The Student's Two Bodies: Civic Engagement and Political Becoming in the Post-Socialist Space

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Abstract: Student activism in Montenegro has remained largely unaccounted for in the growing body of literature on civic engagement and popular politics in the post-Yugoslav space. When students took their discontent to the streets of the Montenegrin capital in November 2011, the dual nature of the student body was rendered visible and audible: while the official student organizations framed their activity as an *a*political expression of discontent over studying conditions, several independent student associations positioned themselves as an extra-parliamentary opposition to the ruling establishment and called for the creation of a wide anti-austerity/anti-corruption coalition. Drawing from critical theory, political sociology, and human geography, this article addresses the questions of why, how, when, and where a part of the student body became political. I argue that a social context that lacks a tradition of politically engaged student movements provides opportunities for a nuanced understanding of *political becoming* of a hitherto apolitical social group.

Keywords: political becoming, student activism, contentious politics, social movements, post-socialism, Montenegro

Introduction

The post-2008 global wave of student uprisings against neoliberal restructuring of higher education resonated strongly throughout the former Yugoslavia, its pinnacle being experimentations with consensus-based models of direct democracy within occupied university buildings. While scholarly accounts focused on prominent urban areas with rich traditions of student political engagement (see Klemenčič et al. 2015), student protests in Montenegro—a small country of roughly 620,000 people, whose first university was established in 1974 and with virtually no tradition of post-secondary student activism—were simply mentioned in passing (see Baćević 2015:229; Štiks 2015:140) or misunderstood as an assemblage of "marches, protests and petitions" void of more profound engagement with politics (see Štiks and Horvat 2014:86).

Despite the emergence of the ever-growing body of scholarly work on social movements in the post-socialist space, critical geography has retained its initial disinterest in contentious politics in Central and Eastern Europe (see Timár 2003:29) and a reluctance to theorize the experience of post-socialism (cf. Stenning and Hörschelmann 2008).[1] Having this in mind—as well as the fact that radical geography has paid minimal attention to the political consequentiality of student

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activism in general (cf. Hopkins and Todd 2015; Zeilig and Ansell 2008)—in this article I draw from critical theory, political sociology, and human geography to address protest events in Montenegro as not only another student movement in the post-Yugoslav region, but as a site from which to explore the *political becoming* of Montenegro's students—that is, their (self-)constitution as a new political subject (ivity) in the Montenegrin public space.

The discussion unfolds in four stages. In the first part, I offer a conceptual framework for understanding the role of space in the process of political becoming. I then move on to contextualize my empirical material, highlighting the specifics of the Montenegrin socio-spatial configuration. In the third section, I examine a year-long wave of interruptions and scales of ruptures in the institutional makeup of Montenegrin society that students produced by contesting their administratively defined social role. I conclude the article with a discussion to demonstrate the theoretical and conceptual bearings on broader debates on political subject-formation.

Rethinking the Spatiality of Political Becoming

The concept of "political becoming" has gained some traction in the recent body of literature on social movements in post-socialist, (post-)transition civil societies, whose defining characteristic is *anti-political* civic engagement. In these contexts, activists predominantly see themselves as non-political actors who pursue their goals by non-political means in the name of moral principles or self-interest, rather than in allegiance to a political agenda (Jacobsson 2015b:14; see also Kopf 2015; Stubbs 2012). Similarly, Kilibarda (2013) shows that anti-politics—or, more precisely, apoliticality—permeates civic activism in Montenegro. "Political becoming" is thus used in post-socialist settings to denote the process of democratic subject-formation of a hitherto *a*political social group that "[gains] a sense of agency and political efficacy" by re-scripting its social role, identity, and collective goals on political grounds (Jacobsson 2015b:19–20; see also Gunnarsson Payne and Korolczuk 2016:1081–1082). Two functions of space can be identified in this process by which collectives politicize problems related to everyday life and, ultimately, exert political agency: first, space facilitates the creation of alternative public spheres; and second, it enables differential social arrangements and political practices to emerge. In other words, political becoming necessitates not only the establishment of *counterpublics* (see Fraser 1990; Warner 2002), but also the creation of *counter-spaces*—understood as sheltered, autonomous zones that facilitate dialogue across difference, the forging of new social bonds, and the enactment of new political practices (see Butler 2015; Lefebvre 1991; Polletta 1999). These counter-spaces have been empirically validated to be a precondition for political contestation *from below* in the post-socialist landscape, but were also shown to frequently be low-key and, therefore, hidden from the public's eye (see Jacobsson 2015a; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Pleyers and Sava 2015). Visibility, on the other hand, is identified as integral to the success of student movements, especially in societies where these movements are "not seen as legitimate political actors" (Altbach 1989:100).

Therefore, for an apolitical social group to become political, I argue, counter-spaces have to render it simultaneously visible and audible, and thus identifiable and recognizable in the public sphere. As I will show, counter-spaces were essential for the facilitation of students' contentious activities, as their ultimate outcome was the gradual emergence of *the student* as a new political actor on the public scene. Therefore, in addition to examining the dialogical/deliberative and performative/prefigurative functions of counter-spaces in the process of political becoming, I elucidate a third spatial dimension of the concept by drawing from the post-Marxist standpoint of radical geography. This position emphasizes how counter-hegemonic spaces of alterity transform socio-spatial power arrangements by democratizing and legitimizing, in and through space, the voice of hitherto invisible political actors (see Dikeç 2005; Isin 2008, 2009; Staeheli 2010; Swyngedouw 2011). By unpacking the concept of "political becoming" through this standpoint, this article explores the role of counter-spaces in rendering students visible and audible in the Montenegrin public space as a new *political subjectivity*, one which was previously unidentifiable in the given field of experience.

