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### (Trans)national Advocacy in the Ousting of Milošević: The Otpor Movement's Glocal Recursions

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# (Trans)national Advocacy in the Ousting of Milošević: The Otpor Movement's Glocal Recursions

Don J. Waisanen

*Over the past decade a remarkable number of revolutions worldwide imitated the touchstone youth movement Otpor, which played an influential role in ousting Serbian President Slobodan Milošević in 2000. Given the continual presence of Western organizations and resources in Otpor's uprising, I argue that the movement demonstrates a type of communication termed glocal recursion—a rhetorical strategy that invites social change by imitating global methods of resistance, with slight variations, in local contexts. In addition to its time-based connotations (in which activists ground new messages in old texts), glocal recursion advances a space-based understanding of recursive appeals (with activists creating local messages from global structures). This essay analyzes four aspects of Otpor's glocal recursions, including its technological conditions, structured spontaneity, indigenous adaptations, and dialectical reappropriations. Various implications are drawn for communication research.*

*Keywords:* Glocal; Movements; Recursion; Rhetoric; Transnational Advocacy Networks

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, a remarkable number of youth movements worldwide played substantial roles in advancing populist uprisings, the overthrow of dictatorial regimes, and new conditions for civil societies. In the Arab Spring, for instance, young people were instrumental in Egypt's April 6 Movement and eventual overthrow of long-time ruler Hosni Mubarak. Yet these events did

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not emerge without precedent. Like activists in nearly 50 other countries, youth from Egypt traveled to Belgrade to meet with former members of the Serbian movement Otpor (Rosenberg, 2011; Stolberg, 2011), a collective influential in ousting dictator Slobodan Milošević in 2000. Otpor (Serbian for “Resistance”) inspired subsequent revolutions across Europe and internationally (Ames, 2006; Irwin, 2005). Egyptian youth also used Otpor’s strategies and documentary *Bringing Down a Dictator* as inspiration for their movement (Jones, 2011)—as one activist related, “the methods we learned from Serbia are what we are using in Cairo” (Kristof, 2011, para. 5).

Otpor and its successors highlight how movements have found new ways to leverage global and local resources toward social change. In particular, Otpor’s relationships with Western political actors illustrate how global strategies of resistance can be locally adapted. “Glocal” is thus a relevant term that “assumes a dynamic negotiation between the global and the local, with the local appropriating elements of the global which are of use, while employing at the same time strategies to retain its identity” (Koutsogiannis & Mitsikopoulou, 2004, p. 86). Glocal scholarship explores how local actors borrow and adapt discourses and techniques from other places—and the new practices and tensions emerging in these interactions (Mitsikopoulou, 2008, p. 353). I find a glocal perspective is particularly useful for understanding macroconcepts like “globalization” in terms of rhetorical processes that mediate the global and the local, underscoring how “when ideas, objects, institutions, images, practices, performances, are transplanted to other places, they both bear the marks of their history as well as undergo a process of translation” (Rao, 2011, p. 157).

In an increasingly interconnected world, how groups have negotiated glocal processes and what these strategies portend for movements remain open issues for inquiry. Social movement studies demonstrate how nondominant groups contest their cases among many audiences (e.g., Chavez, 2011; Pezzullo, 2001). But there is a pressing need to factor globalization into such work as a trend that both motivates and is impacted by local actors and institutions. Additionally, non-U.S. movements beg more attention (Cox & Foust, 2009, p. 621) and scholars need to “internationalize public address studies” (Zarefsky, 2010, p. 76).

While communication research has focused on local movement messages (e.g., Lake, 1991; Sanchez & Stuckey, 2000; Waisanen, 2012), a next step is to better understand global and local activist practices. One call for such research comes from the burgeoning “transnational advocacy networks” (TANs) literature, which connects efforts to construct a global civil society with domestic democracy movements (see Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Strange, 2011). Specifically, research needs to explore the social dimensions of TANs and *how* change has been constructed beyond borders (Klotz, 2002). Since some studies have established many of the ways Otpor influenced subsequent revolutions (Kuzio, 2006; Nikolayenko, 2007), this essay will move beyond comparative analyses to develop a deeper theory of this case, probing the possibilities and limitations for movements combining global and local activities in pursuing change.

Toward this end, I conducted a close reading on an extensive range of extant interviews with activists, literatures, and other documents providing both primary and secondary accounts of Otpor's uprising. A LexisNexis search of the term "Otpor" was made with major world publications and broadcast transcripts between 2000 and 2011, and a textual snowball sample of artifacts were gathered from these 477 sources' allusions and references. Focusing on newspapers, books, films, *YouTube* videos, and other in-depth searches of Otpor's texts, including posters, commercials, and training manuals, I constructed a picture of the movement's communication arising from frequent and distinctive patterns in the data.

My method emerged from the very nature of Otpor's discourses, which provided a diffuse rather than discrete base for research, with many actors and analysts creating perspectives on the movement. This approach has precedent in communication studies, following McGee's (1990) argument that critics can construct a text and context out of the diffuse elements appearing in fragmented contemporary cultures. I also follow Campbell's advice that methods with fixed perspectives or formulas can forgo the unique, complex operations of artifacts—"criticism must be polymorphous because rhetoric is polysemous; that is, rhetorical acts mean in many different ways and on many different levels" (2010, p. 93).

