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Professional paper
doi: 10.5937/snds25005J

RECLAIMING SOLIDARITY: THE INTERPLAY OF EDUCATION AND RESISTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Abstract: The contemporary geopolitical landscape reflects the urgent need for sustainable networks of solidarity and action in light of global crises, from genocides in Palestine and Sudan to students' protests in Serbia and the EU's crack-down on migrant solidarity. Following the events of October 7th, 2023, students worldwide have mobilised to reclaim their campuses, demanding divestment from arms companies and an end to complicity in the genocide of Palestinians. Government responses have been marked by violence, including police brutality and unlawful detentions, yet a collective call for a new social paradigm is emerging against the backdrop of late-stage capitalism. Furthermore, there has been a historical neglect of social unrest in South-East Europe by both Western media and academia, especially regarding the ongoing student protests in Serbia and the subsequent events that unfolded after the tragedy in Novi Sad on November 1st, 2024. University and secondary school students in Croatia and Bosnia have shown strong solidarity with their Serbian peers, with public support for their demands steadily rising. The involvement in protests of Serbian secondary school students, farmers and other workers' groups indicates a widening of support-base for these movements and the wide breadth of the student movement which has reached wider society both within and outside the country.

This paper aims to investigate the critical relationship between education and resistance in fostering networks of solidarity, particularly in the context of recent global social movements. It critiques the forces that commodify education, undermining spaces for collective and critical thinking, and raises important questions such as: what opportunities exist for sustainable organising that brings alternatives, both in theory and practice? What lessons can be learnt across international and interconnected struggles, that aim to dismantle existing power structures? Integrating data gathered from interviews, media coverage, and the cultural practices of students, researchers, professors, and the community in Serbia and the UK, the paper will assess progress in community organising and reimagining educational spaces.

Key words: solidarity movements, cultural resistance, commodification of education, state violence

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Ponovno osvajanje solidarnosti: interakcija obrazovanja i otpora u savremenim društvenim pokretima

Apstrakt: Savremeni geopolitički kontekst odražava hitnu potrebu za održivim mrežama solidarnosti i akcije u svetlu globalnih kriza – od genocida u Palestini i Sudanu, preko studentskih protesta u Srbiji, do represije EU prema inicijativama solidarnosti sa migrantima. Nakon događaja od 7. oktobra 2023. godine, studenti širom sveta mobilisu se kako bi ponovo osvojili univerzitetske prostore, zahtevajući povlačenje ulaganja iz industrije oružja i prekid saučesništva u genocidu nad Palestincima. Reakcije država obeležene su nasiljem, uključujući policijsku brutalnost i nezakonita pritvaranja, ali se uprkos tome oblikuje zajednički poziv za novi društveni poredak, naspram realnosti kasnog kapitalizma. Uz to, društveni nemiri u jugoistočnoj Evropi dugo su potiskivani i zanemareni, kako u zapadnim medijima, tako i u akademskim krugovima – naročito kada je reč o studentskim protestima u Srbiji i događajima koji su usledili nakon tragedije u Novom Sadu 1. novembra 2024. godine. Studenti univerziteta i srednjih škola u Hrvatskoj i Bosni snažno su izrazili solidarnost sa svojim kolegama u Srbiji, uz sve veću podršku javnosti njihovim zahtevima. Učešće srednjoškolaca, poljoprivrednika i drugih radničkih grupa u protestima ukazuje na širenje baze podrške i na to da je studentski pokret zahvatio šire društvene slojeve, unutar i van granica zemlje.

Ovaj rad ima za cilj da ispita kritičnu vezu između obrazovanja i otpora u stvaranju mreža solidarnosti, posebno u kontekstu savremenih globalnih društvenih pokreta. Tekst kritički razmatra sile koje komodifikuju obrazovanje i potiskuju prostore kolektivnog i kritičkog mišljenja, te otvara važna pitanja: koje su mogućnosti za održivo organizovanje koje nudi stvarne alternative, u teoriji i praksi? Koje lekcije možemo naučiti kroz međunarodne, povezane borbe koje teže razgradnji postojećih struktura moći? Na osnovu podataka prikupljenih kroz intervjue, medijsko izveštavanje i kulturne prakse studenata, istraživača, profesora i šire zajednice u Srbiji i Ujedinjenom Kraljevstvu, rad analizira dosege zajedničkog organizovanja i mogućnosti za osmišljavanje novih obrazovnih prostora.

