

Making the Future Inevitable: Legitimizing, Naturalizing, and Stabilizing

The Transition in Estonia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan

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Introduction

Estonia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan are undergoing transitions from a common Soviet past to a future of liberal market capitalism. Despite the fact that each country has varying levels of economic hardship, none of them have adopted policies to reverse the transition, or even to modify it significantly. Despite the fact that there are different levels of economic hardship in each country, each government, whether a succession of them in Estonia, three in Ukraine, or just one in Uzbekistan, have stayed the transitional course. The obvious explanation for this transitional stability would be that the transition has been legitimized; through deliberative debate liberal market capitalism has been chosen over its rivals. But there is an equally compelling, and contrary, alternative explanation for the observed stability: the transition to liberal market capitalism has been naturalized; through a sociopolitical process that ridicules the past, accepts the future as inevitable, and accepts the costs as inherent to the process, liberal market capitalism becomes the only thinkable alternative by default, not debate.

Evidence from 36 focus groups conducted in 1996-97 shows that the transition in Estonia is stabilized by both legitimization and naturalization. The transition in Uzbekistan is mostly naturalized, and the one in Ukraine is stabilized by

neither. Another alternative explanation for transitional stability in the former Soviet space is identity politics, that is, the relationship between the Russians living in the near abroad and their titular hosts. The argument here is, to put it simply, the more the worse. The more Russians in a former Soviet republic, the more vexed interethnic relations and the more weight the Soviet socialist legacy brings to bear on the transition. The findings here do not support these hypotheses. Instead, in Estonia and Uzbekistan Russians are developing a new hyphenated identity that places them closer to their titular neighbors and farther away from Moscow. This stabilizes the transition in both those countries. In Ukraine, on the other hand, Russian identification of themselves as already very similar to Ukrainians makes their political cooperation against the transition more likely.

The collapse of the Soviet Union set in motion not only the appearance of fifteen new sovereign states, but also the political and social re-ordering of their societies. While at first the puzzle may have been discerning the direction each country would follow, today the puzzle is how these societies are managing to cope with the intense social dislocation associated with the transition to the western liberal capitalist future. In the apparent conflict between the socialist past and the liberal capitalist future, it appears as if the latter is becoming the new social consensus. If this new ideological configuration establishes itself, one might expect that observers would say that the governments pursuing these policies of

marketization and liberalization have succeeded in gaining social and political legitimacy. But what kind of legitimacy is it that relies on a politics of one alternative, a political arena where only an idealized Western capitalist future is considered to be an authorized contestant? To a large extent, politics itself is absent on the largest question of the day.¹ A stigmatized and discredited socialist past is the only competitor to the glorious, and seemingly foreordained future. In other words, has the future really been legitimized, or has it been merely naturalized, accepted as inevitable due to the absence of alternatives? Have alternatives to liberal capitalism been rejected after deliberative democratic reflection, or has the alternative of liberal capitalism come to be understood as inevitable and unavoidable, without any serious consideration of its alternatives? Legitimization and naturalization are two different, though not exclusive, ways to stabilize the transition, but they are not the same social and political phenomena. The former implies an act of democratic affirmation, the latter acquiescence to unequal power.

The relationship between legitimacy, naturalization, and identity

A successful transition to liberal market capitalism is commonly thought to be more likely if a country's economic policies yield some general rewards and if the government is buttressed by democratic legitimacy. In this article, on the contrary, I suggest that the prospects for transitional stability, for maintaining the course

¹ I am indebted to conversations with Nilufer Gole on how absent alternatives

toward liberal market capitalism, are dependent not only, or even at times at all, on the legitimization of the future, but on its naturalization. The latter refers to processes that appear to society to be part of Nature, much as the wind, weather, tides, seasons, and rotation of the earth around the sun. In this sense, the future of liberal market capitalism is as natural, as unquestioned, as foreordained, as the progression of time itself. Moreover, economic performance is not directly correlated with prospects for transitional success. Finally, the ethnic identities of Russians living in these post-Soviet countries are an important part of any calculation of the transition's probability of success.

The relationship between legitimacy and naturalization

Normative theorists of democracy like Robert Dahl, and scholars of democratization, like Adam Pzeworski, Seymour Lipset, and Juan Linz, have argued that the procedures of democracy are sufficient to imbue governments and their policies with legitimacy. Being a democracy is a sufficient condition for legitimacy. Dahl's conceptualization of democracy includes **both** contestation and inclusiveness.² If the transitional courses are to be democratically legitimate, there should be evidence of both debates and deliberations in which the liberal market future is contested with some alternative(s) and these deliberations should not

necessarily constrict the boundaries of politics.

² For the definition, see Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

exclude any member of the polity interested in the outcome of the contest. Such a rendering of the hypothesis implies there can be no genuine contestation if there is no competitor to a dominant ideology. If there is majority or unanimous support for any position that is ultimately hegemonic, then it could be said that the issue has already been democratically deliberated and resolved. The absence of contestation in such a case would not signify illegitimacy. Dahl aptly calls political systems where there is no contestation over alternatives “inclusive hegemonies.”³ Though he does not articulate the category in these terms, Dahl’s hegemony could refer to the predominance of a particular consensual understanding of a certain reality, such as liberal market capitalism. Whether or not such hegemony is compatible with any definition of democracy turns on whether or not an inclusive deliberative process accompanied popular acceptance of this single future. To the extent that it is a deliberative choice, support for a single alternative should not be treated as evidence of truncated politics, or a lack of contestation.

The absence of an alternative contradicts the definition of democratic legitimacy. Juan Linz writes that legitimacy is the belief that, in spite of shortcomings and failures, existing political institutions are better than “any others that might be established....”⁴ The critical wording here is “that might be established.”

³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁴ Juan Linz, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes. Crisis, Breakdown and Reequilibration* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

It is not obvious that failing to entertain an alternative future as feasible is sufficient to legitimize the chosen course. If democracy cannot exist in the absence of contestation, can legitimacy be established without contested choices? Max Weber provides a most appropriate formulation of this situation, pointing out that “people may submit (to authority) from...helplessness because there is no acceptable alternative...”⁵ But bowing before circumstance is clearly not as legitimizing as the selection of an alternative because of its relatively desirable features. Przeworski indirectly supports this position by arguing that regimes lose legitimacy only if there is an acceptable alternative. It is a short, and logical, step to then argue that a regime cannot even gain legitimacy unless it has bested some acceptable alternative in some deliberative competitive fashion. Przeworski goes on to say that absent an alternative, “nothing much” happens politically to threaten a sitting regime. This is the politics of naturalization, and it violates the prevailing definition of both legitimacy and democracy. The step that Przeworski does not take, but that is taken by critical theorists of democracy, is to argue that the absence of an alternative may substitute for legitimization in stabilizing a political order.⁶

⁵ Quoted by Adam Przeworski, “Problems in the Study of transition to Democracy,” in Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter and Laurence Whitehead, eds. *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), p. 51.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Before presenting how naturalization stabilizes a polity without the advantage of deliberative legitimacy, it is worth recalling the work of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, in which they made a virtue out of the absence of deliberative legitimacy. Almond and Verba observed some 35 years ago that democracies are “more stable and successful” the more truncated their politics, i.e, the less inclusive the politics. This was presented as an empirical observation of “the realities of political life,” not a normative prescription.⁷ Almond and Verba’s theorization of a truncated democratic politics is relevant to understanding the more general issue of how political orders can be stable even in the absence of deliberative legitimacy. While not concerned with naturalization per se,⁸ Almond and Verba’s work offers a particular appreciation of the work of critical social theorists who share the view that democratic politics empirically is neither inclusive, contested, nor deliberatively legitimate. One defining difference between Almond and Verba’s description of democratic politics and naturalization is that debate over alternatives does take place in their world, albeit with limited inclusiveness; in the world of naturalized

⁷ Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 475. I thank an anonymous reviewer for suggesting I go back to this classic work. John Gaventa provides a useful critical review of the political science literature on why limited participation is characteristic of democratic life in *Power and Powerlessness. Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 3-32.

⁸ Though it could have been, had it explored how citizens came to accept limits on contestation and inclusion as normal in democracies.

governance, there is no debate, even among elites, about many apparently fundamental issues.

One important commonality between Almond and Verba and critical social theorists is their observation that “false consciousness” helps account for political stability. The former point out the importance of British and American popular beliefs in personal political efficacy and influence, combined with personal political passivity and apathy and elite beliefs that the citizenry might be politically influential. These three elements constitute the “democratic myth.”⁹ Among critical theorists it is the mass belief that present-day realities are natural and normal that helps account for that same level of stability. The only difference is that normative critical theorists want to disrupt that comfortable stability, while Almond and Verba did not declaim it.

One could argue that the crucial difference between liberal democratic transition theorists who expect deliberative legitimacy to be associated with democratic stability and success, and those who understand legitimacy as naturalization is the assumption by the latter that strategies of legitimization are always about domination and power, not rational deliberative discourse. Max Weber related legitimacy explicitly to domination, foreshadowing the critiques of liberal democracy that were to arise from the Frankfurt school and contemporary critical

⁹ Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, pp. 479-86.

social theorists. Weber argued that there were three “legitimations of domination.” The first was the habitualized authority of the past embodied in patriarchies; the second was charismatic authority; and the last was “domination by virtue of legality,” or the belief in the validity of rules and laws.¹⁰ None of these forms of legitimization necessarily includes either contestation or inclusiveness; instead they are all mechanisms by which citizens come to believe that their own subordination to the state, its government, and its policies, is natural and normal, something that requires no explanation. Indeed, one could say that naturalization, as conceptualized here, and elucidated in the empirical materials from the three post-Soviet republics under consideration, includes elements from each of the Weber’s three forms of domination.

Not inconsistent with either Weber or Almond and Verba is more recent theorizing about the possibility that political order and stability in democracies rests not on democratic consent, but rather on naturalized practice.¹¹ First, from the liberal

¹⁰ H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, ed. *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), “Politics as a Vocation,” pp. 78-79.

¹¹ Of course, naturalization goes on in all kinds of polities, including authoritarian ones. But the fact that the latter rely so much more on coercion, albeit not as much as is commonly believed, makes authoritarian regimes less interesting, theoretically. The main target of critical social theory is the democracy, the presumed hardest case to which non-deliberative legitimization would apply. So, while the expectation would be that Soviet rule would be naturalized, a form of uncontested legitimization there does not seem as surprising as in France, Britain, or the United States. Naturalization occurs in all polities, and it is important as a source of stability in all polities, but its magnitude differs, according to whether it is being crowded out by

end of social theory, Jurgen Habermas suggested that democracy was not a matter of reasoned consent, because the distribution of power within society made it impossible for the kind of “communicative rationality” necessary for truly democratic deliberation to occur. His solution was the creation of an “ideal speech situation” where all signifiers of power are absent, and communication is stripped of its capacity to reproduce power hierarchies.¹² A key part of Habermas’s reasoning is, however, fully consistent with the work of Robert Dahl, viz., that legitimization occurs through inclusive contestation, or fair deliberation.