The "beginning" of student mobilization in Montenegro is marked in scholarly accounts through the first highly visible mass student rally in the country's post-Yugoslav history (see Baćević 2015; Komar 2015; Štiks 2015; Štiks and Horvat 2014). It occurred on 17 November 2011, when several thousand students marched down the streets of Podgorica to express their discontent with the institutional negligence of growing student problems, the marketization of higher education, and government austerity programs. The protest was treated by the Montenegrin public as a political event of historical significance. Local public intellectuals applauded rebellious students for bringing a new civic energy to Montenegro (Brković 2011a; Radulović 2011) and fighting for social change (Kalezić 2011; Popović 2012b). Trade unionists praised the students' proactive involvement for the creation of civic unity against austerity (Keković 2011a; Nikolić 2011b). Political commentators celebrated the "awakened students" for finally showing political courage to fight for the common good (Baća 2011a; Kosović 2011; Milačić 2011). According to Altbach's (1991:249–250) comparative insights, it is precisely this response of social groups outside of the university environment that is of crucial importance in understanding the political and cultural impact of student movements in a given society.

However, many of these observers pointed out a *division* within the student body. While the Student Parliament of University of Montenegro (SP)—the official umbrella student organization that represents the majority of the student population in the country and the main organizer of the rally—framed the protests as an apolitical expression of discontent over studying conditions; independent student associations positioned themselves as an extra-parliamentary opposition to the regime and called for the creation of a wider anti-austerity/anti-corruption coalition with workers and civil society activists as the second step towards radical socio-political change (Brković 2011b; Keković 2011a; Milačić 2011; Petričević 2012; Radojičić 2011). The SP was later blamed for obstructing the organization of the follow-up protest that independent student associations were preparing with trade union activists (Keković 2011b; Kosović 2011; Popović 2012a). Eventually, key

members (including the president) of the SP exposed themselves as active members of parties whose policies they were allegedly protesting against.[2] When the SP-organized street protests failed to move beyond the parochial interests of its organizers, a group of discontented students carried on with their activities, ultimately culminating in mass social upheaval in the first half of 2012.

In order to draw a contrast between the two student bodies' visibility and audibility in the public space at the time, I seize upon Kantorowicz's (1957) metaphor of "the king's two bodies" to designate the *student body natural*—the administratively defined "good student conduct" characterized by a(nti)political demands and practiced through institutional channels—from the *student body politic* that challenges the very logic of the student body natural by reinterpreting, redefining, and (re)politicizing *the student's* social role through acts of civil disobedience and political contestation. Accordingly, my empirical attention is on student manifestations of "activist citizens", who differ from "active citizens" in that they do not follow institutionalized venues of civic participation, but creatively break rules and routines by "creating new sites and scales of struggle" and, in the process, "emerge not as beings already defined" but as new political subjects (Isin 2008:39; see also Isin 2009).

Following Altbach's (1989:106) proposition to assess the effectiveness of student activism based on its outcomes (rather than direct impact), this article examines the observed *decoupling* of the student body by asking why, how, when, and where a part of the student body became political. The theoretical insights enabled here by the Montenegrin case are applicable beyond this particular context, and speak to broader theoretical debates on political subject-formation. My methodological focus is on what Isin (2008, 2009) calls "acts of citizenship": the small-scale, incremental, and subversive interruptions in the socio-spatial ordering that preceded the "eventful" student rally. By examining "the transgressive appearance of unauthorized speakers on the public stage" (Rancière 2004:18) from November 2010 to December 2011, I explore the ruptures that these acts made in "the 'natural' (or, better yet, naturalized) order of domination through the constitution of a place of encounter by those that have no part in that order" (Dikeç 2005:172). As I will show in the example of Montenegrin students—who are often treated by local media as a paradigmatic model of an a(nti)political collective—for a civically (dis)engaged but apolitical social group to "become political", it must create "a deviation from this normal order of things" by producing egalitarian spaces in which those ordinarily thought to be unequal can demonstrate their equality by interacting with the authorities on equal footing (Rancière 2010:35; see also May 2010). Accordingly, counter-spaces should not be understood only as non-coercive spaces of and for alterity, but as ruptures and interruptions in the institutional makeup of society that render visible and audible new *sites* and *modes* of political being. In short, the concept of "political becoming" entails the bottom-up institutionalization of common spaces where injustices can be publicly addressed and political equality publicized, which in effect radically transform public perceptions of politics through the recognition of the legitimacy of nascent political subjects. For these reasons, I trace the political becoming of Montenegro's students to their refusal to enact administratively defined student roles, interrupting

the "normal order of things" by creating interstitial spaces of encounters, resistance, and resilience.

Student (Dis)engagement in a Non-Anonymous Society

"Montenegro doesn't have real students": this is the dominant sentiment that is propelled in public discourses about studentship, implying that the student body is socially disinterested, politically apathetic, and civically disengaged (e.g. Perović-Korać 2010, 2011; Rajković 2009).[3] Historically, however, Montenegrin students have been sporadically involved in collective actions, but as part of larger socio-political movements (see Morrison 2009:27–49, 81–88, 205–220; Radulović 2016:35–38, 287–290). In all these cases, the "political becoming" of the student body did not occur "organically" within autonomous student spaces, but was instead facilitated by other organizations, movements, and power centers. Students were thus acting—or, more precisely, were visible and audible—as politicized individual members of civic, political, or even professional organizations rather than as a self-aware, self-organized, and inclusive student collective that *became* political. The authentic political subjectivity of the student body, hence, remained at the margins of the political process and publicly invisible and inaudible until 2010–2011.

However, despite the chronic lack of grassroots, autonomous *political* student activism, the Montenegrin public has developed somewhat of a romanticized idea of what the social role of *the student* should be—namely, a vanguard of civic activism and democratic change. This idealistic image of students as "unruly subjects" and as the "consciousness of society" was influenced predominantly by "eventful" street protests in the broader region, where the student population became an extra-parliamentary opposition and the "human face" of democratic interventions against authoritarian regimes. In contrast to these openly political actions, Radulović (2016:287–290) correctly defines actually existing student activism in Montenegro as "student unionism": socially self-centered and politically disengaged involvement aimed at small improvements of "technical" aspects of student life that rarely goes beyond internal university matters. The student body was, therefore, publicly visible and audible at the level of rudimentary forms of apolitical civic engagement organized through institutional channels by so-called "active students".[4] To trace the political becoming of Montenegrin students, I contrast the exercise of the *body natural* of "active students" with the enactment of the *body politic* of "activist students" between November 2010 and December 2011.

