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How ritualistic formality affects the integrity of education at the University of Novi Sad

The integrity of education of the UoNS in regard to the Bologna Process

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Abstract

Serbia hosts an educational system which stands out as particular for a case study because of, among other things, the fact that it has a patron saint of education. As such, schooling is perceived as sentimentally valuable and 'on a higher plane' by the Serbian people. Along with education, another sentimental trait is the cultural way of upbringing of proper behavior which is in Serbian termed "*vaspitanje*", and has been within the culture from the beginnings of Serbian written historical records. The patron saint of education called Sveti (meaning holy, or saint) Sava, was born as Rastko Nemanjic into the family of Nemanjic, the ruling dynasty of the Despotate of Serbia. He disavowed his royal status and escaped to Mount Athos in Greece, to the monastery of Hilandar. Upon his return to Serbia due to the news of his father's death, he came back a dissolving throne and devoted his time to establish an independent Orthodox church and monasteries which would spread literacy and knowledge. Around a hundred years later, Serbia fell under the rule of the Ottoman empire and remained as such for nearly half a millennium, which shaped some cultural traits that still remain in Serbia's social culture, such as nepotistic capitals and predispositions, and a rigid differentiation between 'master' and 'worker'.

The sentimental value of education and proper behavior remained throughout the 600 years, regardless of internal and external pressures, and this can be seen from the fact that the monasteries and even the bones of the saints, including Sveti Sava, were preserved as cultural artifacts, and proper behavior under the scope of "*vaspitanje*" is practiced even today. The sentiment was kept throughout a hundred years after the partition of the Ottoman Empire with the area of today's Serbia, and education was adamant, and absolutistic in regard to authority of super-ordinates at the university. Education reached a prosperous peak around the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, and was impactful not just for Serbia, but the world as well.

One of the students of the Serbian educational system, Mihailo Petrovic Alas, revolutionized certain aspects of modern mathematics. Apart from him, the same system produced renown authors, artists, musicians and politicians, many of which were

internationally recognized. A movie and TV-series were made in 1971., and recently remastered, about the success of education in this period, titled "*Professor Kosta Vujic's Hat*". There is not a single informant I interfered with during my fieldwork that did not know of this movie, as it is considered a "*cultural film*". Alas was one of the students of the eminent professor Kosta Vujic, along with dozens of more who today represent historical pinnacles of Serbian culture and art in all forms.

A hundred years after this affluent period of schooling, Serbia's educational system is split into 8 public and 9 private universities. Due to its poor quality and governmental scandals involving plagiarized doctorates it was removed from the international committee regarding assurance in the quality of education. Faked diplomas from any field can be illegally bought for around one thousand to two thousand euros, and jobs at the university and educational institutions are granted by belonging to the currently ruling political party, often regardless of qualifications and merits. Public schooling of all sorts is severely under-funded, and the introduction of the Bologna Process into an already devastated system of values brought forth the challenge of a lack of incentive for people of higher statuses within the area of education to work on helping their students. The sentiments and culture which glorify education and submission to authority still exist, but the integrity of education seems to be in the process of collapsing. More than two hundred years after the Ottoman Empire left the Serbian culture alone, still a proverb from the Turkish Era can be heard from not just super-ordinates, but friends and close family as if it is 'the way things should be'. It is: "*If the master tells you to tie the horse to a place where you are sure it will die, you still better do just as he says.*" This axiom can be brought hand-in-hand with how power capitals work at the university of Novi Sad which I have been researching for nearly a year. The goal of this research is to correlate submission to authority, to the integrity of the millennium-long sentimentally asserted education, in regard to the international, universal Bologna Process.

1. Introduction

1.1 Interest in the field

The interest in the educational sphere comes from personal experience with several systems of education which I was a part of. It started off in Serbia by eight years of elementary school, followed by three years of a gymnasium high school. I then attended half a year of school in the British educational system in Brighton. After arriving to Norway at the age of seventeen, I spent half a year in an "integration programme" intended to introduce foreigners to the Norwegian culture. The high school I finished in Norway was a Swiss programme taught in the English language, but entirely within the Norwegian culture, called IB (International Baccalaureate), after which I began my anthropology studies at the University of Tromsø.