This critical and liberal understanding of democracy and its legitimization is shared by other contemporary political theorists. Jane Mansbridge, for example, reflects a broad consensus when she writes of the impossibility of either democracy or “deliberative legitimacy” in the presence of differentially empowered citizens.¹³ The key differences among these theorists is not over whether or not

either brute force or deliberative legitimacy. Both Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, for example, concentrate their critique of naturalizing and normalizing practices on modern France. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. An Introduction, Volume I* (New York: Vintage, 1978) and Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture*, trans. Richard Nice, (London: Sage, 1990).

¹² Jurgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, trans. T.A. McCarthy, vol. 1: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984).

¹³ Jane Mansbridge, “Using Power/Fighting Power: The Polity,” in Seyla Benhabib, ed. *Democracy and Difference. Contesting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 53-57. See also Seyla Benhabib, “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,” in Benhabib, *Democracy and Difference*, esp. 69-74; Joshua Cohen, “Deliberation and Democratic Legitimacy,” in

democracies are legitimized according to their own normative standards; they clearly cannot pass that test. Instead, the ongoing debates are over how to overcome the coercion inherent in any democracy. Habermas has offered institutionalized procedures to promote “communicative rationality”, Mansbridge “protected enclaves” of deliberation, Benhabib a “plurality of modes of association” and Iris Marion Young a “communicative democracy.”¹⁴ . In fact, what Habermas, Mansbridge, Benhabib, Young, and other critical democratic theorists call for is very similar to what Almond and Verba decry, “a completely activist political culture...a utopian ideal.”¹⁵

Finally, post-modern critical theory has attacked the very notion that democracy anywhere could be understood absent modes of domination. Adorno and Horkheimer, late of the Frankfurt school, argued that modernity, understood as the Enlightenment’s commitment to rationality, predictability, categorization, homogeneity,

Alan Hamlin and Pilip Pettit, eds. *The Good Polity: Normative Analysis of the State* (London: Blackwell, 1989); Benjamin Barber, *Strong Democracy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 179-85; Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in Craig Calhoun, ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992); and Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*; Mansbridge, “Using Power;” Benhabib, “Toward a Deliberative Model of Democratic Legitimacy,” and Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). It should be apparent that critical democratic theorists do not believe democracies exist in the world, at least according to their own normative standards. However, democracy does exist within polities, and certainly it is possible, and necessary, to compare the “amount” of democracy that exists in the population of polities.

and order, prevented the establishment of any true democracy; instead, all governments resorted to various means of control.¹⁶ Pierre Bourdieu elaborated a theory of social practice that assumed, and to some degree empirically demonstrated, that citizens are prisoners of daily social practices which unreflectively reproduce the distribution of power that sustains the prevailing social structure of domination.¹⁷ And Michel Foucault tried to demonstrate that prevailing ideas about incarceration of the convicted, mentally defective, and sexually deviant were all just effective state instruments to restore normalcy to society, to police the boundaries of the natural.¹⁸

The full range of theoretical positions discussed in this article is in Figure 1.

¹⁵ Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, p. 476.

¹⁶ Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1993)

¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990; and Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production. Essays on Art and Literature*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, (New York: Vintage, 1975); *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* trans. Alan Sheridan, (New York: Vintage, 1979); *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in an Age of Reason*, trans. R. Howard, (New York: Vintage, 1973); and *The History of Sexuality*.

Figure 1

Four Forms of Political Stability

Types of Legitimacy

Liberal Deliberative *Naturalized Dominance*

Normal

Dahl

Weber

Types

Almond/Verba

Of

Theory

Critical

Habermas

Bourdieu

In short, liberal democratization theorists, such as Dahl, observe that democracies are legitimate when there is inclusive contestation. Habermas and other critical democratic theorists agree, but criticize the idea that democratic states have ever established the kind of public space that would ever permit inclusive contestation, and offer a range of solutions to the fatal contradiction. Almond and Verba observed that democracies are most stable when the legitimizing mechanisms identified by Dahl, et.al., are absent. Weber observed that legitimization reproduces the domination of the rulers over the citizenry. Bourdieu and many

critical social theorists have made the same observation, but decry it, and offer strategies for resistance.¹⁹

Before it is possible to investigate empirically whether deliberative legitimization or naturalization is occurring in the three former Soviet republics of interest here, it is necessary to elaborate more on what naturalization is, what it does, and how it works.

Naturalization is a social process often regarded as a political strategy.²⁰ One reason it so often appears as an intentional strategy to make some realities more thinkable than others is because of the power of the state and its educational system in the production of citizens. But one must also pay attention to the myriad daily social practices that constitute the average citizen's mundane existence. For example, which naturalizes Estonian dominance more: the requirement to learn Estonian in public school in Tallinn, or the fact that merchants in Tallinn begin every

¹⁹ Put simply, the overarching aim of critical theory is to reveal hidden means of domination, such as naturalization, and then offer strategies of resistance. See Craig Calhoun, *Critical Social Theory. Culture, History, and the Challenge of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995); Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in Craig Calhoun, ed. *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992).

²⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, for example, identifies the naturalizing effects of daily social practice in fine-grained detail, but ultimately identifies the state and its powerful class supporters as the "causes" of naturalizing practices. See *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, for example.

conversation in the Estonian language?²¹ The answer is not so important to the contents of this article, but one can imagine what would happen if a state propagated a version of naturalized reality, call it communism, but it was not reproduced in the daily practices of the citizenry? Alternatively, what would happen if the citizenry not only did not engage in daily social conduct reproductive of the state's project, and instead enacted a set of daily practices contrary to the state's project, call it national identity? One can hypothesize that the unconscious daily practices of individuals are both necessary and sufficient to normalize reality, while the state strategy is probably neither necessary, nor sufficient, but hardly irrelevant to a satisfactory account of political stability in that society.

The reality being normalized in the cases here is liberal market capitalism. How does this alternative become the presumptive future? The answer lies in each country's particular context, but some general observations can be made about the process of naturalization. Perhaps some examples might make the process more tangible. Slavery was normal until the 19th century; until the second half of the 20th century it was natural that African-Americans were considered unworthy of full

²¹ On the power of this simple language exchange, see David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation. The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 145. On the power of mundane daily social practices to reproduce a naturalized structure of order, see:). Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Anthony Giddens, *The Nation-State*

citizenship in the United States; marriage between gay and lesbian partners remains unnatural to most Americans; poverty was natural until late 18th century England; and being the world's superpower is natural to Americans.

To the credit of those who see naturalization as a strategy, it is hard to find a case of de/naturalization that was not accompanied by some large shift of interests and power against the naturalized reality. So, merchant capital in 19th century northern America helped make slavery unnatural; New Deal Democrats looking for votes made civil rights for African-Americans normal; believers adhering to God's Word make both gay marriage; British industrial capital in the late 18th century made poverty a problem; and the internationalist foreign policy coalition in postwar America makes superpower status for the United States a barely questioned feature of American identity. The point here is that there are certain settled truths that are rarely questioned. At the same time, it is obvious that they can be subverted, as well, slavery being only one example. While all of these examples involve centuries-old naturalizations that get de-naturalized, or contested, over decades and centuries, the case of the transitions in Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Estonia, and indeed, of the entire post-Soviet and post-socialist space is the rapidity

and Violence, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985); and Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (Chichester, Sussex, England: Ellis Horwood, 1985).

of the naturalization of a single future: liberal market capitalism.²² What accounts for this difference, as will become clear in the empirical pages of this essay, is the complete and utter collapse of the past, the socialist alternative represented by the Soviet Union. There is no alternative because the alternative has been delegitimized, albeit to varying degrees in each post-Soviet state. And this is a big part of the story told in this article. Social theorists would suggest that alternatives to the present are delegitimized through the operation of the power of present realities. So, at the macrolevel, economic and political power is so arranged as to render consideration of alternative arrangements fanciful. And at the microlevel, the individual would never consider raising any alternative, as she never hears it being treated seriously, and so it is not a natural part of conversation. In this way naturalization operates as a social structure that impedes public deliberation of alternatives to the dominant present. It is not the purpose of this article to

²² The process of naturalization is at work not only within the three countries of interest here. Adam Przeworski elaborates on the case of Poland, where there was a consensus about becoming a “normal” economy, the only discussion being how “social” to make the market, i.e., how much government expenditure should be directed toward cushioning the blow of the transition. See Adam Przeworski, “Economic reforms, public opinion, and political institutions: Poland in Eastern European perspective,” in Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira, Jose Maria Maravall, and Adam Przeworski, eds. *Economic Reforms in New Democracies: A Social-Democratic Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 142. An article in the Solidarity daily newspaper during the debate about finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz’s liberalizing reform program had a revealing title: “The Program Has Only One Virture: No Sensible Alternatives.” In Pereira, Maravall, and Przeworski, *Economic Reforms in New Democracies*, p. 149.

adumbrate a general theory of naturalization, which would require a specification of precise mechanisms of emergence, reproduction, and change across time and space. Instead, I would suggest the obvious mechanism for the truncated politics of these three countries—the failure of the Soviet project and the availability of the West as the future. The collapse of socialism pushed post-Soviets to abandon their discredited past while simultaneously the West pulled political and economic elites into the dominant global discourse of liberal market capitalism. But clearly this is a unique concatenation of circumstances.

At the individual level naturalization may operate through many micro-mechanisms. I have mentioned the futility of challenging the power wielded by the state and economic elites and the futility of raising in conversation an alternative almost all think impossible. But the precise operation of naturalization is dependent on temporal, historical, and individual context. In the three cases of interest here, each individual has witnessed the collapse and humiliation of its previous reality—the Soviet Union, socialism, the socialist commonwealth. This is a very effective means for making that alternative unavailable, inaccessible, illegitimate to offer in debate. It is hard to think of any alternatives that do not entail, even partially, that discarded experience.

If liberal market capitalism is the naturalized present and future in Estonia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, there should be evidence that the Soviet past is an

illegitimate source of the future, that the West is the inevitable future, and that the misery of the transition is a necessary part of reaching that unavoidable outcome. Moreover, there should not be discussions of the relative merits of capitalism and socialism; the capitalist future should not be legitimized through deliberations, but only naturalized through invocation.

The connection between Russian identity and transitional prospects

Difference is the enemy of naturalization. To the extent that individuals identify themselves as being outside the mainstream, they are a danger to the processes of naturalization that depend on homogenizing all difference, guaranteeing a unified authority. Naturalization of the transition requires either that this process is distributed in some normal fashion across the population, or at least is not so situated as to reinforce the cleavages of identity politics. For example, if Estonians and Russians overwhelmingly supported the transition, and yet Russians understood themselves as outside the Estonian identity project, as Other to the “real” Estonians, the transition to that commonly supported future is somewhat jeopardized. Clearly, the most promising circumstances for transitional stability are those under which Russians to begin to think of themselves as part of the common Estonian identity project, and so be part of the joint naturalization/legitimization of the future.

But a common identity need not always augur well for the transition. If we assume that Russians and Ukrainians are already very close along some measure of identity, then the transition will be even more seriously jeopardized if it has been neither naturalized nor legitimized, since interethnic obstacles to cooperation against the transition would be absent. It would be better for the future of capitalism if instead Ukrainians and Russians had identities that placed them at loggerheads.