In this essay, I argue that Otpor demonstrates a type of movement communication termed *glocal recursion*. Given the continual presence of Western organizations and resources in Otpor's uprising, glocal recursion is a rhetorical strategy that invites social change by imitating global methods of resistance, with slight variations, in local contexts. In effect, the collective engaged in (trans)national advocacy by strategically promoting but also often masking transnational or national resources across its communications to address local audiences. For clarification, it is not simply that rhetoric mediates the global and the local but that it does so recursively, grounding the new in the old (a time-based, *temporal* plane—for example, using old war posters with messages slightly altered to make new appeals) and the local in the global (a geographically based, *spatial* plane—such as the use of Western polling and marketing techniques in Otpor's local campaigns) to invite social change. Glocal recursion highlights how geographically bounded individuals and groups can reach back in time and beyond national boundaries to construct persuasive communication strategies for local political goals. It generates insights into the amplification of a particular advocacy pattern in global politics and what this mode of operating may mean for movements in general—especially how postrevolution challenges for a movement may emerge from messages continually turning to the past or global actors to move forward.

The following two sections provide a historical background and conceptual basis for this project. Next, I analyze four aspects of glocal recursion in Otpor's activities, including the technological conditions under which movement activists built recursive actions, the use of structured spontaneity as a form of recursive organization and appeal, the indigenous, recursive adaptations inviting audiences to revolt, and the dialectical reappropriations recursively drawn between students and the regime. Finally, several implications are developed from this analysis.

## Background

The collapse of communism and Tito's Yugoslav federation in the late 1980s led to the rise of Slobodan Milošević, who became president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (consisting of Serbia-Montenegro) in 1989. Milošević sent his Serbian military into ethnic wars in neighboring Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia in the early 1990s, which ended when peace accords were signed among the region's leaders in 1995. In 1998, warfare erupted again, this time between Albanian separatists and Serbian police in the province of Kosovo. NATO air strikes resulted in the loss of Kosovo to Serbia in 1999 (M. R. Thompson & Kuntz, 2004, p. 165).

In July 2000, Milošević called for a September election to change a voting procedure. His goal was to "bypass the Assembly in favor of a direct vote... his current mandate still had over a year to run, [but] Milošević wanted to re-insure his position" (Benson, 2004, p. 177). Standing against Milošević, a united front of 18 opposition parties formed the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS), which endorsed former law professor Vojislav Kostunica as its official candidate (McFaul, 2005). Milošević lost the September election and annulled the results. A coalition of Otpor and other opposition organizers led a million citizen march to the Federal Assembly building in Belgrade on October 5. Students and others from around the country came armed, expecting violent reprisal from the regime, but the battle never transpired. Failing to mobilize his military, Milošević conceded the election (Di Giovanni, 2003). Following his political downfall, Milošević was transferred to the International Criminal Court in 2001 on charges of war crimes and genocide in the Bosnian and Kosovan wars but died in his cell in 2006 (Kole, 2006).

Some prior developments were critical to Otpor's formation. In 1991, Milošević centralized state media under his party's direction (Gruenwald, 2001). In 1996/1997, he canceled municipal election victories by opposition parties across Serbia, after losing the election (Chiclet, 2001). Some short-lived student protests took place over these events, and Milošević responded in 1998 by passing a law requiring Serbian university deans and key personnel to be appointed directly by the government. Large numbers of faculty throughout the system quit or were fired.

In October 1998, 15 students at four Belgrade universities reacted to these repressive measures by founding Otpor. In an effort to channel the students' previous energies into a focused cause, Otpor made its sole goal Milošević's overthrow. At its height, Otpor claimed 70,000 members of high school and college age, across 126 chapters (Agovino, 2000; Chiclet, 2001; Lebor, 2004). Consistent with its goal of removing Milošević from power, the U.S. government funneled money to Otpor under The Freedom Support Act (Durden-Smith, 2005). Since Serbian banks were not secure, members were handed bags of cash in bordering Montenegro or Hungary (N. Thompson, 2001), where they also received training from consultants. The U.S. government spent only 40 million dollars on this cause, in comparison to its three billion dollar effort to oust Milošević during the Kosovan war. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the International Republican Institute, the National

Democratic Institute, and George Soro's Fund for an Open Society, trained and assisted Otpor activists and organized voter drives and opposition training while channeling money to the group (M. A. Cohen & Kupcu, 2005, p. 49; Holley, 2001; Hudson, 2003).

While the movement's influence should not be overemphasized, many regard Otpor as largely responsible for the revolution (Meyer & Nash, 2002; Sell, 2002; Simeone, 2001). Other factors such as an independent vote count (Ackerman & Duvall, 2005), the prospect of a cold winter with food and gas shortages (Di Giovanni, 2003), a dire economy, several military defeats (McPaul, 2005), an unpopular incumbent, and a clear case of electoral fraud also inspired change (M. R. Thompson & Kuntz, 2004). Yet "no other opposition force was as unsettling to the regime or as critical to its overthrow" as Otpor (R. Cohen, 2002, p. 56). To better understand what practices contributed to these conditions, I turn to the concept of recursion.

