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Etiology of Colour-Labellings of Political Revolutions in the Eastern Europe

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ABSTRACT: Some of the republics of the former Soviet Union in the Eastern Europe and part of Central Asia are pervaded with spree of revolutions beginning in the 20th to 21st century by the revolutionary movements that forced a change of political leadership through strategic non-violence protests in each of the republics. The revolutions have been labelled "Colour Revolutions". Why are the revolutions named after colours? The name – Colour Revolution- is an oxymoron that sparks cognitive crisis deriving from the complexity of their symbolic incoherence. Though the causes of the revolutions have become a popular knowledge and an area of research interest in the existing literature, the origination of the term "Colour" and its relevance to revolution, a phenomenon that is presumed to be chaotic, has however remained a complex question that remained yet unanswered to many people. Thus, this paper is undertaken to bring to knowledge the scenarios that evoked the coinage of the term and their symbolism to the revolutions. The paper is qualitative research that employed etiological paradigm. The research presupposed that the name emerged from the climatic scenario, the instruments of fights and ideologies that the revolutionary movements represented.

KEYWORDS: Etiology, Colour revolution, Political significance, Overthrow of communism, Creative war tactics

1. INTRODUCTION

Notwithstanding the complexity of scientific description of what Colour is, it can be well understood as a visual perception evoked by reflection of differing qualities of light that help one differentiate one object from another. This may be described in term of hue, saturation and brightness. Other than its differing physical effects, there is an array of emotional impacts, cultural meanings and symbolic interpretation they espouse depending on the aspects of human life that employ them. Regardless of this fact, the significance of colour in its either spiritual, biological or traditional perception takes its bearing from the physical properties that impact various lightening effects on an object.

A new Colour concept emerged at a period close to the end of the 20th century with the revolutionary upheavals that erupted in the countries of the Eastern Europe. Some former republics of the Soviet Union namely Yugoslavia, Armenia, Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan have been subjected to political crises by revolutionary movements that sought political transformation and changes of leadership in protest against economic hardship, election manipulation, corruption, injustice and a lot more by corrupt leaders in their respective countries. These transformations were enforced via political revolutions that are dubbed "Colour Revolutions".

The colour in this context does not signify the traditional physical colour known to knowledge. It rather defines a new concept that is associated to the modality or strategic actions exploited by the revolutionary movements to achieve their ambitious political changes in each of the republics. A technical distinction between the physical colour and the revolution-tagged colour is the naming of the latter after flower or household item. Thus, it is sometimes called Flower Revolution.

Though the colour revolution became a tag associated with the political revolutions in the Eastern Europe since the 20th century, it is not to suggest that such is a phenomenon that is limited to that geographical enclave. So, it is worth noting that the concept has its debut reference traced down to the 18th century French revolution that was sparked up in 1789 which upturned the old regime, ushering in the Republican France sequel to the consummation of the monarchical government during King Louis XVI. The Third Estate nay the common unprivileged French citizen's revolt against monarchical and feudal system in France culminating in the overthrow of the *ancient regime* in 1789 featured some symbols that were precursory of the Colour revolution, though incongruent with the European conceptualised colour revolution bearing on strategies of execution. Variants of semiotic referents such as fasces, wearing of tricolour cockade, dressing in liberty cap or Phrygian cap, and planting of liberty tree were given a watershed prominence at the victory of the revolution. These objects and colours were used to assert public support with the revolutionaries, symbolize the achievement of liberty, announce an establishment of everlasting republic against oppressive regimes, and signify recognition of people's sovereignty.

A more exemplar revolution which took a turn after the Eastern Europe style of Colour Revolution was the Portugal's Carnation revolution of 1974. This was a western revolution that smacked of a more typical revolutionary trends that traversed the Eastern European space. On the 25 April, 1974, the dissident soldiers in the Portuguese colonized African countries carried out a coup d'etat which galvanized civil support that consummated the Portuguese fascist government, leading to the decolonization of Portuguese colonies. The revolution was symbolized with red carnations flaunting on the muzzles of the soldiers' guns. A restaurant worker Celeste Caeiro had adventitiously offered a carnation meant for the decoration of their restaurant to some soldiers as a kind of impulsive gesture to mask his inability to provide the cigarette request by the soldiers. The carnation was put in the muzzle of the guns while other protesters rapturously followed suit by distributing red carnations, putting them on the guns and uniforms of the army. The Red Carnation Revolution was a decolonization insurrection that ended the Portuguese colonial regime in a relatively peaceful manner.