Identity is not as significant an issue where the transition is being legitimized through deliberative procedures. If Russians think of themselves as outside the Estonian identity project, and yet they support the transition, it is hard to imagine they would abandon their support for the future they have chosen only because they are at odds with Estonians. But identity and legitimacy do become a reinforcing combination if Russians oppose the transition, and are marginalized. The transition will be in greater jeopardy under such circumstances.

The connection between naturalization of the transition and identity is not a necessary part of a general theory of naturalization and legitimacy, but is very important in post-Soviet cases because of the presence of the Russian diaspora. To the extent that Russian identities in the near broad are becoming different from Russians in the homeland and more like their titular governors, there will be less interethnic conflict between Russians, Estonians, Uzbeks, and Ukrainians. This means there will be a greater potential for the naturalization of whatever policy is on

offer. To the extent this identity transformation is not occurring, or there is trans-ethnonational opposition to the transition, there will be reduced prospects for naturalization, and greater possibility of opposition to the Transition. The evolution of Russian identity toward the titular in effect reduces the barriers to political collaboration either in support of, or opposition to, the Transition.

In sum, empirically speaking, from the point of view of critical social theory, naturalization legitimizes the state, government, and its policies, but it is neither democratic nor legitimate. From the perspective of liberal democratic theorists such as Robert Dahl, naturalization is fundamentally anti-democratic, and hence, illegitimate. In this paper, these two contrary theories of political stability are tested in Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Estonia. To the extent that citizens discuss and reject alternative futures to liberal democratic capitalism, the transitional path of the government is being legitimized. To the extent that such deliberative discourse is absent and, instead, there is a treatment of the transition as inevitable, natural, normal, and unavoidable, the transitional policy of the government is being naturalized. To the extent the transition is discussed and rejected, neither naturalization nor legitimization is occurring, and the transition is in most serious jeopardy indeed. Identity politics can further make the transition more or less sustainable.

The Methods and the Cases

In order to reconstruct how people understand the transition, one feasibly could have chosen from among several alternative methods. Survey research, in-depth interviews, participant-observation ethnography, and focus groups were the four approaches considered most seriously.. Focus groups were chosen for a number of reasons. The choice among cases was similarly broad. The selection of Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Estonia was based on the principle of greatest variance in social, political, economic, historical, and ethnic context.

Focus group methods

Rather than engaging in a lengthy comparison of alternative methodologies, I point out the advantages offered by focus groups in this particular project and how their several disadvantages were addressed by the author. There is a close fit between the evidentiary demands made by a project on comparative understandings of transition and the advantages of focus group research.

The very heart of the focus group is a rolling, collective conversation about some set of predetermined topics or themes. It is most fitting that an ability to distinguish between deliberative legitimization of the transition or its naturalization requires the analysis of a collective conversation on the same. The first step is to determine whether focus group respondents argue about the relative advantages of

liberal market capitalism and its alternatives or simply resign themselves to an inevitable future. But focus group discussions provide much more than this.

One of the obvious advantages of focus groups for this particular project over, say, large-n survey research, is the social character of the data produced. To the extent one believes that interaction is evidence, then focus groups provide a vast quantity of it. The interaction among focus group members reveals potential differences and conflicts over issues, allowing the researcher to avoid post hoc coding of apparent disagreements from survey data. One need not speculate or correlate; it is possible to witness the conflict itself. Moreover, the actual relationships among different positions need not be estimated; they are on the tapes and transcripts in the form of explicit linkages being made among the respondents, or by a single respondent herself.²³ Group discussion includes other evidence that is hard to elicit in other contexts, including encouragement for positions, jokes, storytelling, and defenses against criticism and disagreement.²⁴ All these forms of communication produce valuable evidence for judging whether the future is being legitimized through reasoned debate or accepted as an unshirkable fate. Interaction can also provoke snowballing, where a single response sets off a

²³ David L. Morgan, *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research. Second Edition* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 10.

²⁴ Jenny Kitzinger and Clare Farquhar, "The analytical potential of 'sensitive moments' in focus group discussions," in Rosaline S. Barbour and Jenny Kitzinger,

cascade of participation from other members, participation that could not have been programmed in advance. Another welcome feature of interaction is that it results in comparisons of lived experiences, rather than just opinions. And these experiences are evaluated by other members in the group, leading to additional, often unanticipated, connections.²⁵

The data produced within a focus group are the members' own words in their own context. They can qualify their responses and can specify the circumstances under which what they said is in fact true for them.²⁶ This particular opportunity to follow up reduces the possibility that a "false consensus" or "false dissensus" effect will appear in the evidence. When asked a precise question, respondents have the tendency to give an unequivocal answer. In focus groups, at least, they have the opportunity to situate that answer in a more meaningful context.²⁷ Moreover, it is possible to explore the motives beyond a member's argument, to clarify, to probe, and to assess the meaning of the words for her.²⁸ To

eds. *Developing Focus Group Research. Politics, Theory and Practice* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), pp. 156-57.

²⁵ Moore, *Focus Groups*, p. 20.

²⁶ David W. Stewart and Prem N. Shamdasani, *Focus Groups. Theory and Practice* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990), pp. 12-16.

²⁷ David L. Morgan and Richard A. Krueger, "When to Use Focus Groups and Why," in David L. Morgan, ed. *Successful Focus Groups. Advancing the State of the Art* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 18.

²⁸ David L. Morgan and Richard A. Krueger, "When to Use Focus Groups and Why," in David L. Morgan, ed. *Successful Focus Groups. Advancing the State of the Art* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 16.

the extent one believes that communication is a social phenomenon, one could argue that focus groups generate data that may be more ecologically valid than methods that assess individual's opinions in relatively asocial settings. It could be argued that opinions from focus groups are more like those of the public than even a large n of isolated respondents.²⁹ Finally, the requirement that a member articulate his opinion before a group might invoke the "accountability heuristic," and so produce more genuine and deliberate response than would be the case in a more isolated context.³⁰

The focus group is a compromise between the representativeness of the large-n survey and the naturalism of participant-observer ethnography. The latter aspires to capture the "overheard conversation" as evidence³¹ and this was an aspiration in the focus groups here, too. Eschewing the blunt instrument of a direct inquiry about how the transition was being legitimized, the focus groups instead provided indirect evidence, 1000s of conversations about life in the transition. These conversations were produced with minimal interference from the moderator and

²⁹ Terrance L. Albrecht, Gerianne M. Johnson, and Joseph B. Walther, "Understanding Communication Processes in Focus Groups," in Morgan, *Successful Focus Groups*, pp. 54-55.

³⁰ Philip Tetlock's work in experimental social psychology demonstrated that individuals who knew they would have to defend their choices before peers with unknown views, i.e., were accountable, engaged in more complex and rational decision making processes. Philip E. Tetlock, "Accountability and complexity of thought," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 45:1 (1983), pp. 74-83.

³¹ Morgan, *Focus Groups*, p9.

minimal calculation from the respondent.³² The focus group is designed to determine how respondents structure the world, not how they respond to the researcher's view of the world. It was important that the members narrate their own tales of the transition to the extent possible, while the common focus group protocol provide some outer limits in terms of time and topics.

While focus groups were very suitable to the task of comparing post-Soviet understandings of life in the Transition, they are not without their disadvantages. There are two main concerns: representativeness and reliability. In this project 36 focus groups of between six and eight members met in Estonia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan from October 1996 to April 1997. Groups were varied along the dimensions of sex, ethnicity, education, and rural/urban residence. The age cohort was from 30-49 years. The resulting sample includes 12 Russian groups, six in Estonia, four in Ukraine, and two in Uzbekistan. The four groups in Ukraine were divided between Kyiv and Donetsk, the capital city and major industrial coal-mining center, respectively. The six groups in Estonia were in Narva, a city in northeastern Estonia with a 90% Russian population, Sillamae, a traditional mining and chemicals center on the Baltic, and the capital city of Tallinn. The two groups in Uzbekistan were in Tashkent, at once the capital city and the only area of Russian

³² Stewart and Shamdasani, *Focus Groups*, p. 13. Many focus group respondents after the meeting claimed to have forgotten where they were and what they were doing and the presence of the moderator.

concentration in the country. All focus groups were conducted in the language of the participants and were moderated by someone of the same sex and ethnicity.

Titular nationalities were interviewed in different local sites. Ukrainian groups met in Kyiv, Lviv, a city in western Ukraine, Vinnytsa, an agricultural area, and Ivankiv, an oblast in the official Chernobyl zone. Estonians convened in Tallinn, Tartu, Estonia's "second city," and Tamsalu, a rural region. Uzbek groups met in Tashkent, Bukhara, a city located in the center of the cotton-growing region, and Fergana, an agricultural zone. Tajik groups also met in Bukhara, and two Karakalpak groups were held in Muinak, a former fishing town located on the shores of what was once the Aral Sea.

Eighty to ninety people in each country does not a national sample constitute. But the aim of this project was not to produce a sample representative of a national population. It instead was aimed at surfacing several critical differences within a limited number of groups. It has been argued that focus groups aspire for "qualitative sampling," not for a correlation of respondent characteristics with responses.³³ While these 36 focus groups were not representative of the population, they were structured in order to capture differences in sex, ethnicity,

³³ Jenny Kitzinger and Rosaline S. Barbour, "Introduction: the challenge and promise of focus groups," in Barbour and Kitzinger, *Developing Focus Group Research*, p. 7.

education levels, and urban/rural residence across three most different post-Soviet republics.³⁴

The second primary concern with focus groups is the reliability of the evidence they produce. Many efforts were made to maximize the comparability of focus group data across the 36 sites. First, the reliability of the evidence was far higher because close collaboration occurred among not only the primary investigators in the United States, but also in each of the three countries. Not only had all the collaborators in the FSU already run many focus groups themselves, we all met together for six weeks to develop the focus group protocol. This kind of collaboration resulted in a maximally common understanding of the project, its aims, and the role of focus groups within that endeavour.

A second area of concern for reliability lies in the important influence of the moderator in focus group interactions. But here too steps were taken to ensure that the moderator's influence would be the same across sites, and if not, then would be manifest to the researchers.³⁵ As noted, there was a six-week colloquium among all

³⁴ On theoretical or segmented sampling, see: Morgan, *Focus Groups*, pp. 35-37; Thomas L. Greenbaum, *The Handbook for Focus Group Research. Second Edition*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 62; and John Knodel, "The Design and Analysis of Focus Group Studies. A Practical Approach," in Morgan, *Successful Focus Groups*, pp. 39-41.

³⁵ For a critical analysis of moderator influence on the focus groups in the Ford study, see Marianne Kamp, "Voluntary and Elicited Discourses: A Comparison of Moderator Influence across Sites," presented at a Workshop on Identity Formation

principal investigators, several of whom would also be focus group moderators in the FSU. Moreover, training seminars were held by these collaborators for all moderators. The moderators in general only intervened in order to prompt discussion of the proposed questions. They did, however, allow respondents to go where they wanted, so long as required topics were covered in the time allotted. This kind of moderation might be called "semi-directive."³⁶ Finally, since all focus groups were recorded on tape, transcribed into the language of the group, and then transcribed into English, there was ample opportunity to check just what kinds of effects were produced by moderators' styles.