The question, however, remains: why does Montenegro, when compared to neighboring countries, lack autonomous political student activism? This absence is not an isolated phenomenon, but another symptom of a general characteristic of Montenegrin civil society, where instances of bottom-up articulation of interests and unconventional participation have been shown to be extremely rare (Jovanović and Marjanović 2002:161–172; Komar 2015:146), if not the lowest in the post-Yugoslav region (Bešić 2014:240–241). Studies demonstrate that young people in Montenegro are extremely passive and disinterested in being involved in public life: less than a fourth of Montenegro's youth population participated in public

gatherings (Ipsos Strategic Marketing 2013:29–30), every tenth student has attempted to participate in the decision-making processes at his/her university (Ipsos Strategic Marketing 2013:30–31; see also Petković and Rodić 2015:37–40), while every fifth student thinks that their problems can be resolved through youth organizations (Pavlović 2016:29). The reasons for this have been ascribed mostly to the country's historical heritage of authoritarianism and the current patronage system that have rendered its political culture non-participatory (see Jovanović and Marjanović 2002; Komar 2015; Komar and Živković 2016). As a result, the effects of Montenegro's unique socio-spatial configuration on the lack of activism have rarely been addressed. I extrapolate here from the available literature on Montenegro, to consider the socio-spatial factors that constrain political becoming and simultaneously call for the spatialization of the concept.

Due to the high density of interpersonal relationships and kinship ties, as well as the small scale on which encounters between people happen, Montenegro can be described as a *non-anonymous* society, that is, a large community in which "everyone knows everyone" (see Jovanović and Marjanović 2002; Komar and Živković 2016; Sedlenieks 2015). It is also a society that is deeply polarized and antagonized along ethnopolitical cleavages (see Komar 2015; Komar and Živković 2016; Morrison 2009). In such a divided "micro-society", a citizen is never an anonymous person, but rather a concrete individual whose political affiliations and loyalties are always "known": everyone is "embedded in a set of assumptions that link him or her ... in the political web" through his/her personal connections and kinship ties (Sedlenieks 2015:204). In effect, this severely lowers the social trust necessary for bottom-up mobilization and alliance-building outside existing social and political networks. Put more simply, public space (understood as the physical site of social interactions) in Montenegro is not a space of difference, but a space of familiarity where public opinion is never sufficiently anonymous, so social forces that would mobilize mass constituencies across existing socio-political cleavages that are vital to forging a contentious politics in large "anonymous" societies are extremely weak in Montenegro (Jovanović 2009:39).

Aggravating these constraints on unconventional political participation is the semi-democratic polity that is established on the basis of extant patron–client networks that play a central role in defining state–society relationships. The party in power, Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), is a reformed version of the League of Communists, which had been in power consecutively since 1945, only undergoing internal recompositions of party elites in 1989 and 1997. The political structure thus reinforces the social structure: when the majority of existential issues are resolved through nepotistic-cum-clientelistic mechanisms, citizens are encouraged to use kinship ties and party connections to bend the formal rules of the game in their own favor (Komar 2015:157–158; Sedlenieks 2015:210–212).[5] As a result, anything that would elsewhere inspire collective engagement or direct action may also be addressed through (informal) clientelistic mechanisms in Montenegro. In short, Montenegro rests on a near perfect spatial ordering for the effective exercise of the powers of governing, surveillance, and self-disciplining, in which visibility in the public becomes a double-edged sword: being simultaneously limiting and yet necessary for (contentious) political action.

Whereas in other former Yugoslav republics universities have traditionally been the hotbeds of political activism (see Baćević 2015; Fichter 2016), the University of Montenegro has remained a space devoid of the potential for generating contestation.[6] The explanations cited for this are often ascribed to the lack of a student activist tradition (Radulović 2016:205–209) and the ruling DPS's control of the university (Popović 2010). While both are important, I argue that factoring in the socio-spatial configuration of Montenegro gives additional explanatory power to this equation. Namely, if we take into account research which shows that family is the primary source of identification among students and, as such, is determinant of students' political orientations and affiliations (Pavićević and Uljarević 2007:35) and their level of civic (dis)engagement (Ipsos Strategic Marketing 2013:33), then students are always-already in the vicinity to sites of power and thus vulnerable to power's reach. Due to the country's small size, most towns are in relatively close proximity to the two major campuses in the two largest urban areas of the country (Podgorica and Nikšić), so students that commute can never fully escape the presence, influence, and surveillance of their families. Moreover, due to dense kinship/personal networks, even those students who move away from their families are closely monitored and controlled by extended families in the cities where they study. Therefore, given Montenegro's specific socio-spatial configuration, universities in the country are rendered a *non-place*—namely, a space of transience lacking the characteristics that would foster a sense of attachment, belonging, or uniqueness found in physical places (Augé 1995). For the majority of students, hence, the university is not a *lived space* of transformative experience, of soul-searching, or of perspective-changing encounters, nor is it a distinct space for forging an autonomous social identity.[7] It is a space akin to a transport hub in which claim-making is confined to "student unionist" demands to improve the quality of services in order to enable a faster transition to a degree, after which employment can be secured through nepotistic-cum-clientelistic networks.[8] Within such a university environment, it is highly unlikely that students could develop a sense of place and a collective identity, which then severely inhibits their collective agency. For that reason, the emergence of a year-long wave of autonomous (political) student activism poses an interesting puzzle for scholarly inquiry.

