DIFFUSION AND CIVIL SOCIETY MOBILIZATION IN COLOURED REVOLUTIONS

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Abstract

This article explores the dynamics of transnational diffusion and its influence on civil society mobilization in the "coloured revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine. In the two countries, youth and civic movements that spearheaded mobilization efforts were closely modelled on the example of Otpor, the Serbian resistance group. The article argues that emulation of Otpor's techniques of mobilization was facilitated by favourable political conditions in Georgia and Ukraine. In explaining the mechanisms of diffusion, it focuses on the cognitive processes that allowed local activists to realize that similar actions would bring similar results despite cross-national differences in context. Finally, in two separate case studies, it traces the effects of diffusion on the formation of Kmara and Pora youth movements. The underlying argument of the article is that transnational diffusion, if coupled with favourable domestic context, can compensate for the relative weakness of civil society in triggering large-scale and effective collective action.

1. Introduction

Since its demobilization in the aftermath of 1989, scholars of post-communist politics have all but agreed that civil society in the region remains underdeveloped. When compared to established democracies, post-communist polities exhibit markedly lower levels of participation and membership in voluntary organizations; instances of collective protest and mobilization are rare in comparison with, for example, the post-authoritarian setting in Latin America. Howard attributed this "distinctive weakness" of post-communist civil society to the "homogenizing effect" of the communist institutional system that engendered widespread and persistent mistrust of any kinds of

formal organizations.[1] Meanwhile, efforts of Western donors to resuscitate civil society via extensive support of local organizations have often fallen short of desired outcomes. As Mendelson commented, the influence of NGOs on elites in the post-communist states is often "negligible or nonexistent".[2] Yet not long after these studies pronounced civil society weak and politically insignificant, the so-called "coloured revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine saw civil society organizations rise to the forefront of popular mobilization that toppled corrupt and incompetent regimes. Organized in youth movements and coalitions of NGOs, civil society activists staged imaginative campaigns that mocked pro-regime candidates and mobilized opposition supporters in the run-up to the elections; they also played a salient role in exposing electoral fraud and drove thousands of angered voters into the streets.[3] The Georgian and Ukrainian democratic breakthroughs are often hailed as a "triumph of civil society"[4]; in reality, the actual contribution of civic and youth movements is difficult to measure. Still, the unprecedented scale, sophistication and effectiveness of collective action in coloured revolutions are striking, given the backdrop of generally weak associational life and the alleged impotence of NGOs.

A potentially fruitful way of approaching this apparent puzzle is to look at the dynamics of mobilization in the context of intra-regional diffusion. The two leading youth movements, Kmara in Georgia and Pora in Ukraine, were heavily inspired by the example of Otpor, the Serbian movement that helped overthrow Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Otpor veterans personally trained

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1 Marc Morjé Howard, *The Weakness of Post-Communist Civil Society in Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 20.

2 Sarah E. Mendelson, "The Power and Limits of Transnational Democracy Networks in Postcommunist Societies", in The Power and Limits of NGOs, ed. Sarah E. Mendelson, John K. Glenn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 233.

3 On the role of civil society organizations in Eastern Europe's democratic breakthroughs, see Joerg Forbrig, Pavol Demes, eds,. Reclaiming Democracy (Washington: German Marshall Fund, 2007). Taras Kuzio, "Civil society, Youth and Societal Mobilization in Democratic Revolutions", Communist and Post-Communist Studies, 39(3) 2006: 365-386.

4 Nadia Diuk, "The Triumph of Civil Society", in Revolution in Orange, ed. Anders Aslund, Michael McFaul (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005)

Georgian and Ukrainian activists in techniques of non-violent protest, and actively assisted in setting up their movements' structures and defining campaign strategies. Clearly, diffusion can mobilize even relatively underdeveloped civil society into action. Learning about prior successful examples alters local activists' evaluation of the likelihood of success, thereby increasing their propensity to launch a new movement. Furthermore, as the case of coloured revolutions demonstrates, diffusion also improves the effectiveness of their endeavour by providing a ready-made blueprint for emulation.

The purpose of this article is to shed more light on the linkage between diffusion and civil society mobilization in the run-up to the Rose and Orange revolutions. What conditions made it possible for foreign templates to stir collective action in Georgia and Ukraine? And what mechanisms translated diffusion into the actual formation of youth movements? To address these questions, the article will first identify the "template" in question. Second, it will argue that the process of its diffusion was, in important ways, conditioned by the political context of "recipient" countries – or, in the language of social movement theorists, by their "structures of political opportunity". Third, in discussing the mechanisms of diffusion, emphasis will be placed on actors and their perceptions; it will be argued that actors engaged in "theorization", a cognitive process allowing Georgian and Ukrainian activists to realize that similar courses of action would bring similar results despite structural differences between the countries. The final section will present the case studies of Kmara and Pora, illustrating how enhanced prospects for mobilization and transnational diffusion affected the dynamics of movement formation.[5]

By accentuating factors external to the emergent movements rather than the strength of civil society per se, it becomes evident that the recent outburst of activism in the post-Soviet space should not be over-interpreted when assessing civil society's

[5]Western financial assistance to local civil society organizations was another factor critical to the success of popular mobilization in Georgia and Ukraine. Without external funding, none of the movements could have sustained its nationwide campaign; all social movements need material resources to function. Nonetheless, Western aid explains little about why Ukrainians or Georgians decided to engage in collective action by copying practices used in Serbia and Slovakia. Thus, for the purpose of this article – and due to limited space – the availability of material resources is treated as given.

