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Between Europe and the Past—Collective Identification and Diffusion of Student Contention to and from Serbia

ASTRID REINPRECHT

Abstract

This essay examines diffusion between student social movements against higher education reforms in the countries of the former Yugoslavia. It firstly explores how—despite a strong tradition of protest in socialist Yugoslavia and in Serbia under Milošević—activists involved in the 2006 Serbian student protests chose not to reclaim the past but rather drew on experiences from student movements in France, Germany, and Greece. Second, it uncovers how the wave of protest that started in Serbia evolved into a model for contention for the whole region of the former Yugoslavia, long before the 2011 anti-austerity protests could serve as inspiration.

STUDENTS AND YOUTH ARE OFTEN AT THE FOREFRONT OF SOCIAL movements (Lipset 1971; Gill & DeFronzo 2009, p. 204). Particularly since the waves of protest in 1968, academics have tried to explain why students are so frequently, and often intensely, mobilised. The region of the former Yugoslavia is no exception. During the 1980s, Yugoslavia had the highest number of protests in the communist world (Musić 2009, p. 161; Vladisavljević 2011, p. 143). Students, young academics, and urban youth played a crucial role in most of these protests: students occupied the University of Belgrade in 1968; students triggered the so-called Croatian Spring of 1973; students marched the streets of Kosovo in the early 1980s; students participated in anti-war activities in the early 1990s; and students spearheaded the anti-Milošević demonstrations of 1996–1997 that precipitated his fall in autumn 2000. It thus may come as no surprise that, after a few years of relative calm, the University of Belgrade again became the epicentre of a student occupation in November 2006. For six days, students blocked lectures and university facilities. There are no exact figures for the number of supporters and participants, but the booklet *Borba Za Znanje* (*Struggle for Knowledge*)—a compendium of documents, interviews, and articles published in early 2007 by a group of activists—states that roughly 17,000 students signed petitions in support of the occupation's demands (Borba Za Znanje 2007, p. 7). According to key figures of the occupation, the event heralded the 'arrival of a new generation' (Borba Za Znanje 2007, p. 7) of activists who,

for the first time, occupied university spaces through decision-making in direct democratic plenary assemblies.

But how new were these tactics, and how did these tactics come to be decided upon by the activists involved? The struggles of 2006 paved the way for what Štiks (2015) has labelled the 'new left' in the former Yugoslavia.[1] According to Štiks' analysis, the new left unites 'generally progressive political and social movements' which are characterised by their 'experiments or advocacy of direct, participatory, and horizontal democracy [and their] critique of the neoliberal capitalist transformation of the post-Yugoslav societies' (Štiks 2015, p. 137). Broadly in line with scholars such as Della Porta (2015), Štiks links the development of this emancipatory politics to the 2008 global economic crisis. This essay refines such findings in two important ways. First, it traces the beginnings of the new left back to the Serbian student occupation in 2006. In other words, the essay shows that the origins of contention in the former Yugoslavia predate the 2008 global economic crisis and the 2011 protest cycles in the Middle East (Sadiki 2015), the US, and Southern Europe (Prentoulis & Thomassen 2014). Serbian activists in 2006 created the contours of subsequent student mobilisation for the whole region of the former Yugoslavia.

Second, the essay refines Štiks' (2015) observation of the new left's 'internationalist approach'. It uncovers how students in 2006 oriented themselves towards student movements outside the post-Yugoslav region, rather than to past experiences with fringe politics under communism. The contention of 2006 arose from a perceived necessity to distinguish mobilisation from earlier incidents of student protests. This does not imply that past experiences with protests did not matter at all. However, my essay analyses the puzzle of why students downplayed links to the past while elevating references to student movements in France, Germany, Greece, and other European countries. The finding is that—faced with a broadly unquestioned pro-EU (even if often superficial) discourse by their adversaries as well as with participants' left orientation— Serbian activists deliberately referenced student movements at the margins of Western European societies to legitimise their own struggle. My analysis of Serbian activists' achievements in 2006 hence permits a rich appreciation of mobilisation in Southeast Europe.

In my exploration of the Serbian student contention, I draw from social movement scholarship on collective identity and discursive opportunity structures.[2] Cultural processes of collective identification and 'framing' are singled out as primary conceptual tools to enlighten us about movements' organisational forms, strategies, and tactics. In order to dissect the differences between historic forms of mobilisation in Yugoslavia and the occupation in 2006, I first provide a brief historical background of grassroots activism under communism and during the ensuing Yugoslav Wars between 1991 and 2001.[3] I then present the contours of mobilisation, focussing on frames and related tactics in 2005, 2006 and 2007. My insights derive from online and offline documents produced by student activists around the entire post-Yugoslav region (except Kosovo) from 2005 up until summer 2014, and from 30 semi-structured interviews with key informants conducted in 2012 and 2013 in Croatia and

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[1]For the purpose of this essay I employ the terms 'successor states of Yugoslavia', also termed the 'former Yugoslavia', to designate the countries which once formed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Croatia, Bosnia & Hercegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Montenegro).

[2]A discursive opportunity structure results from contests between various interpretive frames held by activists (Gamson 2011).

[3]The comprehensive label for the ten-day war in Slovenia (1991), the war in Croatia (1991–1995), the war in Bosnia (1992–1995), the Kosovo War and the NATO bombings against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1998–1999), and the violent conflict in Macedonia (2001).

Serbia.[4] For the sake of clarity, I point to regional developments where necessary, but keep my overall focus on Serbia. I then move on to the core part of the essay, where I analyse the diffusion of certain frames and tactics from student movements in Europe to Serbia and explain the adoption of such elements by Serbian student activists as conditioned by the necessity to construct an inwardly and outwardly appealing collective identity. The empirical part concludes with a brief illustration of how Serbian innovations from 2006 inspired Croatians in 2009, and were then diffused back to Serbia in 2011, and on to the whole region. In my conclusion, I relate my discussion to broader debates around mobilisation and resistance in Southeast Europe.

Diffusion as a corollary of collective identification processes

The actions and narratives of social movements are rarely *sui generis* but draw on conflicts that have occurred at different times and/or in different places. In the following section, I summarise the meanings of fundamental terms such as 'repertoire', 'frame', 'identity', and 'diffusion'. These terms will serve as a basis for my argument, according to which the need to construct a sound collective identity may induce social movement actors to draw inspiration from elsewhere instead of inventing their own tactics and framing. For the purpose of this essay, I define student movements as a subcategory of social movements that unite a large portion of students in the 'relatively organized effort … to either bring about or prevent change in any one of the following: policies, institutional personnel, social structure (institutions), or cultural aspects of society' (Gill & DeFronzo 2009, p. 208). As with social movements in general, the conflictive nature of student movements is crucial. It captures the movements' role in expressing (and acting upon) social conflicts. Social movements are orientated towards interrupting the social and/or cultural *status quo*: 'fostering or halting change is the *raison d'être* for all social movements' (Snow *et al.* 2011, p. 8).