Acts of Political Becoming

In this section, I examine a series of interruptions and scales of ruptures in the "normal order of things" within Montenegrin society that emerged by contesting the administratively defined social role of students at the University of Montenegro.[9] As a result of these disturbances, a *student body politic* was enacted between November 2010 and December 2011. This empirical section is organized in three "acts", laying out in chronological order the flow of political becoming of the student body. The first act covers the rebellion of students at the Faculty of Philosophy (FOP) in Nikšić, from November 2010 to May 2011. The second act focuses mainly on the protests organized by independent student associations based at the Faculty of Political Science (FPS) in Podgorica, from September to

November 2011. The final act captures the "Big Student Protest", as it came to be known, and its aftermath which spanned from November to December 2011.

I examine three interlocking spatial registers of political becoming, by answering why, how, when, and where a creation of counter-spaces resulted in alternative public spheres for encounter and deliberation; facilitated the emergence of new social bonds and political practices among students (including a sense of belonging and togetherness); and ruptured/transformed the "normal" institutional makeup of society by enabling students to interact directly, on equal footing with their representatives, the authorities, and the public. I use primary (interviews with activists) and secondary (newsmedia articles) sources to trace the genealogy of political becoming from small-scale, incremental acts of resistance to large-scale, mass student protests. I conducted interviews with the most prominent activists of the 2010–2011 student movement: Boban Batrićević and Slobodan Radović, who initiated and steered the wave of contention in Nikšić from November 2010 to May 2011; Ognjen Jovović, who organized student protests in Nikšić from October to December 2011; and Demir Hodžić and Aleksandar Novović, who mobilized and led students in Podgorica from October to December 2011. My interviewees were also chosen because they fully actualized their "political becoming" by continuing to practice civic and political activism even after they graduated.[10]

Act I: Staging the Student Agora

In November 2010, several students at the FOP in Nikšić complained about the non-transparent and unfair election process that favored incumbent student representatives and obstructed the nomination of other candidates. When the university administration denied these appeals as unfounded, excluded students organized themselves into an "Initiative Committee for the Boycott of Teachings and Elections" (ICBTE),[11] which began its work through *tribine*—horizontal, plenum-like forums for deliberation—where all students could participate on an equal footing.[12] These spaces of encounter—which would become institutionalized by activist students after repeat elections—served both as info-sessions and as a platform for marginalized student voices to be heard in public. More specifically, in these egalitarian counter-spaces of alterity and democratic interventions, all students were invited to discuss issues of public importance and jointly decide upon courses of actions in the fight for their interests and rights. According to Radović, individuals involved in these forums—or, as he calls them, "student *agora*"—became aware of how the "creation of an environment that makes [them] feel like citizens and not mere machines for the reproduction of knowledge" facilitates constructive and empowering discussions. Their debates unfolded "without taboos and constraints", addressing "all the problems [they] were facing, not only as students, but as members of an unequal society". In the process, he continues, students became "politically aware ... in terms of jointly identifying and addressing the roots of social problems". The ultimate effect of these forums, therefore, was a creation of spaces of encounter within the university where a

student's sense of place, community, self, and specific interests and needs as a distinct social group was articulated.

The university administration ignored their demands and proceeded instead with "illegitimate elections"—marred by numerous irregularities—to which nearly 200 students responded by occupying the faculty building in order to demand their annulment.[13] Reclaiming control over university space did not only involve deliberation in counter-spaces, but also loud intrusions into administratively controlled places. Batrićević describes how discontented students purposively disrupted the routine flow of everyday life at the FOP by "marching through the halls, study rooms, and offices, howling and booing at everything and everyone", motivated by a desire to "fill every corner with frustration at the Kafkaesque environment that [students] were living in". This reclaiming of university space continued on 16 November 2010, when around 50 students occupied the FOP and spent the night inside the building, thus symbolically asserting that the university belongs to the students.[14] While they had no legal right to boycott lectures, occupy buildings, or speak in the name of the student body, the ICBTE's spatial practices of resistance enacted the very right they were perceived to lack. Disobedience through the production of counter-spaces, therefore, became a precondition not only for identity-building, but also for rendering a contentious student voice audible and the wrongs it addressed visible in the public sphere. The radicalization of their actions also shifted the scale of visibility of the student body politic, making their grievances a front-page story in the mainstream media. Put more simply, through acts of contestation students not only created what Batrićević refers to as the "student class consciousness", but also produced counter-hegemonic spaces in which their previously ignored voices now gained competence to address the issues they were deemed unqualified to speak on. As a testament to their political agency, the university administration swiftly reported on seven violations of the Statute of the SP and announced repeat elections.[15]

Turnout at the repeat elections was unprecedentedly high at 40%, with the ICBTE's slate winning a landslide (60%).[16] The newly elected student representatives—who labeled their rebellious collective as "the genuine student avant-garde"—publicly renounced the traditional structures of student representation, calling instead for a more inclusive mode of student organizing, and explicitly retaining the right of non-institutional action and claim-making.[17] After the elections, activist students were organized within the official representative body, the "Student Council of the Faculty of Philosophy" (SCOFOP). Batrićević describes their platform as based on three principles: first, using "official student structures to facilitate the accumulated rebellious spirit"; second, motivating "students to fight for their interests and rights"; and third, creating spaces to be "heard as citizens genuinely dissatisfied with the socio-economic and political situation in Montenegro". Under this new leadership, the SCOFOP quickly became an engine of prefigurative politics, proactively working on creating the conditions for practicing the ideals that motivated the boycott that initiated the process of political becoming. As Batrićević and Radović explain, the SCOFOP organized an ombudsman-like student service to protect "individual and collective student dignity", especially for students with disabilities, the victims of "mobbing"

or "blatant political harassment" at the hands of professors, the administration or the "old guard of the student establishment". Moreover, they proactively worked to reclaim university space by creating what they called "islands of resistance and emancipation" in which everyone, from high-school students to pensioners, was welcome. They also organized movie nights, reading groups, music concerts by politically engaged bands, free foreign language courses, and panel-discussions on issues that "were not welcome in the classrooms".[18] These spaces of encounter, exposure, and engagement enabled socially transformative civic dialogue and creative learning, as well as enhancing the students' capacity for action, making them not only feel a sense of place within the university but doing so in a politically emancipating and empowering way. In other words, the political becoming of the student body entailed the transformation of university non-place into a lived space that in turn strengthened their nascent political subjectivity.