I spent years being silent in the classrooms after leaving Serbia because of this inculcated feeling of never wanting to ask teachers and professors questions related to anything. In elementary school in Serbia, it was not out of the ordinary for teachers to use various forms of physical attacks, such as slapping; grabbing a student by the shirt and shaking back and forth; forcing a student to kneel on dry corn seeds in the corner of the classroom; throwing a pen/chalk or any close-by small item at a student; and the most favourite among teachers; grabbing a child by the sidelocks of their hair and lifting the student up from their seat; and so on. It was only recently that the use of physical force was banned from use in public educational institutions.

These punishments were used for reasons such as talking during class, chewing a gum, or using a cell-phone, and every sort of behaviour that is not considered appropriate for the atmosphere of education.

Verbal abuse was often a way of "behavioural education" of pupils in Serbian elementary school, and the mentality of the authoritative figures was to do it in public as to "make an example out of them". According to data collected from fieldwork, this still seems to be the case as it happened several times while I was attending online and live lectures with students of the UoNS. This gives students who were publicly called out an image that is recognized by other students, and by the teacher as well. This impression is important, and the

fieldwork analysis will show how a person's recognition is a factor regarding their final grade and the rites of passage of ascending in the hierarchical structure of the university.

This multifaceted background provoked many internal comparisons of these educational systems, and the one with the most controversial properties is the Serbian system of education. Having experienced how knowledge can be transferred over barriers of language and cultural differences in four systems after leaving Serbia, it left me with a lot of curiosity which I wanted to study and interpret using my knowledge of cultural anthropology, by the analysis of the conducted fieldwork of the Serbian system of education. Certainly, the scope of this subject on the level of a whole country is far too wide, so my arena of focus were merely several faculties at the university of Novi Sad, my hometown, notably the ones Pierre Bourdieu has described as "dominant faculties"¹, the ones of law and medicine. (Bourdieu 1988:41)

The goal of this fieldwork is to thoroughly depict how a particular peoples' influences, with its culturally-relative social aspects such as the one of "*vaspitanje*", affect the integrity of education at a university which aspires to an internationally-bound Bologna Process system of higher education. The aim is to take this setting of the contemporary Serbian education, which is intertwined with an international system of schooling, and describe in a universal fashion how specific embedded cultural traits react in contact with the customaries of a theoretical meritocracy of a university which the Bologna system entails. Embedded cultural traits such as the prominent use of nepotistic favoring, and behavior shaped by a particular cultural trait of upbringing called "*vaspitanje*", which is guidance of submission to authority, are not traits that belong in this theoretical meritocracy of a university, and thus this empirical observation turned into a research subject. Originally, before embarking on the fieldwork, the proposition was to study and analyze the conundrum between what is best described as *ritualistic formal behaviour* and the integrity of higher education, but the problem was far too intricate to leave out any contextual aspects of the Serbian interactional culture. To gain a feeling of an effective description and subsequent analysis, these factors need to be meticulously characterized from the data collected in the field, taking into consideration numerous theoretical concepts from the literature of anthropology and its familial social sciences such as sociology.

¹ Pierre Bourdieu explains dominant faculties as the key institutions in charge of reproducing a country's legislative and healthcare systems.