However radical their orientation and framing, social movements commonly rely upon repertoires, or 'established ways in which pairs of actors make and receive claims bearing on each other's interests' (Tilly 1993, p. 265). Repertoires bundle diverse courses of action together. This may include a social movement's tactics and strategies, as well as less tangible behaviour such as ideas, slogans, and frames. Repertoires are bent on historicity; they 'are learned cultural creations … they emerge from struggle' (Tilly 1993, p. 264). Various authors (Tilly 1978, 2004; Tarrow 1989; Traugott 1993; Beissinger 2002) have investigated how repertoires change over time. Coming from a tradition of political process theory, Tilly (2006) holds that repertoires shift incrementally in relation to underlying transformations of large-scale socio-economic and cultural opportunity structures. Tarrow (1997) proposes that short-lived and highly publicised 'moments of madness do not transform [repertoires] at once' (Tarrow 1997, p. 329), but that these peaks of larger protest cycles contribute to the evolution and—if proven successful—'modularisation' of innovative contentious practices (Tarrow 1997, p. 337). Modularisation occurs when innovations stabilise into routines, and thus enrich previously established repertoires.

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[4]The interviews with 16 Serbian interviewees were conducted within the framework of my doctoral research in Zagreb (on 18 May 2012) and Belgrade (20–24 May 2013). The interviews with 14 Croatian interviewees took place in Zagreb (on 18 and 19 May 2012 and 15–19 May 2013). See the Appendix for an anonymised list of interviewees.

In contrast to political process approaches (Kriesi 2011), new social movement scholars concentrate on inner dynamics of mobilisation and insist on the structuring impact of frames and identification on mobilisation (Offe 1985; Della Porta & Diani 1999, pp. 24–33; Benford & Snow 2000). Most new social movement scholars agree that generating a sense of shared purpose and emotional belonging is essential for mobilisation. Identity fulfils several essential functions for social movements. First, identity might constitute an implicit or explicit goal for contention. Second, it may form the basis for collective claims and motivate potential adherents to act. Third, it may be used to legitimise activists' choices and tactics (Polletta & Jasper 2001, pp. 286–97). This last point is essential for our present discussion: the form of the movement itself (Melucci 1989, p. 60) and its organisation, tactics, and strategies do not merely flow from the availability of resources or environmental incentives, to give one example, but must also conform to the exigencies of identity. In other words, 'answers to the pragmatic question of "How do we organize?" reverberate inward to the shaping of collective identity and outward to link movements to institutions or opportunity structures' (Clemens 1996, p. 209).[5] Moreover, as Gamson and Meyer (1996) have pointed out, activists' readings of opportunities and the outcomes of their 'framing contests' (Gamson 2011, p. 249) determine how they are affected by such opportunities. The objective existence of opportunities is not enough to understand why social movements (and their repertoires) change. In the most extreme case, for instance, activists might misjudge or simply not perceive obvious opportunities. Repertoires change not only because social movements respond to seemingly given circumstances, but because they conform to inner logics of collective identity construction. Adoptions and/or innovations do not only take place because of unstable environments or because old ways have proven ineffective. Social activists might be looking out for new ways to wage their struggle if they feel that the existing repertoire fails to represent them adequately.

The above definition of repertoires includes the term 'established'. This implies that, once tested and adopted, repertoires remain fairly consistent over time: 'the distinctive features that set the repertoire apart are the considerable stability it exhibits … and the constraining influence it exercises over participants in collective action' (Traugott 1993, p. 310). It is rare that social movement actors radically overhaul previous practices; they prefer to adopt rather than invent (Biggs 2013, pp. 408–9). It may be more efficient to learn from other examples of mobilisation and adapt what has been achieved elsewhere to one's own situation. This is where the notion of diffusion—defined as a 'flow of innovations' (Soule 1997, p. 860) within or between contending social actors—comes in. Diffusion occurs when an innovation (frames, stories, claims, tactics, strategies, practices, or organisational forms) spreads from the innovating social movement to the adopting social movement (Givan *et al*. 2010, p. 1; Soule 2011). Contrary to what might be assumed, diffusion involves a substantial degree of activity either by the innovating and/or the adopting movement.[6] 'Diffusion implies that outsiders make a conscious decision to copy what happens in another state' (Bunce & Wolchik 2006, p. 286).

Three factors simplify the diffusion of innovative practices. First, diffusion is easier the more practices are condensed into ready-made modules that 'can easily be transferred from setting to setting, by groups of social actors who are not engaged in face-to-face discussion'

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[5]See also Taylor and Van Dyke (2011).
[6]Types of diffusion are discussed further in Benford and Snow (2002, pp. 27–37).

(Soule 1997, p. 859). Second, previous success (or at least the perception of success) increases the likelihood that another social movement adopts a new practice (Tilly 1993, p. 266). Aligning oneself with successful movements elsewhere might help to establish legitimacy with the audience, that is, a movement's constituency (adherents, potential participants, sympathisers) and adversaries. Third, objective and/or perceived commonalities underpin diffusion (Givan *et al.* 2010, p. 6). Similarities are not just 'out there', they must be attributed and constructed. Hence, diffusion comes to depend on processes of attributing and constructing similarities (Benford & Snow 2002). Thus, it is closely intertwined with processes of identification and framing.

Framing can be defined as a process through which activists build cognitive schemes (frames) to explain and interpret certain aspects of the world (Snow *et al.* 1986). Frames serve to simplify and condense (Benford & Snow 2000, p. 614) reality through defining and diagnosing a problem, articulating possible solutions, and motivating activists (Benford & Snow 2000, pp. 614–18). With regard to diffusion, activists thus need to frame (interpret) their own reality as comparable to the reality of the other movement. Only when the adopting activists understand and articulate who they are (or are not) and what the surrounding context is (not) like, will they be able to comprehend whether another movement is similar enough to serve as a role model. What other social movements have done will only be perceived as feasible, legitimate, or effective if activists frame their situation as comparable. Framing thus underpins diffusion, which is much more than instrumental learning: 'Through the construction of new meanings, identities, and issue frames … actors alter their conception of what is politically feasible or desirable. Diffusion, in short, often entails a transformation of political consciousness' (Tilly 1993, p. 9).

Student mobilisation in Serbia: from the past to the present?