Ključne reči: pokreti solidarnosti, kulturni otpor, komodifikacija obrazovanja, nasilje države

Introduction

The contemporary geopolitical landscape reflects the urgent need for sustainable networks of solidarity and action in light of global crises, from genocides in Palestine and Sudan to students' protests in Serbia and the EU's crackdown on migrant solidarity.

Government responses have been marked by violence, including police brutality and unlawful detentions, yet a collective call for a new social

paradigm is emerging against the backdrop of late-stage capitalism. Furthermore, there has been a historical neglect of social unrest in South-East Europe by Western media, academia and the wider Western community, especially regarding the ongoing student protests in Serbia and the subsequent collective actions that have been ongoing since the tragedy in Novi Sad on November 1st, 2024 (Balkan Insight, 2024).

In the context of unprecedented global transformations, we are witnessing today, the importance of understanding how university campuses and spaces are used for resistance and solidarity has never been more urgent. The potential to harness these spaces for building alternative futures offers a unique opportunity to impact societal change. As I reflect on this phenomenon, I am inspired not only by the possibility of advancing our collective understanding of such practices but also by the potential for scholarly work in sociology, as well as other disciplines, to proliferate knowledge about their significance, their utility in fostering resistance, and the ways in which they can be amplified.

Whose streets? Our streets! – Whose Campus? Our Campus!

This study critically explores how culture and education shape solidarity and resistance within global social movements. At its core, it critiques how institutional forces commodify education and culture, eroding spaces for collective, critical thought. The US/UK-driven marketisation of higher education has gained traction across the EU, directly affecting Serbia: Western-backed funding serves to promote a corporate model in Serbia's higher education, silencing dissent and shrinking spaces for critical and radical thinking (Karaulić, 2025). Following the collapse of Yugoslavia and authoritarian regimes in the Balkans, Western Balkan countries had to re-build their higher education systems from the ground up—creating new legal frameworks, funding models, governance structures, and quality mechanisms. Simultaneously, these countries committed to European integration through the Bologna Process and the EU's Lisbon Strategy, creating tension between national realities and international demands (Hackl, 2014).

In addition to the familiar tension between local legacies and EU aspiration, the issue of implicit rules and structures that shape students' access and progression within higher education affects the Ex-Yugoslavian HE scene, just as much as the EU and UK ones. Karaulić (2025) highlights

how Serbia's government has implemented policies that undermine university autonomy, such as reducing research hours and increasing teaching hours, which financially destabilise public universities and hinder international collaboration. These reforms have led to the silencing of academic dissent, with professors and students facing threats, salary cuts, and legal actions for opposing government policies.

Bernstein, as cited in Donnelly (2018), informed the approach to inequalities within HE in this paper. Bernstein's theoretical lens shed light on hidden inequalities—notably, cultural expectations and norms that are rarely examined in widening-participation initiatives. Donnelly compellingly argues that current debates on widening access in UK higher education often overlook underlying cultural codes that privilege certain groups. What this study looked at, as part of its analysis of the dynamics at play in the reclaiming of both UK and Serbia's university spaces, are the implicit gatekeeping mechanisms at play—which university management is keenly aware of and uses to silence dissenting student voices and their supporters.

Vukasović & Sarrico (2010) provide an insightful definition of 'inequality' in the context of higher education spaces: a multidimensional view, which understands inequality as not just socio-economic status, but also cultural, demographic, gendered, and geographic divides. They reiterate the importance of viewing inequality in HE not only as an access issue, but as a complex puzzle involving *who enters*, *who succeeds*, and how institutions and systems contribute to ongoing social stratification. Understanding the incredible student-led actions across both Serbia and UK cannot be done without a critical analysis of the exclusionary nature and dynamics of the marketised higher education sector, which students have openly rejected, as well as the expectation that they simply accept the repressive nature of management and local governments. Investigating how these spaces are being repurposed by students and their supporters and what they signify in terms of collective imagination for systemic change, can offer valuable insights into how marginalised voices reclaim agency in times of crisis within the context of an increasingly securitised society under the growing influence of right-wing extremism.

