



Humor and Nonviolent Struggle in Serbia (Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution)

Janjira Sombatpoonsiri

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"If I had no sense of humor, I should long ago have committed suicide," wrote the late Mahatma Gandhi, expressing the potent power of humor to sustain and uplift. Less obvious is humor's ability to operate as a cunning weapon in nonviolent protest movements. Over the last few decades, activists are increasingly incorporating subversive laughter in their protest repertoires, realizing the ways in which it challenges the ruling elite's propaganda, defuses antagonism, and inspires both participants and the greater population. In this highly original and engaging work, Sombatpoonsiri explores the nexus between humor and nonviolent protest, aiming to enhance our understanding of the growing popularity of humor in protest movements around the world. Drawing on insights from the pioneering Otpor activists in Serbia, she provides a detailed account of the protesters' systematic use of humor to topple Slobadan Milosevic' in 2000. Interviews with activists, protest newsletters, and documentaries of the movement combine to illustrate how humor played a pivotal role by reflecting the absurdity of the regime's propaganda and, in turn, by delegitimizing its authority. Sombatpoonsiri highlights the Otpor activists' ability to internationalize their nonviolent crusade, influencing youth movements in the Ukraine, Georgia, Iran, and Egypt. Globally, Otpor's successful use of humor became an inspiration for a later generation of protest movements.

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