1.2 Ethical implications

During this fieldwork, I was never soliciting anyone for their time or information. Because the fieldwork started off from a room on which I left a note inviting people to come and talk to me about my thesis, I started gaining friendships and acquaintanceships with students, and my network of available informants and sources of data kept increasing from the start, until the end of the fieldwork. Not having been the solicitor of conversations, the fieldwork's data is more qualitative because none my informants were "forced" into conversation, rather they wanted to express their opinions openly. This way, I met students who live in student housing buildings, and these buildings were the arena where I obtained most of the data, and where I have spent the greatest amount of time. As the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus became alarming, my initial arena of fieldwork - the University of Novi Sad, became far less accessible. This shift to a new place where I was expecting to be a participant and observer in everyday interactions with the goal of understanding the culture of education, along with the health emergency caused by the virus, created additional ethical implications. These were: limitations in the amount of people allowed at certain locations which I was obliged to stick to as a researcher; social distancing; being a researcher within a place where the students live; and the shift from the public arena of the UoNS where I was approved by the administration, to a "private" arena of the student-housing buildings, where I was a foreigner. However, as the text will show, it was rather quick and simple to lose this recognition of being a foreigner just after conversing with people who thought I was one, face-to-face. And because this ease of getting to know new people, I had several 'reference people' whom I often talked to about my questions, meetings, new environments and the technical side of the UoNS, such its function and structure. These people will be represented in the text under pseudonyms, due to the ethical implication of anonymity.

Because of the fact that my fieldwork is in such a sphere where names and professions are easily recognizable and traceable, during my time in the field there were several rules I followed. I never asked for anyone's name, the only way I got to hear it was if the other person wanted to introduce themselves to me. Before engaging in conversation with anyone, I made sure to state how everything they say and do will never be traceable back to them, as it will only be used as data for describing and analyzing how the educational system of the University of Novi Sad functions. When talking about people of higher statuses, because there are only a few

of them at the faculties I conducted fieldwork at, I avoided mentioning their gender, as it is not relevant to the objective of this work, and it gives another layer of anonymity to the people who are being talked about.

In addition, most of my fieldwork was happening during the outbreak of the Covid-19 virus. I have stayed away from large groups of people, and anyone in that matter, unless I was invited by someone, and if I considered that what we are doing by interacting is within the reasonable responsibility. Due to this ethical implication of the pandemic, I was prevented from witnessing a greater scope of the culture of education of the University of Novi Sad, as I intended to spend far more time wandering around and about the institution being a participant, and an observer.

However, it felt far more responsible not to endanger lives, than to gather information for my master thesis. Hence the outcome of this fieldwork is predominantly a theoretical analysis of the gathered data, including a cultural and contextual thick description needed to interpret this culture in a universal language of anthropology.

Education and periods of examination at the university are often a student's turning point in life, and as such these situations can often carry a large dose of stress. I was invited by several professors to attend two examination periods, one for the students of law, one for the students of medicine, in the spring of 2021., and I emphasized how I would not like to stand in anyone's way during this period. The professors told me how I can sit in the back row with my papers just like every other student does, and no one would even notice me. I could not pass on this opportunity because grading is something I truly wanted to see and analyze, as I have heard so much about it from the students during my fieldwork.

2. Methodology and developments

(Focus groups: Students, assistants, assistant-professors, associate-professors, professors, and other, higher statuses)

My status and role of a participant observer have to be emphasized as I was a part of the Serbian educational programme for ten and a half years. Certain perspectives and experiences which I got to discuss with the informants during my fieldwork instinctively made me question what my *emic* opinion is on the subject in question.

Two phenomena related to the researcher need to be observed:

- My instinctive inner reaction was sometimes: "*That is not fair, that means students are not evaluated on the basis of their knowledge, rather on their presence and obedience.*"
- My secondary inner reaction was always: "*I am a researcher, there is no right or wrong, this needs to be interpreted in a manner relative to the host culture.*"

I pressured myself into trying to derive not only what is different to what I am used to regarding education and culture, rather how to portray situations; conversations; debates; lectures; the culture of interaction; rules; behavior; and every aspect of social interaction I encountered, in a manner that stresses cultural relativism. However, due to questioning myself about how I experience the listed aspects of interaction I sometimes found it necessary to express my impression as both a researcher, or participant observer, and on occasion, someone with enough cultural and social capital to be just a participant, and not an observer. This methodological personal implication will serve as a preventive interpretive tool, hindering "over-exoticization of the domestic."

