Yeltsin's political life and presidency. But what is of interest to the present research is the analysis of his ambitions and goals early in his presidency and where he and the Russian Federation stood several years later on his resignation day. Yeltsin's vision as a 'state builder' formed and developed during a long political career which preceded the fall of USSR and his subsequent presidency. In a press conference held on September 7, 1991, Yeltsin shared his vision for the future of Russia in the presence of foreign journalists:

"The country is now devoid of all "isms." It isn't capitalist, nor communist, nor socialist; it's a country in a transitional period, which wants to proceed along a civilized path, the path along which France, Britain, the United States, Japan, Germany, Spain and other countries have been and still are proceeding. It's an aspiration to proceed precisely along this path, that is, the decommunization of all aspects of society's life, the deideologization of all aspects of society's life, an aspiration to democracy" (Breslauer, 2002, p. 144).

In hindsight, one may assume that Yeltsin's understanding of the Russian "aspiration to democracy" was mostly realistic in 1991, but his image of a Russian state based on Western models did not materialize during his presidency. According to the records, what lies between Yeltsin's inauguration and his resignation is a multitude of structural challenges, socio-political failures, upheavals and economic setbacks. As the records show, Yeltsin dedicated his resources to massive transformations in the economic system, which emphasized the transition from the ailing Soviet economy to a liberal market economy. Among other things, these radical reforms led to massive privatization in Russia. However, as a result of this so-called 'shock therapy', inflation, public debt and depreciation of the Russian currency ensued and haunted the newly established government throughout the 1990s. In short, radical transformation caused radical results. However, these changes occurred in a historical process which began during the reforms within the Soviet political system. In other words, Yeltsin's radical reforms had their roots in the official changes in 1989-1990. In this connection, Vladimir K. Yegorov has argued that the concept of transformation gradually replaced reform within that timeline (see, Yegorov, 1993). Yegorov was one of Mikhail Gorbachev's close advisers who then became the Minister of Culture in 1998 during Yeltsin's presidency. Interestingly, he has described Gorbachev's perestroika or restructuring as a "revolutionary evolution" (see, Gill & Markwick, 2000, p. 61). In all likelihood, therefore, the foundations of these radical reforms were laid during the late 1980s. However, the records show that Boris Yeltsin differed from Gorbachev in that his opinion on reforms was sharper and he remained a persistent critic of Gorbachev's conservative approach (see, Gill & Markwick, 2000, p.104). In fact, his disillusionment with the Soviet system predated his reckless criticism of Gorbachev's reforms. It can be traced back to the 1970s during Leonid Brezhnev's leadership (see, for instance, Colton, 2008, p. 96). However, similarities may come to light when the process is considered historically. In this manner, George Breslauer has concluded in his comparison that "Yeltsin like Gorbachev was both a system destroyer and a system builder" (Breslauer, 2002, p. 295). However, Yeltsin had a leading role in destroying the Soviet system towards the end of that era. His political will and opposition to the system had made him a significant political figure globally and within the Soviet republics.

Due to his problematic system-building, Yeltsin's presidential record has attracted widespread pathology. In terms of popularity too, his records show a slippery slope. Yeltsin enjoyed immense popularity in the late eighties and early nineties but, on his resignation day, he was no longer popular among the Russians and the world no longer viewed him with the same optimism. In fact, by 1999, this grueling marathon ultimately forced the ailing leader to appear on national television and ask for forgiveness, confessing that he was 'too naïve' in his visions. For this reason, historians may tend to undervalue his performance and the general situation in Russia in the 1990s. Indeed, Yeltsin's controversial trajectory went through a series of national crises and ill-advised maneuvers. More notably, these cases included a series of questionable presidential decrees, the constitutional crisis in 1993,

in 1993, the dissolution of the parliament in what was known as Yeltsin's October Coup and his handling of the First Chechen War. Additionally, some scholars have been highly critical of the controversial 1996 presidential elections which resulted in a victory for Yeltsin (Brudny, 1997; Depoy, 1996; McFaul, 1997). In Russia and abroad, the government's response to these crises undermined Yeltsin's position and his initial image as a democratic and benevolent leader. Nevertheless, his government had some enduring achievements in foreign policy. Like Gorbachev, Yeltsin followed a foreign policy that emphasized friendly relations with foreign governments and facilitated Russian economic development, financial aid and foreign trade. His legacy included the signing of multiple accords with the US government to officially end the Cold War. A case in point was the signing of START II in 1993 which was a historic agreement between Russia and the United States to reduce strategic offensive arms. In both cases, however, these achievements brought about controversies in Russia's domestic politics. Yeltsin's liberation of foreign trade was heavily criticized and the State Duma did not ratify START II until 2000. One may argue that these achievements gradually lost their relevance or significance following Yeltsin's retirement in 1999. Yet, on another level, Yeltsin's political career displays one of the most successful and ambitious trajectories among world leaders. Indeed, he had gained an international and domestic reputation for supporting democratic movements in the Russian Republic before the dissolution of USSR. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that Yeltsin's radical reforms indicated a broad and ambitious campaign even though many of his reforms fell short of expectations or remained incomplete. Perhaps, it was the broadest attempt in Russian history to transform the nation and facilitate its transition to a stable and progressive post-Soviet era. Hence, this extensive campaign was not without achievements, albeit small ones. A review of literature demonstrates mixed reviews about Yeltsin's leadership and legacy while historians and biographers all seem to agree on his significant leadership in contemporary Russian history.