Before proceeding with the analysis of the 2006 student protests, it is instructive to briefly outline previous student-led mobilisations in the former Yugoslavia.[7] Such an endeavour serves to clarify the precedent from which Serbian student activists in 2006 sought to differentiate themselves. Compared to the Soviet Union, mobilisation was not uncommon in communist Yugoslavia. The main reasons for this were malleable state–society relations and the peculiar location of the Yugoslav Federation 'between East and West' (Kanzleiter 2011).

After his break with Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia's ideological mastermind and leader Josip Broz Tito created a separate version of socialism (Calic 2010, p. 192). Its main elements included non-alignment in foreign-policy matters, a transnational identity scheme ('brotherhood and unity'), federalised political structures, and self-management of workers at the company level (Allcock 2000; Ramet 2006). The gradual devolution of decision-making to the Republics of Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia culminated in the new constitution of 1974. What had been devised as a means to (re)gain legitimacy and reduce centrifugal tendencies eventually weakened the central state: 'insofar as this regional pluralization operated within a federal structure founded on differences of a-nationality, it was apt, in conditions of political illegitimacy and economic deterioration, to reinforce nationalism'

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[7]Some notable pieces of research include Bieber (2003, 2011), Steinberg (2004), Kanzleiter (2008), Nadjivan (2008), Mujkić (2010) Djokić and Ker-Lindsay (2011).

(Ramet 2006, p. 379). Conversely, as state power declined, the power of society grew (Irvine 1997, p. 9). Opportunities for social assembly, cultural expression, and voicing 'grass roots expression[s] of discontent' (Vladisavljević 2002, p. 10) increased as points of access to the system multiplied. For young, mostly urban people from the mid-1960s and 1970s, cultural associations, critical magazines and journals, and music clubs became more open to alternative ideas and practices rooted in anarchism, feminism, ecology, and pacifism (Figa 1997, pp. 168–73; Dvornik 2009, p. 141).

A turning point in the history of Yugoslav grassroots activism occurred in 1968. On 3 June 1968, students occupied the University of Belgrade and established 'the Red University of Karl Marx' (Kanzleiter 2011, p. 84). The following day, protests quickly spread to other universities around the federation. For the first time since World War II, students 'destroyed the illusion of a conflict-free society' in communist Yugoslavia (Kanzleiter 2008, p. 100). They called into question the regime's claim to be the sole interpreter of society's interests (Beslin 2009, p. 61). Authorities at first condoned the events as legitimate self-management. Eventually, however, repression increased, and many of the activists were imprisoned (Spehnjak & Cipek 2007, p 278). The events of 1968 transgressed the established boundaries of grassroots activism, as students publicly claimed the right and the capacity to reinterpret Yugoslav communism. However, this claim was not contentious in the sense of challenging Yugoslav communism as a system of political power *per se*. As time passed and student protests developed in other republics, the nature of these movements shifted. Thus, during the so-called Croatian Spring between 1971 and 1973, proponents of an explicit federalisation of Yugoslavia co-opted student protest. Backed by proto-nationalist intellectuals, especially from within the *Matica Hrvatska* (Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts), nationalist (that is, anti-Yugoslav) ideas gained ground (Ramet 2006, pp. 285–323).

From the 1980s, other segments of society outside urban and intellectual epicentres were involved as well. In the industrial complexes of northern Kosovo, miners and rural youth were drawn into strikes that were motivated first by social but then increasingly nationalist demands. Nationalism was an 'unintended consequence of the high levels of mobilization and spiralling of various conflicts in a highly decentralized, authoritarian multi-nation-state' (Vladisavljević 2011, p. 156). It remains disputed in the literature as to how much nationalist mobilisation was authentic (Vladisavljević 2002, p. 2) or manipulated (Magaš 1993, p. 206; Musić 2009, p. 161) by politicians in their quest to enlarge their 'extra-institutional power base' (Mujkić 2010, p. 17). However, it is predominantly accepted that Kosovo and its future status became a focal point for nationalist mobilisation. In the end, Slobodan Milošević's 'anti-bureaucratic revolution', starting in 1987, contributed to the destabilisation of the Yugoslav Federation (Mønnesland 1997, pp. 318–20). Whatever the precise trigger, content, and nature of mobilisations, the Yugoslav Federation offered space for ordinary people to become active, and this space grew markedly while federal institutions (such as the League of Communists, the cult of the leader Josip Broz Tito) withered away (Irvine 1997; Vladisavljević 2011, pp. 145–46).

After the first democratic breakthrough in Slovenia and Croatia in the early 1990s, the Yugoslav Wars resulted in ethno-nationalism, war, genocide, and increasing authoritarianism (Ramet 2005). In Serbia, Slobodan Milošević established a 'hybrid regime' (Bieber 2003, p. 74) with tight control over the media, administration, and security sectors. Though elections took place, they were not necessarily free or fair. Yet, despite widespread censorship

(Kurspahic 2003, pp. 3–26), war-induced economic hardship and clientelism, the space for dissent never fully closed, as Bieber (2003) argues. Even if mobilisation[8] remained restricted to Belgrade for a long time, the 'Other Serbia' (*Druga Srbija*)[9] 'fulfilled an important symbolic function in challenging the seeming homogeneity in intellectual and popular support for extreme nationalist policies' (Bieber 2003, p. 83). During the early years of the war, anti-war demonstrations (Bilić 2011, 2012; Stubbs 2012) gathered activists from pre-existing networks of students, feminists, pacifists, and ecologists in Serbia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Slovenia. Rock music (Steinberg 2004) and alternative media (such as the Belgrade radio station B92) (Collin 2001; Kurspahic 2003) were important means of information, motivation, and diffusion. For example, B92 was 'much more than a little student radio station playing noisy rock records. It was now the centre of a social movement: anti-war, anti-nationalism; pro-democracy, pro-human rights' (Collin 2001, p. 56). The winter protests of 1996 relied upon student networks but also included some opposition parties and platforms (Bieber 2011). Because public assemblies were forbidden, activists strolled around the streets, dancing, singing, and banging their drums. Thus, 'the crowds occupied space and thereby claimed it, physically and politically, with their bodies, their noise, their banners and so on' (Jansen 2001, p. 40). From the mid-1990s, recruitment was slightly adapted as activists for the first time actively sought to unite different strands of society (including, for example, churches and rural youth) in one movement, which was called *Otpor!* (Resistance!). The focus shifted from attacking the cultural hegemony of nationalism to an overt critique of political leadership. The street as primary locus of contention became ever more crucial, both as a space of appearance and media-staging (Nadjivan 2008, pp. 139–76). After 2000, *Otpor!* and other social movements around the post-Yugoslav region reorganised as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or political parties, partly as a consequence of the increased interest from outside. In a 2009 article, Vetta lays out how NGOs in Serbia increasingly lost their grassroots character due to foreign funding: 'the donors promoted the "NGO model" as the ideal type of civic engagement to create a new political culture and in doing so, encouraged the emergence of a new urban local elite and fostered "technocratic capital"' (Vetta 2009, p. 30). Many Serbians perceived this as a loss of authenticity (Grødeland 2006).