overall robustness and the consequent prospects for democratic consolidation. Of course, prior development of civil society laid the necessary groundwork of pre-existing institutions, social networks and connective structures from which youth movements could germinate.[6] In coloured revolutions, however, the relative weakness and scarcity of these structures – inherent to the post-Soviet context – was offset by favourable political circumstances and powerful effects of diffusion that provided a unique platform for mobilization, not unlike the case of the 1989 anti-communist revolutions. In the changed landscape of post-revolutionary politics, however, civic and youth movements inevitably lose part of their purpose, influence and organizational capacity. Finally, it is worth noting that NGOs and civic movements represent but one segment of civil society; likewise, popular mobilization against authoritarian practices – albeit vital in the transition period – represents but one of the functions of civil society in promoting democratic progress.[7]

2. Diffusion and coloured revolutions

References to diffusion figure prominently in the scholarly accounts of coloured revolutions. The concept itself is a metaphor borrowed from the natural sciences and refers to the "process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system".[8] In the same vein, a number of scholars, most notably Bunce and Beissinger, conceptualize the wave of democratic breakthroughs as driven by the diffusion – via collaborative networks of transnational activists and demonstration effects – of a generic model of regime change invented by "early risers" in Slovakia and Serbia and emulated by successive revolutionaries in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.[9]

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6 Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Framing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)

7 Diamond lists thirteen different functions through which civil society assists in deepening and consolidating democracy. Larry Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999)

8 Everett Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations* (London: Free Press, 2003), 5.

9 Mark S. Beissinger, "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions," Perspectives on Politics, 5(2) 2007: 259-276. Valerie Bunce and

Their model rests on unity of the opposition forces, a spirited mobilization campaign, and the exposure of electoral fraud that subsequently triggers non-violent protest. However, as critics of this approach point out, an interpretation of coloured revolutions that privileges diffusion as the primary explanation can be challenged by demonstrating empirical inconsistencies.[10] For instance, at least one of the core components of the "electoral model" – opposition coalescence – is difficult to be transplanted from one country to another by transnational activists. Instead, the formation of a unified opposition bloc is usually a function of domestic elite contestation, and often a culmination of its long-term development. Although "demonstration effects" of prior revolutions may prompt an otherwise quarrelsome opposition to work together or a previously loyal elite group to defect, the causal story is very difficult to substantiate empirically. In sum, even as the political dynamics in coloured revolutions followed a similar pattern – one that entailed opposition coalescence, electoral fraud and mass protests – these may, strictly speaking, still be "illusions" of diffusion induced by an independent clustering of similar domestic factors.[11]

Given the difficulty of distilling real effects of diffusion on political and social outcomes, it is useful to focus merely on practices whose adoptions can be pinned down empirically, and separate actors engaged in their active transfer – i.e. mainly civil society activists – from other political actors. From this perspective, the core of the Serbian "innovation" is a non-violent youth movement that defines elections as a focal point of collective action. It presents itself as a grass-roots vanguard of democratic revolution that transcends traditional political parties, and its pervasive and non-conventional campaign aims to "shake people out of their slumber".[12] The movement's mobilization drive, targeting primarily the young, urban and better educated segments of the

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Sharon Wolchik, "International Diffusion and Post-communist Electoral Revolutions", Communist and post-Communist Studies, 39(3) 2006: 283-204

10 Lucan A. Way, "The Real Causes of the Color Revolutions", *Journal of Democracy*, 19(3) 2008:55-69

11 Daniel Brinks and Michael Coppedge, "Diffusion is No Illusion: Neighbour Emulation in the Third Wave of Democracy", *Comparative Political Studies*, 39(4) 2006: 463-489.

12 Vladimir Illic, *Otpor: In or Beyond Politics* (Belgrade: Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia, 2001), 36.

electorate, is designed to bolster the pro-democratic opposition, disadvantaged in the electoral process by the regime's manipulation, especially its abuse of "administrative resources" and control of mainstream media. Once the outpolled incumbent resorts to electoral fraud – a frequently used method of preserving political power in post-Soviet pseudo-democracies – its quick exposure acts a "revolutionary trigger" and catalyst for non-violent mass protests.[13] Otpor-style movements are distinct by their use of corporate branding and modern PR in the design of campaign messages and posters. Furthermore, Otpor activists make extensive use of humour, satire and symbols of popular culture via direct street performances and other happenings to ridicule the regime; Otpor made civil resistance and political campaigning look "cool". Also, it adopted a decentralized cell structure that fostered a strong sense of kinship among foot-solider activists and blocked regimes' efforts to subvert them. Crucially, during the campaign and in the post-election protests, Otpor's actions were guided by the principles of non-violent conflict.[14] The practice of non-violence was succinctly captured by Otpor's Alexander Maric: "When the Georgian activists asked me whether they could fight the police, I told them: No, you're non-violent. Police beat people. You stand in the front-row, some of you will bleed, journalists take pictures of it, CNN puts it online, and that's it."[15] In addition to Otpor's example, activists in the post-Soviet states – and especially in Ukraine – also drew on the lessons and experiences of Slovakia's civil society, whose voter mobilization campaign, OK98, helped the opposition defeat the authoritarian-leaning Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar in the 1998 elections.