As mentioned earlier, there is a growing literature on the causes of Russian reform failures in the 1990s. Discussing these elaborations is not the aim of the present study. However, some of these studies have described the peculiarities of political culture in Russia in addition to the flaws in the government's structure. For instance, Gill and Markwick have concluded in their discussion on "Russia's stillborn democracy" that despite the increasing participation of the general public in political affairs, politics in general "remained overwhelmingly the preserve of the elite" due to what these scholars described as "the weakness of civil society during the Yeltsin period" (Gill & Markwick, 2000, p. 256). Following this line of inquiry, the social impediment may have been exacerbated by the still-existing political culture of the Soviet era, but the impacts of the aforementioned 'shock therapy' and the rapid adoption of capitalism were also significant. As stated previously, the implementation of radical transformation within a short space of time led to economic uncertainty and harmful social consequences. In other words, Yeltsin's fast-paced reforms were counterproductive both economically and socially in the sense that these consequences disillusioned the populace from participation in the democratic process. To be sure, although public apathy and disillusionment were noticeable, they could not explain the wide range of causes behind the malaise of the post-1991 period. In a similar line of inquiry, Richard Sakwa has concluded, in his critical review of Russia's post-Soviet transition, that this lack of initiative from the civil society was coupled with the weakness of institutions and political parties and, consequently, the dominance of political elites (see, for more discussion, Sakwa, 2002, pp. 156–168). This view acknowledges the pluralism of Russian post-communism society, even though it may have been fractured. It also acknowledges popular motives for participation in the system, but emphasizes the lack of mechanisms through vibrant parties, parliamentary actions or legislative assemblies to harness the popular feelings. These conclusions all seem to emphasize Russian political culture, Yeltsin's inadequate response, and the continuation of old and often inefficient methods. In sum, from 1991 to 1999, the leadership of the Russian

Federation encountered a wide range of political, economic, cultural and structural setbacks that weakened the nation's stability and its fledgling democracy.

With respect to these evaluations, political analysts have continued to explore the extent to which Boris Yeltsin could be responsible for these shortcomings. However, the purpose of this study is to compare and analyze his inauguration and resignation speeches from textual and extra-textual angles. Therefore, in what follows, the comparisons will focus more specifically on the rhetorical situation in the English transcripts of these speeches.

Rhetorical Comparison of Boris Yeltsin's Inaugural and Resignation Speeches:

The purpose of this comparison is to clarify the rhetorical situation for Yeltsin's first inaugural speech and his resignation speech. It follows the Aristotelian tenet that rhetoric can serve politika and the neo-Aristotelian tenet that rhetoric can lend itself to historical context. In other words, this study seeks to link the speeches to their historical context by showing how textual similarities or differences may contribute to our understanding of the political environment. As stated previously, this attempt can be significant in that the texts may reveal contributory information about two crucial points not only in Boris Yeltsin's presidency, but also in Russian post-1991 history.

Within the context of this study, the rhetorical situation consists of circumstances or the historical context that affect the speech and rhetor (that is, the speaker or writer). Historically, the American rhetorician, Lloyd Bitzer, developed this concept in a paper called "rhetorical situation" which was published in 1968. In his definition of rhetorical situation, Bitzer emphasized the role of exigence, audience, and a set of constraints. He defined this situation as "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence" (see, Bitzer, 1968, p. 3). Here, exigence is the factor, problem or occasion that motivates the speaker to address a topic. It highlights 'why' the speech was made in the first place and can point to the purpose it may serve. While the meaning of audience is straightforward, the rhetor's constraints can be vague because they consist predominantly of factors such as the speaker's beliefs or the location, environment, ambiance or time of the speech. Therefore, these constraints are varied and case-specific. In fact, a review of literature demonstrates that context can be abstract and hard to define. For instance, Ivor Armstrong Richards warned in his "Philosophy of Rhetoric" that context can embody time, period or "anything else which is relevant to our interpretation of it" (Richards, 1965, p. 33). But with respect to discussions on rhetorical situation, one should note that Bitzer's concept has received much attention, debate and criticism from rhetoricians (see, for instance, Vatz, 1973; Consigny, 1974) and, therefore, the concept has undergone multiple revisions over time with new emphasis on its constituents. The details of these rhetorical debates may not serve the purpose or scope of the present comparison. However, the components of rhetorical situation must be clarified in approaching Boris Yeltsin's historic speeches.