This brief overview summarises the recurrent waves of protest and a related increase of contentious experiences and knowledge within activists' networks. Students and young people readily participated in and contributed to popular dissent. Most significantly, however, a repertoire of contention slowly evolved. In the early period of grassroots activism, during the 1960s and 1970s, Yugoslav citizens were already creatively experimenting with diverse tactics such as covert cultural events and concerts, mobilisation through magazine and media production, street protests and marches, strikes, and occupation. From the 1980s, public demonstrations became more prevalent, with Milošević mobilising masses of ordinary people in the streets (Nadjivan 2008, pp. 90–1). During the mobilisation of 1996–1997 and 2000, the tactics of street protests, marches, and public demonstrations crystallised into a regional repertoire.

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[8]Bieber (2003, p. 83) counts six waves of protest in Serbia between 1991 and 2000.
[9]*Druga Srbija* was a term used to denote groups and individuals, who were critical of Milošević and to the principles he stood for (nationalism, authoritarianism, war), as well as supportive of protests against his regime.

Contours of the 2006 Serbian occupation

On 22 November 2006, students occupied the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Belgrade for six days. During the subsequent spring, two more occupations occurred at the Faculty of Arts in Belgrade (19 March–1 April 2007 and 8–15 May 2007). These occupations arose from experiments in contentious action in winter 2005, during which student activists from the University of Belgrade had blocked streets and bridges, assembled in front of government buildings, staged theatre performances, and started a hunger strike (Pantić 2005).[10] However, activists subsequently acknowledged that these efforts were neither successful in spurring participation, nor did they garner substantive public (or media) attention and support: 'we realised that we did not have traditional organisations and networks we could count on to mobilise people'.[11] Thus, activists had to re-orient themselves and think of alternatives. I will analyse why students chose to learn from instances of student mobilisation in Europe rather than from previous Yugoslav examples of citizen activism. In the section below, I outline how students discursively substantiated their purpose through the frames of commercialisation and direct democracy.

The occupations of autumn 2006 followed the introduction of the new Law on Higher Education of August 2005 with which Serbia sought to carry forward the so-called Bologna Process.[12] Serbia, along with almost all other countries of the former Yugoslavia, had signed the Declaration on the European Higher Education Area in 2003 as part of its EU ambitions. The Bologna Process—even if at the outset legally not an EU policy—had become part of the broad push to Europeanise Southeast Europe. This 'generate[d] a battle between the forces of reform and reaction' (Anastasakis 2005, p. 77). Higher education reforms in the name of the Bologna Process brought more autonomy for universities. As a result, rules about tuition, studying conditions, and criteria for grants were altered. For Serbian student activists, the (more or less stringent) application of reforms following Serbia's joining the Bologna Process symbolised a political consensus to commercialise higher education. This understanding formed the core of the movement's framings, as I outline in the subsequent section.

The Serbian student mobilisation of 2006 combined the frame of commercialisation and the frame of direct democracy. In accordance with Benford and Snow (2000, pp. 615–18) I argue that the frame of commercialisation identifies the problem, the aims, and adversaries of mobilisation. The frame of direct democracy, building upon the interpretation presented through the first frame, invalidates the use of various tactics and courses of action. Namely, Serbian activists expressed a local problem (remodelling higher education after communism and war following European standards) according to an internationalised vocabulary.[13]

The commercialisation frame connects higher education reforms with an unjustified move towards global capitalism. The introduction of the Law on Higher Education—of which the

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[10]'Blokadom do Uslova', 2005, *Novosti Online*, 7 December 2005, available at: http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/aktuelno.69.html:177040-Blokadom-do-uslova, accessed 29 September 2017.

[11]Interviewee RS-B, male student, aged 27, Zagreb, 18 May 2012.

[12]The 'Bologna Declaration on the European Higher Education Area' started out as a series of multilateral meetings and agreements to harmonise university education across Europe in the late 1990s. The declaration brought a unified structure for studying, a new system of credits, more autonomy to universities, and intensified international collaboration. With the exception of Slovenia, which signed the treaty in 1999, all other countries in the region became members of the Bologna Process as of 2003. It is important to note that joining the Bologna Process was part of the conditions for preparing EU membership.

[13]For more on transnational activism see Tarrow (2005, pp. 59–76).

rise in tuition fees was one of the most contested elements—symbolised the transformation of public education into a private commodity. Students regarded this as a flagrant injustice, since, according to their interpretation, the education acquired by students had a broader social benefit for the whole society.[14] Following this line of argumentation, the localities of this production (universities) acquired a public value in a double sense. First, knowledge acquired at universities was seen as relevant to all. As one student expressed in an online posting, 'education should be completely free of charge, because it is, first and foremost, a public good' (Borba Za Znanje 2007, p. 175). Second, because universities were funded by the state and the state was financed through taxes, all taxpayers were identified as having a stake in higher education. The introduction of higher education reforms 'ha[d] broader consequences for students … and the whole of society'.[15] In short, this frame constructs citizens as the ultimate constituency for student mobilisation. The identified adversaries are—interchangeably—the markets and the institutions incorporating 'market logic' such as the EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Members of the political elite were framed as the 'henchmen' of these international culprits, and placed in opposition to the aggrieved students, academics, and citizens generally. The slogan 'We study, while they profit' (Borba Za Znanje 2007, p. 113) displayed during a demonstration on 16 November 2006 in Belgrade and the poster posing the question 'Whose are our faculties?' illustrate this line of reasoning. As other scholars have pointed out (Kraft 2013), 'neoliberalism has been almost completely absent from the post-Yugoslav public sphere. The student movements were the first to make the connection between this concept and the ongoing processes of transformation in the societies of the former Yugoslavia' (Baćević 2015, p. 235).

Whereas the commercialisation frame diagnoses the sell-out of universities as the core problem, the direct democracy frame contains the rationale for appropriate action. This frame blames capitalism for hollowing out democratic representativeness and proposes to remedy this misrepresentation of the (silenced) majority through direct democratic methods. In *Borba Za Znanje* (2007, p. 265), one student writes: 'direct democracy [was thought to be the] solution to the manifold limitations of parliamentary democracy …. For this reason, activists rightfully saw parliamentary democracy, in its form of students' parliaments at university, as something, which in reality bears non-democratic traits'. Student activists were constructed as 'standing up for', as opposed to 'standing in for' (that is, representing), the majority. They were considered to be defending democracy at a substantial and procedural level: at a substantial level through criticising the commercialisation of higher education; procedurally because they demanded direct democratic deliberation based on inclusivity and equality.