3. Structures of political opportunity

By itself, the availability of a template for effective mobilization does not explain the decision of civil society actors in other countries to copy it. The political context in "recipient" countries

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13 See Joshua Tucker, "Enough! Electoral Fraud, Collective Action Problems, and Post-Communist Coloured Revolutions", *Perspectives on Politics*, 5(3) 2007: 535-551.

14 See Srdja Popovic, Andrej Milivojevic and Slobodan, Slobodan, *Nonvionlent Struggle: 50 Crucial Points* (Belgrade: Centre for Applied NonViolent Actions and Strategies, 2007)

15 Alexander Maric, Otpor activist, interview by author, Novi Sad, (March 28, 2008)

plays a salient role. In their analyses, Beissinger and Bunce implicitly treat transnational diffusion as an independent variable affecting the likelihood of regime change. However, in the case of Georgia and Ukraine, the direction of causation may be the reverse, in that the emulation of Otpor's techniques was itself conditioned by prior shifts in power relations that increased the likelihood of regime change. For instance, in Ukraine, it was not until 2003 – when it became clear that Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko would form a broad-based anti-Kuchma alliance ahead of the 2004 presidential elections – that local civil society activists decided to launch their own Otpor-style youth movement, despite the fact that Otpor veterans had been active in Ukraine ever since Milosevic's fall in 2000.[16] In short, activists' attitudes toward Otpor's model have been shaped by domestic "structures of political opportunity". According to Tarrow, these are "consistent – but not necessarily formal, permanent or national – signals to social and political actors which either encourage or discourage them to use their internal resources to form social movements".[17] Mobilization does not always correlate with real changes in the political context. Some scholars argue that perceptions of increased opportunities, rather than expansion in real existing ones, ultimately set social movements in motion.[18] This is because structures of political opportunity translate into collective action primarily by affecting activists' expectations of success or failure.

A core element of political opportunity structures is the level of openness of a given polity. It appears plausible to assume that, on the whole, neither fully open nor completely closed systems are likely to engender the highest degree of incentive for contentious action. The notion was first addressed and quantitatively examined in 1973 by Peter Eisinger, who studied conditions associated with incidences of urban protest and race riots in American cities in the 1960. Eisinger concluded that

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16 Milos Milenkovic, Otpor activist, interview by author, Belgrade, March 25, 2008

17 Sidney Tarrow, "States and opportunities: the political structuring of social movements", in *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Framing*, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 54.

18 Charles Kurzman, "Structural Opportunity and Perceived Opportunity in Social-Movement Theory: The Iranian Revolution of 1979", *American Sociological Review*, 61(1) 1996: 153-170.

protest is most prevalent in municipalities characterized by a "mix of open and closed factors" in terms of their responsiveness to citizens' needs and demands. [19] Applying this logic to today's political systems and the ways they structure civil society mobilization, incentives for the formation of pro-democratic movements should be highest in the so-called "hybrid regimes". Hybrid regimes are ambiguous systems that combine democratic institutions – especially elections – with more or less authoritarian practices.[20] Indeed, as one seasoned Eastern European activist put it, "action is most easily spurred in mixed regimes; in functioning democracies, if you attempt to change something, you will never find enough people to go for it with you because the system is essentially working; in an authoritarian regime, on the other hand, you lack the vital element of hope".[21] The regimes of Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia and Leonid Kuchma in Ukraine – and many other in the post-Soviet space – have been frequently categorized in the literature as hybrid regimes, or, more specifically, as "diminished subtypes" of authoritarianism. As such, they provide the greatest systemic incentives for potential pro-democratic insurgents.

However, the actual emergence of a social movement and its timing is influenced by the more dynamic and situational aspects of political opportunity structures, determined by configurations of power relations that characterize systems at a given point in time. [22] In Tarrow's typology, dynamic elements of opportunity include instability of political alignments, divisions among elites and the presence of influential allies. In reality, these factors are often intertwined and reinforce each other. The inability of incumbents to retain a cohesive power base destabilizes existing

19 Peter K. Eisinger, "The Conditions of Protest Behaviour in American Cities", *The American Political Science Review*, 67(1) 1973: 11-28

20 Larry Diamond, "Thinking about Hybrid Regimes", *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2) 2002: 21-35. See also Andreas Schedler, ed., Electoral Authoritarianism (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2006); Stephen Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, "The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism", *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2) 2002: 51-65.

21 Pavol Demes, German Marshall Fund, interview by author, Bratislava, (January 3, 2008)

22 Doug McAdam, "Conceptual origins, current problems, future directions", in Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Framing, ed. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, Mayer N. Zald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 26.

political alignments that may result in elite divisions and the emergence of "influential allies" in the form of formidable anti-incumbent opposition. In hybrid regimes, ruling elites are generally most vulnerable toward the end of an electoral cycle, given that – unlike in full-blown dictatorships – elections remain competitive, outcomes are uncertain, and opposition victory is possible.[23] Looming elections thus amplify Tarrow's dynamic elements of opportunity, in particular if incumbents are weak or "lame ducks", as in the case of Shevardnadze and Kuchma, thereby encouraging opposition coalescence and elite defections.[24] In sum, from the vantage point of aspiring revolutionaries, windows of opportunity open once ruling elites appear weakened, divided and unpopular, while in response, democratic opposition begins to show signs of cohesiveness, determination and popularity. The nearest electoral contest usually assumes a polarized and hyped atmosphere in which the polls are perceived as a de facto referendum on the incumbent regime, whereby the latter is eventually forced to steal elections to remain in power. Arguably, this black-and-white picture of electoral politics – with an entrenched autocratic-leaning leader is challenged by a broad-based pro-democracy alliance – is possible only in "hybrid" regimes. For activists striving to replicate Otpor's story, it is a necessary precondition, given that civic movements do not directly take part in elections and their success hinges on the existence of a viable alternative that could benefit from their mobilization. Of course, if favourable conditions are not in place, activists may still launch attempts at mobilization, but with limited success.[25]

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23 Andreas Schedler, "The Nested Game of Democratization by Elections", *International Political Science Review*, 23(1) 2002: 103-122.