One final rationale for using focus groups is perhaps more sociological than methodological. One of the contributions this methodological choice makes to the literatures on democratization, consolidation, and transition is that it operates at a level of analysis, the individual respondent in a group, that has not been given much attention in the past. The literature on democratization and transition has been mildly criticized for concentrating on elites, institutions, parties, and correlations of economic and political change.³⁷

Most different cases

and Social Issues in Estonia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan, August 4-8, 1997, Kiev, Ukraine.

³⁶ Stewart and Shamdasani, *Focus Groups*, p. 89.

³⁷ Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, "Contentious Politics in New Democracies," *World Politics* 50:4 (July 1998), 550-52.

The principle of maximum difference is the foundation of the choice of cases in which to test alternative accounts of transitional durability. Estonia, a small country of less than 1.5 million people, of whom 28% are ethnic Russians, was incorporated into the Soviet Union as a union republic at the beginning of World War II. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, this Baltic country has re-established ties with Finland, Sweden, and the “Hanseatic” community more generally. It is near the top of the list for membership in both the EU and NATO. It is also, according to conventional Western measures, one of the most “democratic” of post-Soviet states. Ukraine, with a population of nearly 50 million, of whom 22% are ethnic Russians, was incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1921, but had a 600-year history of close relations with Russia and Moscow. Its politics have been largely democratic, though Freedom House scores it as “partly free” for the 1995-97 period. Uzbekistan, with a population of 24 million, of whom less than six per cent are ethnic Russians, was incorporated into the Soviet Union in the mid-1920s with the rest of Central Asian Turkestan. Its politics is mostly authoritarian, and ranks second to last in Freedom House’s tables of post-Soviet republics.³⁸

³⁸ To put these scores in perspective, Estonia received a 2.2 in 1995-96, the same as Finland when the Soviet Union existed. Estonia received a 1.2 in 1996-97, equivalent to a West European democracy. Uzbekistan’s 7.7 and 7.6 was worse than the Soviet Union received. Ukraine’s score of 3.4 was just within the partly free category. For all these scores, go to: www.freedomhouse.org/rankings.pdf

These vast differences in size, political history, ethnic composition, and geography are captured nicely by David Laitin's "three patterns of peripheral incorporation." Estonia is an example of the "integralist" model, having been able to maintain titular control over its cultural and national identity throughout Soviet rule. Ukraine follows the "most-favored lord" path of having its titular nationality elites privileged to administer Ukraine without Russian dominance. Quite the opposite, Uzbekistan was "colonized," administered by Russian rulers with the consequent loss of Uzbek titular control over its identity.³⁹

Hypotheses about transitional legitimization and naturalization correspond to the cases. Liberal theorists of democratization should expect the processes of deliberative legitimization to be present in democracies (Estonia), but not in non-democracies, (Uzbekistan). Social theorists of naturalization would expect naturalization to occur in all three countries, but liberal theorists would not expect it in any of the three. Evidence for these contrary positions is in the 700 pages of single-spaced transcripts derived from the collective conversations of 250 individuals for 72 hours in 36 different sites.

The interpretation of these texts involved treating each focus group as a unit of analysis in itself while being guided in one's analysis by the structure of the protocol questions. The participants in the focus groups were each invited to talk

³⁹ David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation. The Russian-Speaking Populations in the*

about their own experiences of the changes over the last decade or so. Each group discussed any improvements or difficulties in society over that period, identified who they thought had benefitted, and who had lost, discussed who, or what, was responsible for these problems, and then talked about whether different groups in society, more specifically, men or women, titular or minority ethnicities, home region, other regions, or the center, had experienced the transition in the same way.

The first two-thirds of the focus group were devoted to eliciting responses that were relevant to understandings of the transition: who had won, who had lost, what were the problems, who was responsible for them, and how would they go away. The last third of the focus group was aimed at issues of identity and its relationship to problems of the transition. While adhering to this interpretive format, the texts contained additional themes of interest to the issue of legitimization. These included generational differences, uncertainty about the future, and beliefs about the abroad. What became increasingly apparent from analyzing the transcripts was that the focus groups had yielded a series of understandings and accounts for the torturous and tortuous movement from the Soviet Union to some future world currently dominated by Western market capitalism and cultural hegemony. The

differences that emerged in these accounts pointed to the relevance of applying alternative theories of legitimization to the post-Soviet transition.⁴⁰

The Evidence

The presentation of the evidence is divided into three parts. The first section speaks directly to the issue of legitimization, asking respondents who benefitted and lost from the transition, and what was it that they had won. If respondents see winners from the transition as deserving any gains, the transition is legitimized. If, instead, these winners were identified as unworthy beneficiaries, the transition is delegitimized. Moreover, attributions of unworthiness such as these also denaturalize the transition, since they are effectively making a problem out of a natural feature of the movement to liberal market capitalism. The second source of evidence on legitimization is discussions about who lost in the transition. If losers are identified as deserving losers, this legitimizes the transition; if, instead, they are identified as victims, this both delegitimizes and denaturalizes the transition. The last bit of evidence on legitimization concerns conversations about what was won in the

⁴⁰ The method described here is not obviously inconsistent with the interplay between theory and narrative that is described in Robert Bates, Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry R. Weingast, *Analytic Narratives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1998), 3-22.

transition. If respondents are able to identify gains from this process, then legitimacy is enhanced.⁴¹

Evidence on the processes of naturalization includes two major themes: assigning blame for the misery of the transition and locating solutions to its costs. If respondents blame the government, or entities and policies for which the government has responsibility, then the transition is both delegitimized and denaturalized. If, instead, respondents assign responsibility to the inherent essence of the transition itself, or to their own failure to fulfill the transition's promise, they are naturalizing the costs of the move to the market, holding nobody responsible but prevailing reality and their role in it. Solutions to the ongoing misery that include abandoning the transition are both denaturalizing and delegitimizing, and solutions that include waiting for the process to take its course naturalize that transition. Demands to do more of what the market demands may either legitimize or naturalize the course, depending on whether the additional personal efforts are the result of deliberative judgment or instead the product of resignation to unavoidable market desiderata.

Finally, the last section concerns how Russian ethnic identities affect transitional prospects. To the extent Russians identify uncertainty about their own

⁴¹ Note that the transition is legitimized whenever a respondent identifies anything good that has been experienced from it. Naturalization, on the other hand, only occurs when some transitional bad is rationalized.

identities, the emergence of a new identity, and an alienation from Russians in Russia, the possible barrier that ethnic difference might pose to political collaboration either for or against the transition is reduced.

The focus group transcripts show a transition doubly fortified by legitimization and naturalization in Estonia; a transition partially supported by far more modest quantities of legitimization and naturalization in Uzbekistan; and a transition under potential assault from a united Ukrainian-Russian front of citizens who regard the move to the market as neither natural nor legitimate in Ukraine.

Legitimate and Illegitimate Winners, Losers, and Benefits

The first layer of inquiry concerns how people regard the transitional winners. What matters is not so much **who** people believe have benefitted from the transition, but whether or not people believe that those who have benefitted **should have**. Estonia begins to differentiate itself from both Uzbekistan and Ukraine on this issue. In fully half of the 36 focus groups "traders" were identified as a group that had benefitted.⁴² This would be unexceptional but for the fact that trader is a

⁴² A word about "measurement" is necessary. Throughout this text I refer to the number of times focus group participants mention a particular item or maintain a particular position. I use those numbers as both a way of differentiating among the three countries, but also to differentiate among groups within and across sites, and among issue areas and responses to them. To qualify as a data point, an item must, in general, be mentioned by more than one participant in the group, and be discussed by that group's members. The numbers I use to ascribe meaning to the content of a text should be understood as indicators of the presence of a position within a group, not as a measure of lines devoted to its elaboration, or time consumed in its

term of opprobrium to many. Russian women in Tashkent, for example, compared scrubbing floors positively to trading in the bazaar. Russian women in Narva called these traders pushy, cool, and not very honest. One may infer that many people think the people who have gained from the transition are not like them; they are not worthy of any admiration. The only group of people who did not mention traders as beneficiaries were Estonians. Estonian responses included "entrepreneurs" and "rich businessmen" as transitional winners, but did not use negative appellations, such as traders, middlemen, buyers and sellers. Estonians, alone in our sample, believed that those who were benefitting should benefit. This conclusion is further supported by the following finding. Nine groups, including Russians, Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Karakalpaks, said that government officials and other political elites had benefitted from the transition. These people did not believe that these men (safe to say) who had been well-positioned in the communist era, in fact deserved any reward at all. But no Estonian identified officialdom as a winner from the transition.⁴³

The provisional conclusion is that Estonians both do not understand the transition to be privileging unworthy people and do not see their government, and its bureaucrats, as illegitimate recipients of the fruits of the transition. These two features begin to show how the Estonian transition enjoys a measure of legitimacy

discussion, or its relative salience, or the percentage of participants who mentioned it.

against any discontent brought on by the advent of market capitalism. More is to come. The evidence from these discussions is relevant to both issues of naturalization and legitimization. Both the Uzbek and Ukrainian governments lose legitimacy when their citizens identify unworthy people as winners from the transition. Such ideas also work against naturalizing the transition insofar as these people question its justness. In Estonia, on the other hand, the transition is legitimized since people do not identify its winners as unworthy recipients of the fruits of the process.

One source of delegitimization and denaturalization for each of the three governments is the unanimous popular understanding that the people who have lost in the transition definitely did not deserve their fates: farmers, pensioners, people with large families, workers, the poor, and so on. The point here requires no elaboration. Transitional stability is threatened by the fact that people of all classes and ethnicities think that the transition has done enormous harm to people who deserved much better.

The answer to the question of who won reveals the limits of the transition's legitimization and the potentials of focus group research. The moderators asked the respondents to write down all the improvements they could think of in the last five years or so. Almost without exception, the request was met by laughter, silence,

⁴³ Two Russian groups from Estonia, however, did identify government officials as

derisive jokes, and other intimations that the transition had done no good. Often, the moderator would have to implore them to think hard, think about their families, about other people they knew. Eventually, the participants wrote down some improvements. But a less interactive research tool, such as a phone survey, could never have captured the initial ridicule for the question; instead, it would have simply recorded the responses, which focus group moderators also did, but not before recording the context that gave meaning to those responses.⁴⁴

The focus groups show that governments enjoy a fair amount of legitimacy based on ongoing rewards, although they all lack any significant popular appreciation for material gains. The most important gains from the transition are independence and sovereignty and personal freedoms. Fourteen of the 36 focus groups mentioned them, including two Russian groups in Ukraine.⁴⁵ The next two symbolic improvements have more equivocal consequences for governmental legitimacy. Eight groups, six in Uzbekistan, and one each in Ukraine and Estonia, identified the establishment of the local language as the state language as an improvement borne

beneficiaries of the transition.

⁴⁴ A 1994 national survey in Estonia found that over half the respondents could not name a single positive trend in the country. For this and other results of the comparative Baltic region survey, see Jacek Moskalewicz and Christoffer Tigerstedt, eds. *Public Opinion on Social Problems. A survey around the Baltic Sea* (Helsinki: Nordic Council for Alcohol and Drug Research, 1998), esp. pp. 50, 67-75, and 211.