### Recursive Rhetoric

Jasinski clarifies that a root term for recursive means "to run back," finding the concept explains how "social life is recursive because it is repetitive," since "our lives, both individually and collectively, are rather routinized; they consist of patterns of behavior that are repeated . . . with degrees of variation" (2001, p. 481). Recursion bears similarities to LaCapra's "repetition with variation over time" (1983, p. 44), and Leff's ideas about imitation, which "allowed historical texts to serve as resources for invention" (1997, p. 97). Transported to a movement context, recursion explains how *temporal* elements are engaged in cross-border advocacy, as organizers imitate old texts to introduce social changes over time. But I would add there is also a "glocal" plane upon which this rhetoric takes place, so that *spatial* resources are recursively engaged between the global and the local.<sup>1</sup>

While qualities of human language can be described as recursive in general (Giddens, 1979), Otpor's use of time- and space-based recursion illustrates a more specific, strategic rhetorical pattern or practice fit for modern conditions. Otpor is continuous with past movements engaging transnational resources in local contexts, like nonviolent civil rights movements inspired by Gandhi. But its local tactics evidence a remarkable *degree* of historical and international imitation that appears to have arisen with globalization and the speed and reach of new technologies. Compared with decades-long transnational social justice campaigns to abolish the slave trade or movements for better wages that worked mostly within national boundaries (see Manheim, 2011), for example, the sheer pace of Otpor's borrowing from other times and places to achieve its aims demonstrates a far more recursive orientation to activism. My point is not to establish a threshold at which glocal recursion suddenly becomes evident but rather to focus on the fusion of time- and space-based recursion in Otpor's communication as a matter of persuasive emphasis. Otpor's continual alternation between old/new and local/global resources also provides some explanation for the viral nature of this messaging in inspiring so many other imitative revolutions over such a short period of time.

Underscoring what is potentially new about recursive approaches to movement messaging and organizing, Crozier notes emerging contextual trends of “recursive governance” in contemporary political communication (2007, p. 1). Recursive governance highlights the shifts that have arisen with the networked, multilateral, and mimetic processes involved in modern governing, involving the global spread of new technologies, the professionalization of media advocacy, and the continual monitoring of public audiences. Different than prior political paradigms of “technical rational expertise” (2007, p. 11), where governments saw communication activities as unilateral, meanings as relatively singular and stable, and publics as “homogenous” and “passive,” for instance, information is far harder for leaders to control now than in the past, creating relentless needs for public relations, “media management,” and consultation with audiences through “generative informational loops” (2007, p. 8). In essence, “the idea of recursion offers a way to conceptualize this new mode of communicative action” (2007, p. 4). I follow Crozier’s logic but also locate recursive conditions with the development of particular “glocal” rhetorical strategies.

Recursive rhetoric imitates to invent, looking backward to move forward and to the global for the local, as structures with which to generate change. Moving beyond models that theorize political communication in terms of linear messaging and reception, this study hence examines the mimetic, transformative toggling between “global flows” and “local identities” (Rao, 2011, p. 156) in modern movement activism. The next section analyzes the recursive features of Otpor’s communication.

### Otpor’s Glocal Recursions

#### *Technological Conditions*

The technological conditions under which activists built recursive actions from older and newer media constituted one aspect of Otpor’s rhetoric. From a temporal angle, this recursive communication highlights moments when old technologies and protest tactics were repeated but slightly varied to meet situational demands. From a spatial perspective, Otpor recursively imitated newer technologies emerging beyond Serbian borders to construct local social changes.

(Trans)national movements can evolve through recursive technological practices. Following the Serbian government’s crackdown on independent media and universities in 1998, a “craving for a new form of protest” developed among disaffected youth (“Opponents of,” 2000, p. 1). In particular, emerging Western media provided Otpor with new capabilities. The student protests in 1991 were limited geographically to Belgrade, the 1996/1997 protests spread to other Serbian cities, but it was between the 1996/1997 and 2000 demonstrations that students became users of the Internet (Vagvolgyi, 2000). Serbia’s population is quite dispersed and isolated, underscoring the region’s potential for centralizing media to construct new collectives (Rogel, 2004); and Otpor used the Internet as a resource before it even had an office (York, 2002).

In Otpor protests, new global media sidestepped the regime’s monopoly over traditional technologies like newspapers and television. The U.S. State Department

continually, recursively updated Otpor with new communication tools, routing servers from other surrounding European countries to bypass the Serbian government's jurisdiction (Lebor, 2004). As new media limit the power states have to control public opinion (M. A. Cohen & Kupcu, 2005), Otpor introduced emerging technologies to mediate global and local interests.

Critically, these new technologies did more than "inform" Serbians, they invited a fearful, apathetic populace to become engaged citizens. Otpor's marketing director related that new media were chosen to give off "the image of an illegal organization . . . to be more sexy than the other old movements . . . Like with some illegal organizations from the second World War" (York, 2000b, "On spreading," para. 1, 2). Using both a historical and geographical reference, he repeats the illegal organization image to create the impression new global technologies were more than media—they were resources for framing Otpor as active and appealing, inviting transformed civic identities.