The paper begins by briefly reviewing the timeline of events that have unfolded since October 7th, 2023, in the UK and since November 1st, 2024, in Serbia. 'Mixed Methods within Ethnographic Designs' section introduces the research design and analytical lens, propounding the framework of why and how students and the wider citizenry took the lead in this research.

In ‘*Disclose, divest! We will not stop; we will not rest! // Svi u blokade! Napali su studente, svi na ulice!*’ section, I substantiate my argument by highlighting preliminary findings from both research locations, addressing similarities, differences and lessons learnt. I do so by centring the voices of my research partners, whose words and ideas help with understanding the interconnectedness of these struggles. In the conclusion, I outline how these preliminary findings feed back to the discussion on building solidarity networks in the context of global crises, while also identifying key takeaways from both data collection sights and outlining the next stage and goals of the project.

Encampments and *blokada*: a Timeline of Protests and Resistance

Following the events of October 7th, 2023, students worldwide have mobilised to reclaim their campuses, demanding divestment from arms companies and an end to complicity in the genocide of Palestinians. The student-led mobilisation in the UK was met with violence, including police brutality and unlawful detentions, and with many encampments being served eviction notices and orders of removal, leading to their dismantling. Nevertheless, students and community members that have rallied behind them persist with many still holding liberated zones and spaces on their campuses and with graduates from 2024 and 2025 disrupting graduation ceremonies and marking them with display of Palestine solidarity, including chants and visible keffiyehs.

Here is a timeline of the student encampments across UK university campuses:

Late 2023 – Early 2024: Foundations & Early Actions

- Open letters and petitions at Cambridge and Oxford (~1,400–1,900 signatures) demanded ceasefire statements, divestment, and protection of students.
- Academic calls for university accountability grew and the international BDS (Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions) movement gained traction with staff members starting campaigns and responding to their Palestinian peers’ call for ending all collaboration with Israeli institutions and denouncing the *scholasticide* in Palestine (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2024).

Spring – Summer 2024: Encampments & Occupations

- Students swiftly begin setting up encampments, reclaiming on-campus spaces and setting up ‘liberated/free zones’, from Goldsmiths to Leicester University, and Manchester, UCL, SOAS, and many more follow suit (Hall & Gohil, 2024).
- Legal actions begin—Birmingham (May 14), Queen Mary (QMUL) & Birmingham face court cases, while students at Swansea and Imperial voluntarily end encampments by mid-/late June 2024 (Chen, 2024).
- Only ~12 of the ~36 encampments remain active (Birmingham, Bristol, QMUL, SOAS, Nottingham, Newcastle, Oxford, Reading); legal orders force closures at London School of Economics (LSE), Birmingham, Nottingham, QMUL; Bristol ends mid-July; UCL evicted Aug 6 (Adams & Abdul, 2024).

The encampments set up across UK university campuses were met with violence and aggressive repression, both from academic management and local authorities, with police allowed on university premises and police brutality being encouraged under the guise of ensuring on-campus safety. Nevertheless, student encampments emerged as a robust form of protest blending direct action, solidarity, and institutional critique. They confronted university governance, confronted UK Higher Education legacies tied to arms companies and Israeli partnerships, and navigated a fraught environment marked by competing free speech imperatives and rising tensions around antisemitism.

The unrest prompted some institutions to shift ethical investment approaches and revealed deep-seated challenges in balancing protest, state surveillance and violence, and community trust. There were some concrete wins for students who pushed management to partially concede —Goldsmiths, Swansea, Reading, York are among the universities that divested or pledged policy reviews; University of the Arts’ (UAL) encampment witnessed the resignation of Vice-Chancellor James Purnell. Furthermore, the encampments served as grassroots educational spaces, reinforcing activist identities and critical thinking reclaiming and reframing the purpose of university spaces. Much like in the case of university campuses across the US, external condemnation (BRISMES Committee on Academic Freedom, 2024) of violent crackdowns and silencing of students did not deter UK Universities who, ultimately, succeeded and shut down the encampments. Despite the fear and hostility demonstrated by security and management on campuses, students and

staff alike have persisted in their mobilising by participating in peaceful Palestine solidarity rallies and actions. Their steadfast commitment is not rooted in safety, but rather in the moral obligation and commitment to the Palestinian cause.