⁴⁵ This observation foreshadows a most important general conclusion about Ukrainian-Russian relations in that country.

of the transition. Another six groups, four in Uzbekistan and two in Ukraine⁴⁶, thought the revival of the nation was an important advance over the last ten years. The Ukrainian and Uzbek governments gain legitimacy from these sentiments, but only to the extent that non-Ukrainians and non-Muslims in the two countries do not feel excluded by the linguistic and national revivals celebrated by Ukrainians and Muslims. It should be noted here that only one of six Estonian groups, and, of course, no Russians, reported the restoration of their language or nation as an important improvement. While depriving the state of symbolic capital earned from Estonian appreciation of their language status, it might also protect it from inter-ethnic conflict borne of a more pronounced and exclusive Estonian ethnonational identity. One particular symbolic advantage enjoyed by Uzbekistan, and no other country, is the nearly unanimous (nine of eleven groups) appreciation of religious freedom and revival as a benefit of the transition. If this revival can be sustained without disquieting Orthodox and non-observant communities, it should be an important legitimizer for the government.

Finally, the only material improvements widely cited were better supplies of goods in the shops and open borders. But the discussions of both these items quickly revealed the paradox of market reform. Whereas before, political connections allocated goods, in the new world, the market distributes goods, and in

⁴⁶ There was complete overlap between the four Uzbek groups, but none between

most cases, proves to be an institution more impervious to manipulation than the communist political system. So, two Estonian groups observed that if travel abroad had been a political decision in the bad old days, today it was impossible to travel without unimaginable sums of money. It appears that the market disciplines as severely as a party apparatchik.

Before concluding that these transitional governments enjoy ample reserves of at least symbolic capital, it is useful to remember that the absence of material capital is no advantage. Focus groups had a very hard time coming up with any material improvements in their lives, and did not do so at all except under hard prodding from the moderator. The bottom line here is that governments have gained diffuse legitimacy through popular appreciation of symbolic gains from independence, sovereignty, and ethnic and religious revival, but these sources of legitimacy are only distantly related to transitional legitimacy. Moreover, the transition has been delegitimized in all three countries by the presence of undeserving losers. Only Estonia has the legitimacy gained from worthy winners; both Ukrainian and Uzbek transitional politics is delegitimized by beliefs that winners, whether middlemen or bureaucrats, are not deserving.

the two Ukrainian ones.

Naturalizing Misery: Who is to Blame and What is to be Done

All three governments enjoy the protection offered by a population that sees the transition as natural and inevitable, but to significantly varying degrees. In each of the three countries, the future of the transition is considered to be embodied in the West, in Europe, in the United States. These are very important social resources, because the future already exists, if only somewhere else. But the peoples of the three countries regard that future quite differently. Simplifying only a bit, Russians and Estonians in Estonia aspire to be the West, while those living in Uzbekistan are more ambivalent. The critical difference lies in Ukraine, where a large proportion of respondents explicitly decry the West, cursing their inevitable future as unnatural.

When focus group respondents were asked to identify who or what was to blame for current conditions, their answers could be divided into delegitimizing/denaturalizing or naturalizing categories. Answers that delegitimized or denaturalized the transition came in the form of blaming local or national governments or those individuals, managers and traders, who exist because of the policies of the national government. The two kinds of responses that naturalize the responsibility for the transition, making the issue a non-political one outside the realm of deliberative debate, are those that make the transition itself responsible or blame the people for letting the transition down. The respondents in the three countries gave different accounts of transitional responsibility. In Estonia, naturalizing

answers were slightly favored over delegitimizing ones. In Uzbekistan, there was a slight edge for delegitimization. But in Ukraine, answers that delegitimized the transition dominated.⁴⁷

Placing blame

The evidence from the focus groups affords a unique opportunity to see just how the process of naturalization works, at least discursively. These findings allow us to differentiate between a case of legitimization with a rejected alternative and a case of naturalization with no alternative. If a process of legitimization were under way, we should record conversations which justify the transition vis-à-vis some alternative futures. But if naturalization is the process stabilizing these governments, we should find discourses of inevitability, no alternatives, and time. It is the naturalizing discourse that dominates in Estonia and Uzbekistan. For instance, the first way the transition is understood is as a process whose pain will end some indeterminate time in the future. So, an Uzbek man in Bukhara explains that "this is a **temporary** condition." An Estonian man in Tamsalaa suggests that "maybe **in fifty years**" these problems will not exist. An Estonian woman in the same town expresses this logic in eloquent fragments: "It is **inevitable**...That is **life...Time**...."

⁴⁷ If focus groups are used as the unit of analysis, then four Estonian groups naturalized, while three delegitimized; in Uzbekistan the score was 11-15, and in Ukraine 4-13.

A second rendering of the naturalized transition is as some dehumanized, depersonalized structure; there is never any locus of responsibility or authority to whom one could appeal. So, "the market economy and market conditions **demand**," is heard from Uzbek men in Bukhara; "A rise in prices is **natural according to economics**," said Uzbek men in Fergana. It should be noted that the word natural implies that the pain and misery are to be expected, are inevitable, are part of some inexorable process leading somewhere better. "Problems are **natural** in the **transition period**," said one man in Fergana. The most critical feature to this kind of reasoning is that there is no other way; there are no solutions to the problems created by the transition other than continuing the same course. To quote a man in Tallinn: "Whether we like it or not, we have to endure **this period**."⁴⁸

A third mitigating mechanism of naturalization is the popular imagery of a turning point, a rubicon, a threshold, an entry into a new world, the crossing of a boundary or frontier. This imagery has great power, for it implies there is no turning back: that which was before can be no more; it is unthinkable. An Estonian man in Tallinn declares, "we have **fallen into the beginning stages of capitalism**," which means "the state simply does not have the resources right now" to alleviate the social costs of the transition. A Tajik man blames "**the epoch**," as if a new

⁴⁸ It is suggestive that Przeworski finds almost the exact same language of naturalization at work in Poland. We need to "swallow a bitter pill," the general

era, fraught with irresistible demands, has been entered. The evidence from these residents of the transition offers a different way to understand how transitional stability is possible, given the high levels of suffering that occur. Joel Hellman, for example, recently summarized work on post-communist transitions by reducing the problem to getting farther along on the “J-curve” of misery, the curve described by suffering up front, only to bottom out and recover sometime in the future. The empirical findings here show just how these states do survive being at the bottom of the J-curve, waiting for the costs to abate and the benefits to begin. They do so through a sociopolitical process that naturalizes this suffering through the language of time, inevitability, and rubicons.⁴⁹

Finally, attributing unemployment, high prices, the lack of a social safety net, impoverishment of pensioners, rising crime rates, and morally dissolute youth to the transition, to the birth pangs of liberal market capitalism, further allows those experiencing these kinds of social costs to imagine that other kinds of social ills are also the natural byproducts of emerging capitalism. One such social ill is sex discrimination in the workplace. The group of Estonian men with higher education in Tallinn agreed that women receive lower wages than men, and that they are the first fired whenever a business experiences difficulties. But the availability of the

principle being that unless it tasted bad, it could not be good for you . Przeworski, “Economic reforms,” p. 149.

transition as an explanation allowed these men to conclude that no sex discrimination exists in Estonia. As one of these men concluded: "It is not discrimination, it is inevitable."

In sum, attribution of the misery of the transition to the "natural" properties of the unavoidable transition itself, and not to the government, or to local government, factory managers, and traders for whom the government is supposed to bear some responsibility, protects the governments from popular outrage and anguish over the transition. It is significant that in allocating blame for their suffering, people in Estonia and Uzbekistan, at least, never identified a foreign source for their misery. Neither the United States, nor Europe, nor even Russia are perceived to be responsible for the costs of the transition. This omission robs these transitional governments of an additional buffer against popular discontent. The reason for this absence, which I elaborate below, is that the West is their imaginable future, while Russia is their unacceptable past.

Prescribing solutions

When asked who or what could solve the problems caused by the transition, respondents answered with three very different kinds of solutions. The first, delegitimizing, set of answers demanded that the transition be effectively suspended. The second, naturalizing, group of answers referred to time as the

⁴⁹ See Joel S. Hellman, "Winners Take All. The Politics of Partial Reform in

ultimate cure. The third, legitimizing, collection of answers demanded the transition's policies be implemented more faithfully. Estonia's transition was stabilized the most with a combination of legitimizing and naturalizing answers. Ukraine and Uzbekistan, on the other hand, revealed a fundamental ambivalence toward the transition. About half their responses were delegitimizing, but the other half were divided between naturalizing time and legitimizing market actions.

Ukrainian Fanta and Estonian Screws: Delegitimizing and Legitimizing Speech

Uzbek men in Tashkent agreed that they "should manufacture everything themselves." Ukrainian men in Ivankiv wanted to know "why is it we cannot make our own Fanta?" Tajik women in Bukhara wanted to ban imports of all "low-quality goods." Tajik men in Bukhara criticized the influx of German and Turkish labor. These illiberal anti-market positions either went unchallenged or were commonly held within the group. Compare this to the following discourse of deliberative legitimization among Estonian men in Tartu.

Juri: Estonia should produce its own screws, rather than import those expensive ones.

Enn: You cannot talk like that here. Estonia is a small country and we do not have our own iron ore. To buy it special and begin processing it here just is not right.

It isn't profitable at all. I mean...countries who have ore can do it more cheaply than we can.

Juri: Still, I'd like it if Estonia would produce its own consumer goods.

Aleks: It doesn't make sense. It is cheaper to produce them there.

Urmas: It makes no sense...Our quality isn't good enough for other countries.

Aleks: Since Estonian screws would be far more expensive to produce, they would be priced out of export markets.

Leo: It makes sense to produce something [only] if we can compete with the West.

It bears mentioning that it was the Uzbek men in Tashkent who had the higher education, not, perhaps as expected, the Estonians in Tartu. Juri's pleas to protect Estonia from the outside world were roundly and soundly refuted. This is an instance of deliberative legitimization of the transition.

Naturalization looks quite different. Here it is captured in the idea of time curing all, the popular belief that at least one's children will benefit from present transitional misery. These beliefs contribute to that transition's durability, as does the popular knowledge that the future already exists, if only in the West..

Time cures all

A Russian woman in Kiev put it starkly: "Now up to the age of 30 you are still a person, but after 30..." This statement expresses a widely advanced belief

that the best, often only, hope is in one's children, and younger people. While we do not or cannot expect to reach the Promised Land beyond the transition, at least our children can. Russian men and women in Narva and Ukrainian men in Kiev declared that they could not learn local languages at their ages: leave it up to the young people, they said, in effect. Ironically, Estonian men in Tartu agreed: the Russian problem with the Estonian language will disappear with a new generation of Russians learning Estonian. A Ukrainian man in Ivaniisk at first refused to participate, saying that "the young people should.... I am old." Russian women in Tashkent pointed out how young people are far more able to adjust themselves to the transition's new demands. As one woman said there, "They do not have a past they need to change." In other words, the Soviet legacy lies heavily on those who wish to make the transition, so the younger the better. A Russian woman in Narva lamented that "We do not even know how to sell ourselves." This, of course, must become a natural act.