The concept of French revolutionary colour is dissimilar in comparison with the Eastern Europe's deriving from the strategies the revolutionary movements employed to achieve victories. The Colour Revolutions derived its name as a tag that symbolises the peaceful manner through which victories were achieved, a mystic that is ironical of political revolution tactics. Revolution is generally presumed to be a high-risk, deadly, delicate, dangerous, and the most hardline adventure to compelling a utopian political change. It is historical believed that victories in revolutions could only be achieved with heavy prizes of blood spill. The French revolution was a reference situation where the transition from monarchical and feudal system to democratic government was realized via insurrection that claimed several lives including that of King Loius XVI of France.

Colour Revolution has upended this fixed mentality by creating a new revolutionary phenomenon. Thus, this paper is undertaking to trace the root of the new revolutionary concept namely Colour Revolution, commonly associated with the hitherto Soviet republics, aiming to give a clear understanding of why the revolutions are named after Colours. Though the primary focus here is not on the causes of the revolution, a brief account of the causes is essential to give a prelude to the major subject.

2. CATALYSTS OF THE COLOUR REVOLUTIONS

The deluge of revolutions that swept away some regimes through Colour Revolutions is an assertion of a Newton's law: "action begets reactions".

Down the history, the causes of Colour Revolutions are invariably relational in that, the Revolutionary Movement's escapades of overthrowing a government are commonly engineered by government's anti-people policies, ineptitude, corruption, economic hardship, despotism, authoritarianism and all sorts of recklessness in governance. In some other instances, the attitude of dehumanizing the masses vis-a-viz suppression of civil rights, high scale legal injustices, election manipulation, and creation of class and segregation of classless society instigated anti-government rebellion.

Slobodan Milosevich exemplified this assertion on the heels of his despotic ruling as a Serbian President in the 1990s. His regime was allegedly characterized with increasing rate of unemployment at an index of 50 percent before 1996, subjecting the masses to impoverishment under economic hardship. Milosevich gave a preference to exploiting national resources to financing unwarranted several wars with Croatia and Bosnia with blatant disregard for the strangling economic situation of the country which, in the course, plunged the masses into economic cul-de-sac. The potency of civil reaction was at the peak in 1996 at the instance of the municipal elections in Serbia. This tendency for revolutionary action was spiked into reality by Milosevich's refusal to certify the political opposition candidates whom the municipal election favoured. His oppressive and dictatorial behaviour instigated massive resentment that fuelled what is known as Caterpillar Revolution in Serbia.

Georgia's first bloodless revolution was not largely different in comparison. Eduard Shevardnadze was another communist President who was personalized with corruption and kleptocratic governance, whose regime was characterized with gloomy economic prospect, and electoral rigging. The Georgia's President consummated the overbearing resilience of the Georgians that have lasted through the authoritarian regime of his predecessor Zviad Gamasakhurdia who was ousted in a coup d'etat within one year of his government. Under Shevardnadze, Georgia was thrown into instability, poverty and economic stagnation from his inability to curtail separatist movement of Abkhazia and South-Ossetia. An election for Georgian Parliament was held in November, 2003, and which was to set a groundwork that would determine the outcome of the next presidential election which was to be held in 2005. The result of the election which favoured the President's party was alleged to have been rigged by the party.