24 Henry Hale, "Regime Cycles", *World Politics*, 58(1) 2005: 133–165.

25 A prime example of failure in the face of unfavourable circumstances is the mobilization campaign of Zubr, an Otpor-trained youth movement in Belarus, against the autocratic president Alexander Lukashenka. In the aftermath of the Orange revolution, Otpor-style youth movements sprang in many countries of the post-Soviet space, including Azerbaijan, Russia or Uzbekistan. These groups, albeit operating in unfavourable conditions, were drawn into action by the cumulative effect of prior examples. Beissinger, "Structure and Example in Modular Political Phenomena: The Diffusion of Bulldozer/Rose/Orange/Tulip Revolutions"

4. Mechanisms of diffusion

An expansion of opportunities need not automatically lead to collective action. Opportunities may be missed;[26] and even if a particularly suitable model for mobilization exists, this may go unnoticed. For this reason, it is vital to consider the micro-mechanisms of diffusion that mediate between the former and the latter, enabling would-be revolutionaries in Georgia and Ukraine to become cognizant of and seize upon expanding political opportunities by adopting the very same approaches as their Serbian and Slovak forerunners. This connection is by no means automatic, insofar as it entails the transfer of nearly identical strategies and objectives across dissimilar settings of Milosevic's Serbia and Meciar's Slovakia, on the one hand, and post-Soviet Georgia and Ukraine, on the other.

In part, the relative ease with which Otpor's innovations travelled can be attributed to the nature of ties connecting Otpor veterans and their interlocutors in Georgia and Ukraine. Diffusion theory posits that face-to-face interaction is most effective in persuading an individual to adopt novel practices.[27] Simply hearing about Milosevic's downfall in the media and learning about Otpor's story online would hardly have convinced activists elsewhere to copy Otpor's project in its entirety. Agency – i.e. active promotion and dissemination of successful techniques by some dozen veterans of the Serbian and Slovak campaigns – played a key role. Their interaction with local activists occurred both at the level of movement leaders, whereby overall movement strategy was developed, as well as at the level of foot-soldier activists, usually in training sessions for groups of up to 30 activists. Furthermore, smooth transmission was fostered by what Burt termed "structural equivalence", i.e. the degree to which actors occupy "the same position in the social structure".[28] Leading youth activists were generally from middle-class families, and either studied or completed studies at one of the more prestigious

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26 Traci M. Sawyers & David S. Meyer, "Missed Opportunities: Social Movement Abeyance and Public Policy", Social Problems, 46(2) 1999: 187-206

27 Rogers, *Diffusion of Innovations*, 18

28 Ronald Burt, "Social Contagion and Innovation: Cohesion Versus Structural Equivalence", The American Journal of Sociology, 92(6) 1987: 1291

universities in major cities; most were well-traveled, often English-speaking, and sharing a broadly defined pro-Western outlook; many had already participated in collective action at the level of university politics. As a result, albeit operating in different environments, transmitters and adopters could easily identify with each other at a personal level.[29]

Still, by itself, personal chemistry between individual activists would not suffice to transmit what arguably was a very complex innovation – a method of affecting regime change. What ultimately mattered were the adopters' perceptions regarding its relevance and applicability to their domestic contexts. Rationalizing the use of Otpor's methodology had thus been conditioned by what social movement theory coined the "attribution of similarity".[30] In general, as diffusion theorists Strang and Meyer famously argued, culturally analyzed similarities and linkages construct a tie between actors and entities which is substantially different – and ultimately more pervasive than – direct relations like friendship and exchange. If transmitters and adopters see themselves as falling into the same category – i.e. assume that they are not only connected but also fundamentally similar – diffusion of innovation is likely to be robust. In the case of Eastern European civil society activists, however, this assumption was far from straightforward. A number of parallels existed between their countries: a communist past, a hybrid regime type, recently regained statehood, ethnic complexities, a relatively poor economic performance and a corrupt leadership, as well as previous rounds of protests.[31] On the whole, though, it is fair to say that, prior to the democratic breakthroughs, any political analyst comparing the four countries would highlight differences rather than similarities. Unsurprisingly, when they first heard about Otpor's campaign, many Ukrainians and Georgians doubted whether it could be replicated in their own countries, arguing that the circumstances were different.

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29 Anastasiya Bezverkha, Yellow Pora activist, interview by author, Oxford, (February 27, 2008)

30 Doug McAdam & Dieter Rucht, "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas", *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 528(July) 1993: 56-74.