An already-existing future

Time would not be much of a panacea if there were not some palatable outcome imaginable at the end of the wait. A most critical advantage for the transition is the widespread belief that their future has already been achieved, in the West. Despite the fact that respondents were never asked any questions about foreign lands, almost every single focus group had some kind of discussion in which

local conditions were being compared and contrasted to some external standard, a standard developed right there among the respondents. In over half the focus groups there was an impromptu discussion of some foreign country in comparison with the situation at home.

The availability of an extant future in the West operated in many particular ways to make the currently experienced difficulties more bearable. The experienced lack of some desired governmental support, such as social security, was justified by the fact that “it is a problem of capitalistic society” in general. “It is the same in Nigeria or Somalia,” one Estonian man suggested in Tallinn, apparently wanting to demonstrate that it was *really* the same everywhere in the capitalist world, including in the most unEstonian of locales. Being able to point out that a current problem will never go away, precisely because it is inherent in the future, certainly naturalizes a potentially politically contentious situation. For example, Uzbek men in Tashkent observed that unemployment will always exist, since it does even in Japan. Estonian men in Tartu pointed out that American and German politicians don’t keep their promises either.

Having an already-operating future also helps make the idea of time a more bearable and apprehendable explanation. “We haven’t had enough time to get all this going yet,” said an Estonian man in Tallinn. This would only beg the question, of well, when will we get it going? A less than satisfying answer would be we don’t know,

or who can tell? The existence of the West permits a more precise, but more important, a finite answer, based on historical experience. As a Russian man in Tashkent suggested, “democracy has existed abroad for 200 years, while our situation is very different.”

Tolerating the transition is also easier if one believes one is moving toward an outcome of epic proportions, rather than merely joining the world market economy. Such a transcendent experience would be the movement toward “civilization,” which many equated with the West. Recall, for example, Sergei’s account of how he moved from Dushanbe to the Baltic in order to be closer to “Europe, civilization, the West, Estonia.” One last feature of the Future is its singular quality. Resistance to the transition would be much easier if peoples of the former Soviet Union were to advance alternative models of the transition, but not ones rooted in the Soviet past. While Asian, Pinochet, and Scandinavian variants of capitalism have each been mentioned as possible variants in other contexts, none of these, nor any other, were advanced by any of the 250 respondents in this research. This absence of alternatives under consideration by the population works to make the choice on offer—liberal market capitalism—the only natural alternative.

New Russian Identities

Continuation of the transitional course in former Soviet republics depends partly on how Russians living there not only regard the costs of the transition, but

also how they understand their own identities, both in relationship to the titular majority and to the Russians living in the homeland. Focus group respondents in Estonia and Uzbekistan revealed a new and emergent Russian identity that moves Russians simultaneously farther away from Moscow and closer to Tallinn and Tashkent. This hybridization, when combined with the transition's legitimization and naturalization in Estonia, and naturalization in Uzbekistan, further strengthens the transition's prospects in both countries. The evidence from Ukraine is quite the opposite. When the absence of much legitimization or naturalization of the transition is combined with Russians who already understand themselves as very similar to Ukrainians, a potential obstacle to contesting the transition, interethnic hostility, is removed. In this way, the absence of difference permits the political contestations of a delegitimized and denaturalized transition. This makes the transition to a liberal capitalist future in Ukraine least stable among the three. I present the evidence for the Russian identity crisis in the near abroad and its emergent resolution in Estonia and Uzbekistan.

When asked to identify the most important problems of the transition, there was virtual unanimity across the three countries on material economic hardship. The respondents cited higher prices, deteriorating health care, high levels of unemployment, socioeconomic inequality, and late wages. But ethnic Russian focus groups were characterized by two additional problems that few non-Russians felt

worthy of mention: uncertainty about the future and sundered communications with the Russian homeland. The issues of uncertainty and communications were not raised as material concerns. As a Russian woman told the moderator, "uncertainty about tomorrow is the same thing as the problem of national identity." The transition has created a kind of identity crisis for Russians in these three countries. A Russian woman in Donetsk said that the old has gone, but the new has not come yet. In other words, Russians find themselves literally in the transition. Another Russian woman, this time in Kiev, confessed that she is now overwhelmed by a feeling of not being needed, not being in demand. Before, she had dedicated herself to the Homeland, but now?

Russian concerns about communications reinforce the problems with uncertainty about their own identities. Russians in each of the three countries complained about being unable to travel abroad to see relatives.⁵⁰ But travel has more meaning than simply visiting a loved one in another country. Travel is a way to reconnect and revitalize one's Russian identity. For example, a Russian woman in Tashkent reported how distressing it was for she and her husband to not be able to show their young daughter the historical and cultural sites of Russia. A Russian woman in Estonia lamented that here, in a free country, she feels like she lives on

⁵⁰ As did Estonians and Karakalpaks.

an uninhabited island.⁵¹ Russian men in Tashkent bemoaned the fact that the availability of Russian media: TV, radio, newspapers, books, and journals, had been drastically curtailed since independence.

There are, broadly speaking, two different relationships between Russian identity and transitional stability: the Ukrainian variant of Russian identification with Ukrainians as the closest possible Other⁵², and the hyphenated Russians just emerging in Estonia and Uzbekistan, perhaps true liminal identities betwixt and between an “authentic” Russian homeland and a most foreign Other. The dynamics of identity in Ukraine potentially threaten the transition while emergent Russian identities in Uzbekistan and Estonia promise an additional source of support for the course.

Ukrainians as Russians' closest Others

Of all the focus groups, Ukrainians and Russians in Ukraine expressed the most equanimity about interethnic relations. Perhaps it was most starkly put by a

⁵¹ Laitin's field research in Estonia also found Russians feeling cut off from Russia proper. Laitin, *Identities in Formation*, p. 169.

⁵² This is not to say that there is no conflict between oneself and one's closest Other. On the contrary, battles over claims to authenticity are most intense between precisely these types of identities, but this does not nullify the empirical observation that Russians in focus groups in Ukraine in 1996-97 understood Ukrainians as more like themselves than a theory of interethnic conflict would predict. On Ukrainians as Russians' closest Other, see Mikhail Molchanov, “cite” and Emil Draitser. Draitser traces Russian understandings of Ukrainians through a topography of ethnic jokes told by Russians about other ethnic groups. Emil A. Draitser, *Taking penguins to the movies: ethnic humor in Russia* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998).

Russian man in Kiev, who said that economic problems have erased nationality. "A beggar in the street does not feel very proud to be either Ukrainian or Russian," he said. Another Russian man in the same group expressed pride that wealth in Ukraine is not divided according to nationality. Yet another suggested the ideal: a civic national identity, where "we are proud of Ukraine without being Ukrainian," where we are "all part of the government of Ukraine," but where "there is no nationality."⁵³ Most important, Ukrainians agree with this Russian interpretation of Ukrainian nationalism. Serhiy, in a Kievan group, contended that Ukraine should cultivate patriotism, not chauvinism, and Petro concurred, noting that in "America, they are proud of their state."⁵⁴ A possible connection here between these conceptualizations of national identity and continuing sympathy for the Soviet

⁵³ A civic national identity refers to Anthony Smith's formulation of a brand of nationalism not based on ethnicity. Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origin of Nations* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 135 See also Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). A Ukrainian civic national identity is officially enshrined in the 1996 constitution which declares, "we, the Ukrainian people—citizens of Ukraine of all nationalities...." This language is reproduced in Graham Smith, Vivien Law, Andrew Wilson, Annette Bohr, and Edward Allworth, *Nation-building in the Post-Soviet Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 124.

⁵⁴ Two observations are in order here. First, each of these "liberal" accounts of Ukrainian national identity are from people with higher education, thus raising the question of whether mass, popular views are divergent. On the other hand, if these 40 higher educated citizens of Ukraine are representative of the politically aware population, their views on national identity are precisely those that would be necessary for a political movement based on class, material, or economic interests to emerge to contest the transition, transcending Russian-Ukrainian ethnic difference.

economic model is implicit here. While I have placed Ukrainian and Russian discussions of nationalism into the context of Western ideas of civic nationalism, in fact, they are probably more appropriately understood as adherence to Soviet internationalism, the Stalinist nationality policy of “national in form, socialist in content.” The latter would allow for national cultural expression, but within, and bounded by, a more authoritative state identity. This distinction is important insofar as Ukrainians and Russians who accept this internationalist conceptualization of nationalism are also likely to be receptive to the Soviet past in other respects, such as a protective economic system whose policies would undermine the transition.

This general devaluation of ethnic difference is not absolute. In western Ukraine, especially, Russians complain about discrimination at the hands of Ukrainians there.⁵⁵ And Russian women in Kiev observed that there were too many “artificial” ceremonies and folk festivals on TV, and that the study of Ukrainian history in school was being done in a primitive manner. Russians in all three countries pointed out that to get official jobs, or even good jobs, they had to be Ukrainian, Estonian, or Uzbek, or at least know the languages. But within these

⁵⁵ In a 1995 national survey, citizens of Ukraine were asked whether they had seen or experienced discrimination. Eight per cent said yes with respect to Jews, mostly in the West and North of the country; nine per cent reported that Ukrainians had experienced discrimination, especially in the northwest and southwest. But twice that number, 13-17%, reported discrimination against Russians, in the West and Crimea, respectively. Reported in Evhen Golovakha, “Public Opinion Observance of

complaints is a potentially important difference. Russians in Ukraine are the only Russians in any of the three countries to suggest that the titular majority is justified in restoring its national identity at the expense of the Russians themselves. Russian women in Kiev, for example, acknowledge that "the introduction of the Ukrainian language is **"natural,"** implying that Russians in the minority in Ukraine can see the privileging of Ukrainian national identity at their expense as a reasonable act of the state and the people of Ukraine.

This possibly emergent Russian attitude cannot be considered in isolation from the Ukrainian views about the possibility of a civic internationalist identity noted above. These Russian attitudes of acknowledgement and the Ukrainian views on civic internationalism intimate a foundation on which political cooperation could be built. There is additional reason to believe this to be a possible outcome. Among the Ukrainian men in Vinnitsya, **without higher education**, it was agreed that Ukrainian schools today are insufficiently **"internationalist"** in their courses on history and culture. They suggested Ukrainian studies was being given too much attention. At the end of the session, the moderator asked: "How would you like your children educated: according to Ukrainian traditions or the traditions of world civilization?" The consensus that emerged from the group was the latter. Consistent with the view that Russians and Ukrainians are constructing a relationship unlike

those in either Uzbekistan or Estonia are Ukrainian attitudes toward Russia. A 1996 national survey in Ukraine reported that while 83% of Ukrainians had favorable opinions of the United States and Germany, fully 77% had positive views of Russia.⁵⁶

The obvious explanation for Russians in Ukraine being less concerned about being a minority may in fact be the right one, viz., that they already feel themselves so close culturally and ethnically to Ukrainians that the expected loss does not appear that bitter. And Estonian and Uzbek identities are so "foreign" to Russians as to be unalterably Other.⁵⁷ Recent survey research in Ukraine shows an emergent Russian-Ukrainian identity that gets beyond ethnonational difference.⁵⁸ Both Ukrainians and Russians are reluctant to give only one ethnic identity to the question calling for the same. They say both, or opt for a Ukrainian civic identity, or a Soviet

Portrait of Ukraine 7:1995, p. 134.