The Czechoslovakia Velvet Revolution was not divergent in the excuses that informed the revolution that consummated the 40-year-old Soviet backed communist rule in the country. Little would anyone had thought, that the people have been enlightened and acquainted with the Western world democratic values that concede to the people freedom of speech, free economy, political sense of belongings, civil rights and cultural liberalism. In the contrast, Czechoslovakians have been under the siege of the communist centrally planned economy that led to the people's impoverishment, and centralized political system that repressed their civil rights and political inclusiveness. The authoritarian regime of Gustav Husak that ousted Alexander Dubcek's Prague Spring liberal government was a bad omen of perpetuity of communist repression, and a big factor that spiked revolutionaries' actions that informed the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

The wave of the revolution in the Eastern Europe did not leave Armenia alone with the revolution that was tagged Velvet or Gentle in 2008. The country governance has been stigmatized with poor economy, high level of corruption, authoritarianism, electoral frauds, constitution manipulations and abuse of office among others.

Kyrgyzstan Tulip revolution was no different the reasons that sparked up resentment against President Askar Akayev leading to the 2005 revolution. If not even worse than the previous cases, Askar's government-led was found inescapable of tons of accusations that could not have deserved anything other than political revolution against the regime. Askar practiced what could be described as a dynasty or family government leaving the economy of the country in the hands of his cohorts and family thus plunging the masses into widespread poverty. Complicating the allegations against his government was the repression and arrest of political dissidents, electoral fraud, particularly in the parliamentary election of 2005, clandestine violation of human rights, autocracy, regional bias, and manipulation of constitution in order to extend his tenure in office.

Viktor Yanukovich also experienced the revolutionary waves in Ukraine 2004 Orange Revolution, having been accused of electoral fraud during the 2004 presidential election whose result came out in his favour. The International Electoral Observers reported various significant election frauds that declared him a winner. Though, the cause could be more far traced to political undertone and divergence of geopolitical interest of the Ukrainians people and Russian government which Yanukovich presumably represent.

3. SCENARIOS OF THE REVOLUTIONS' COLOUR LABELLING

Czechoslovakian Velvet (1989)

Students gathered en masse in Prague in protest against the communist regime in a non-violent protest to fight for academic freedom, gradually joined by actors and other groups of the citizens that eventually toppled the government. Despite the police repressions, protest spread exponentially, theater workers went on strike, converting their stages to forums for public discussion and later grew to include citizens from all works of life. The revolution set a foundation for what is known as velvet divorce – the split of Czechoslovakia into two separate nations of Czech Republic and Slovak Republic – and a transition from the communist and totalitarian regime to capitalist and democratic nations.

The revolution was dubbed Velvet by a Czech dissident, a journalist and later Czechoslovakian Ambassador to the US, Rita Klimova[1] [2] . The credit of the name was given to her by the European Parliament Directorate-General for Translation. The name signifies the idea that the revolution was non-violent, though there were suppression of the protest by the security agencies, arrests, beating and uses of water cannon on the protesters. The revolution is alternatively referred to as Gentle Revolution, bearing on the peaceful manner it was coordinated and achieved. Velvet revolution was later named Sametova Revoluce by Czechs and Nezna Revolucia by Slovaks after the velvet divorce.

Yugoslavia's Bulldozer (2000)

Slobodan Milosevich, the incumbent President of Yugoslavia triggered the protest, civil disobedience and chaotic situations that culminated in Bulldozer Revolution by his attempt to rig the country's presidential election in 2000. Hundreds of thousands of protesters that were made up of workers and youth bombarded the national parliament building and the State Television station at Belgrade for mass action.

At some point during the protest, Ljubisav Dokic, also known as Joe, an engineering vehicle operator, turned on the engine of his wheel loader, drove through the police and security lines and wrecked a Belgrade building which was the main office of the Radio Television of Serbia, serving as the main propaganda office of Slobodan Milosevic.

Though the naming of the equipment as a bulldozer is a misnomer, its appropriateness to the scenario cannot be faulted hinging on a fact that both equipment share some similar features that perform same duties. Bulldozer has a front blade and wheel loader, a bucket or front-mounted attachment that looks almost exactly like front blade, making both the equipment capable of conveniently destroying concrete structures. Except the professional or skilled technicians in the construction field, differentiating between a bulldozer and wheel loader by name could be a task. Thus, the generic identity for such similar equipment to a layman could not have been anything else than bulldozer.