In what follows, this review will examine five revised constituents: purpose, audience, topic, rhetor and context. With regard to the question of audience, one should note that rhetoricians often distinguish between immediate and mediated audiences. In this sense, the audience can vary from an individual to an unidentified collective. In the case under study, the immediate audience consists of all who are in attendance of the Yeltsin's speeches or hear the words directly from the speaker (for instance, from Russian radio and television broadcasts). The latter refers to all for whom the speech was intended. In the following analysis, the mediated audience will take precedence simply because Boris Yeltsin, as his words demonstrate, addressed the Russian people in general. With regard to the salience of context, it should be noted that, while it may describe the direct or physical circumstances of speech in classical rhetoric (e.g. time, location, ambience and setting), emphasis will be given to the historical context behind these speeches and how Yeltsin's utterances were historically significant.

1. Inaugural speech (July 10, 1991)

As the first President of Russia, Yeltsin attended an inauguration ceremony at the State kremlin Palace on July 10, 1991. His inauguration speech was short, straightforward and rather emotional. However, it also communicated the president's subtle philosophical, idealistic and historical notions. Yeltsin began his speech by an appeal to emotion, saying that he could not express what he felt in words. The opening words stressed the uniqueness of that moment in Russian history because, for the first time, the President was required to take "an oath to his compatriots". This was perhaps in sharp contrast with how the Soviet leaders came to power by demonstrating their loyalty to the party and to Marxism-Leninism. Yeltsin continued to highlight similar contrasts to indicate the uniqueness of what lay ahead. In his following arguments, he summarized his views about why, in his opinion, the Soviet Union had failed:

"For ages, power and the people were at different poles in this country. For ages, the interests of the state were placed above the interests of people and their needs and aspirations".[1]

Here, the president's use of contrasts and his resentment towards the former system can be detected. As stated previously, the president was known among the public as a vocal anti-communist voice. Therefore, inserting a criticism of the former communist system in his speech was consistent with his previously recorded remarks. He emphasized the duality of "power versus people" and then "state versus people". What is implied is that people had no power and political capacities were used largely in promoting Soviet ideology rather than the people's interests, needs and aspirations. Later in his speech, by returning to this contrast, Yeltsin claimed that, to be successful, this model must be replaced with what he called "voluntary interdependence". He asserted that both the state and the people were responsible in shaping the future for Russia. By comparing the Soviet society to those of "civilized nations", a term which he had used frequently in his public utterances, Yeltsin expressed his philosophy of governance and concluded that primarily "a state is strong through prosperity of its citizens". To ascertain this claim, one should consider Yeltsin's previous experience and remarks about the Soviet and Western societies and how far apart they were in terms of welfare and the standards and quality of life. As a high-ranking Soviet official, Yeltsin had traveled in Western countries in the previous decade. The records and his own words suggest that he was often disappointed and 'shocked' to see the USSR gap in the standards of living. In Yeltsin's assessment, it was the rejection and denial of this "sacred principle" that precipitated the collapse of great powers (implying the fate of the former USSR) and neutralized "large-scale social experiments" (implying the Soviet Union's massive but fruitless social experiments). Therefore, Yeltsin indicated that "we" the Russians have paid "an enormous, unprecedented price" to gain this experience, highlighting again the uniqueness and significance of that occasion by emphasizing a mutual experience.

In his following words, Yeltsin claimed that, by electing a president, the citizens of Russia have chosen a path that Russia would follow. To use Yeltsin's words, this path is "democracy, reform and revival of human dignity". The president used these terms to make a contrastive distinction in reference to the Soviet system in his speech. As the President of the Russian Federation, he expressed his image of presidency as something entirely different from that of former leaders. Yeltsin asserted to his audience that "the President is no god, or new monarch, or omnipotent miracle man". Rather, the President is a "citizen vested with enormous responsibility for the future of Russia". To an American or French audience, perhaps, this proposition was only cliché, but the Russians may have seen it differently. Historically, one should note that different generations had seen monarchs in the Tsarist Russian Empire. Yet, they had also seen Lenin and Stalin as Gods. The following Soviet leaders claimed, at least by their practices if not in words, to be omnipotent miracle men who committed themselves to massive but often fruitless social experiments.