The Serbian activists aspired to restore a true sense of participation; participation that appeared nullified by representative democracy: 'if we define democracy as having free elections, it exists [in Serbia]. Nobody steals elections [in Serbia]. But if we define that people would participate in the real sense of making a difference … then [there is no democracy]'.[16] Deliberation and decision-making in an equal, inclusive, and non-dominant fashion were considered the only legitimate ways to outbalance the perceived failure to represent students through student parliaments at universities and citizens through national parliamentary elections. In this frame, occupation is constructed as a logical—but not necessarily

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[14]Compare also Baćević (2010).
[15]Interviewee RS-F, male student, 29, Belgrade, 22 May 2013.
[16]Interviewee RS-F, male student, 29, Belgrade, 22 May 2013.

temporal—prerequisite for direct democratic decision-making: without free spaces, no truly 'free' decisions for all could be achieved. As one respondent noted, 'occupation as a [space] apart from everything else is a nice way of building something completely different from everything else. When you start experiencing freedom … you have people who start to think without restraints, without pressures from outside. They start to depend on themselves and on each other'.[17] By rejecting conventional political representation, the activists endorsed a radical understanding of democracy (Little & Lloyd 2009). Moreover, Serbian activists' claims about the defects of representative democracy at universities, as well as in Serbian society at large, expose 'the fact that a particular regime … has captured and hegemonised the term democracy and presents both the term and itself [the regime] as its unrivalled and impeccable realisation' (Machart 2002, p. 306).

Beginning in 2005 and continuing through 2006, Serbian student activists introduced the frames of commercialisation and direct democracy, as well as the combination of occupation with direct democratic decision-making. These twin tactics of occupation plus direct democracy amounted to a structural disruption of higher education facilities (Gonzalez-Vaillant & Schwartz 2012, p. 1). By experimenting with unorthodox democratic decision-making methods, the activists introduced a moment of rupture in the *status quo* of representative democracy and brought into being new 'forms … of being political' (Isin 2009, p. 383). Serbian student contention introduced new strategies to the existing repertoire which—as I have described above—at the time encapsulated street protests under hierarchical leadership and re-positioned students as equal actors on the 'community stage' (Rancière 1999, p. 109). The occupation of 2006 functioned as a 'moment of madness' (Tarrow 1993) through which the twin tactics of occupation and direct democratic decision-making were forged into a model fit for use elsewhere in the post-Yugoslav region.

Learning from abroad and collective identification

Why did Serbian students decide in November 2006 to occupy the Faculty of Philosophy? Why did they not adopt the previously described repertoire of social contention—street protests, marches, and public demonstrations—that had evolved through communism until the end of Milošević's regime? Why did they insist on principles of equal, inclusive, and non-hierarchical decision-making in direct democratic plenary assemblies instead of opting for clear leadership structures? The following section attempts to answer this puzzle.

After having unsuccessfully experimented with various contentious strategies over the second half of 2005, Serbian student activists in 2006 had two options: turn to previous examples of social mobilisation in communist Yugoslavia and/or during the authoritarian regime of Slobodan Milošević; or, look further afield. Interestingly, activists chose the second option. Serbian activists' inclination to learn from Europe,[18] rather than from the past,[19] can be explained by collective identification. The hegemonic discourses in Serbia influenced how

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[17]Interviewee RS-J, male student and translator, 26, Belgrade, 20 May 2013.

[18]With the notion of Europe I do not seek to reify a binary between an ostensible civilisational Western sphere and the Balkans as its 'dark Alter Ego' (Todorova 1999, p. 267). I appeal to a malleable reference point for alternative understandings of European marginalities. This notion transcends both Europe as a geographic marker as well as the EU as a hegemonic political project (Horvat & Štiks 2015, p. 8).

[19]With 'the past' I hark back to the socialist legacy as continuity (Todorova 2015, p. 94), present throughout the region but denied by the forceful pro-EU orientation of elites (Džihić & Wieser 2008, p. 5).

activists positioned themselves. At the same time, the need to remain attractive in the eyes of current and potential participants meant that not too many compromises could be struck in terms of identity. According to one of the activists, 'Greece and France were crucial. … We were inspired from outside to try something, to pose those questions, to put them on the table for public discussion'.[20] The reason for this was that Serbian student activists hoped their frames would resonate with the Serbian public while still harmonising with their own basic self-identification as an anti-capitalist force (Borba Za Znanje 2007, p. 240). In the subsequent paragraphs, I demonstrate how Serbian student activists framed their movements as being similar to other instances of student mobilisation in Europe and dissimilar to earlier mobilisation in Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

Europe and us

During the 1990s, resistance to Milošević not only comprised resistance against nationalism (Bieber 2003) but also an orientation towards liberalism. The intellectuals associated with *Druga Srbija* advocated European democracy and a market economy (Collin 2001). During the demonstrations that led to Milošević's overthrow, the people, groups, and initiatives associated with *Druga Srbija* filled the ranks of *Otpor!* After 2000, members of *Otpor!* comprised the economic, political, and intellectual elites of post-Milošević Serbia (Bieber 2003, p. 87; Nadjivan 2008). For this elite, the EU represented the only way forward (Džihić *et al*. 2006). Many of the policies endorsed in the early 2000s stemmed directly from EU conditionality or were rationalised by reference to the EU. In other words, '"Europe" developed to be the ultimate instrument in advocating one's own politics and dismiss [*sic*] arguments of others' (Džihić & Wieser 2008, p. 87). For student activists in 2006, the resistance of the 1990s was opportunistic and politicised (Borba Za Znanje 2007, pp. 218, 269, 275), because it carried with it an affirmation of political liberalism and economic neoliberalism (Borba Za Znanje 2007, p. 214) and cooperated with political parties from the opposition. By adopting direct democratic strategies, student activists of 2006 signalled that they were independent from political parties and thus from the protests of the 1990s. As well as criticising the overtly pro-EU stance of their leaders, Serbian student activists questioned the teleology of transition towards EU membership. As interviewee RS-B said,

> we have this strong culture of de-politicisation in Serbia that occurred after the revolution of October 5, 2000. Because on one hand, on the level of mainstream politics you had more or less a consensus that we are a pro-EU country that we want to get integrated into the whole EU concept. So the mainstream politics became reduced to the level of policies.[21]

Yet student activists not only re-politicised higher education policies (Baćević 2015, p. 236) but contested what they argued was a neoliberal logic behind reforms undertaken with reference to European integration. For instance, interviewee RS-J explained: 'when Slovenia entered the EU it became a huge shopping mall. … Standards increased but it's an empty kind of living. Everything got globalised'.[22] Higher education reforms undertaken in the name of the Bologna Process in this way became associated with other neoliberal

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[20]Interviewee RS-B, male student, 27, Zagreb, 18 May 2012.
[21]Interviewee RS-B, male student, 27, Zagreb, 18 May 2012.
[22]Interviewee RS-J, male student and translator, 26, Belgrade, 20 May 2013. At the time of the interview in 2013, Slovenia still was the first and only former Yugoslav country to have joined the EU.

reforms and processes. Student activists regarded them as hegemonic, because they observed that all the parties from the political establishment (regardless of their ideological stance) implemented pro-European policies (Dzihić *et al.* 2006). In order to position themselves as a political alternative within Serbia, student activists of 2006 hence refused to align with the EU and all that it represented for them.