31 Bunce and Wolchik, "International Diffusion and Post-communist Electoral Revolutions"

The appearance of similarity had to be – at least in parts – actively constructed and required a cognitive process that Strang and Meyer refer to as "theorization". Theorization is defined as "self-conscious developments and specification of abstract categories and formulation of patterned relationship such as chains of case and effect".[32] In practice, theorization turns diffusion into rational choice by specifying why potential adopters should attend to the behaviour of one group and not another, what effects the practice will have, and why the practice is particularly applicable or needed. To this effect, theorization mitigates the heterogeneity of actors and populations involved in diffusion by making salient the characteristic they share and marginalizing the differences. Ouchi captured the pattern nicely in his discussion of the potential of transfer of a Japanese management style to the USA: "To a specialist in the Japanese society and culture, the differences between Japan and the United States are so great that a borrowing of social organization between them seems impossible. To a student of business organization, however, the underlying similarity in tasks between Japanese and American businesses suggests that some form of the essential characteristics of Japanese companies must be transferable."[33]

Likewise, as far as aspiring revolutionaries and "specialists" in non-violent conflict are concerned, the cross-national similarities they intuitively looked for – and perceived of as particularly salient – naturally resembled those characteristics that are relevant to the prospects of a non-violent regime change. In other words, "theorization" pertained to the parallels in political opportunity structures, namely regime type and incumbent-opposition power relations. According to Ivan Marovic, an Otpor leader who coached Ukrainian Pora activists, "of course, Serbia, Georgia and Ukraine are totally different countries: different histories, different circumstances and different opponents; but they had a common regime type – nominally democratic but in essence autocratic; nature of the problem was very similar."[34]

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32 David Strang and John W. Meyer, "Institutional Conditions for Diffusion", *Theory and Society*, 22(4) 1993: 487-511.

33 Strang and Meyer, "Institutional Conditions for Diffusion", 496.

34 Ivan Marovic, telephone interview by author, January 14, 2008

Hence, because of the parallels in opportunities and challenges facing oppositional movements under such regimes, the range of tasks at hand is similarly generic – i.e. the formation of youth movements that galvanize opposition parties via creative marketing and catchy slogans, participate in the exposure of electoral fraud and spearhead subsequent post-election protests – provided that opposition is sufficiently pro-Western, united and capable of outpolling the incumbent. From the activists' perspective, it matters little whether a country is large or small, ethnically divided or homogenous, post-war or peaceful, post-Soviet or not. This approach is an instructive example of theorization: not only does it formulate a patterned cause-and-effect relationship, but it also assumes that "similar systems respond in consistent ways to environmental inputs", thereby predicting that "similar practices can be adopted by all members of a theoretically defined population, with similar effects".[35]

Theorization was also informed by shared assumptions regarding the logic of post-communist transitions. Most activists believed that problems facing their countries were of a similar kind: corrupt, abusive and incompetent regimes born out of "incomplete transition" from communism that continued to halt political and economic progress. During training seminars in Ukraine, Otpor veteran Milos Milenkovic made Ukrainian activists list the ten greatest problems their country was facing. As he recalled, "out of the ten, eight were usually common for both Serbia and Ukraine".[36] Remedies for the post-communist malaise were also thought to be analogous: a decisive replacement of the existing elites with pro-Western leaders who would set the country back on toward democratic consolidation. The underlying assumption that elite agency is the pre-eminent determinant of democratization – trumping structural and country-specific variables and pre-conditions such as historical legacies, geographic proximity to the West, political culture, levels of economic development – formed the intellectual underpinning of diffusion in coloured revolutions. Also implicit in the thinking of many Eastern European activists was what the literature calls

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35 Strang and Meyer, "Institutional Conditions for Diffusion", 496

36 Milenkovic, interview

"teleological" and "linear" conception of democratization.[37] Serbian, Georgian and Ukrainian activists perceived their struggles against Milosevic, Shevardnadze and Kuchma as essentially the same struggle for democracy's ultimate victory in Eastern Europe and the post-Soviet space.[38]

In the final analysis, it is clear that levels of domestic political opportunities and receptivity to diffusion are closely interlinked. The stronger the pro-Western opposition vis-a-vis incumbents in hybrid regimes, the easier it becomes for local activists to "theorize" parallels with prior successes, and, consequently, the more likely they are to adopt novel practices. This, in turn, feeds into formation of Otpor-style movement in a two-step process. First, is the sheer motivational effect generated by success stories recounted by accomplished revolutionaries. Their versions of causation in Milosevic's or Meciar's defeat also underwent theorization, and usually overemphasized the role of civil society at the expense of other factors. "The motivation was really important for me," said Dmytro Potekhin, senior Ukrainian activist who attended Serbian-run training seminars. "It was this feeling of possibility of changing things with just what you have in your hands and with ordinary people – sometimes brave, sometimes not, sometimes talented, sometimes not."[39] Potekhin's words capture what social movement scholars call "cognitive liberation" and the expansion in "perceived opportunity structures" whereby activists realized that "it doesn't take much to help change the system".[40] This motivational effect – itself, of course, made possible by prior attribution of similarity – was subsequently followed by the actual transfer of particular lessons that pertained to strategic planning, development of organization and recruitment, response to police aggression, stagecraft of street actions, and the design of logos, slogans and campaign materials.