[1] *All the quotations in this section have been taken from the English transcript of Boris Yeltsin's inaugural speech: Inaugural Speech by President Boris Yeltsin of the Republic of Russia. (1991). Foreign Policy Bulletin, 2(1), 32-32. doi:10.1017/S1052703600007425*

Therefore, it seems that Yeltsin had the advantage of a shared collective memory. In sharp contrast to this distant image of leaders, he portrayed himself as "a citizen vested with enormous responsibility". The shift work between these contrasts characterizes the initial segments of his inaugural speech.

In what followed, Yeltsin hinted at the special role of religion (that is, the Orthodox tradition) in Russia's past and indicated perhaps a revival of this role which was frowned upon in the Soviet era. In fact, Yeltsin gave the second speech on the inauguration day. While the third congratulatory speech was given by Mikhail Gorbachev, the first speech had been reserved for Alexy II, the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus. Albeit briefly, Yeltsin's words seem to suggest that religion was part of the "spiritual revival" that he intended for Russia. Interestingly, the revival of the Orthodox Church has received consistent attention since then. However, in what was perhaps the most significant point in his speech, Yeltsin revealed his idea of governance and the essence of his future policy. He asserted that "the essence of the presidential policy is radical reform". This assertion captured the attention of foreign observers but it remained to be seen what Yeltsin meant by 'radical'. The word has appeared three times in his speech followed by 'reform', 'renovation' and 'transformation'. In all these cases, it described the pace of actions and the way in which they would be delivered. However, contrary to what is known today, Yeltsin denied that this radical reform would come from the above. Instead, he insisted that the reforms would follow "initiative and free enterprise". To explain the meaning of this reform, the President used another contrast. He asserted that, unlike the Soviet system which demanded mass self-sacrifice, "the fundamental principle of our policy is not mass self-sacrifice but the well-being of every person". Once again, the speech emphasized the idea that the state exists for the people and not vice versa. But what was perhaps more appealing to foreign observers was the president's key assertion regarding Russia' foreign relation:

"We are turning to the world community with pure intentions in order to win new friends but not enemies, and to establish honest and civilized relations with other states".

Considering his tone, the speaker sounded confident throughout the speech. He was confident about the future of Russia and this tone grew stronger towards the end of his speech. Finally, after expressing his optimism about this future, he famously stated the following words:

"The great Russia is rising from its knees! We will certainly turn it into a prosperous, democratic, peace-loving and sovereign state governed by laws. This work, which requires great efforts from all of us, has already begun. Having withstood so many tests and having a clear idea of our aims, we are confident Russia will revive!".

This brief review of Yeltsin's speech may clarify the aforementioned components of rhetorical situation. As stated previously, the rhetorical situation consists of circumstances or the historical context that affect the speaker and speech. It clarifies the context of speech and links it to the audiences. In this line of inquiry, the study suggested five constituents: topic, purpose, audience, rhetor (speaker) and context. But what is relevant to this review is also the concept of exigence. It examines the speaker's motivation and, in this case, what motivated Boris Yeltsin to give such a speech. Considering that the inaugural speech was given in an official ceremony, it can be concluded that the rhetorical act merely followed tradition or convention. In other words, the speaker was required to attend a ceremony and speak perfunctorily as is often the norm. But in this case, as discussed previously, Yeltsin's motivation for an inaugural speech was tied to the other components of the rhetorical situation. To approach this situation, the purpose of this speech should be examined based on the text.

A writer or speaker may create a text mainly to inform, convince or explain. The review of President Yeltsin's utterances suggests that he pursued all these goals in his relatively short speech. It was stated earlier that the speech had an emotional load. In the opening proposition, he uttered "I cannot express in words what I feel" and, during his speech, he repeatedly appealed to the sentiments of his audience. Yeltsin expressed his sense of responsibility as the first democratically elected president of the Russian Federation.

This rhetorical act followed an expression of gratitude for the responsibility given to him and a connection with the audience in the beginning of the speech. For the first time, a Russian president referred to his audiences as "citizens of Russia". However, to understand the relationship between the speaker and the audience, one should refer to the discussions in the previous section and consider the historical situation following the dissolution of USSR. In this sense, for the speech to be meaningful, the speaker shared something with his audience. The introductory sentences of the transcript emphasize this as the lived experience that Boris Yeltsin shared with the people of Russia during the Soviet era. In this manner, the role of the audience highlights another constraint which is the context. What was set in the speaker's location might be crucial in reconstructing the rhetorical situation. According to the records, these historical elements were the new flag, the new constitution, the type of music and decorations, and the presence of the most prominent representative of the Russian Orthodox Church. Even the presence of the former leader was physically significant considering that the Soviet leaders came to power when their predecessors were often deceased or debilitated. The physical factors in Yeltsin's direct environment affected the rhetorical situation. However, what is relevant to this comparison is the historical context and time of this speech. To understand this review, it is therefore necessary to review the topical shifts that the speaker followed in his inauguration speech. According to the English transcript, these include the appeal to emotions, uniqueness of the moment, shared and lived experience, failures of the past, virtues of the present, and faith in the future. As stated earlier, this shift work was coupled with rhetorical strategies such as elaboration, comparison and exemplification.