The state-sponsored tragedy of November 1st, 2024, when the canopy of Novi Sad railway station collapsed, murdering a total of 16 people, marked the beginning of public outrage and unrest, in response to yet another blatant example of state corruption and negligence by authorities (Savanović, 2025).

Here is a timeline highlighting the key moments of the student-led, mass mobilisation that took over across Serbia:

November–December 2024: From Vigils to Blockades

- 22 Nov: Students at Belgrade’s Faculty of Dramatic Arts (FDU) were attacked while holding a vigil. In response, they initiated a faculty blockade on 25 Nov, sparking nationwide action (Savanović, 2025).
- By early Dec, blockades had spread to over 60–85 university faculties, as well as multiple high schools. Around 75% of state-run faculties joined, suspending classes and occupying buildings (Krstić, 2025).
- The movement was self-organised, with decentralised plenums (plenary assemblies) and no formal leadership or political party affiliation.

January 2025 – ongoing

- Actions reached 276–419 towns and cities (Centro di Ateneo per i Diritti Umani “Antonio Papisca”, 2025; Leofreddi, 2025).
- Large-scale assemblies took place:
 - 22 Dec 2024: ~100,000 people in Belgrade’s Slavija Square
 - 15 Mar 2025 (Mašina, 2025): Harnessed 100s of thousands (200k–350k+) in Belgrade, with citizens gathering in the capital after travelling from all across the country.
- April 2025: After an arduous 13-day bike ride from Serbia, about 80 student protesters met members of the European Parliament and Council of Europe in Strasbourg to tell them about their ongoing demonstrations for official accountability (Baletić, 2025). This marks the students’ movement and moment moving beyond national borders and mobilising many members of the Serbian diaspora across Europe.
- Similarly to their UK peers, students and the wider community faced government’s attempted to suppress dissent: arrests of protesters, sporadic police and pro-government groups violence, de-

nials of transparency, and media framing of dissent as foreign-supported agents and domestic terrorists.

- Despite direct threats to their safety, disruption to their daily lives and academic journeys, combined with the historical neglect of social unrest in South-East Europe by Western media, academia and the wider Western community, the student-led social uprising is still going strong with another large-scale protest held on Saturday June 28th, 2025 with students reiterating their call for elections (Al Jazeera, 2025).

The unwavering commitment to societal and systemic change shown by Serbia's students, who have rallied and awoken the country's wider society, is another example of a collective call for a paradigm change against the backdrop of late-stage capitalism, whose cracks and faults are particularly visible in a society dealing with post-socialist legacies, domestic abuses of power and foreign-sponsored state corruption. Milosavljević (2025) highlights how horizontal coordination, absence of political party leadership, and direct democratic plenums mark a activism model particularly visible in Serbia's current student movement. Radical protest tactics are understood as responses to regime violence and repression.

In addition, decentralised, plenum-based organisation among students (some 80+ faculties), supported by educators and workers, seem to have fostered direct democracy, solidarity networks, and collective social learning. Cvetković & Knežević (2025) frame it as a transformative “rupture” that models new forms of social organisation.

Through a comparative and contrastive analysis, this research aims at addressing the following key questions:

- What opportunities exist for sustainable organising that brings alternatives, both in theory and practice?
- How can society oppose the silencing of radical voices by state powers and compliant mainstream media?
- What do the actions of student organisers across Serbia tell us about contemporary civil unrest and the need for systemic change?
- How can we ensure that our struggles do not create new divisions and tensions that reinforce existing power structures?

As this is a fully self-funded project, it is very much at a preliminary stage and as such the data collection and analysis are both still ongoing and the finding presented later in this paper should be understood as preliminary.