A second wave of contention, according to Batrićević, began due to the faculty administration negligence to ensure adequate heating during the winter break, which made it impossible for students to study in faculty and dormitory facilities for nearly two months.[19] The SCOFOP used it as a leverage point to demand an extra exam term in August. They organized a petition signed by more than 50% of students at the FOP, which gave them a mandate to threaten another boycott if the university did not comply with their demands.[20] Radović posits that the SCOFOP used the situation as a springboard for critiquing the neoliberal Bologna reforms that have "reduced student life to memorizing and reproducing, not learning and critical thinking", as well as criticizing its administrative rationality "that commodifies and quantifies knowledge" and "reduces students to high school pupils who have no time for any extra-curricular ... or intellectual activities outside collecting grade points and ECTS credits". While making nostalgic appeals for the restoration of the Humboldtian ideal of the university, students used *tribine* to articulate their grievances as victims of the neoliberal restructuring of higher education. In their discourse, the university became a mass producer of cheap labor for whom critical thinking was a luxury, as students' and graduates' time was reduced to navigating between the precariousness of the transitional economy and the grip of clientelistic mechanisms as the only way of escaping existential uncertainty.

The SP in Podgorica could no longer ignore the will of the students at the FOP, so they included their demands in a document called "A Set of Student Measures". To create additional university-wide pressure, a petition was organized by the SP in February and signed by approximately 8000 students, which was the largest single instance of student participation in the history of Montenegro.[21] In late March, the university administration approved the additional exam term in the last week of August, while the plethora of other issues related to the students' standard of living remained unresolved.[22] The approval of "technical" demands encouraged the SP to maintain their position that all problems should be resolved through institutional channels, so they met with the Prime Minister to discuss these issues. However, the SCOFOP representatives were not welcomed into the institutionalized space of student dialogue with the government. This is how the third wave of contention began, as the SCOFOP turned into a renegade council within the SP calling for the

"awakening of students in the streets".[23] They publicly announced their detachment from the official representative structures, criticizing the class privilege of university professors and SP representatives that had turned them into a part of "the ruling establishment" and "servants of the system" disinterested in representing student interests and defending the public good.[24] For that reason, Radović maintains that the protest was not organized as an expression of student discontent, but was instead framed as a "struggle against government policies, austerity measures, the lack of job opportunities and job stability". On 11 April 2011, around 200 students marched from the FOP campus to the town square in Nikšić, while holding banners saying "Sovereignty for the University!", "This is our 1968!", and "I think, therefore I protest!", among other emancipatory declarations. They demanded lower tuition fees, free tuition for students from low-income families, discounts for public transportation, standardized curriculum, regular lectures and tutorials, and paid internship opportunities. However, what made their voice important was that they offered the first public critique of neoliberal rationality that was dismantling the autonomy of the university and turning it into a "stock company".[25] As Jovović describes, they worked on "patenting a new, radically different student class" by making the FOP "a *topos* of a different kind of insurgency" through demanding a more democratic and inclusionary system within university student structures, ending the commercialization of knowledge, and calling for students to be proactively included in decision-making processes.

SCOFOP's political subjectivity was, however, negated by institutional actors within the university in two ways: first, by dismissing them as infantile and incompetent for renouncing institutional mechanisms based on "negotiation and dialogue" as the only way that "future academic citizens and intellectuals" should defend their interests and rights;[26] and second, by framing them as attention-seekers that "artificially are dividing the student population" with their calls to engage in street protests.[27] Yet, whether they were addressing student-specific issues or neoliberal governance more broadly, the students' political voice was articulated in counter-spaces that were also effectively used to exert agency outside of administratively defined boundaries of their pre-ordained social role.

Act II: Enacting the Dictatorship of the Studentariat

While students in Nikšić were mobilizing in dormitories and classrooms, a group of discontented students from Podgorica, who met in spaces of non-formal education, began to gather in private homes and cafes to deliberate on how to improve their situation. Since they were denied a space for organizing at the University of Montenegro, these students felt the political urgency to present their dissatisfactions by protesting in the streets. Gathered in a newly formed non-governmental organization, the "Student Union of Montenegro" (SUM)—which was, according to Hodžić, established as a "parallel organization for genuine representation of student interests and needs by students whose grievances were systematically neglected by the SP"—activist students organized a protest in front of the Parliament of Montenegro on 3 October. Under the slogan "Our leaders

are our ideas!", "Students unmute!", and "Why do I need a degree when I have relatives in power", around 150 students demanded that MPs acknowledge their existence.[28] Ten days later, they also held a protest gathering in front of the Ministry of Education in response to its decision to limit available dormitory accommodations for state university students in favor of students from private universities and SP members.[29] The SUM was protesting against high tuition fees, the system of clientelism and nepotism as the key means of achieving social mobility, and government policies that foster cheap and precarious labor. Once again, the reclaiming of space was used as a tactic by students to make their predicaments visible and their diagnostics audible to the public, to highlight the combined effects of problems in the higher education sector and in labor policy on the student population. These were articulated as symptoms of the neoliberal rationality and corrupt practices of DPS governance. SUM's interruption of the "normal order of things" did not only mark students' political becoming in the eyes of the state, but, more importantly, made the student body politic identifiable in the public space, "[a]nd once identifiable, they could become identified with" (May 2010:40). Trade unionists and civil society activists praised them as a non-corrupted student organization that could be a potential partner for joint actions in fighting austerity and corruption.[30]

With student self-organizing becoming more common and contentious, the SP reacted by organizing a meeting of all student associations to discuss the possibility of joint action. Novović remembers how he and a group of the FPS students came uninvited to the event to "see who was this 'student nobility' that was representing [them]" and announced a blockade of their faculty building. The majority of students present at the meeting, including their official representatives at the FPS, characterized the blockade as "an unnecessarily radical method", but it was a place where they met with representatives of SCOFOP and the SUM who offered to assist with the blockade. FPS students formed an informal group named the "Student Coordinating Body" (SCB) that, according to Novović, planned actions through consensus-based models founded on principles of direct democracy in which "everyone was a member and a leader at the same time". While several members of the FPS faculty denied students' right to be political, the SCB were determined to resist and transgress institutional boundaries and administratively defined student roles in creative, emancipatory, and disruptive ways.