Around a year before getting in touch with the arena of this fieldwork, which is the University of Novi Sad, I made contact with the student services in order to check whether will it even be possible to conduct research here. This was well before the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic that hit Serbia in March of 2020. I have sent my fieldwork proposition to these university employees, who are also fourth-year students there, and scheduled a meeting with them in February of 2020. This encounter is of value to the theme of the thesis, and it will be

elaborated on in more detail later in the text. For now, it is important to emphasize how the fieldwork started gathering information, and how the Covid-19 outbreak changed the methodology that was planned.

Due to the fact that the integrity of education under the scope of the Bologna Process at the UoNS has an insurmountable number of factors that influence it, I realized early on how spending as much time with as much people that are my potential informants within the arena of the university is the right thing to do. I explained this idea to the student services, and they told me how getting into student-housing buildings where there are large cafeterias and lobbies could be productive, because the students spent a lot of time there. I emphasized how I would like to have the opportunity to sometimes speak to the people holding higher statuses at the university, like the assistants and professors. The student services told me how there are small rooms made mostly out of glass within the corridors and lobbies of the university, and that with a bit of persuasion with the school's administration, they would grant me one of these rooms. Apparently, they exist so that the students would be free to advertise various student organizations, sports programmes and so on, but they remain mostly abandoned.

Before the restrictions to social life became official in Serbia, I had the opportunity to spend several hours on daily basis in those small rooms at the university. I posted a piece of paper on the entrance saying: "*Foreign student here, looking for information regarding the integrity of education at the UoNS*". I was skeptical about the number of students I would get to interact with regarding my thesis, but I kept in mind the fact that education here is not satisfactory, based on impressions I got from interacting with the student services, on top of my prior experience with the sphere of education in Serbia. This fact revealed itself to me rather soon upon sitting inside this small room, which is called a "glass-shop window". There is nothing but two chairs on the opposing sides of a small table inside, and it was a great source of information for a questionnaire-like type of data extraction, which is what I did at first. I would start every sentence by introducing myself, saying that I am a master student of anthropology at the Norwegian university of UiT, and that my thesis is regarding the influence of Serbian culturally-relative factors such as "*vaspitanje*", nepotism and submission to authority, on the integrity of education of the UoNS, under the scope of the Bologna Process.

It is in this "glass-shop window" that I met one of the informants, that will be called

Marko, whom I have spent a lot of time with, as he was a student of the fifth and last year of studies, called an "apsolvent" (advanced university student). "Apsolvents" in Serbian education are students who have sat through all the mandatory lectures and practice classes, and now only have exams left in their final year. Marko is from a village that is around 120km away from the University of Novi Sad, so he has been staying at the student-housing building throughout his studies. Because of this, he has proven to be a person with a lot of knowledge and connections regarding my fieldwork. Marko was nearly always the person inviting me to the online lectures held in their lobbies and cafeterias, as well as arranging meetings for me with other students, assistants and other university employees. The value of his assistance will be described in greater detail when this analysis shows the large difference between being on formal terms with someone, and being on terms of agreeing to having the same status as the other interacting party. Shortly, Marko and I were formal to each other when he first came to talk to me inside my "office" at the university, the glass-shop window, but due to our similar age and origin we soon agreed that it is "silly" that we continue referring to each other as some "posh adults". Losing the formality in a conversation in Serbia is also losing the tension brought up by the concept of "*vaspitanje*", which insists on formal respect of one another, and often gives a negative connotation to subjects that are touchy, such as the subject of nepotistic favouring at the UoNS.