Mixed Methods within Ethnographic Designs

The research design for this study is mixed in nature, comprising of classic ethnographic methodologies, such as anonymised questionnaires and one-to-one interviews, content analysis of national and international media sources and field observation of protests, rallies and student-led actions.

In line with principles of ethnographic research in at-risk contexts, the study was conducted with a strong emphasis on anonymity and informed consent, using clear and accessible language to explain its aims and confidentiality limits. Participation was entirely voluntary, with no mandatory responses.

The research design included indirect questioning grounded in specific, context-based examples from the UK and Serbia, and relied on encrypted digital tools to ensure data security. The aim was to triangulate data collected through observation, interviews, and questionnaires, taking into account the dispersed nature of actors and overlapping cultural fields that characterise contemporary social movements.

Open-ended and semi-structured formats were used, alongside content analysis of national and international media, in accordance with ethnographic methodology (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019; Bernard, 2017; Murchison, 2010). Research partners included students, teaching staff, alumni, and campus security officers.

Data collection involved field observations (mainly protests, some co-organised by the researcher), one-to-one interviews, and a survey with all research participants. The survey focused on the experiences and reflections of the London- and Oxford-based university community, particularly in relation to protests and encampments following October 7, 2023. The research period covered both observational involvement (February 2024–ongoing) and interviews and survey implementation (March–May 2025).

Due to a lack of access, I was not able to involve other university labourers, outside of the academic group, besides security guards and as such, this is to be considered a limitation of my research. My intention had initially been to treat the university ‘community’ as an entity that expands beyond the classroom and the standard university spaces, but I was ultimately only able to include alumni and security staff, in addition to current students and staff members. The university campuses were in Oxford (1 university) and London (3 universities). In total, I was able to interview and speak to 6 research partners across London and Oxford universities.

Data collection in Serbia relied primarily on survey responses, media analysis, and community engagement, given the absence of field observations. Research partners were Serbian citizens, predominantly based in Belgrade, with a few from the diaspora across Europe. Notably, all but two were not affiliated with academic institutions.

Due to geographical distance and limited funding, it was not feasible to conduct repeated field visits to Serbia, which limited in-person observation. Media reporting focused on independent and radical outlets, both domestic and international, and the researcher also contributed to one such outlet as a Serbian-to-English translator.

The Serbian-language survey gathered insights into experiences, reflections, and concerns of those involved in student-led and broader organising efforts that followed the uprisings beginning on November 1, 2024.

My positionality for both data collection locations is relevant as it informed both my access to research partners as well as my ability to engage with local sources on the ground in Serbia. Being a London-based researcher, with an activist and community organiser background, and being Italian – Serbian, i.e.: born in Italy to Ex-Yugoslavian parents, with my mother's side of the family being based in Belgrade, I was not able to directly interact with current students across Serbia, which should be considered as a limitation to this particular data collection set, but I was able to follow personal connections who have been involved with the protests since they first started. As such, I had to slightly pivot and refocus my research on a different set of partners, namely members of older generations (born between 1959 and 1985), witnessing and participating in this historic moment. They added a comparative perspective to my ethnographic data collection and analysis: they remember and lived through the 1996-1997 protests, and through their insights, they brought together their past, lived experiences, and their current hopes, concerns, and admiration for what this generation of students has been able to achieve.

As a Serbian-English translator myself, I was in direct contact and communication with journalists and reporters working on the ground and continuously made the effort to break through the wall of silence on the student-led movement in Serbia that I witnessed in the UK and across Europe as well, by translating articles. I did the latter both as a way of reaching the international solidarity movement scene and as a research practice. More specifically, I wish to explore what alternative techniques, for archiving and reporting on social uprisings and protests, if any, does our collective society have to the rise of fascist tech moguls and the use of AI to further misrepresent and erase social uprisings.

Disclose, divest! We will not stop; we will not rest! //
Svi u blokade! Napali su studente, svi na ulice!