At the same time, students framed their struggle as part of other European struggles against higher education reforms. As laid out in the theoretical discussions above, movements adopt other movements' frames if and when the adopters regard themselves as similar to the innovators. The student activists saw Serbia as the semi-periphery of a larger process of change that affected all European countries.[23] Since Serbian student activists believed that students around Europe suffered the same fate as them, struggling against the Bologna Process induced them to learn from those who were already embroiled in the struggle. This self-identification as a European semi-periphery was rooted in an attempt at re-appropriating a discourse that degrades the region (and its people) as less developed, less civilised, and less Western (Bakić-Hayden 1995; Todorova 1999). Identification with European student contention thus facilitated the diffusion of mobilisation against Bologna from European countries at large to Serbia.

At a conference of the UK National Union of Students (NUS) in April 2005, students established a campaign for free and accessible education.[24] They framed the problem as one of commercialisation. After three years, the NUS abandoned the campaign 'Education is Not for Sale' due to internal factions about the effectiveness and generalness of the campaign.[25] Meanwhile, student activists in Germany, France, and Greece had already picked up on this critique of neoliberalist restructuring of universities and interlaced it with a critique of representative democracy, arguing that the 'tyranny of the majority'[26] benefitted neoliberal elites and that direct democracy was more genuine and just. In early March 2006, French students occupied the Sorbonne University in Paris. Their anti-capitalist frame invited activists to consider occupation as viable and necessary: 'the insurrectionist collectivity must also constitute a blocking collectivity, physically blocking all circulation of goods'.[27]

Serbian students were directly inspired by events at the Sorbonne. One activist (Interviewee RS-B), who had studied in Paris, organised an event, 'Sorbonne in Flames', at the University of Belgrade on 18 April 2006. This event was the first opportunity in Serbia to hear first-hand about best practices from France and elsewhere. In addition, it was designed to identify people who were interested and—potentially—ready to become involved (Borba Za Znanje 2007, pp. 131–36). Debates evolved over the summer in the framework of a group called

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[23]See the essay 'Attack on Neo-liberalism' in Borba Za Znanje (2007, pp. 8–23); for similar reasoning see Horvat and Štiks (2013).

[24]See the post by Daniel Randall, member of the Education is Not for Sale Network, elected into the Union as a representative in April 2005, available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/mortarboard/2006/mar/24/danielrandalleducationnotf, accessed 24 February 2012.

[25]'NUS Drops Free Education Doctrine', *Guardian*, 2 April 2008, available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/apr/02/highereducation.uk2, accessed 24 February 2012.

[26]'Il appartient à notre lutte de limiter autant que possible la tyrannie du vote majoritaire'. Communiqué by the direct democratic general assembly of the Sorbonne in Exile from 17 March 2006, available at: https://lignesdeforce.wordpress.com/tag/anti-cpe/, accessed 28 March 2015.

[27]'Dans un monde de flux, le parti de l'insurrection ne peut être que parti du blocage, du blocage physique de toute la circulation marchande ….', in 'Ultime communiqué du comité d'occupation de la Sorbonne en exil', *Étudiants pas Contents*, June 2006, available at: http://etudiantspascontents84.viabloga.com/news/archives-cpe-ultime-communique-du-comite-d-occupation-de-la-sorbonne-en-exil, accessed 25 August 2015.

Socijalni Front.[28] According to these early gatherings, the occupations in France and Greece had yielded some success, albeit discursive rather than material: these student movements had won (media) attention and, through this attention, been able to shape public debate. By adopting their tactics, Serbian students hoped to gain more visibility and thus discursive power. They also hoped to motivate more people to join their activities. In the *Borba Za Znanje* booklet (2007), the imperative of direct democracy is explained in terms of the inability of the newly established student parliaments at Serbian universities to safeguard students' interests and the overall failure of representative democracy in Serbia. As mentioned above, this line of argumentation echoes criticism of representative democracy in France and other European countries by local student movements.

We are not the past

A second reason to learn from abroad rather than from the Yugoslav past, lay in the attempt to maintain legitimacy with regards to the general Serbian public (that is, the potential constituency) and local elites (adversaries). The discursive opportunity structure after the collapse of the communist regime in Serbia stigmatises positive allusions to left/social—or seemingly socialist—ideas. All around the region, the majority of (and the most powerful) politicians and media routinely condemned the commemoration of Titoist Yugoslavia (Todorova 2010, p. 4). Anyone who publicly identified as left ran the risk of being ridiculed as 'Yugonostalgic' (Lindstrom 2005). This made it difficult for Serbian activists in 2006 to frame the communist past constructively, for instance, by making reference to models of direct democracy used during the occupation of the University of Belgrade in 1968 or to workers' self-management: 'any kind of social struggle … is totally demonised. … When we come out with [social] demands, it looks like a thing of the past'.[29] Attributes of the Left were downplayed in communications with potential participants and sympathisers:

> in 2006 our idea was to … well, as a left-wing group we are aware that we cannot mobilise all the students …. We were also aware that if you are a small movement, trying to ignite a larger movement, you won't share left wing ideas as dominant, and the left-wing will not be leading the movement.[30]

Confronted with this context, student activists rejected the historical example of 1968 and emphasised dissimilarities between the communist higher education system in Yugoslavia and the higher education system in postwar Serbia. The perception of Serbian universities as embedded within European—and global capitalist—relations of power formed a crucial reason for differentiation from the past. According to their commercialisation frame (as laid out above), the overall aim of activists in 2006 was to reverse commercialisation in higher education. If Serbian student activists wanted to build a collective identity that appealed to current and potential participants, they could not entirely abandon their anti-capitalist orientation but had to re-inscribe claims for social justice into the public sphere. This explains their eagerness not to be associated with the mobilisations of 1996–1997 and 2000.