Georgian Rose (2003)

"Instead of bullet, we will throw rose to our enemies". This is a quote credited to Zviad Gamskhurdia, the first democratically elected Georgian President, during one of his addresses in a public gathering. Could this have been a reference that inspired the dubbing of Georgian revolution as "Rose?". It was very much likely. The name Rose was spurred as a situational response to an overwhelming political stance that demands decisive action rather than preplanned tactics to fight for political freedom by the Georgian dissidents. Their choice of weapon on the front lines was the flowers which they handed out to soldiers confronting the crowd, possibly to signal an appeal that the revolutionaries are not violent and not armed and so deserve humane treatment from the Georgian soldiers that were deployed to enforce suppression of protestors. Natia Zambakhidze, a Journalist at Rustavi TV says, to counter the rescue call by Shevardnadze declaring that a violent coup taking place, she reacted to the statement that "I don't think

[1] Time Magazine, November 16, 2019

[2] Rita Klimova; Czechoslovakia Ambassador to US. L.A. Times Archives, Jan. 1, 1994

it was a coup. The people were not armed. They were armed with flower…, if we should call it something, it was a flower revolution, a rose revolution because there were roses in their hands". So, the contradiction between the reality and political maneuvering gave rise to the name.

In one of the dramatic situations, the woman asked the would-be successor of Shvadnaze, Mikhail Saakashvili on live from parliament building whether the revolution was rose. His response was "yes, it was a rose revolution". During another interview on CNN, Saakashvili maintained that the revolution was rose, and it went much wider.

Georgia had Rustavi-2 TV which powerfully shaped public opinion being a non-state-controlled television. Media played an important role, especially Rustavi-2, being the most influential media that supported revolutionary forces (Nino Machurishvili, 2018, 161).

Ukrainian Orange (2004)

Ukraine witnessed a revolution that ousted a Russian-backed Ukrainian President, Viktor Yanukovich resulting from the allegation of electoral fraud in which he was declared the winner in the presidential run-off election in 2004. The revolution has been dubbed Orange Revolution; 'Orange' being adopted as the Viktor Yushchenko's election campaign colour[3]. Orange-clad demonstrators gathered in the Independence Square in Kyiv in Nov. 22, 2004 to start protest. Viktor Yushchenko belonged to "Our Ukraine" political party, a broad-based democratic coalition. The ideology is National democracy. The flag is dominant orange colour forming the background though, having a mix of yellow and blue colour design at the center of it and inscription "Nasha Ukraina" – Our Ukraine" in blue colour close down to the edge of the flag. Ukraine flag colour is yellow and blue[4] which is a symbol of freedom and independence. Party colour represents political ideology that can appeal to voters. Perception that can evoke emotions of the electorates. Orange revolution was made by protesters wearing orange clothing and waving the flags.

Kyrgyztan Tulip (2005)

Kyrgyzstan revolution was one of such a milestone in the post-Soviet republics which consummated the communist era in the Asian region, known as the Tulip Revolution. The occurrence generated its name possibly because of the country's legacy wherein Tulip is considered as the country's national flower. According to Yilmaz Bingol, the revolution was sometimes later named "yellow" and once again later, Lemon. Whichever the case, Tulip remains the globally acknowledged designation of the revolution because there are some other agricultural revolutions (not political) that are dubbed Yellow or Lemon. Tulip is a boubous herbal flower type of Lily family that blooms in the spring, mostly found in Asia and Turkey. The flower is the Czechoslovakian national flower which symbolizes the country's national identity, its natural beauty, values and pride. Tulip is historically believed to have originated from Asian part of the world of which Kyrgyzstan belong. Tulip has been culturally and historically been identifies as the country's national flower which typifies the national emblem that is designed by nature with the aesthetic appeal of the country's landscape. Forming an important aspect of horticultural trade and tourism, the natural beautiful appeal of the flower conjured a unique attraction to visitors reflecting not only a national pride of beauty but also economic value. The blooming of the flower in the spring has been associated with renewal and freshness, thus aligning with the historical transformations including the Tulip revolution. Adoption of Tulip as a designated identity for Kyrgyzstan revolution is suggestive of newness, renewal and abundance that the flower symbolizes to the nation. That is, a transformation from the authoritarian communist regime to a 'new' democratic one that promises 'abundance'.