On 8 November, they interrupted the socio-spatial ordering of university by occupying the FPS building. The blockade was staged in order to facilitate an emotionally supportive environment for the expression of dissatisfaction with higher education policy in Montenegro. United under the banners "Death to corporatism, freedom to the university!" and "Don't want to join the party, just want a job!", around 150 students used the faculty building to criticize government budget cuts for state university funding as an "allowance for science".[31] By collectively forming a physical circle, students performatively delimited a free, autonomous zone for everyone to address the gathered crowd. The creation of this counter-space, which facilitated "equality of any speaking being with any other speaking being" (Rancière 1999:30), motivated students to exercise their political agency, even those who saw the SCB as "too radical". According to Novović, "the

blockade created an opportunity for everyone to speak freely", thus leading "all these diverging voices to cumulatively produce the desired outcome—what [the SCB] jokingly called then, the dictatorship of the studentariat".

About a week later, three independent student associations organized follow-up blockade at the FOP. This time, however, the student body politic became fully articulated. Jovović explains how discontent and resistance that was accumulated through these blockades connected and empowered all "progressive student groups and individuals" who jointly decided their actions "cannot be anything else but political" in the sense of bringing "a new, different voice in the public sphere" that would "speak about issues that were rarely spoken about". By occupying spaces and thereby claiming them, physically and politically, with their bodies, banners, voices, and performances, students created counter-spaces for emotional support in which students stopped being afraid to speak and, ultimately, became political. During blockades, student activists called for the radical transformation of a university system that was dominated by DPS party *apparatchiks* and the restoration of its autonomy through the liberation of the state whose present condition was characterized by "tyranny" and "autocracy".[32] Just as in the April protests, the students called on workers, civil society activists, and all other dissatisfied citizens to form a wide coalition that would return political power to the citizenry by instituting civil disobedience as a duty in fighting systemic precarity and the all-pervasive corruption.[33]

By "opening up spaces that permit speech acts that claim a place in the order of things", from November 2010 to November 2011, through radical re-signification of university space and students' role in it, activist students "launched a proper political sequence that would overturn the symbolic order and the distribution of functions and places associated with it" (Swyngedouw 2011:378, 377). Their spatial disruptions rearticulated the given order of the post-secondary landscape by inscribing political meanings into it and probing the limits of the administrative/party control. Spatialization thus became the very condition of political becoming for the student body, as non-coercive and egalitarian counter-spaces facilitated the building of a student social identity from the ground up, in turn enabling the development of a self-aware collective with a shared sense of moral autonomy and political efficacy. Yet, through spatial interruptions in the "normal order of things", activist students made audible not only ethics, values, and meanings that differed from those that were institutionally hegemonic, but also enacted and demonstrated alternative political practices and modes of (political) being. In other words, before the "Big Student Protest" began, the student body had already become split in two, between those representing the clientelistic structures of the party-state apparatus and those representing a radical emancipatory break from its strictures.

Act III: Performing Student Carnival

For the organization of the "Big Student Protest" activist students had to go outside their newly established networks and mobilize the entire student population in coordination with the SP. Both social and mainstream media were used to promote

the event: including posters that cried "Enough!" and promotional videos asking "How many of us have to gather to be heard?". The joint student platform mirrored the demands of SCOFOP, SUM, and SCB that the SP had previously dismissed as "unrealistic" (Nikolić 2011a:30): the reduction of tuition fees, guaranteed tuition waivers for students in good standing, public transportation discounts, state co-financing of a post-graduation internship salary, and increased budget spending for student living and studying facilities.[34] Yet, even though their demands transcended "student unionism" and brought into question current policies in higher education, it became evident that the protest would not be as subversive as the public hoped it would be (Baća 2011b). Namely, the event was framed by the SP as an a(nti)political "celebration of the International Day of Students" through the public expression of discontent with the state's lack of understanding for growing student problems,[35] and as such was logistically supported by the university senate.[36] Radović criticizes those who expected the senate-sponsored protest to be subversive and dismisses it as a "staged charade" and a "crowd-pleasing carnival", while Hodžić, who does not question the sincerity and honesty of the majority who participated, condemns the role of the SP as an enabler of the "PR stunt" whose goal was for "the Prime Minister to come out as a 'savior of students'".

It was estimated that 3000–5000 participated in the peaceful protest march from the University of Montenegro campus to the Parliament of Montenegro in Podgorica. However, it was not until the students began to give speeches that the distinctions between the two student bodies began to manifest in public space: while the SP officials demanded immediate mitigation of the problems students were facing, the activist students expressed their anti-establishment sentiment by calling for the liberation of the university from the regime's clientelistic grip and the reassertion of its autonomy (Nikolić 2011a; Popović 2012b).[37] Their criticism was aimed at the structural causes of their problems, their future as a precarious workforce, and demanded that the state uphold the country's constitutional identity as a "state of social justice". As the key precondition for any substantive change in higher education policies, they also demanded an immediate stop to austerity measures targeting higher education and increased budgetary spending on post-secondary education as the first step in halting the marketization, commercialization, and commodification of knowledge, and favoring of private universities.[38]

The Prime Minister responded with an invitation to discuss student issues "over a coffee".[39] The SP held a series of closed-door meetings with government representatives and emphasized that the protest was never politically driven, nor aimed against the government. Eventually, they reached an agreement that did not involve the key demand of the student body politic—increased state funding for higher education.[40] Conversely, the independent student associations saw the November rally as a first step towards more substantive social change, so instead of talking with the authorities, they began negotiations with trade union activists to jointly organize anti-austerity protests for 15 December 2011. According to Hodžić, "it seemed like a logical thing to do", since many of the activist students "came from working class families" and saw themselves as "future workers that

needed to protect their rights and interests", while their SP counterparts thought of themselves as "future elites and decision-makers".