In short, elements such as speaker, audience, purpose, topic and context were all present in Yeltsin's speech and, rhetorically, the text corresponded to the situation. With these details, for comparison, one may proceed to a rhetorical analysis of Boris Yeltsin's resignation speech that appeared eight years later.

2. Resignation speech (December 31, 1999)

Due to immense domestic pressure, Boris Yeltsin announced his resignation in a televised speech on 31 December 1999. He opened his speech by saying "Dear Russians!" and addressed his mediated audience directly. As with his inauguration speech, he then indicated the historic significance of the moment and the timing of his speech at the end of the 20th century. In what followed, Yeltsin engaged his audiences by highlighting the uniqueness of the moment as something he shared with them. Thus, he mentioned that "we have all measured this date against ourselves", a date which he described in the opening line as "a momentous date in our history". With an emphasis on this shared moment, Yeltsin proceeded to the purpose of this speech, adding that he was addressing the Russians for the last time as the President of Russia. His next words conveyed his resignation about which he had, in his own words, "contemplated long and hard". Given the historical context and the sequence of events preceding this speech, one should note that the subject of Yeltsin's resignation had been debated widely before it finally came on that date. In fact, the Russian media, ordinary citizens and foreign observers had raised and debated the subject. Therefore, in his following utterances, Yeltsin touched upon these debates and added a defense of his own character:

"Many times I have heard it said: Yeltsin will try to hold on to power by any means, he won't hand it over to anyone. That is all lies. That is not the case".[2]

However, the historical context discussed previously gives several examples of Yeltsin's tenacity. Actions to consolidate his position, most notably shelling the parliament and staging an autocoup, had given his audience grounds to imagine that the president would "hold on to power by any means". In this case, what Yeltsin failed to mention was as important historically as what he mentioned deliberately. In a subtle way, Yeltsin intended to show his commitment to the Duma and Constitution.

[2] *All the quotations in this section have been taken from the English transcript of Boris Yeltsin's resignation speech: Boris Yeltsin Resignation Speech. B. Yeltsin. BBC Transcript, (December 1999). URL: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/monitoring/584845.stm*

The word 'constitution' has appeared four times in the resignation speech. However, the emphasis on this word could be seen in the context of Yeltsin's presidential politics. Following the constitutional crisis, which led to widespread controversy about the president's legitimacy, Yeltsin succeeded in developing and adopting a new constitution which expanded his authority as president. Accordingly, in his resignation speech, he insisted on the legitimacy of this new constitution which was largely his own product. He did so by asserting that "the Duma elections should take place within the constitutional timescale".

A vital aspect of any democracy and especially young democracies is the peaceful transfer of power from one government to another through elections. Yeltsin's next sentences highlighted this popular fact and emphasized its significance for Russia. The outgoing president described this political act as "a vital precedent of a civilized, voluntary handover of power". Amidst the socio-political pressure that the president had encountered, the rationale for his resignation may have seemed straightforward at that time. However, Yeltsin's utterances also offer additional grounds for, in his own words, "standing down earlier than scheduled". The citizens of Russia and international spectators noted the significance of this speech. By adding such a point, Yeltsin asserted that "Russia must enter the new millennium with new politicians, new faces, new intelligent, strong and energetic people". In this sense, he proceeded from announcing his resignation to the framework of transition and his likely replacement. Implicitly, Yeltsin hinted at his successor by describing him rather than mentioning his name. In that historical context, "intelligent, strong and energetic" could only describe very few figures in the Russian political landscape. However, Yeltsin also put this succession in the context of recent Duma elections and the emergence of "a new generation of politicians". The outgoing president then claimed that in his judgment, "Russia will never return to the past. Russia will now always be moving forward". Interestingly, he described this process as "progress". Yeltsin's utterances suggested that he saw recent developments positively and believed in a better future for the Russian Federation. However, what seemed as a controversial process could not be simply classified as progress or what Yeltsin descried as "natural progress of history" in his resignation speech. In fact, historians have debated, often negatively, whether Yeltsin's replacement paved the way for progress or betterment. But the speech demonstrated how he viewed this transition. In what followed, Yeltsin referred to this strong candidate without naming him:

"Why holding on to power for another six months, when the country has a strong person, fit to be president, with whom practically all Russians link their hopes for the future today? Why should I stand in his way?"