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37 Thomas Carothers, "The End of the Transition Paradigm", *Journal of Democracy*, 13(1) 2002: 5-21

38 Bunce and Wolchik, "International Diffusion and Post-communist Electoral Revolutions"

39 Dmytro, Potekhin, Znayu activist, telephone by author, (March 14, 2008)

40 Balasz, Jarabik, OK98 activist, telephone interview by author, (November 15, 2007)

5. Diffusion to Georgia: Kmara

In terms of the influence on the formation of a social movement and its tactics, transnational diffusion arguably had the greatest resonance in Georgia. The decline of Eduard Shevardnadze's power base and popular support – and the simultaneous rise of opposition parties – engendered unusually favourable opportunities for collective action ahead of the November 2003 parliamentary elections. For the already well-organized activists close to pro-Western opposition, exposure to Otpor's story provided them with what they had hitherto lacked – a clearly defined strategy. In the spring of 2003, they established a youth movement called Kmara ("Enough"). In terms of design, Kmara was the truest copy of the Serbian original: its activists meticulously adopted most of Otpor's strategic thinking, organizational structures and tactics, and even chose Otpor's clenched fist as their symbol. On the other hand, given that Kmara originally targeted the 2005 presidential elections, it had never developed into a truly mass movement, and by November 2003, mustered only 3000 volunteers.[41]

At the time of Kmara's creation in 2003, the power structure that President Shevardnadze had presided over since 1995 had all but fallen apart, and his "electoral autocracy" looked increasingly vulnerable. Until the early 2000s, the relative stability and unity of Georgia's ruling bloc was maintained by the existence of a strong pro-presidential party, the Citizen's Union of Georgia (SMK), and by Shevardnadze acting as an "arbitrator" between the various informal groupings competing for access to power and resources. This arrangement disintegrated in 2001 after the so-called "young reformers" – a pro-Western wing of the SMK backed by the relatively free Georgian media and NGO sector – moved into open opposition against Shevardnadze and the corrupt ex-nomenklatura cadres in the SMK. The fatal rift came in late October when security forces, controlled by the latter group, stormed the building of the independent Rustavi-2 channel on the basis of alleged tax evasion, triggering anti-regime demonstrations in Tbilisi. In response, Mikheil Saakashvili, former justice minister and the most radical of the "young reformists",

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41 Giorgi Kandelaki, Kmara activist, interview by author, London, (January 26, 2008)

decided in November 2001 to create a broad anti-Shevardnadze bloc, the "New National Movement", and Zurab Zhvania, another prominent member of the group, forged an alliance with Nino Burjanadze, the popular speaker of the parliament, to create a new opposition party, the "United Democrats". Meanwhile, the Shevardnadze loyalists attempted to regroup by merging what remained of SMK with a number of smaller parties to an election bloc "For a New Georgia". By 2003, real political power was no longer vested in the "lame duck" president – due to step down after his second term in 2005 – and political actors were by now competing for dominant positions in the post-Shevardnadze period.[42] At this stage, the opposition parties – each enjoying over 20 percent popularity in 2003 pre-election polls – failed to unite.[43] Still, in the face of a fragmented, weak and deeply unpopular Shevardnadze regime – "For a New Georgia" had only the support of between 6 and 9 percent of population, according to polls – the media-savvy opposition was poised to ultimately prevail, either in 2003 or in the 2005 presidential contest.

The palpable shift in the balance of power and the emergence of "influential allies" created a fertile ground for the reception of Serbian revolutionary know-how. The idea of putting Serbian and Georgian activists together originated in the Tbilisi offices of the National Democratic Institute and Open Society Fund. In late 2002, NDI organized an international conference on civil society in Tbilisi, inviting several activists from Serbia, among them Otpor's Slobodan Djinovic, who later presented Otpor's example to civil society leaders at the Liberty Institute, a prominent advocacy group close to the political opposition, which had also been active in developing a network of student organizations campaigning for education reform. Liberty Institute's leaders Levan Ramishvili and Giga Bokeria quickly realized that a non-violent youth movement might have been just the instrument they had been looking for. To some local activists, achieving systemic change still appeared to be rather a "long-shot". They argued that the Serbian example "was irrelevant to Georgia – of

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42 Jaba Devdariani, "Georgia: Rise and Fall of the Facade Democracy", *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, 12(1) 2004: 79-115.

43 Unlike in presidential elections, the numerical advantage to be gained from formal unity was less significant in parliamentary elections.

course, Shevardnadze was no Milosevic, Western powers were not as interested and Russia more involved".[44] But in February, during a trip to Belgrade, Liberty Institute leaders, in consultation with Djinovic and other Otpor veterans, devised the blueprint of Kmara. Djinovic himself later returned to Georgia to run three-day courses for activists in a training camp that Kmara set up in a mountain village outside Tbilisi. In October, another Otpor consultant, Alexander Maric, arrived with a task to "fine-tune the organization that Djinovic already trained in basic stuff, and to give them direction".[45] Maric focused on the most practical of issues and coached Georgian activists in the streets. In addition, all Kmara activists watched "Bringing Down the Dictator", an acclaimed documentary on the Bulldozer revolution; other materials they downloaded from Otpor's website.