The ineffectiveness of the previous repertoire of contention and the apparent success of students in European countries is one part of the explanation for the particular shape of

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[28]The *Socijalni Front* was at the heart of the occupation of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade the following autumn, but had disbanded by mid-2007.
[29]Interviewee RS-C, male student, 23, Belgrade, 21 May 2013.
[30]Interviewee RS-B, male student, 27, Zagreb, 18 May 2012.

Serbian student contention in 2006. The main reason for looking outside the region lies in the need to construct a collective identity that would appeal to current and potential participants while remaining acceptable to the Serbian general public. By turning to anti-Bologna Process student movements, they reduced the possibility of the pro-EU members of the elite (their identified adversaries) de-legitimising them as regressive 'Yugonostalgics'. Through turning to marginalised rather than mainstream actors in Europe, Serbian activists avoided being dismissed as inauthentic. This engendered a highly complex process of constructing differences and similarities. 'Europe' as a synonym for the EU was staunchly rejected as a reference point: the EU stood for exactly those neoliberal policies—propagated by the Serbian elites—which student activists sought to stop. By highlighting similarities with social movement activists at the margins of Western European societies, Serbian student activists signalled they were not alone in their fight but firmly located on the map of contention in Europe. This appeared more promising in gaining wider public acceptance than an orientation towards de-legitimised models of mobilisation from communist Yugoslavia or Milošević's Serbia.

Regional diffusion: from Serbia to Croatia and back

The 2006 occupation in Serbia constituted a transformative contentious event. A contentious event is transformative if it shifts 'the very cultural categories that shape and constrain human action' (Sewell 1996, p. 263). In the case examined here, the Serbian actors inspired activists in Croatia in 2009. The latter adopted and partly enhanced the Serbian experience and, again, served as an example for Serbian student occupiers in 2011. Diffusion happened both directly and indirectly: aided by the reciprocal intelligibility of the Serbian and Croatian languages, many activists developed personal friendships across borders. The Figure below gives an overview over occupation events in Croatia and Serbia and illustrates paths of diffusion (see Figure 1).

Theoretical debates and exchanges intensified as personal encounters revolved around the Subversive Festival. The festival was founded by Croatian activist Srećko Horvat in Zagreb in 2008 and had evolved from a film-oriented festival to an event to discuss an alternative politico–philosophical agenda. Over time, the festival became 'a much-needed gathering of Balkan progressive forces and an urgent development of their cooperation as well as of a common vision of another Balkans built on true democratic foundations, social equality and international solidarity'.[31] This relational diffusion (Givan *et al.* 2010, p. 2) through personal communication and mutual visits was complemented by non-relational diffusion.

After their first occupations in 2006, Serbian activists put together a booklet of documents (reprints of posters, leaflets, and photos), reprinted interviews and commentaries, entitled *Borba Za Znanje* (*Fight for Knowledge*). All the Croatian interviewees who had participated in the first occupation in spring 2009 admitted to having read *Borba Za Znanje*: 'at the time, this information gave us confidence'.[32] Between the first and second Croatian occupation in 2009, Croatian activists themselves published lessons learned in the booklet *Blokadna Kuharica* (*Occupation Cookbook*).[33] Again, the mutually intelligible languages simplified

[31] Available at: http://www.subversivefestival.com/txtl/1/185/en/conference#sthash.j5rmJPNe.dpuf, accessed 25 November 2015.

[32] Interview HR-E, male student, unemployed, 28, Zagreb, 19 May 2013.

[33] The Croatian version is available at: http://www.mediafire.com/file/mn2kny3uqu1/Blokadna+kuharica+fin.pdf, accessed 29 September 2017; the English version is available at: http://marcbousquet.net/pubs/The-Occupation-Cookbook.pdf, accessed 29 September 2017.

FIGURE 1. DIFFUSION OF CONTENTION BETWEEN SERBIA AND CROATIA.
Source: Created by the author.

the reception of these texts across the borders, and beyond Croatia and Serbia in the whole post-Yugoslav region. Croatian students also maintained the website *Slobodni Filozofski* (Free Faculty of Philosophy). For some years, this website provided a hub for contentious action and thinking, and even operated in English for some time.[34]

As proposed in the introduction, the Serb model of contention diffused to Croatia, from whence it travelled on to other countries in the region. In 2009, student contention erupted in Macedonia when students established the initiative *Slobodni Indeks* (Free Index) at the Faculty of Philosophy of the SS Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje.[35] This initiative ended around 2012 but provided resources in terms of people and knowledge when a law aimed at changing examination procedures at Macedonian universities was introduced when plans about a law aimed at changing examination procedures at Macedonian universities became public in late 2014. Thus, in late 2014, students from the same university formed a new initiative dubbed *Studentski Plenum* (Student Plenum).[36] The *Studentski Plenum* was the guiding force behind mobilisations that occupied various parts of faculties in Macedonia. The plenum espoused direct democratic strategies and a staunch critique of market-oriented reforms in higher education. Over time, this mobilisation focused on higher education merged with larger social unrest, which was triggered by scandals surrounding corruption, espionage, and the abuse of political power (Petkovsky 2014). In addition to the university occupations in Serbia, Croatia, and Macedonia (in 2015), Slovenian activists also occupied faculties at the University of Ljubljana. Slovenian students raised their stakes in May 2010 when around 8,000 activists gathered to protest against an education bill. The bill was contentious because it put a cap on the maximum wage students could earn through part-time work while still being funded

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[34]The Croatian version of the website is available at: http://www.slobodnifilozofski.com/; English version is available at: http://slobodnifilozofski.org/, last accessed 25 January 2012—the English version has been removed, but the Croat version was still accessible as of 29 September 2017.
[35]Available at: https://slobodenindeks.noblogs.org/, accessed 28 February 2016.
[36]Available at: http://www.studentskiplenum.org, accessed 28 February 2016.

by public scholarships.[37] Roughly a year later, in spring 2011, a new initiative was founded under the name *Mi Smo Univerza* (We Are the University).[38] *Mi Smo Univerza*, together with the initiative *Pokreta 15.0,* blocked the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana for two months, until January 2012. In its resolution from 27 November 2011, students clearly associated themselves with the strategies and principles laid out by Serbian and Croatian social movements by claiming to provide a forum for 'democratic, inclusive and well-founded debate[s]'[39] on higher education, employment, and social policy. Thus, in many countries around the region, activists emancipated themselves from existing representative fora of decision-making and developed something new: different frames (commercialisation and anti-representative democracy), and a different strategy (occupation plus direct democratic assemblies).

As demonstrated throughout this essay, their activities were rooted in an attractive model of contention that was first formulated in Serbia in 2006. The modularisation of Serbian tactics permanently widened the historical repertoire of contention, which had been developing since communist times and finally stabilised under the post-communist authoritarian regimes. This is not to say that students in the region of the successor states of Yugoslavia could not learn independently from other European student movements as well. However, Serbian tactical and framing innovations were more easily adopted because of the contextual similarities and the direct and indirect links between activists as described above.