In August 1999, Yeltsin had signaled during another speech that he wished to see Vladimir Putin as his successor. As this speech demonstrates, Putin had established a strong enough status to be considered for presidency in 1999. After touching upon the question of succession, a topical shift brought Yeltsin's words to a climax for which the speech is remembered today. Yeltsin's words became apologetic as he asked for forgiveness. In words that seemed more intimate and personal, the Russian president asked for forgiveness because, admittedly, his government's plans had not succeeded and the radical transformation which appeared easy on his inauguration day "turned out to be painfully difficult". Somehow, Yeltsin confirmed in his speech what the international and domestic observers had concluded over the years. The jump from a totalitarian past into a rich future had not occurred during his presidency. The speech thus acknowledged the Russian government's failures and mistakes. The speaker gave his hard-earned conclusion in the end and famously stated that he was "too naïve" in some respects. But he also insisted that the task was never easy and that he appreciated the sufferings of the Russians during his radical experimentations. His sincere apology was therefore coupled with a subtle defense of his own character and performance. During his presidency, Yeltsin attracted the attention of media for not only his presidential campaign and ambitions, but also his deteriorating health.

In his resignation speech, he denied that he was leaving for his health. Rather, he asserted that he was leaving "because of all the problems taken together". Having admitted his inability to address such problems, he reaffirmed his belief in the new generation of leaders. In his opinion, it was a generation that could "do more and do it better". Towards the end, Yeltsin referred directly to Vladimir Putin as the prime minister and, according to the Russian Constitution, the Acting President upon his resignation. He also referred to the presidential election which was to be held in three months. With regard to the question of succession, Yeltsin expressed his confidence in the "amazing wisdom of Russian citizens" and stated that he had no doubt about the choice that they would make at the end of March 2000. In all likelihood, the outgoing president signaled his preference for succession and, finally, in another appeal to his audience's emotions, he ended his resignation speech with the following words:

"In saying farewell, I wish to say to each of you the following. Be happy. You deserve happiness. You deserve happiness and peace. Happy new year, happy new century, my dear people".

Yeltsin's resignation speech contained references to the rhetorical situation and the historical circumstances that influenced him. As with the previous section, five key components will be considered (i.e. topic, purpose, audience, speaker and context). With respect to exigence or what initially motivated the speaker, one should note that political motivations are not always clear. Yet, they can be inferred through the words and actions of the political actor according to the context. It was mentioned earlier that Yeltsin's resignation put an end to an eight-year-long chapter of insurmountable events. Yeltsin's motivation in this regard could be an attempt to end his political career. Historians argue that, with his resignation, he secured immunity from legal investigations. They point to Vladimir Putin's first action as president which stopped corruption investigations against Yeltsin.

Yeltsin's motivation may remain a puzzle added to the historical ambiguities of his presidency, but the purpose of his speech was less ambiguous even though the president's resignation came as a surprise. Rhetorically, the speaker's primary purpose was to inform. The speech informed the Russian audiences of the president's decision to step down. But as rhetoricians propound, how speech is structured can be also indicative of its secondary purposes. The tone of the televised speech was noticeably apologetic. It did not suggest what rhetoricians call 'symbolic restitution' by which rhetors try to avoid direct responsibility. Yeltsin appealed to his audience directly. However, the secondary purpose of the speech was to 'ask for forgiveness' and less explicitly provide a defense of the speaker's character against the detractors' accusations. In comparison, the identity of audiences has not changed in Yeltsin's second speech. However, if considered as a collective, their mentality, beliefs, expectations and evaluations may have changed during Yeltsin's controversial presidency. As with the previous speech, Yeltsin endeavored to establish a rhetorical connection with this audience based on commonalities. To do this, he emphasized what he shared with them. In his inauguration speech, Yeltsin had emphasized that "We" paid an enormous and unprecedented price for our present experience. Similarly, Yeltsin acknowledged the hardships of the Russian citizens during his two terms in office. This is considered an appeal to pathos by which rhetors dwell on the audience's sense of pity, regret and despair. Therefore, after admitting his mistakes and furnishing his apology, Yeltsin established a connection with his audience by using the following words in his resignation:

"Today, it is important for me to tell you the following. I also experienced the pain which each of you experienced. I experienced it in my heart, with sleepless nights, agonizing over what needed to be done to ensure that people lived more easily and better, if only a little. I did not have any objective more important than that".

In terms of topic, the shift in Boris Yeltsin's resignation almost mirrored the shift work in the inauguration speech delivered eight years earlier. In the resignation speech, he followed a procedure that began with an appeal to emotions, an expression of the uniqueness of the moment, and a defense of his own character and career.