The role envisaged for Kmara was analogous to that of Otpor: a radical and non-partisan youth movement acting as a "detonator" to break the apathy of the public and reduce the scope for possible compromise between opposition reformists and representatives of Shevardnadze's regime.[46] Upcoming parliamentary elections – the results of which were expected to be manipulated – were seen as an opportunity to gain further momentum and prepare ground for 2005. This emphasis on planning distinguished Kmara from previous anti-regime movements in Georgia. As Georgi Meladze, one of its founders, put it: "Kmara was different because it had a strategy, something that would take you from day one to day hundred; and this we learned from the Serbs."[47] In fact, Georgian activists copied almost every aspect of Otpor's innovation. In terms of its organizational structure, Kmara adopted Otpor's horizontal and cell-based structure. It also used the same campaigning tools, such as graffiti, satirical street performances and get-out-the-vote techniques. Some of the slogans were even left in the

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44 Kandelaki, interview

45 Maric, interview

46 Mathew Collin, *The Time of the Rebels* (London: Serpent's Tail, 2007), 70

47 Giorgi Meladze, Kmara activist, telephone interview by author, (January 21, 2008)

Serbian language, and others represented direct translations.[48] In part, close identification with Otpor was a deliberate strategy, inasmuch as it directly invoked parallels with Milosevic's fall.[49] Robust diffusion was also facilitated by strong perceptions of similarity between transmitters and adopters, both at the personal level and at the level of national contexts. As Maric put it, "Georgia was similar to Serbia, so they did not have to adapt that much. Most of the experience from Serbia could just be copy-pasted to Georgia".[50]

6. Diffusion to Ukraine: Black and Yellow Pora

Unlike in Georgia, where civil society activists – having learned about Otpor at the time of favourable political opportunities – began almost instantly to plan their own movement, diffusion to Ukraine was a more long-term process. It involved both Serbian and Slovak activists.[51] Their experience had been spreading in Ukraine since Meciar's and Milosevic's fall, but it was not until political opportunities expanded in 2003 that Ukrainian activists decided to utilize these strategies fully. Parallel to the process of opposition coalescence around the candidacy of Viktor Yushchenko ahead of the 2004 presidential elections, civic and youth activists began to realize that the experience of their foreign interlocutors was highly relevant to Ukraine. Two groups of Ukrainian activists – one tied to Otpor trainers and one with stronger links to OK98 veterans – formed two separate but closely interlinked movements known as "Black" and "Yellow" Pora ("It's Time").

The failure of Leonid Kuchma's "competitive authoritarianism", as dissected by Way, stemmed from the inability of the president to install effective top-down control in an oligarchic state captured by powerful economic interests and plagued by "rapacious

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48 In choosing Otpor's fist as their own symbol, Georgians even acted against the advice of Djinovic and Maric, who advocated an original symbol so that Kmara could be perceived by the public as an "autochthonous". Maric, interview

49 Kandelaki, interview

50 Maric, interview

51 Several activists from Kmara also took part in training workshops in Ukraine, but their influence on movement formation was not as significant.

individualism".[52] Without a viable party of power or otherwise cohesive ruling organization, the equilibrium in which the president acted as an umpire over competing clans, backed by a loose coalition of oligarchic parties,[53] grew progressively more unstable in the early 2000s, bringing about shifts in political alignments as Kuchma's former allies – prime ministers as well as oligarchs – gradually moved into opposition against him. This process was also encouraged by Kuchma's falling popularity, especially in the aftermath of the Gongadze affair of 2000 and the subsequent wave of mass protests in Kiev. The dynamics of opposition coalescence gained momentum after the reformist Prime Minister Yushchenko was voted out of office in April 2001 and the anti-Kuchma "Our Ukraine" bloc was set up shortly afterwards. Yet the emergence of "influential allies" – dubbed the "Orange" coalition – was far from straightforward. Yushchenko, himself a former Kuchma loyalist, failed to forge a coalition with the more radical opposition forces, led by Yulia Tymoshenko, ahead of the 2002 parliamentary elections. In the end, it was partly due to the relentless attacks on the part of the Kuchma administration that prompted Yushchenko to agree on close cooperation with Tymoshenko ahead of the 2004 presidential elections. In the meantime, a number of influential oligarchs – most notably, Petro Poroshenko, Oleksandr Zinchenko and apparently even Kuchma's son-in-law Viktor Pinchuk – defected from the camp of the "lame duck" president and switched sides to the opposition. This clearly reflected the increased expectations of Yushchenko's prospective victory: in June 2003, his support was at 35 percent, compared with 14 percent for Viktor Yanukovych, Kuchma's designated successor.[54] In August 2004, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko cemented their cooperation by forming the "People's Power Coalition", and agreeing on the former as the opposition's single presidential candidate.

52 Lucan A. Way, "Kuchma's Failed Authoritarianism", *Journal of Democracy*, 16(2) 2005: 131-145.

53 Taras Kuzio, "Regime Type and Politics in Ukraine under Kuchma", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 38(2) 2005: 167-190.

54 Adrian Karatnycky, "The Fall and Rise of Ukraine's Political Opposition: From Kuchmagate to the Orange Revolution", in *Revolution in Orange*, ed. Anders Aslund and Michael McFaul (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2006), 37.

In the meantime, the idea of creating an Otpor-style movement took relatively long to prevail within Ukrainian civil society, no doubt reflecting the protracted road to unity at the level of opposition parties. First contacts with veterans of Slovak and Serbian campaigns took place as early as 1999 and 2001: civic leaders from Kiev forged links with OK98 representatives in March 1999 at a knowledge-sharing workshop in Bratislava, and remained in close contact thereafter; separately, Milos Milenkovic, Otpor's recruitment specialist, was invited in March 2001 to organize training seminars for Ukrainian youth activists.[55] In the course of two years, Milenkovic – together with three other Otpor trainers, Nenad Belcevic, Alexander Maric and Sinisa Sikman – conducted 23 two-day seminars across the country, exposing over 700 Ukrainian activists to Otpor's story and methodology, albeit without any explicit aim to encourage movement formation.[56] Indeed, at the time, creating an all-Ukrainian organization akin to Otpor initially seemed unfeasible to most of local youth and NGO leaders. The main argument, recurring throughout discussions in 2001 and 2002, was that Serbian methods would not work because Ukraine lacked a united and strong opposition. As one Slovak advisor in Ukraine pointed out, "there was no point in mobilization" ahead of either 1999 or 2002 elections because there was simply no political alternative.[57] By mid-2003, however, this outlook changed significantly. As the collaboration of opposition parties deepened, it became increasingly evident that 2004 presidential elections would be a two-horse race between Yushchenko and whomever the authorities decided to put it. [58] Hence, the core group of Ukrainian youth activists and Serbian visitors concluded that – as Alexander Maric put it – "we need a big organization that will take it one step further".[59]