Western video game technologies also served as an identity frame for political engagement. Many Otpor members used language and ideas from gaming to construct resistance methods. These imitations even led one member to create a video game for activists to "practice scenarios like battling corruption, fighting discrimination, and overthrowing dictators" (Spivack, 2011, para. 1). As a bridge to revolutionary strategies (Tischler, 2006), framing protest in terms of games helped youth recursively connect a familiar domain with unfamiliar political actions.

Replicating global technological structures can thus serve to create new "networked public spheres."<sup>2</sup> Cell phones and text messaging spread news of protests, providing nonregime information to members (Zivkovic & Hogan, 2005, p. 162), and Otpor used new media in ways the Serbian government seldom understood (Vagvolgyi, 2000, para. 5–6). Milošević curtailed nonregime newspapers "by creating a shortage of newsprint," thinking he had full control of the opposition, while new media undermined the state (Bujosevic & Radovanovic, 2003, p. 3).

Western organizations provided Otpor with continual training in modern campaign techniques, further propelling the movement's turn to and replications of global resources. Otpor's revolution was qualitatively organized (at local levels), but also a product of social science (from global structures) (Mendelson, 2004). For the first time in Yugoslavian history, a "poll-driven, focus-group tested revolution" was conducted so that, as one student activist related, "at every moment, we know what to say to the people" (Dobbs, 2000, p. A01). Ultimately, such global marketing techniques recursively mediated national and transnational interests. A former Clinton advisor polled the Serbian electorate for years before the revolution (M. A. Cohen & Kupcu, 2005), and NGOs worked with Otpor on legal standards for fair public voting and exit-polling (Popovic, Milivojevic, & Djinovic, 2006, p. 57).

From a recursive perspective, polling is a means of not only "informing" but "transforming" public understandings. By repeatedly relaying back to Otpor and Serbian publics what their opinions were, recurring reports invited citizens to modify their identities—suggesting social knowledge should induce collective action. To create an opposition candidate, Western polling techniques showed that Kostunica was



far more popular than former Serbian politician Djindjic. As a result, international pollsters advised Djindjic to leave the campaign to Kostunica for a viable opposition to form. Such repeated polls called for change in a context where candidates had previously been unable to unite against Milošević (see York, 2002).

Yet, the role of new technologies in such revolutions should not be overstated. (Trans)national advocacy constructs change through repeated turns back to older technologies and more traditional resistance strategies. One Otpor activist related, “no movement that I know of that has relied solely on the Internet has succeeded” (Spivack, 2011, para. 7). Several Otpor members asserted that Uncle Sam posters (which urged U.S. citizens to join the army during World War I and II) were “one of the greatest recruitment posters in history” (Popovic et al., 2006, p. 101). Otpor reappropriated the text with a finger pointed at Serbians urging “We need you” (Popovic et al., 2006, p. 101), illustrating both a temporal turn back to a historical text and a spatial (U.S.), global resource varied for the Serbian context. Whether Otpor was exposed to the original posters through transnational media like the Internet or through other means, direct links to outside communities led activists to adapt this message through a local, more traditional medium (posters) for Serbian audiences.

The local, historical symbolism of older technologies can also act as recursive structures for global interests. In 1997, when the government closed a popular, independent radio station in Belgrade, the station became a symbol for those who valued an independent media (“Protests in,” 1997), so transnational actors latched onto this cause. A poll showed the U.S.’s Radio Free Europe was the most listened to station in Serbia from 1999 to 2000 (Hudson, 2003). Independent media “relay[ed] news about the falsified vote” and “publicize[d] mounting popular protests” (McFaul, 2005, p. 9). Using an older local resource (radio), but in new way (backed by Western rather than regime interests) invited change.

Overall, technological conditions were an important aspect of glocal recursion, as Otpor repeatedly turned to but made slight variations upon temporal and spatial structures. As Roudometof (2005) writes, examining how “globalization is present in everyday life, at the micro-level... provides the preconditions, the material and non-material infrastructure for the emerging spaces of human interaction” (pp. 118–119). In a similar manner, Otpor’s very organizational structure highlights another characteristic of its glocal recursions.

### *Structured Spontaneity*

As both a form of movement organizing and type of persuasive appeal, structured spontaneity constituted a second area where Otpor used glocal recursions. The movement’s associations with global actors helped students evolve from “ragtag pranksters to power brokers” in their local advocacy (Genzlinger, 2002, p. B17). Many student protests prior to 2000 focused on making activism spontaneous and “fun” to engage Serbian youth, which had little impact upon the regime. When students combined an improvisational spirit with systematic political technique, however, Otpor created a

robust method of structured spontaneity.<sup>3</sup> Recognizing this form, one former Serbian army general called the type of protests he saw emerging in 2000 “organized disorder” (Erlanger & Cohen, 2000, p. 1). An Otpor leader too noted his “was not a very centralized organization,” yet “enforced planning” (York, 2000a, “On Otpor,” para. 1, 3). Moreover, global organizations like “the CIA gathered important information, but mostly it stood on the sidelines. It helped to write the script and plot strategy, but it didn’t carry out the plans” (N. Thompson, 2001, “Rules,” para. 1).