However, the SP voted against this measure and criticized joint protests with trade unions as an unnecessary radicalization of dissent and posing as a potential security risk, reaching a conclusion that any future protests must remain a "student affair", while workers should fight for their rights themselves, as their demands cannot be the same.[41] Overall, the SP reaffirmed its body natural by calling itself a non-revolutionary organization that fights along corporatist lines only for narrow student interests through institutional channels.[42] This act of negation of the emergent student body politic, by refusing to co-organize joint student–worker protests, provoked public outrage. Many saw the November protest as the long awaited "awakening of the Montenegrin students", so the SP's decision to disengage from student mobilization and to discredit attempts by independent student associations was seen by independent media outlets and civil society as an "act of betrayal" and revealing themselves as "puppets of the regime".[43]

Activist students, however, called on workers to continue their cooperation with the "free thinking students" and declared that the decision of the SP is not the will of the student body.[44] Hodžić recalls how they criticized the official agreement between the Prime Minister and the SP reached in December around "student unionist" demands as a "deceptive move to pacify the momentum of student mobilizations", dismissing it as a "bribe for student silence". In response, independent student associations continued to gather and plan future actions outside of university spaces. Unlike student movements in the region that were unable to extend their impact beyond the university and create a wider movement (Štiks 2015:145–146), activist students in Montenegro successfully connected their struggles to wider social demands, eventually igniting the citizen-led mobilizations of the so-called "the Montenegrin Spring" during the first half of 2012. It started in January as a protest against energy price hikes but, as Kilibarda (2013) demonstrates, eventually turned into a wider critique of both neoliberal economy and authoritarian polity, with demands that built on demands of the student body politic of 2011: accessible education, dignified work, better social security, review of Montenegro's privatization process, and ultimately calls for government resignation.

Conclusion

My interest in this article has been to broaden the concept of political becoming by exploring its spatial dimension; to show how through this process the "normal order of things" is put on "trial by space" (Lefebvre 1991:416–418). To understand political becoming in the post-socialist context is, therefore, to examine how new sites, scales, forms, and ultimately modes of political being emerge through counter-hegemonic spatial practices during which people can be what is not expected of them to be and, as it is often said, "demand what is not theirs to demand", thus making themselves visible and audible as the "part of those who have no part" in the society (Rancière 2010:33).

Three spatial dimensions of political becoming can be extrapolated from the case study of student activism in Montenegro. First, counter-spaces were essentially encounter-spaces where students navigated (or were exposed to) an entangled web of personal and public politics through constructive dialogue. The resulting effect of these encounters was a discursive reinterpretation of the university and the administratively defined social role of *the student*. That is to say, non-coercive, egalitarian counter-spaces created by activist students functioned as new "polemical scenes" in the Montenegrin public sphere wherein "subjects that do not count" contest "the objective status of what is 'given'" (Rancière 2000:125).

Second, when the university was re-scripted from being a non-place into a place of activism, the outcome was the creation of counter-spaces within the university that promoted sociality, community, and autonomous interactions with others. As my interviewees explained, encounters in these spaces placed them in a position to understand the myriad of (socio-economic) problems they shared as a social group, despite coming from different class, identity, and ideological backgrounds/positions, as well as to jointly identify the political (structural) causes of their common predicaments. These encounters were democratic to the extent that students could move in-between and beyond their social positions/identities and, in the process, enact a new (political) subjectivity despite their initial differences. Most importantly, these "lived" counter-spaces sheltered them from the influences of Montenegro's non-anonymous society by functioning as support networks for reducing fear of DPS retaliation against students and their families, escaping pressures from kinship structures, and facilitating safe spaces for emotional support to sustain activism.[45]

And finally, counter-spaces enabled activist students not only to participate, but create alternative representative structures as well. This was not only a question of sustaining "direct student democracy", but also of establishing different form(s) of student representation. As opposed to student organizing *as an order*, which was embodied in the practices of the SP, activist students strived for student organizing *as a movement*: a fluid, horizontal, decentralized, and inclusive association (of associations) that could not be reduced to a single place (such as the official student organizations), but one that continuously questions and expands its boundaries to produce spaces in which injustices can be addressed. In sum, counter-spaces did not only make students feel a sense of place within the university, but enabled them to gain that sense in a politically emancipatory, empowering, and transformative way, ultimately rendering them visible and audible in the Montenegrin public space/sphere as a new political subject(ivity).

By examining the wave of student protests in 2010–2011, I have shown how activist students disrupted the dominant discursive field and altered the spatial boundaries of student identity and subjectivity. The counter-spaces they produced gradually transformed their intent of fighting only for their direct benefit into a fight for idealistic causes, effectively turning involved students from passive consumers into proactive rebels. Through the denunciation of university as a site of domination, activist students temporarily stopped reproducing arrangements of exclusion and injustice and momentarily made university a vital site of democratic politics.

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Endnotes

[1] Critical geography accounts on civic activism and popular politics in the region are virtually absent in recent works on post-socialist social movements (see Horvat and Štiks 2015; Jacobsson 2015a; Jacobsson and Saxonberg 2013; Pleyers and Sava 2015).