Unlike in Georgia, anti-regime efforts in Ukraine did not represent a single movement. On the one hand, leaders of youth organizations – mainly groups from Western Ukraine who took

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55 Milenkovic, interview

56 Oleh Kyriyenko, Black Pora activist, telephone interview by author, (January 10, 2008)

57 Demes, interview

58 Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 70

59 Maric, interview

part in the radical anti-Kuchma "For Truth" committee formed in the wake of the Gongadze affair – began planning their own movement in mid-autumn 2003, known as Black Pora, modelled closely on Otpor and Kmara, and devised in collaboration with Serbian and later Georgian activists. The final preparation workshop took place in April 2004 in Novi Sad, Maric's hometown in northern Serbia, attended by 18 youth leaders from various Ukrainian regions, and four senior Otpor veterans. Independently of the Serbian-trained groups – but inspired partly by the OK98 campaign in Slovakia – seasoned civic activists around Vladislav Kaskiv and the "Freedom of Choice" coalition in Kiev began planning their own large-scale project: a broad-based nationwide campaign of coalitions of NGOs entitled "Wave of Freedom" that combined elements of voter education, monitoring and get-out-the-vote. The voter mobilization drive, effectively a social movement of its own, later became known as the Yellow Pora; its "federal" organizational structure, overall moderate or positive campaign messages and an emphasis on professional handling of the media drew significantly on the Slovak experience.[60] Black Pora, by contrast, strictly applied Otpor's grass-root model of a loose horizontal structure based on autonomous cells, focused largely on negative campaigning via stickers, graffiti or satirical street performances, and rarely talked to journalists. As far as the broader public was concerned, activists of both wings were keen to ensure that there is only one "Pora". Institutionally, however, Black and Yellow Pora never fully united. In part, their parallel emergence and campaigning was rooted in the nature of diffusion and the separate influences of Serbian and Slovak examples.

7. Conclusion

This article examined the process of intra-regional diffusion that underpinned civil society mobilization in the recent democratic breakthroughs in the post-Soviet world. It argued for a narrow conception of diffusion in coloured revolutions that focuses on the spread of specific mobilization techniques as opposed to a wholesale "electoral model" of regime change. The adoption of

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60 Vladislav Kaskiv, Iryna Chupryna, Yevhen Zolotariov, "It's Time! Pora and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine", in *Reclaiming Democracy*, ed. Joerg Forbrig, Pavol Demes (Washington: German Marshall Fund, 2007), 137

these techniques by activists in Georgia and Ukraine was facilitated by favourable political opportunity structures at home: an inherently unstable "hybrid regime" and splits in the ruling elite that weakened the incumbent leader and paved the way for a formidable pro-Western opposition to emerge. Diffusion itself was channelled by interpersonal contact between activists and reinforced by their structural equivalence. However, given the structural diversity of recipient countries, actors needed to actively construct cross-national parallels – to realize that they are not only connected but also fundamentally similar, i.e. situated in analogous settings. This perception was, in turn, made possible in part by the similar nature of political opportunity structures in Georgia and Ukraine prior to elections in 2003 and 2004, respectively. Without attribution of similarity, examples of Serbian Otpor or Slovak OK98 campaigns would hardly appear motivational and inspirational to Georgian and Ukrainian activists. Finally, the two brief case studies sought to illustrate how opportunity structures and diffusion affected the dynamics of movement emergence: in Georgia, the formation of an Otpor-style youth movement was swift and straightforward, while in Ukraine, it was longer and multi-layered.

The campaigns of Kmara and Pora no doubt represent an important milestone in the development of post-Soviet civil society, but they should not be interpreted as indicative of its profound transformation and lasting political influence. As this article argued, mobilization in coloured revolution owed much of its dynamism and effectiveness to the permissive nature of domestic political environment and effects of transnational diffusion. The "black-and-white" picture of political struggle in the pre-election period provided a unique opportunity for youth movements and NGOs to step in and influence the course of events. However, in the more complex and nuanced political reality of the post-revolutionary period, neither Pora nor Kmara managed to retain their independence and leverage, let alone membership base: the former attempted to enter party politics but suffered a humiliating defeat in the 2006 parliamentary elections; the latter dissolved and many of its leading activists joined Mr Saakashvili's new administration, which further weakened Georgia's civil society and its position vis-a-vis the

state.[61]   More broadly, despite its proven capacity to mobilize against undemocratic leaders, post-Soviet civil society remains "distinctly weak", lacking the vibrancy, organizational density and depth to serve the array of functions critical to the process of democratic consolidation requires.

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[61] Laurence Broers, "After the 'Revolution': Civil Society and the Challenges of Consolidating Democracy in Georgia", Central Asian Survey, 24(3) 2005: 333-350

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