A global playbook acted as one recursive resource for turning spontaneity into serious political action. More than in past eras, movements are pressured by global media providing model examples of activism inviting imitation. A text for exporting revolution used by Burmese activists in the 1990s, *From Dictatorship to Democracy* (Sharp, 1993/2003), became one of Otpor’s primary guides for action (Schaeffer-Duffy, 2005). Yet, Otpor activists underscored how such global resources should leave room for local spontaneity: “without proper planning, your campaign is just a series of ‘guesses,’ . . . of course, because campaigns are always changing, your plan is a fluid document” (Popovic et al., 2006, pp. 46–48).

Beyond an organizational form, structured spontaneity is also a type of persuasive appeal that toggles between transnational and national interests. One Otpor rule was never to talk about its outside world assistance (Dobbs, 2000) so that a spontaneous quality would permeate students’ messages (Ivan Marovic Tavaana Interview Transcript, 2010, “Vision and Motivation,” para. 1). Many Serbians felt unfairly stereotyped by outside world images—especially of Balkan barbarism—and remained opposed to foreign interference (Gruenwald, 2001). Otpor was thus careful to give off an image of authentic, homegrown spontaneity to the population at all times.

As such, structured spontaneity is a way of maintaining some movement leadership while seeming to have none. Otpor continually communicated to its members and potential enlistees that the movement lacked hierarchy (Chiclet, 2001), so that “Otpor was a total contrast to the hierarchical parties that were the norm in Serbia” (Gallagher, 2005, p. 111). Local Otpor chapters had autonomy and could make decisions by consensus to counter threats of prison or bribery, since not every member could be jailed (Agovino, 2000; R. Cohen, 2002). Otpor was thus described as “dynamic, innovative, and decentralized” (Lebor, 2004, p. 303). But some leaders clearly emerged (see York, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c), with many individuals holding greater influence than others (Sandford, 2000, p. 32). Thus, structured spontaneity was as much a credibility appeal as a method of organizing.

As much as recursive rhetoric can legitimize a cause, it may also set the stage for future movement problems. By masking the global structures upon which its apparently spontaneous actions were being built, public perceptions about Otpor’s authenticity were easily relinquished after the revolution, and “many Otpor members quit, feeling betrayed” (Rosenberg, 2011, para. 21). The need to pause over strategies reproducing old or global resources to invent local changes is also underscored in the next section, which analyzes Otpor’s largely time-based, indigenous appeals with Serbian populations.

*Indigenous Adaptations*

Otpor's indigenous adaptations constituted a third area where glocal recursion emerged. Mostly focusing on Serbian cultural and historical myths, the movement's local, nationalistic adaptations used recursive appeals to invite changes. Otpor activists fused such appeals with transnational political strategies like branding and audience segmentation to reach Serbians. One opposition leader, underscoring the hold the regime had on the country expressed, "Milošević is inside all of us" (Wertheimer, 2000, p. 1). Pre-election polling in 2000 showed that despite Milošević's pervasive unpopularity, the majority of Serbs still believed he would hold on to his power after the election (Dobbs, 2000). By imitating but slightly varying available temporal and spatial resources over time, Otpor chipped away at the leader's power.

Glocal recursion appears to be well suited for situations where long-standing ideologies have taken root among a populace. As much as Otpor asked for a clear outcome—the overthrow of Milošević—its campaigns worked to gradually motivate local audiences by repeating discourses with which they could identify. In one example, Otpor combined sloganeering with common Serbian knowledge to create familiar but new terms. Drawing on historical knowledge that Milošević's parents both committed suicide when he was very young, Otpor took a popular chant Serbian football fans once sang, "Serbian Slobo, Serbia is with you" and repeated the structure with a new (stark) variation, "Slobo, save Serbia and kill yourself" (Lebor, 2004, p. 301), showing how imitations of old structures can construct new forms of advocacy.

In glocal campaigns, "branding" and "segmenting" strategies reproduced global marketing structures with younger and older audiences. Otpor members used "get out and vote" campaigns through youth rock concerts organized across 60 Serbian towns, while different initiatives targeted other groups (Centre for Applied Non-violent Action and Strategies, n.d., para. 9). The "get out and vote" drive was directly adapted from U.S. election slogans (Thompson, 2001), bearing similarities to MTV-style "Rock the Vote" campaigns. Otpor activists used celebrity advocates and an "It is time" campaign to reach the 18 to 27 demographic, while creating messages "oriented to different target groups, both urban and rural, with different education level[s] and political preferences" (Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies, 2004, "August," para. 2, 4). This branded revolution used 5,000 U.S. taxpayer-funded cans of spray paint and 2.5 million stickers of the Otpor logo to spread resistance messages across the country (Ames, 2006). Another segmenting strategy used local, well-known kids in rural neighborhoods to create publicity in the provinces (York, 2002) and officials' children to gain access to regime figures (Ivan Marovic Tavaana Interview Transcript, 2010, "Audience," para. 4). Children became a recursive resource, combining their familiar presence among Serbian publics with unfamiliar messages.