⁵⁶ Reported in Volodymyr Zviglyanich, "Specter of Integration in Russia. Lessons for the West and Ukraine," *A Political Portrait of Ukraine 8*, 1997, p. 18. For the sake of comparison, only five per cent of the respondents had a positive assessment of Romania.

⁵⁷ David Laitin has advanced some interesting evidence on the relative identity difference Russians feel with respect to Estonians, Latvians, Kazakhs, and Ukrainians. Through comparative experimental procedures, he established that Russians are closest to Ukrainians in that they do not lose the respect or friendship of their Russian peers when they speak Ukrainian. This is not true in the other three countries. See Laitin, *Identity in Formation*, p. 234.

⁵⁸ And the "Russophone Ukrainians" are a swing group situated between ethnic Russians and Ukrainophone Ukrainians. For an excellent discussion of how language and ethnicity combine in Ukraine to produce a decidedly ambiguous mix of national identity, see Smith, *Nation-building*, esp. pp. 121, 136-138

one. These complicated responses are partly supported by quite high intermarriage rates (30% overall, and as high as 55% in the East), far higher than elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, and highly correlated with those who refuse to be simply categorized. In a 1994 survey, only 11% thought of themselves as Russians. Of the 57% who identified themselves as Ukrainians, 37% preferred to speak Russian.

Pirie's conclusions accord with the findings of this study: Russians are in a state of transition to a mixed Russian-Ukrainian identity or "even an ethnically indifferent cosmopolitan one."⁵⁹

Finally, it is necessary to point out a feature of Ukrainian understanding of the external world that amounts to contestation of the inevitable future. Those living in Ukraine to some degree naturalize the transition through understandings of time and solutions like the former Soviet citizens of Uzbekistan and Estonia. What differentiates them is their less positive assessment of the West, its civilization, and the future it offers. This matters because both Russians and Ukrainians share this suspicion of, and hostility to, the transition's promised future. This provides them with a potentially unifying political base for resistance to the transition in the future. Supportive of this conclusion is the fact that Russian men and women in Ukraine, with and without higher education, and Ukrainian men outside of western Ukraine

⁵⁹ Paul S. Pirie, "National Identity and Politics in Southern and Eastern Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48:7, 1996, 1079-1104. Smith, et.al., in *Nation-building*, report a 1997 survey that replicates Pirie's findings. See page 138.

and Kiev, agreed that the transition is being forced on Ukraine, the country “is being sold and exported to the West,” everyone “worships the West,” foreign culture is stifling “our culture, cooking, dances, songs, music, our passion,” and America won’t help us in any case. The impression is that not only is the future undesirable, but the West isn’t even helping Ukraine get there; instead it is exploiting its difficulties. The evolution of Russian identity in Ukraine only works to delegitimize and contest the naturalization of the transition.

Emergent hyphenated Russians in Estonia and Uzbekistan

While it is already possible to marshal evidence from a variety of sources to suggest that Russians and Ukrainians in Ukraine already identify themselves as most similar to each other, the evidence for such an argument in Estonia and Uzbekistan is only just surfacing. At this juncture, it is only safe to point out that ethnic difference between Uzbeks and Estonians, on the one hand, and ethnic Russians on the other, is not as acute as was predicted or feared, but this does not imply a necessary assimilationist outcome, only an intriguing hypothesis worth retesting.⁶⁰ The evidence, admittedly still thin, for this final proposition comes from

⁶⁰ I might add it is worth retesting not only to establish the prospects for interethnic peace in the former Soviet Union, or to compare competing theories of identity politics, though these would suffice in making the case. It is worth retesting, as well, because of the implications it has for Russian identity in Russia, both at the level of foreign policy and domestic identity politics.

Russian men in Narva and Russian women in Tashkent.⁶¹ I produce a fair bit of their conversation. The question was asked why Russians do not protest about their grievances.

Andrei: People here are more civilized.

(This should be read in light of Sergei's introduction of himself at the beginning of the session by saying he had left Dushanbe for Estonia because he wanted to "move closer to Europe, civilization, the West, Estonia.")

Andrei: They are Russians, but [we] have become more civilized in Estonia. [We are] Western, different Russians.

Andrei 2: There is a difference in mentality and culture. It is a general approach to problem-solving. Not just to grab an axe and a sword, but to try to find a solution somehow.

Vladimir 3: A compromise.

Vladimir 1: Those who have lived here for a long time are not really considered to be Russians in Russia.

⁶¹ I should add here that my research collaborators in both Estonia and Uzbekistan concurred that Russians in those two countries have and are developing an identity distinct from Russians in Russia. But, not unexpectedly, Uzbeks and Estonians are less aware of, or are less willing to acknowledge, the new emergent identity than the Russians themselves living there. According to Smith, et.al, *Nation-building*, p. 209, "Russians in Central Asia have frequently described themselves and the particular values they hold (e.g., drinking less, working harder, stronger family orientation) as different from those held by their co-ethnics in Russia." Also see

(This is a critical move, because prior to this point the Russian men were only expressing how **they** felt they were compared to Russians in Russia. But now they point out the Russians in Russia do not see them as authentic Russians.)

Vladimir4: No, they are not.

(The conversation now turns to how it would be impossible to live with Russians again.)

Vladimir Pervyi: I'm sorry, but we cannot accept the disorder that is typical for Russia.

Sergei: Those Russians who have lived here for a long time already have these typical Estonian features [of being calm]... People are not like those former Soviets.

Vladimir4: Russians from the Baltic area were hazed in the Soviet army because they were not real Russians.

Vladimir1: Going to Russia is like going to the zoo--to see exotic things.

Vladimir4: They stare at you there: [saying] These are foreigners, they are all foreigners.

This excerpt implies that Russians in Estonia are already thinking of themselves as different from the Russians they were, and have experiences that

reinforce this new identity.⁶² They are now hyphenated Russians, in part the product of the indigenous culture. If this re-identification were to continue, it would necessarily transfer the political landscape of Estonia from one based on ethnic politics to one based on attitudes toward, among other things, the transition. Instead of facing an ethnic minority that sees itself as both different from the indigenous majority, and tied to Russia, a government in Tallinn could be faced with a minority that sees itself as increasingly similar to the local majority and increasingly differentiated from Russians in Russia. One possible consequence would be that future Russian opposition to the transition could be treated as a dispute over the distribution of losses and gains, rather than necessarily an interethnic dispute.

The conversation among Russian women in Tashkent demonstrates a parallel universe in Uzbekistan.

Nina: I am uncertain about where to spend my life.

Yulia: In Ukraine someone called me an Uzbek girl.

(Again, some Other in/validating someone's identity.)

Anya: Yes, that is what they say in Russia. In Russia they do not recognize us as Russians, even in Moscow. (Presumably the most cosmopolitan and open-minded collection of Russians.)

⁶² Laitin's field work in Estonia also uncovered an emergent Russian-Estonian identity. See Laitin, *Identities in Formation*, pp. 159-63, 194-95.

Irena: Our community has turned out to be more cosmopolitan. It began in 1966 when people from all regions and republics came after the earthquake and the result was a cultural blend.

Masha: We are more European than Russians or Uzbeks. (Irena agrees)

Yulia: More tolerant. We never distinguished ourselves by nationality when we went to school here.

(And here comes the bid for greater authenticity than those Russians in Russia:)

Masha: There is one factor that matters. We speak the literary Russian language spoken in Moscow and Petersburg before the Revolution. Today in Moscow they speak differently. I watched a TV program with Princess Shakhovskaya and she spoke exactly the way we do.⁶³

The emergent identities in Estonia and Uzbekistan have the potential to both naturalize and legitimize the transition. The Russian identity in Ukraine has the potential to subvert the transition. But these identities have additional profound implications for politics more broadly in these states. It should be acknowledged that scholars have treated the Russians abroad as if they were a monolithic

⁶³ One of my Russian collaborators from Tashkent concurred with Masha's analysis of the relative purity of spoken Russian in Uzbekistan.

ethnonational bloc connected to Moscow and Russia in some irreducible manner.⁶⁴

Besides the inherent theoretical interest in exploring the emergence of a new identity among Russians living abroad, there are some practical political effects of note. First, Russian-Estonians and Russian-Uzbeks, by differentiating themselves from Russians in Russia and adopting features common to the titular nationality, no doubt will ease ethnonational relations considerably. Moreover, as they understand themselves as increasingly different from Russians in Russia, and Russians there see the Russian diaspora as partly Other for them, the political gains to be made in Moscow by trumpeting the plight of Russians abroad diminish. This removes a major source of concern for many states in their relations with Moscow, especially Kazakhstan and the Baltic states. Finally, and derivative of this logic, Russian relations with the West should benefit from the removal of this potential source of tension between them.

The emergent Russian identities in Estonia and Uzbekistan only reinforce the direction that transition politics is already heading; they do not transform it. The new Russian identity in Ukraine, on the other hand, reflecting a Russian population satisfied that its own identity will not be erased by Ukrainian efforts to re-establish its own, opens the way to deeper and broader political cooperation on the basis of

⁶⁴ Like myself. See Author, "Russian Identity and Russian Foreign Policy in Estonia and Uzbekistan," in Celeste Wallander, ed. *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy After the Cold War* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 147-72.

class/material interest between the two communities than is imaginable in either Estonia or Uzbekistan.⁶⁵ And the effects of these identities are governed by the degree to which the transition is naturalized, legitimized, and subverted in these three countries.

Three Transitional Tales and a Methodological Coda

I would like to offer two kinds of conclusions. The first, and main conclusion, concerns how the findings in these three countries shed light on the prospects for transitional stability in Estonia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. While differentiating between legitimization and naturalization as two possible bulwarks for the transition, I also review the focus group findings on winners, losers, and national identity. The second conclusion is a methodological one, suggesting how the focus group research here, the narrative analysis of focus group transcripts, can be combined with other social science methods in a fruitful manner.

While it is premature, and may always be, to predict smoother sailing to a post-transitional state for both Estonia and Uzbekistan in comparison with Ukraine, I think the voices of those who are living this experience have much to say. Before treating each of their stories separately, it is worth noting one extraordinary common feature: each of these three societies is a true liminal, situated betwixt

⁶⁵ Other scholars have concluded also that “the range of identity options in Ukraine is clearly wider than in many other post-communist states.” Smith, et.al., *Nation-building*, p. 138.

and between. On the one hand, there exists the mostly unusable past of the protectionist Soviet period. On the other hand, there exists the bright and golden future of liberal market capitalism. In between exists the equally unusable present, the transition. But are there really no alternative usable transitions? Is there only one miserable path?

The table shows how the three new republics stack up to each other on various dimensions of legitimization and naturalization.