[2] The SP has low legitimacy among students, as it is perceived as an alienated "student establishment" and conformist "student bureaucracy" of opportunists who are positioned in a servile relationship with respect to the ruling party and its clientelistic networks. The SP uses its position in relation to the ruling establishment to gain personal benefits for its members, effectively promoting conformism among students, marginalizing dissenting voices, and ultimately serving as a recruitment pool for future party cadres ("Kome trebaju mali tajkuni", *Vijesti*, 16 October 2011; "Kadar SDP-a organizuje pobunu", *Vijesti*, 14 November 2011). Official umbrella student organization, therefore, provides no mechanism for articulating grievances, working instead to contain such demands while simultaneously fostering ideologically appropriate future elites (Nikolić 2011b; Perović-Korać 2011; Popović 2010).

[3] The lack of student activism is so acute in Montenegro that two documentaries were made on the issue, *Montenegrin Beauty* (directed by Danilo Marunović, 2011) and *Vice Versa* (directed by Bojan Stijović, 2015).

[4] The term "active students" is commonly used in Montenegro to designate students who engage in extra-curricular activities, usually through official student associations. These activities are predominantly academic and professional in nature, while their "activist" aspect is non-contentious, non-subversive, and predominantly a(nti)political.

[5] Party statistics from 2011 show that approximately 28,000 of the Montenegrin youth population are members of the DPS, or in other words, roughly every third young person is a member of the ruling party (Perović-Korać 2011).

[6] My interviewees often lament the historical lack of politically engaged student movements in Montenegro and mention blockades and occupations of universities in Croatia in 2009 as one of the key inspirations for their actions.

[7] The most recent studies show that students spend the entirety of their (creative) free time outside the university environment (Pavlović 2016).

[8] Students have to be careful not to politically misbehave as this can pose serious problems for their prospects of employability upon graduation (Perović-Korać 2011; Rajković 2009).

[9] Students of private universities and colleges are not included in the article due to their choice to express their voice only once, through an anonymous protest letter sent to media outlets, in which they complained about the declining quality of education in these institutions despite increases in tuition fees ("Pare traže non-stop", *Dan*, 22 October 2011).

[10] After they graduated, my interviewees became prominent activists on diverse topics, including workers' and minority rights, anti-corruption, environmentalism, and anti-regime protests.

[11] "Kandidature naknadno pečatirane", *Vijesti* (10 November 2010).

[12] "Izbori probudili studentsku svijest", *Vijesti* (11 November 2010).

[13] "Novi izbori ili masovniji protesti od ponedjeljka", *Vijesti* (13 November 2010).

[14] "Studenti prenoćili u holu fakulteta", *Dan* (17 November 2010).

[15] "Sa protesta u kampanju", *Dan* (19 November 2010).

[16] "Bojkot urodio plodom", *Vijesti* (22 December 2010).

[17] "Batrićevića podržalo 680 kolega", *Dan* (22 December 2010).
[18] See also "Barikada zatvara ulicu, a otvara put", *Vijesti* (3 April 2011).
[19] See also "Iscurilo pet tona nafte", *Vijesti* (26 January 2011).
[20] "Za akciju 2.000 studenata u jednom danu", *Dan* (22 February 2011).
[21] "Studenti prvi put zajedno", *Vijesti* (26 February 2011).
[22] "Odobren vanredni ispitni rok", *Dan* (1 April 2011).
[23] "Studenti se bude", *Dan* (9 April 2011); "Priželjkuju 1968", *Vijesti* (10 April 2011).
[24] "Lukšiću, javi se, gladni smo", *Dan* (12 April 2011).
[25] "Crnogorski sistem—rijaliti šou", *Vijesti* (12 April 2011).
[26] "Ulični protesti nisu rješenje", *Dan* (21 April 2011).
[27] "Filozofski nije tražio pomoć", *Vijesti* (29 April 2011).
[28] "Dolazimo opet ako ne ispunite zahtjeve", *Vijesti* (4 October 2011).
[29] "Trista studenata izgubilo krevet", *Vijesti* (13 October 2011).
[30] "Dolazimo opet ako ne ispunite zahtjeve", *Vijesti* (4 October 2011); "Skupljali pomoć za poslaničku sirotinju", *Dan* (4 October 2011); "Neopravdani izostanci za 20.000 studenata", *Dan* (5 October 2011).
[31] "Spasavaju Univerzitet od 'ljeks specijalista'", *Vijesti* (9 November 2011).
[32] "Hoće da osjete ukus slobode", *Vijesti* (16 November 2011).
[33] "Dođite da zatalasamo Crnu Goru", *Dan* (16 November 2011); "Država sputava studente", *Dan* (23 October 2011).
[34] "Zaustavimo gaženje po studentima", *Dan* (14 November 2011).
[35] "Studenti izlaze na ulice 17. novembra", *Dan* (19 October 2011).
[36] "Svi na protest 17. novembra", *Dan* (4 November 2011).
[37] See also "Dobro jutro, vrijeme je za buđenje", *Vijesti* (18 November 2011); "Studenti pjevali o padu Vlade", *Dan* (18 November 2011).
[38] "Očekuju 2.000 ljudi u povorci", *Vijesti* (17 November 2011).
[39] "Pozvao organizatore protesta na kafu", *Pobjeda* (20 November 2011).
[40] "Sve može ali novca nema", *Vijesti* (15 December 2011).
[41] "Vlast se plašila da će se proširiti talas pobune", *Vijesti* (12 December 2011); "Ne žele da ugroze partijske lidere", *Dan* (12 December 2011).
[42] "Ne žele da ugroze partijske lidere", *Dan* (12 December 2011).
[43] "Izdali su studente", *Vijesti* (11 December 2011); "Borci protiv marioneta vlasti", *Vijesti* (15 December 2011).
[44] "Nikšićani i FPN idu svojim putem", *Vijesti* (13 December 2011); "Izdali su studente", *Vijesti* (11 December 2011).
[45] Pressure and intimidation was exerted both on Jovović and Hodžić: one was physically threatened, while the other was offered a job in order to stop mobilizing students and organizing protests (Nikolić 2011b; Perović-Korać 2011).

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