Transnational actors provided further inspiration for appeals targeting local audiences. It took two years for Otpor to build a resistance network and to reach the countryside, which strongly supported Milošević (Simeone, 2001). But after watching

film footage of U.S. civil-rights struggles and prodemocracy demonstrations in China's Tiananmen Square, one Otpor leader learned that movement strategies should focus on small, step-by-step efforts (Gross, 2002, para. 20). In its tactics, Otpor drew inspiration from the Velvet Revolution in Prague (Popham, 2011), and such disparate Western figures as Martin Luther King, Jr., Monty Python, and even the "Untouchables" who pursued Al Capone (Holley, 2000, p. A3; Rosenberg, 2011).

Beyond the glocal invention of slogans and other techniques, time-based, nationalist myths perpetuating regime power invite more complex recursive adaptations with local audiences. Many Serbians were proud of their history, and Milošević cast himself within a mythic "strongman mindset" permeating Serbian culture, particularly in rural provinces where folk heroes were celebrated for their ability to wield power against foreign enemies (Gruenwald, 2001; Pavlakovic, 2005). Burkholder (1989) describes how "by moving beyond ideology to mythic first principles, rhetors are able to transcend ideological differences" (p. 293), erasing the need for deliberative processes. Similarly, regime appeals to totalizing, quasi-religious myths moved Milošević's policies beyond public debate. In essence, Otpor worked with many populations having "a greater symbolic investment in the past than the present" (Lipset & Raab, 1978, p. 504); making the repetition of past resources to invent new perspectives necessary.

Activists can dismantle archetypal myths by recursively communicating their own unyielding stances in the face of opposition. By holding their ground against regime repression, for instance, youth imitated heroic, "strongman" actions—but varied this historical pattern by embodying the myth in collective rather than individual terms—repeatedly modeling how Serbs could act in democratic concert rather than subservience. As an Otpor member emphasized, "we did everything like we [were] a massive movement" (York, 2002). Even when membership numbers were low, creating an impression of the movement's strength remained critical to local adaptations.

From an early point, students repeated yet varied popular Serbian myths and prophecies to serve their cause, targeting their communication in outlying provinces (Malešević, 1997; Sell, 2002). Otpor also held a demonstration in Milošević's mythic hometown of "Pozarevac" after regime police brutally beat a young Otpor member (Agovino, 2000; "Opposition stirs," 2000). Otpor repeatedly linked Milošević's city with the beating of the young activist, so that the well-known town became a symbol for regime injustice, and posted funeral notices in the town's center announcing Milošević's death on October 5, 2000 (Di Giovanni, 2003, p. 167). Activists imitated a common text in an expected location but with typical content altered. While such notices normally only look to the past, the repetition of this structure with the slight, time-based variation attempted to reclaim a public place.

Former Otpor activists working with resistance efforts worldwide continue to emphasize that revolutions must be "totally home-driven and homegrown thing[s]" (Brooks & Teodorovic, 2011, "Laughing all," para. 5). Yet, Otpor's use of global resources belied member's claims to purely local advocacy. Nationalist discourses might be appreciated by particular audiences, but one final aspect of such moves

should be considered—that regime messages about a movement’s recursions can equally shift the public’s attention back to activists’ transnationalism.

### *Dialectical Reappropriation*

Communication between Otpor and the regime offers a fourth perspective on glocal recursion. Both Otpor and the administration co-opted or imitated each other’s discourses. When a regime and movement are constantly committed to reappropriating one another’s symbols, recursive messaging carries the potential to delegitimize both parties.

The very temporal and spatial factors at play in a recursive conflict are grounds for dialectical reappropriation. Milošević framed Otpor through state media from the movement’s inception. The regime called Otpor “a terrorist organization” (Wertheimer, 2000), “fascist hooligans,” and “fascist hoodpins” (Manyon, 2000, p. 22). An Otpor member stated that the regime’s attempt to cast Otpor’s logo as a fascist symbol from World War II was, in turn, reappropriated: “We accommodated the fascist story easily. We just shifted [its colors from] black to white” (York, “Was the,” 2000c, para. 2). The regime repeated public messages about Otpor youth “work[ing] against [the] country’s interests”—so Otpor answered with campaign posters outlining “Resistance because I love Serbia” (Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies, “November,” 2004, para. 3)—imitating but varying the regime’s messages. One Otpor activist even likened this process to “Newton[’s] law of action and reaction” (York, 2002).