Armenian Velvet (2018)

Movement leader against Armenia's president Nikol Pashinyan dubbed the revolution 'Velvet' suggesting that it would be peaceful[5]. Miriam and Elspeth referenced the humorous nonviolent tactics of the protesters who held their hands up to claim that they were peaceful protesters whose hands there are no stone, no hate, no aggressiveness but love, respect and light only[6]

The naming of the revolution was suggested to have been associated with the Czechoslovakian Velvet revolution which was typical of the peaceful manner in which it was carried out. Presumably, the dramatic peaceful manner in which the Czechoslovakian revolution victory was achieved inspired the adoption of the same strategy and name for the Armenian revolution. But then, what relevance could velvet have had that made it a reference of significance in the revolution? The protest was not embellished the flaunting of velvet as in the case of "rose" or wavering of flags in Ukrainian scenario. Nikol Pashinyan was more likely to have figuratively likened the revolution to velvet inspired by the texture and a soft touch feeling that velvet gives. Velvet is a type of material that is sleek, gentle, and soft in nature. In essence, the name has its origin from a metaphorical description of the revolution based on the peaceful manner it was conducted soft way the victory was achieved.

[3] The Orange revolution in Ukraine by Taras Mazyar, July 2005.; Greg Satell, March 30, 2025. Greg satell.medium.com

[4] The Orange Revolution, 2004. Peterson Institute for International Economic. Pp. 175 - 200

[5] Britannica. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Nikol-Pashinyan; BBC, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-43852822; Armenia's Velvet Revolution, New Colors and Vibes in Country's politics and society by Lilit Makunts on Minds of the Movement, an ICNC blog on the people and power of civil resistance.

[6] Armenis's Velvet Revolution by Miriam Lanskoy and Elspeth Suthers, p.93

4. CONCLUSION

Colours are associated with many aspects of human living. They have subjective meanings that can be defined around biological, cultural, artistic or even spiritual premises. While they are known for creating physical, psychological or emotional appeals, variants in their meaning speak volumes depending on the culture or circumstances that surround the usage. For instance, RED has no static symbolic meaning because its interpretation will be guided by the purpose and the climatic scenario that wrap it. Biologically, it symbolizes 'danger', but can as well psychologically signify 'love'. The same 'Red' has various symbolic meanings in different cultures. In Europe, it may symbolize 'life' but 'horror' in Africa.

In other way, colour has its political dimensions where it either represents political ideology, partisan party identity or a movement ideology. It also has national and historical values that define the people's identity, their national landscape, and their strength. All of the aspects of colour symbols are wrapped up in what culminated into Colour Revolutions; the demonstration of party flags and wearing of clothing having a mix of party and national flag colour of Ukraine in the case of Orange Revolution, Tulip, representing the national flower of Kyrgyzstan in the case of Tulip revolution, and Velvet which psychologically appeals 'peaceable' in the case of Armenia. Nevertheless, Colour Revolutions, synonymously called Flower Revolutions are primarily politically-based in that the revolutions smacked of political parties and movements agenda for political transformations. The goals transcend partisan political interests. Even, when that subsists, it is largely pivoted on overall citizens' desire for change.

The movement came in a dynamic that suspended the consciousness of any physical appeal or traditional interpretation that visual colours may impact. Colours came into the picture of revolution as a subtle strategy to fight a war without firing a bullet; the rationale which in some occasions are inspired by instincts rather than premeditated plans. Colour revolutions demonstrated the strength of the masses in achieving a desire for change, and to resist any restraint to achieving their goal when they are united in purpose. They are dangerous and risky colourful gatherings that are organized as peaceful but decisive actions to enforce people's will to achieving political freedom and transformation as the cases may be. Colour revolutions is thus, a dynamic shift from the conservative belief, that political power shift can only be achieved by the popular masses through bloody confrontations. It is suggested that, the approach has become an intelligent precedence for aggrieved patriotic masses to coordinate their grievances against underserved political leadership.

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