As previously stated, the findings presented below, together with their analysis, are to be considered preliminary and initial. The project is ongoing, and the aim is to expand on the data collection and fieldwork, by carrying out work on the ground in Serbia, engaging with the latest organising led by students and engaging with the university community in the UK. Albeit less active than last year, the latter is still mobilising the wider community and is supporting the actions of other Palestine solidarity groups and collectives, despite state repression and silencing.

UK preliminary findings

Preliminary findings from the UK highlight the intensification of state and institutional violence, disproportionately targeting racialised, migrant, and Muslim students, activists, and university staff—both academic and on-campus. University security management has reportedly travelled to and from the United States, where, according to one research participant, “they have learnt from peers additional and more violent strategies to suppress protesters and stop students from actively organising encampments” (Research Partner 1). Another participant noted that London and Oxford university leadership “do not uphold their mandate to keep all their students safe, nor do they prioritise the wellbeing of students that are affected by their complicity in genocide” (Research Partner 4). In addition, there is a concerning lack of advocacy for the increasing number of political prisoners in the UK who are part of the university community, with little support from leadership, teaching staff, or trade unions.

With regards to the lack of advocacy and outspoken support for political prisoners who are also members of the UK University community, Research Partner 2 identified the “*members of the Filton¹⁸, like Q, a first-year undergraduate student who has not received any visible, institutional support from their London University*” as an example.

What emerged during both field observation and one-to-one interviews with research partners in the UK was the perceived need for a broader critique of the economic status quo, of which the elitist university is a product, to push for divestment from arms companies and any other complicit entities.

The multi-dimensional inequality embedded in the UK HE sector also transpired, mainly as all research partners highlighted how, as a result of repression and silencing, “*Racialised students will continue to be forced*

to take a step back and adopt inactive roles in organising, out of fear for their safety. The intersectional nature of on-campus organising also clearly emerged, as migrant and racialised students and staff are those whose precarious position means they are less likely to be able to “*vocalise their support for the Palestinian cause out of fears of legal reprisals and immigration consequences*” as multiple research partners observed.

Despite a lack of reporting and attention to the student-led uproar in Serbia, research partners in the UK demonstrated, for the most part, a good, albeit basic, understanding of the situation. It is worth noting how they drew parallels between the two contexts, as the following exchanges reveal “*Strategic targeting of corridors of power as seen in Serbia, where students across the country flooded Belgrade and even pushed pressure beyond Serbia by going to Strasbourg*” Research Partner 2; “*Cross-solidarity is vital. The student struggle within institutions shaped by elitism and inaccessibility must be linked to the struggle of workers.*” Research Partners 2 & 3.

Serbia preliminary findings

There has been swift civil society support, with student-led actions reaching beyond Serbia to the international stage. Students also secured unprecedented, peaceful engagement with EU leaders by taking their demands directly to Strasbourg and Brussels. However, more visible and broader support of student protests is needed at the national and international levels. The students’ demands have been widely supported, and most of Serbia’s citizenry has recognised the necessity to fulfil those demands.

All research partners claimed that the intensity and severity of today’s protests are similar to those of the mid/late 90s, which were caused by the election thefts of Slobodan Milošević’s regime. The swift and overwhelming civil support granted to the student movement, which expanded beyond Serbia and onto the international stage, is what truly sets this *moment* apart.

As confirmed by the latest protest on June 28th, 2025, students’ demands have been widely supported, and all research partners highlighted how most of Serbia’s citizenry has recognised the necessity to fulfil them and for an overarching systemic change to come as a result. According to my Serbia-based research partners, the government’s response and reaction to the student-led actions, as well as the international community’s lack of condemnation of Vučić’s crackdown on both protesters and anti-regime media, undeniably show how the EU’s support for Vučić’s regime is closely tied to lithium production, unsafe mineral mining, and ecologically harmful technologies. In other words, Serbia is seen as the EU’s lit-

eral and metaphorical landfill—used for hazardous waste dumping and illicit practices that violate the very same ‘core principles’ the EU utilises to justify its complicity with corrupt and genocidal allies, i.e.: Isreal.