Milošević globalized the conflict, using his population’s anti-Americanism—at its height with the country’s post-Kosovo loss to NATO—to tie Otpor to Western governments (Erlanger, 2000). Milošević labeled Otpor members “traitors,” “NATO infantry” (Sell, 2002, p. 339), and “NATO lackeys” (Dobbs, 2000, p. A01). Televised propaganda re-characterized Otpor’s transnational assistance through negative imaging:

Every evening, news programs broadcast clips of Otpor rallies, interspliced with shots of dead bodies from the Kosovo war, the American flag flapping atop the White House . . . Posters in the street portray Otpor members in Nazi uniform, fists clenched and raised in Heil Hitler salute. Beneath the image it reads: “[U.S. Secretary of State] Madeleine [Albright]’s Youth. Killing Children, Destroying Schools, Destroying Hospitals . . . Why?” (Brunner, 2000, p. 34)

As regime messages about the movement became more global, activists increasingly localized their rhetoric, repeatedly repositioning the(ir) bodies shown on television in local urban and rural places. Progressively, regime charges of terrorism became unbelievable to Serbians as Otpor youth spread out around the country, using their very selves as counterarguments to the administration’s claims (see Sanford, 2000; Sell, 2002).

The use of ambiguous protest symbols is vulnerable to co-optation (see Edgerly, Toft, & Veden, 2011, p. 329) and recursive appeals. Otpor’s black fist logo, used

throughout almost all its counterregime advertising, was a historical repetition of the “red fist,” a communist image well regarded by Milošević and his supporters (R. Cohen, 2002, p. 56). Regime media reinterpreted the Otpor logo (a black fist with “He’s finished” underneath) with posters throughout Serbia, “showing the Otpor fist, but full of dollars, with the slogan: ‘It’s finished—with Treason’” (Holley, 2000, p. A3). In response, Otpor recursively plastered “He’s finished” stickers over existing Milošević posters (Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies, n.d., para. 10).

Humor is a type of communication well suited to such reappropriations. Humorous forms like parody are based upon doubled perspectives, juxtaposing imitations of an original image or symbol against slightly varied versions of the same. Milošević would often declare himself a “national hero” to the Serbian public. In mocking response, Otpor members, “printed stickers and badges [of Milošević] in mass quantities that read ‘I am a national hero’” (Harden, 2002, p. 8). By repeating Milošević’s assertion in a different medium, the movement suggested an alternative interpretation of the leader as simply bloviating—while Western institutions funded these messages, fusing global structures with local content.

One recursive strategy involved humorous “dilemma actions,” which co-opted regime behaviors. Otpor activists rolled barrels with pictures of Milošević on them down city streets and asked passersby to insert coins into small slots on each barrel’s side. If they had no money, citizens were invited to hit the barrels with baseball bats (“Barrel,” 2011). When police showed up, activists would flee and take footage of them arresting a barrel. Whether intervention was taken or not, the regime ended up in a losing situation (Popovic et al., 2006, p. 70). Temporally, this was a way of making typical regime actions look ridiculous. Spatially, Otpor’s inspiration came from global examples of dilemma actions—like Gandhi’s Salt March against the British (Popovic et al., 2006, p. 70).

Interacting with a regime, recursive imitations of old, familiar topics can be reappropriated to reach new publics. Otpor mobilized many youth to play the board games *Monopoly* or *Risk* in public locations to communicate, “how Milošević was toying with their future” (Harden, 2002, p. 8). Activists would frequently refer to Milošević as the “Dean” of the country (Brunner, 2000), giving students a way to connect their personal context with Otpor’s political cause. A choice to respond nonviolently to violence was also a reappropriating act. Otpor youth were subjected to over 4,000 detentions, beatings, and other violent regime actions but seldom wavered in their devotion to nonviolent resistance (Ackerman & Duvall, 2005). Repeatedly responding with as much force as the regime at each turn, but with nonviolent variations, Otpor persuaded many adults to join its cause. Overall, such tactics illustrate *how* a hallmark movement recursively constructed change in both a bordered and borderless context.

## Conclusion

Otpor’s legacy is of independence and interdependence, and the blurring of these distinctions in matters technological and otherwise. Activists desired original methods

for activating change but found them in past and global structures. They created indigenous spontaneity and nonhierarchical appearances but craved and implemented order. Otpor sought presence and authenticity in its local efforts but transcended constraining domestic forces through mythic appeals, regime imitations, and universal blueprints for protest. There are a number of implications emerging from this analysis.

First, glocal recursion explains how movements create (trans)national advocacy networks through particular rhetorical strategies. Glocal recursion is a pattern accounting for a mixture of local and global elements in diffuse movement messages. As Jasinski proposed, “the concept of recursivity may help rhetorical scholars to negotiate or circumvent vexing conceptual dualisms” (2001, p. 483). Recursion provides an approach for examining the ebbs and flows of globalization, which is established by and sets the conditions for recursive rhetoric—particularly as external actors pressure movements with examples worth imitating.

There is unlikely to be such a thing as a completely nonrecursive political movement. Yet, transnational environments expose activists to similar events and movements to such a high degree that activists may find they have little choice but to engage in transcending rhetorical strategies. Relative to other times and places in which recursion has been less necessary—and as immediate transnational media like the Internet provide a background against which to draw ideas—the persuasive challenge for activists increasingly appears to be one of adaptation and translation. Overall, recursive rhetoric navigates the many ways collectives are (re)produced in contexts where both national and transnational pressures have become pervasive.