**Scoring the Transition's Relative Levels of
Legitimization and Naturalization**

	Estonia	Uzbekistan	Ukraine
1. Who Won?	+		-
	-		
2. What Gains?	+		+
	+		
3. Who Lost?	-		-
	-		
4. Material Problems	-		=
	-		
5. Local Russian Identity	+		+
	-		

6. Blaming the State	-	+	+/-
	-		
7. Time and the Future		+	+/-
	-		
Total Score	+3		-2
	-5		

Though admittedly crude, it should be evident that expectations for enduring the transition are far brighter in Estonia than Ukraine, with Uzbekistan arrayed somewhere in between. The plusses are won through achieving legitimization or naturalization; the minuses are amassed through delegitimizing and denaturalizing responses. On this scale, Estonia's transitional advantages are manifest, while Ukraine's relatively problematic state is equally clear, and Uzbekistan's middle position is apparent. To take but one example, "Blaming the State," respondents in Estonia legitimized the transition by failing to blame the government for the transition's costs; Ukraine's respondents delegitimized the transition by blaming the state; and Uzbekistan's respondents showed ambivalence by both blaming and absolving the state of responsibility.

Estonia's Move Through the Transition

Estonia appears to be uniquely endowed to make its way through the transition. Estonians and Russians, by and large, do not think of those who have

gained from the transition as being illegitimate recipients of these gains. Most important, they do not identify government officials as beneficiaries. Estonia further benefits from its citizens being satisfied with symbolic rewards, such as national independence and personal freedoms, at least in the short to medium term. Russian development of a different identity, that of Russo-Estonians, should also be a boon for the Estonian government. The hand of the Estonian government is further strengthened by the fact that blame for the transition is largely placed on the natural evolution of the transition itself. The Estonian government is yet more privileged by the solutions favored by the public: either more of the same, or just more time. Meanwhile, popular appreciation of the West as the Estonian future gives those living in Estonia a real future to imagine after the transition. In sum, the Estonian transition enjoys both legitimization and naturalization.

Uzbekistan's Transition from Above

The Uzbek government shares some of Estonia's advantages, but also bears several less promising features. The first potential problem is how Uzbek citizens think about those who have profited from the transition to this point. They see traders and government officials both as the primary beneficiaries, and as less than deserving. The Uzbek government benefits from popular appreciation of independence and personal freedom, as well as a restoration of religious values. But high marks for national and linguistic revival might conflict ultimately with

ethnonational peace.⁶⁶ But if Russians continue to develop a new Russo-Uzbek identity, this may mitigate the effects of an Uzbek ethnonational revival, as Russians will adopt more of the local identity as their own. Uzbekistan's material problems include two: wage arrears and health care, that do not afflict either Estonia or Ukraine as severely, at least in popular attention. In sum, Uzbekistan's recognized misery is balanced by how people in Uzbekistan understand that misery and their government's role in addressing it. Uzbekistan occupies a middle position. On the one hand, the transition is legitimized through high and almost unanimous regard for the rewards of independence. On the other hand, the transition is only weakly naturalized, with complaints about the winners and a less than enthusiastic appreciation of the Western future.

Ukraine's Potential to Exit the Transition

The transition in Ukraine appears to be most susceptible to serious political challenge. Sources of legitimization are few; just independence and personal freedom. Naturalization seems to have never taken hold: Ukrainians curse the Western future, blame the government for what is wrong, and still appreciate elements of the Soviet past. Meanwhile Russians do not see Ukrainians as Others, but as close to the same. This is not a relationship that is possible for Russians

⁶⁶ Several factors bear watching. The Karimov government has made nationality a category required on all passports, placed the Islamic symbol of a crescent moon on

with either Estonians or Uzbeks. The implication is that cooperation between Ukrainians and Russians on the basis of shared opposition to the social and economic effects of the transition for political action is imaginable, while it is much less so in either Estonia or Uzbekistan. Unlike Russians in Uzbekistan and Estonia who already might be developing their own hyphenated identities, Russians in Ukraine appear to think of themselves in relation to Ukrainians in such a way as to obviate the need to become a Russo-Ukrainian. Moreover, and significantly, Russians and Ukrainians share critical views of the future: it is not their future, but an alien one. In sum, the Ukraine government is saddled with popular blame, and ethnonational differences may not keep material/class interests from uniting political forces who will demand an interruption of the natural transitional course. In other words, the process of naturalization has not gone as far as in the other two countries.

In the second half of the conclusion I want to suggest how an interpretivist narrative account of transition politics, relying on focus group materials, can make a contribution to more conventional approaches to the same themes. It might be suggested, for instance, with a fair amount of validity, that one need only have looked at the economic indicators in these three countries to know where the transition was likely to succeed and fail. After all, it stands to reason that the better

the flag, and Karimov himself swore his presidential oath on the Koran. Smith, et.al.,

the economy is doing, the more popular support there will be for the transition. This common sense, however, only gets us so far. In 1996, for example, Estonia enjoyed a four per cent increase in GNP, while Ukrainian GNP declined by 12% over the past year, and 1995 Uzbek GNP declined by 1%. Inflation in the three countries was similarly distributed: 140% in Ukraine, 74% in Uzbekistan (1995), and 23% in Estonia.⁶⁷ The only deviation from this pattern comes from figures for income distribution. On this measure, Estonia is the second-worst performer in the post-communist world, trailing only Russia. Estonia has experienced a far more dramatic redistribution of income from the poor to the rich in the last six years than the other two countries.⁶⁸ From the conventional point of view that correlates economic indicators with transition outcomes, things look bad in Ukraine and Uzbekistan and better, but still ambiguous, in Estonia. But what happens when we read these figures with the narratives available from the focus groups? Two important possible re-interpretations emerge. First, Uzbekistan's prospects look better, because we know the transition has been naturalized. Second, Estonia's seemingly unjust redistribution of income recedes in importance because Estonians and Russians living in Estonia both identified these privileged winners from the transition as

Nation-building, pp. 145, 155, and 160.

⁶⁷ These figures come from www.un.kiev.ua/UnonLine/hdr97/bf.htm; www.un.tallinn.es/UnonLine/hdr97/bf.htm; and www.un.tashkent.uz/UnonLine/hdr96/bf.htm.

⁶⁸ Gini coefficients for post-communist countries are reported in Hellman 1998, 225.

legitimate, and second, they all understand income redistribution to be a natural part of the transition.

This example suggests that while these economic figures are significant, they should not be read as objective indicators of transitional stability.⁶⁹ While rising inflation and income inequality and declining growth are prima facie evidence of a rocky transition, we know from the focus groups that people actually experiencing the transition believe they are suffering, regardless of their level of misery relative to others in the post-communist world. Moreover, with the exception of Ukraine, there is no variance in support for the transition from Estonia to Uzbekistan, regardless of levels of relative hardship. Indeed, the narratives can help interpret the meaning of these raw figures.

The interpretation and application of these findings suggest ways in which focus group narratives could be usefully combined with survey and statistical work to produce more satisfying accounts of the sociopolitical and economic situations in post-communist countries. Joel Hellman, for example, has written about the fact that there is more governmental turnover in countries pursuing the most radical

⁶⁹ Ekiert and Kubik report the same lack of a relationship between objective economic indicators and political protest activity in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia. Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, "Contentious Politics in New Democracies," *World Politics* 50:4 (July 1998), 567-71. Terry Lynn Karl also acknowledged that "who benefits from democracy" mattered to regime durability in "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics* 23 (October 1990).

reform packages, and the least turnover in those that resist reform. This phenomenon is treated as anomalous because the most radical reformers have also experienced the best economic times. His interpretation of this data, that short-term electoral costs are no obstacle to deep reforms, is certainly not wrong.⁷⁰ But it does not, and cannot, entertain the alternative interpretations borne of the focus group narratives presented here. Such an interpretation would be that deep reforms are so painful that frequent elections are necessary in order to respond to public outcry against further pain. But the fact that reform continues, even when there is a change in government, demonstrates that frequent elections are not necessarily associated with political instability and do not inevitably lead to the reversal of economic policies.⁷¹ No alternative ensures the continuation of the transition. The result is rapid election cycling, as in Estonia, with frequent changes in government, but no change in the transition program. The point here is not to criticize Hellman's findings, but to point out that absent both his statistical correlations and the focus group narratives presented here, the account of Estonian electoral cycling offered above would have been impossible.

The focus group results on the naturalization of no alternative could explain another apparent anomaly in post-communist politics: the low level of social protest

⁷⁰ Hellman, "Winners Take All," 212-217.

against the costs of the transition. Ekiert and Kubik report that the level of protest politics in East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia in 1989-1993, i.e., the first transitional years, was lower than in “consolidated West European democracies.”⁷² Moreover, in the 1000s of strikes, occupations, demonstrations, and other forms of protest recorded by Ekiert and Kubik, they reported “broad support for democracy and the market economy.”⁷³ In other words, politics stopped before the naturalized future, even when protesting against the present.

Adam Przeworski has argued that the absence of change after an election may discredit democracy, and push people toward authoritarianism. The fact that this has not been true in any of the cases may be explained by the process of naturalization. To the extent that change is expected by electing a new government, it is only tactical emendation of the transitional program. The continuation of the real misery is expected regardless of who wins. Therefore, there is no thought of an authoritarian solution to a problem that has no solution, since there is no alternative to the future.

It is significant that Hellman poses his puzzle in terms identical to my own:
how can governments continue to pursue policies that cause so much misery

⁷¹ Postwar Italian politics was often described as unstable because of frequent elections that resulted in 47 governments in 50 years. But 45 of these governments had the same party, the Christian Democrats, at their head.

⁷² Ekiert and Kubik, “Contentious Politics,” 548.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 560. See p. 578, too.

without being thrown out?⁷⁴ He suggests that other scholars' solutions to this problem have included autonomous states, authoritarianism, powerful executives, and foreign assistance. But the evidence here suggests a more fundamental and robust solution to the dilemma: naturalization, a process that is greatly helped by the absence of a feasible alternative.

The general lesson here seems to be that analysis of focus group narratives can, at a minimum, generate alternative causal accounts for why outcomes of interest occur. So, if statistical analysis, whether from economic and social data or from survey research, turns up some promising findings linking preferences with circumstance, focus group data can and should furnish competitive accounts, thus helping to hone both theory and research instruments for the future. And of course focus group texts themselves may be used to test and refine theory.

The collective conversation recorded in the focus groups in Estonia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan challenged whether processes of deliberative legitimization were occurring in countries that had chosen a transition to liberal market capitalism. The evidence suggests that while such legitimization is desirable for transitional stability, as in Estonia, it is not necessary, as demonstrated in hardly deliberative Uzbekistan.

⁷⁴ Hellman 1998, p. 203. John Gray also suggests that liberal democracy may have to be sacrificed to see the transition through to a market economy. John Gray, "From Postcommunism to Civil Society: The Reemergence of History and the Decline of the Western Model," in Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, and Jeffrey

Instead the process of naturalization may provide an alternative to legitimization in making the transition durable. The absence of both, as in Ukraine, raises the risk of abandoning the transition altogether.

In sum, the stories of the 250 participants in these focus groups in Estonia, Uzbekistan, and Ukraine suggest that the transition can be stabilized two different ways, through legitimization or naturalization. The Estonian government benefits from both; the Uzbek government very partially from both; and the Ukrainian government barely from either. The results also suggest that alternative methodological approaches can benefit from taking each other into account.