These speech acts were followed by asking for forgiveness and more appeals to the audience's emotions. In terms of topic, then, the speech established a more direct link with its audiences and, in comparison, no philosophical or idealistic themes appeared in the underlying topics of the speech. But these topical shifts can only be discerned when put in the context of Yeltsin's long and controversial presidency. In what follows, a discussion of these similarities and differences will be given within that context.

Discussion:

The current article is primarily an attempt to compare the inaugural and resignation speeches of Boris Yeltsin within the context of Russian post-Soviet history. In this regard, the above comparison demonstrated some similarities, contrasts or contradictions which will be reviewed briefly.

Historically, one may argue that some of Yeltsin's actions contradicted his words. For instance, in his augural speech, Yeltsin insisted that he was "no omnipotent miracle man" to demonstrate how he was different from the former leaders. Yet, his radical campaigns revealed such an inclination. Furthermore, he was once a vocal critic of Mikhail Gorbachev's slow-paced reforms and yet his fast-paced reforms caused more frustration and apathy among the citizens of Russia in the post-1991 period. When linking speech and visual cues, one can notice that Yeltsin's first inaugural speech was energetic and emotional. Eight years later, his televised resignation speech was still emotional but lacked energy. In comparison, upon his resignation in 1999, the aging and sickly president looked very different from his former self both physically and verbally. As a political actor, Yeltsin's popularity was partly due to his image and the nationalist agenda that captured the attention of Russians in 1991. However, by 1999, this image had been severely degraded. Therefore, this loss of prestige was perhaps the most noticeable contrast that occurred in the space between these speeches. In other words, public approval of Yeltsin's socio-economic plans suffered over the course of a decade (see, for further discussion, Breslauer, 2002; Huskey, 1999).

In his inaugural speech, Boris Yeltsin first expressed his feelings, claiming that he could not put them in words. By contrast, in his resignation speech, Yeltsin addressed his audience directly. However, in both cases, the speaker was under the influence of time or political environment. In his inauguration and resignation, he pointed out the uniqueness of the time in Russian history. In 1991, he addressed his Russian audience as the first democratically elected president of the country. Hence, his 1991 speech had historical significance for the Russian people. In the second speech, however, the uniqueness of time in December 1999 was its coincidence with the end of a century in which the world and Russia underwent tremendous change. Therefore, the uniqueness of time was not only related to the political atmosphere in Russia but was also related to the end of a century. That being said, Yeltsin took advantage of these occasions to strengthen the impact of his speech. Another difference was the emotional load of these speeches. In both cases, Yeltsin tried to arouse the emotions of his audience while his resignation speech was admittedly more personal and intimate.

However, the most striking difference between these two speeches was seen in expression, style and content. In his inaugural address, Yeltsin used an idealistic and philosophical discourse to describe his responsibility and the path that the Russian people had chosen. The speech created an epic moment in the contemporary history of Russia as the president's admonishing speech enumerated the shortcomings of the former regimes. Conversely, his resignation depicted a political tragedy. His words conveyed the speaker's realistic awareness of the status quo and his recognition of the government's failures. By comparing the content of these two speeches, it can be understood that the President of Russia had two radically different self-images in 1991 and 1999. Therefore, while the second speech was suitably apologetic, the outgoing president also offered a defense of his intentions and character. By comparison, in addition to the content and style, the atmospheric differences were also significant. Boris Yeltsin's inauguration speech was held during a unique ceremony with music, attendance and decorative

elements unlike what the Russian audience had seen in the Soviet era. However, in the 1999 televised speech, the audience could only see a Christmas tree behind the president. Boris Yeltsin was seen in two different physical atmospheres and the second one demonstrated his fatigue and despair at the end of a political marathon. Conceivably, both speeches engaged the whole nation, but in different ways.