Second, glocal recursion guides persuasive invention and civic transformation. Many networked models of communication characterize “information” as a relatively neutral substance flowing in a unidirectional fashion between nodes. As much as Otpor engineered the transmission, diffusion, and adoption of youth movements across European countries (Nikolayenko, 2007), recursion demonstrates that there is far more going on in the production and reception of movement messages. In the uprising, media didn’t just inform but recursively, repeatedly invited transformations in civic identities.

Even polling—which can prevent publics from seeing opinions as discursive products, forgoing more deliberative forms of democracy (see Hauser, 1998)—recursively invited new political identities in the uprising through their very repetition. At the same time, recursive discourses are particularly suited to protest forms like humor, which rely upon the repetition of past social knowledge to advance new perspectives. The fusion of temporal and spatial resources in Otpor’s rhetoric provides a picture of the many actors and institutions at play in (trans)national advocacy. This framework thus counters explanations of movement activism that might, for example, see new technologies as the only driving force in modern revolutions.

Last, glocal recursion raises questions about the conservative or radical dimensions of (trans)national advocacy. Communicators must always work within the structures of their times and places in constructing new, more liberating forms of discourse (Campbell, 1995). Given the pressures of a globalizing environment, however,

recursive discourses may condition individuals or groups to keep turning to prior or outside structures too much. Otpor's eventual dissolution appears to have been impacted by the weight of recursive messaging used during the uprising, showing how easily old conditions can remain after a revolution; and providing one explanation for why movements may have such a difficult time maintaining change after a revolt.

The revolution was criticized for leaving intact a strong, parochial nationalism in Serbia, undermining the potential for democratic values to take hold (Pavlakovic, 2005). The opposition often translated its efforts through a mythical cultural language understood by many Serbians. It is possible that Otpor could only seek incremental change in these adaptations, given audiences' deep commitments to historical symbolism. But an issue in Serbian politics has remained: "the problem of liquidating political rhetoric based on images and characters which can hardly survive in democratic political discourse" (Čolović, 2002, p. 308).

Revolutionary discourse is also challenged by recursive activism masking foreign government assistance, potentially fostering reactionary, conservative responses among local populations. Dechaine has asked "how, in light of the difference-oriented epistemology of a 'postmodern' world, are we to understand the place of 'universal rights' and totalizing conceptions of social 'global' processes" (2005, p. 8)? Otpor invokes the same tension, demonstrating how a lack of transparency about the involvement of global actors in local changes may lead to public cynicism in an uprising's aftermath. There was a clear desire for Otpor's work to continue after the revolution, as "a civil society public-interest group and unofficial watchdog" (Gruenwald, 2001, p. 155). Yet Serbians came to understand how much Otpor was involved with the West. Many associated postrevolution Otpor slogans like "we're keeping an eye on you" with foreign control (Chiclet, 2001, p. 38). Glocal recursion may thus turn, as Ottaway describes, "so called civil society organizations into mirror images of their donors, rather than distinctive organizations that focus directly on their countries['] particular problems" (2001, p. 14).

In the postelection period, another Otpor problem was simply, "how to adjust to the challenge of remaining relevant in less heroic times" (Gallagher, 2005, p. 129). Despite Milošević's overthrow, many mafia groups restructured and Serbian politics stagnated through the ensuing decade. One Otpor member also described how "after Milošević was gone, the movement fell apart because all these differences came out" (Ivan Marovic Tavaana Interview Transcript, 2010, "Goals and Objectives," para. 2).<sup>4</sup> The work of governance thus likely requires a different creative repertoire than that offered by imitative turns to past and global structures.

Perhaps because recursive tactics are more suited for revolutionary than postrevolutionary conditions, many former Otpor activists now spend much of their time exporting their strategies in dictator-ousting efforts worldwide. With the decline of nation-states and the increasing role of NGOs and other nonstate actors in international affairs, Otpor's tactics are being used in resistance efforts across countries. Former Otpor members even hope to start a venture called "Democracy Island"; a place where local activists from different countries can be trained in revolutionary



methods (Schmidle, 2010). This essay recommends more critical pause over such efforts, as such strategies may both advance and undermine domestic democracy movements in the long term. Future analyses should therefore analyze and evaluate recursion in comparative forms of activism. Overall, Otpor's communication pre-sages some of the possibilities and limitations movements will continue to face in our increasingly glocal futures.

## Notes

- [1] These "glocal" interactions are similar to Witmer's (1997) study of an Alcoholics Anonymous chapter, which found that "structures from the global organization are disembedded by the founder, transformed, and recreated in the local organization" (p. 324).
- [2] I do not mean to import Habermasian and other conventional notions of "spheres" here, instead using the phrase "networked public sphere" (Pfister, 2011, p. 141) broadly to describe the use of digital sites and other electronic media as resources for collective deliberation or activism (see Warner, 2007).
- [3] Gladwell (2005) also has used the phrase "the structure of spontaneity," though in different contexts.
- [4] Former Otpor members returned to demonstrations in a Serbian city square years later, however, as one activist stated, "the October 5 [2000] changes have been curtailed, and there is a danger we will return to the ways of ten years ago," clarifying the opposition leader they helped put in power was "a big mistake . . . [he] nowadays reminds us more and more of Slobodan Milošević" ("Otpor says," 2008, para. 2, 4).

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