Students across Serbia, from Novi Pazar, to Niš, to Beograd have shown a rejection of ethno-nationalism, questioning the discourse around ethno-nationalism locally and internationally. *“Thanks to their struggle, we can see what is happening in Novi Pazar, we can see Bosniaks, Slovaks, Vlachs, Roma, not as caricatures of their political representatives, nor as “minorities”, but as equal members of society”*. However, this is also seen as a delicate and ongoing process, with which not only students but the wider population across Serbia must actively and continuously engage with. *“I think it is positive that the students show that they notice the diversity of national and religious affiliations in their country... This does not diminish the fact that nationalist characteristics can be seen among the protesters... but some progress has been made in people’s consciousness”* (Research Partner 8).

Conclusions and New Questions

Findings from both locations seem to suggest that organised and focused escalation are needed for all aspects of collective organising, student-led and civil society-led. Similarly, both movements-moments need to confront key questions and challenges, both in terms of internal structure and vision, to work out a sustainable way forward. The issues of positionality, power dynamics and sustainable organising were highlighted by research partners across the groups.

Despite being about their personal on-campus experience, Research Partner 2’s words resonated with research partners in Serbia: *“While groups often claim to operate non-hierarchically, which was the case on my campus along with many others, informal hierarchies tend to emerge. These discrete power dynamics have marginalised racialised members, especially in decision-making situations that require the recognition of positionality and the diverse range of perspectives and lived experiences of members”*. Equally, the undeniable shift brought about by the student-led mass-mobilisation was recognised by all research partners, both in the UK and in Serbia, as per Research Partner 7’s words when asked about what is next for the students and the country: *“Systemic changes have already begun...they have already taken place at the level of consciousness of a large number of individuals. How long it will take to articulate it as a collective consciousness that has the strength and mechanisms for systemic changes in the work of institutions cannot be predicted precisely. But the process has already started, and there is no going back”*.

This preliminary study set to investigate the student-led occupations, actions and encampments within and outside university spaces in the UK and Serbia reflects a growing trend in which educational spaces are reimagined as sites of resistance, care, and pre-figurative politics. This preliminary study has used Bernstein's (2000) sociology of education, which offers a valuable lens for analysing these developments, particularly through his concepts of classification and framing, which highlight how students in these movements disrupt traditional boundaries and reconfigure what counts as legitimate knowledge and authority. In such spaces, the weakening of strong classification allows for more horizontal and collaborative learning arrangements, directly opposing the hierarchical structures of formal education. Donnelly (2018) complements this analysis by drawing attention to the affective and embodied nature of student protest, arguing that acts of occupation should be understood as "experiences of critical pedagogy" (Donnelly, 2020, p. 530), where emotion, risk, and collectivity produce meaningful learning outside the classroom. These perspectives align with literature on autonomous learning spaces, which sees student protest not simply as oppositional but as a generative force—constructing alternative educational imaginaries that resist neoliberal and securitised university models (Canaan & Shumar, 2008; Haworth, 2012; Neary & Winn, 2017). Such spaces foreground the agency of marginalised voices, offering what Holloway (2010) describes as "cracks" in capitalism—zones where students rehearse radical democratic futures, often in direct defiance of institutional and political norms.

The completion and further expansion of this research could take a multitude of forms, but one aspect I am keen to retain is its epistemological grounding in people's personal accounts and first-hand experiences. This applies to their accounts of both individual and collective stories, as they are both part of societal and cultural archive practices, the same way media content analysis encompasses national and international perspectives.

Future subjects this research may touch include: engaging more closely with the Serbian (and the wider Ex-Yugoslavian) diaspora and its reception of the social movement-moment initiated by students back home; reflecting on the need to reimagine the reporting and archiving of societal and historical moments, to stand up to the silencing of radical voices and reporting, perpetrated by the powers that be and the complicit, mainstream media apparatus.

* This paper is part of an ongoing study the researcher is still conducting and is an entirely self-funded project, and is not the recipient of any grants, public or private. The researcher has applied for funding, with

which she hopes to expand and complete this project and is currently waiting for the application's outcome. The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my research partners for sharing and trusting me with their thoughts, concerns and insights and for making this research possible. // Još jednom vam hvala što ste podelili svoje misli i ideje i što pristali da budete deo mog istraživanja.

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