Conclusion

This essay has investigated the question of why Serbian students in 2006 looked to student movements in other European countries for inspiration, rather than to past cases of mobilisation in communist Yugoslavia or Milošević's Serbia. The main finding was that the particular cultural environment as well as the expectations of participants and potentially interested supporters induced Serbian student activists to carefully design their collective identity: caught between the taboo on positive alignment with anything remotely reminiscent of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the ideological inappropriateness of anti-Milošević mobilisation, they integrated elements of student movements in European countries into their own frames of commercialisation and direct democracy. The two-pronged Serb strategy of occupation plus direct democracy was used to distinguish the activists from, first, the 1968 occupation of the University of Belgrade, and second, the anti-Milošević protests in Serbia during the 1990s. In contrast to 1968, Serbian student activists in 2006 identified themselves as essentially pro-democratic, even if they were staunchly critical of the current form of democracy. Furthermore, in contrast to the 1990s anti-Milošević protests, they adhered to a pronounced left ideology which was in opposition to the former's neoliberal orientation. The choice of direct democratic decision-making flowed from the attempt to forge a collective identity in tune with the anti-Yugoslav discursive context, while the choice of occupation as a tactic demonstrates the students' self-identification as (anti-EU) anti-capitalists. Diffusion not only occurred for reasons of efficiency and feasibility—though these had some relevance—but

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[37]'Student Protest in Slovenia', *No Comment TV*, 20 May 2010, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CN8ZevN6yYw, accessed 28 February 2016.

[38]Available at: https://www.facebook.com/mismouniverza/, accessed 28 February 2016.

[39]'Želimo vzpostaviti demokratično, vključujočo in poglobljeno razpravo', *Mi Smo Univerza*, 27 November 2011, available at: http://mismouniverza.blogspot.co.at/2011/11/kaj-je-zasedba-zasedba-je-zacasna.html, accessed 28 February 2016.

for reasons of attractiveness and legitimacy in the eyes of adversaries, participants and potential supporters, and potential participants. Only by embedding their own struggles within the larger processes of Europeanisation and globalisation could Serbian student activists in 2006 define themselves as a social and anti-capitalist force.

Serbian student activists portrayed themselves as outside of, or rather beyond, corrupt and non-accountable representative politics: 'people, especially young people have no faith in politics. Politics is something that politicians do, and we all know politicians are scum. So we don't want to have anything to do with politics'.[40] At the same time, their choice of direct democratic organisation implied that Serbian students explored the role of 'activist citizens' (Isin 2009), and 'citizens as rebel' (Balibar 2013). Thus they 'engaged in [re]writing scripts' (Isin 2009, p. 381) of how democracy was being enacted in Serbia. Even if politicians did not endorse all of their demands and activities dissipated over the course of 2007, I do not dismiss the events of 2006 as only partially successful.

For the first time, Serbian activists elaborated a comprehensive critique of neoliberalism in the public sphere of postwar Serbia. Their objections to perceived social injustices resulting from higher education reforms questioned the very essential 'existing inscriptions of equality' (Rancière 1999, p. 100) in Serbian society. Thus, Serbian students not only redefined the procedure of democracy through creating new subject positions (roles) for citizens, but they also disputed the substantive distribution of social rights and brought issues of class cleavage back into Serbian debates. They heralded the trend of protests against austerity, which returned with force in the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis. At the juncture of 2006, core European countries influenced Serbia-as-a-periphery more than its own past or current situation, and this well before the anti-austerity movements made their way back from the periphery to the core of Europe and the United States (Della Porta 2015).

However, Serbian student activists in 2006 did more than just inject new meanings into Serbian politics (Baćević 2010). They re-invented and tested forms of direct democratic action, which had fallen into oblivion (or rather, into disgrace) in the whole region since the fall of communist Yugoslavia and the de-legitimisation of any kind of left or seemingly left politics. In his seminal work on the 'end of post-communism', Boris Buden postulates that transition in Southeast Europe corresponds to a process of educating post-communist societies into infantility (Buden 2009, pp. 40–51). According to Buden, the only means of escape is through resistance, to put an end to this childlike state of powerlessness. Student mobilisation in Serbia 2006 was the starting point for recurrent waves of protest through which 'radical politics was reborn in the rebel peninsula' (Horvat & Štiks 2015, p. 2; Kraft 2013). Through the diffusion of Serbian frames and tactics to Croatia, this kernel of a new democratic practice was refined and modularised into a repertoire for the whole region.

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[40]Interviewee RS-B, male student, 27, Zagreb, 18 May 2012.

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Appendix

The following is an anonymised list of the 30 interviewees from Croatia and Serbia. It includes the basic information that interviewees provided in writing before the interview took place.

Interviewees from Croatia

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Occupation	Start of activism	Date of interview	Location of interview
HR-A	30	f	Freelance journalist, active at Subversive Festival	2007	18 May 2012	Zagreb
HR-B	29	m	Theoretician, active at Subversive Festival	2008	19 May 2012	Zagreb
HR-C	35	m	Journalist	2008	18 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-D	31	m	University professor	2008	17 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-E	28	m	Student, unemployed	2007	19 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-F	26	m	Student	2009	17 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-G	38	m	Activist, student	2002	16 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-H	38	m	Ph.D. in chemistry, assistant professor	1995	17 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-I	23	f	Student	2009	18 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-J	27	m	Student	2009	15 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-K	25	m	Student	2010	16 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-L	29	m	Ph.D. in civil engineering, assistant professor	2009	17 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-M	24	f	Student	2012	18 May 2013	Zagreb
HR-N	23	f	Student	2008	19 May 2013	Zagreb

Interviewees from Serbia

Interviewee	Age	Gender	Occupation	Start of activism	Date of interview	Location of interview
RS-A	29	f	Student, NGO-employee	2005	18 May 2012	Zagreb
RS-B	27	m	Student	2006	18 May 2012	Zagreb
RS-C	23	m	Student	2010	21 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-D	23	m	Student	2009	30 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-E	22	m	Student	2009	21 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-F	29	m	Student	2005	22 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-G	23	f	Student	2011	21 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-H	25	m	Student	2007	22 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-I	26	f	Student	2008	22 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-J	26	m	Student, translator	2006	20 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-K	24	m	Student	2008	22 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-L	21	f	Student	2011	22 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-M	25	m	Student	2006	23 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-N	22	m	Student	2010	24 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-O	24	m	Student	2009	24 May 2013	Belgrade
RS-P	23	f	Student	2011	24 May 2013	Belgrade