On another level, the above rhetorical comparison highlights what remained philosophically unchanged in Boris Yeltsin's statements in 1991 and 1999. The historical background indicates the growing difficulty of the political situation in Russia during his presidency. However, the comparison suggests that Yeltsin had a linear image of Russian history and the political trajectory of the Russian Federation. In other words, he viewed the new Russia as a nation rising from an "uncivilized" past. In both speeches, Yeltsin demonstrated his faith in Russia's constructive potential and, especially in his resignation, he emphasized that "Russia will not return to the past, but will move forward". In comparison, this optimism or outlook remained unchanged. It suggests that the president of Russia saw the political and social history of his country on a path from backwardness, dictatorship and helplessness to betterment and progress. In fact, Yeltsin's utterances emphasized this worldview even before the fall of the Soviet Union. For instance, only a few weeks after the coup of August 1991, Yeltsin described Russia as a country "which wants to proceed along a civilized path" and, furthermore, he described this trajectory as a path along which Western democracies were proceeding (Breslauer, 2002, p. 144). More specifically, in his own inauguration, Yeltsin asserted that the citizens of Russia have chosen not only a personality "but first and foremost the path this country would follow". Through voluntary interdependence, Yeltsin claimed that Russia was inevitably progressing towards a better future. Likewise, in his resignation speech, Yeltsin reiterated his faith in this historical progress, even though he acknowledged the failures and mistakes of his government. In fact, Yeltsin justified his resignation partly by claiming that he did not want to block the natural progress of history. In this sense, the rhetorical comparison may lead to the conclusion that Yeltsin considered the coming of Vladimir Putin and a new generation of Russian politicians as the embodiment of this progress. In his speeches, he did not describe this path as a process in which developments could take a regressive course. Furthermore, his utterances did not simply suggest naïve optimism. Rather, in their depth, these utterances seemed to suggest the view that the history and destiny of Russia is that of progress. In other words, the speech gave credence to a linear theory of history. Arguably, this was perhaps a theory that Marxism-Leninism had promoted and indoctrinated in the various generations of Soviet officials and politicians. As noted previously, Boris Yeltsin was an outspoken critic of communism. In simple terms, however, he may have believed that societies inevitably move forward, passing through primitive and advanced stages. Earlier, it was stated that what is shared between the speaker and audience is crucial in any rhetorical situation. In 1991, as with many Russians and perhaps foreign onlookers, Yeltsin believed that the past was evil and the future would be necessarily better. Eight years later, his resignation speech still promised a progressive future for Russia amidst public disillusionment.

What this textual comparison highlights as Yeltsin's determination during his presidency may corroborate what, in a larger context, some scholars have noted about Boris Yeltsin's character as a Russian leader. In this regard, Yeltsin's intellectual growth, charisma and presidential politics have been the subject of widespread research (see, for instance, Breslauer, 2002; Huskey, 1999). Beyond the context of these speeches, a review of literature may also suggest that Yeltsin's outlook on Russian history was consistent with his methods. More specifically, this consistence has been noted by scholars who approached Russian political culture in that timeline. For instance, Richard Sakwa conducted a critical review of this transitional post-communist period and concluded that "the first generation of democratic politicians in Russia came largely from the old system" (Sakwa, p. 166) suggesting that Yeltsin shared with his Soviet predecessors the same determination, optimism and tendency for "the

use of authoritarian methods" (Sakwa, p. 167). These scholars refer to the dominance of political elites in the post-Soviet government and the increasing employment of authoritarian methods in presidential politics. Although Yeltsin saw himself as the opposite of Gorbachev, he more or less followed Gorbachev's path in terms of planning and restructuring. In the 1980s, Gorbachev overestimated perestroika (restructuring) and what it could achieve. By 1991, perestroika ended with the demise of the Soviet Union. Similarly, Yeltsin's determination to end the Soviet command economy through radical reforms and his faith in the outcome could parallel the Soviet belief-systems.

The comparison and analysis of Yeltsin's speeches can be relevant to the understanding of contemporary politics in Russia in two ways. First, as stated previously, the utterances symbolize the beginning and end of a massive political process in post-Soviet Russia. In other words, the speeches reveal the course of presidential politics from democratic to authoritarian extremes. Therefore, the current presidential politics that some scholars (for instance, Gill & Markwick, 2000; Medvedev, 2002; Sakwa, 2002) regard as authoritarian and idealized leadership can be partly explained with reference to the transformations that characterized the Yeltsin era. Secondly, the analysis of these utterances and especially the president's farewell speech can describe the historical background for the emergence of a young, competent and reliable character in the Russian political landscape. With an emphasis on this historical context, the inaugural and resignation speeches can illustrate the transition to the current function of presidency in Russia.

Conclusion:

This comparison was an attempt to link Yeltsin's speeches to historical context to ascertain recurring patterns, differences or cues that can be important to historical analysis. As stated above, such an undertaking is significant in that it provides contextual clues to Russia's transition from democratic to authoritarian rule during the Yeltsin era. Moreover, comparing the language of these speeches provides some clues to the influences of political environment. In this regard, the comparison suggested that the most salient differences appeared in expression, style and content. Boris Yeltsin's words summarize the trajectory that the people of the Russian Federation experienced in a transition from the Soviet era to the Putin era. The general conclusion that can be drawn from these two speeches is that they correspond rhetorically to the historical context as they also present Boris Yeltsin's idiosyncratic attitudes. Historically, the difference between these two speeches can be viewed as the difference between two epochs in Russian history that punctuate a beginning and an end. The inauguration speech signals hope and vision for the future of Russia and the resignation speech conveys a chastening awareness of socio-political challenges in Russian government and political culture. These opposing signals were set to persist in the new century.

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