I did not start off with a specific list of questions to ask any of my informants during this fieldwork, rather I started by having a list of subjects I would like to discuss with the various degrees of statuses within this university. The first subject I brought up was the concept of "*vaspitanje*". Secondly, we moved onto talking about nepotism; the respect of authority; their impressions of the quality of education regarding lectures and practical classes; the financial factors of studying; exams and grading; what they think of the Bologna Process; and more factors that will be mentioned throughout this fieldwork analysis. I was writing everything down on a laptop which was the fastest way of registering data. I have to emphasize I wrote everything down in Serbian so I would not lose the "feeling" of the culture by instantly translating it. By doing so, I have preserved a larger dose of the cultural impression than I would have if I directly tried translating what was said to me.

Moreover, "*vaspitanje*" is a concept that will be detailed further on in the analysis, but for now it is important to emphasize that it teaches every member of the Serbian culture a

specific, formal way of behavior in formal and unknown situations, and institutions such as this one of the University of Novi Sad.

According to its guidelines, I was referring to everyone I talked to in these small rooms by pluralizing the pronouns "you" directed at my informants from this arena. This is a formal way of symbolizing respect towards people of a higher status or age in Serbian spoken language, whereas when showing formal respect in the written form, one would capitalize the word "You". This is how I interacted with the students, and everyone else at the university. Well-mannered and formal behavior within such an institution is simply appropriate, and it often happened that the party I was speaking with simply said there is no need for such formal language. When this transition happens, the conversations become far looser and of a friendly connotation, rather than feeling "uptight" and formal, dry. This "glass-shop window" was on the way from the central part of the university towards the exit where all the students have to pass to go for a cigarette, or a coffee break, and at times there were lines of people waiting to talk to me. Some assistants, assistant and associate-professors, and professors even devoted some of their time to talk to me, but I can with certainty say that these conversations were far shorter, and non-recurring. However, the depth and weight of information that higher statuses share is noticeably greater than that of the students.

The more I met certain people, the better the quality of information was, that I obtained because of the gained level of trust that kept increasing over time. This is especially true because of the constraints that the ritualistic formal behavior of "*vaspitanje*" entails, as when the barrier of formality is overcome by a mutual agreement, the way of socializing becomes far more unconstrained. Unfortunately, there was nothing to do during the summer as all the large meetings and gatherings were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It felt irresponsible to go back to the university to the "glass-shop windows" due to how small they are, and because of the fact that it created lines in front. It felt as irresponsible to go to student-housing buildings during the lockdown that lasted for several weeks. Serbia's lockdown was a "police hour", which means no one was allowed on the streets between 17:00 and 05:00, including a full prohibition on being outside from Friday 17:00, until Monday 05:00 every week, for over two months. I still kept in contact by chatting with several students via online messengers during this lockdown period, mostly about the structure of the

university's hierarchy, and formalities such as paying for semesters, exams, and the way they are graded. I tried to use this to understand how students perceive this atmosphere they are in, in regard to rules and regulations enforced by the university itself. I always had questions and themes to talk about, but some of them were not as applicable to chatting, as they would be to a face-to-face conversation, hence the lockdown period of the fieldwork was time which I spent gathering information about the structure and function of education, such as the technical obligations that the students have. Some of these technical obligations are: registering for classes via an outdated system; paying for individual exam applications; having to collect the signatures of professors and assistants that confirm their presence in the corresponding lectures; and the way the grading works under the ESPB Bologna Process point system.

The subjects that are far more revealing of cultural traits are the ones of controversies that are country-wide known news. Some of the examples of these controversies are mentioned in the introduction, such as the fact that several governmental ministers and other officials have plagiarized doctorates. Asking such a question in a text message would not reveal the person's emotion and reaction towards being asked how do they feel about having to go through five years of law or medical school, and far more preparation and training to become viable of being employed in the country's legal system. The conversations regarding this subject were productive in a sense that everyone has a strong opinion on this controversy, and they would often continue in the students pointing out more controversies that they think are inherently wrong in the system. The reason why such external influences matter to the quality of the analysis of this fieldwork is intricate, but essential towards describing how it is culturally-relative, ritualistic, and nepotistic, for Serbia to have forceful social rules, standings and statuses. Out of such conversations about controversies regarding the University of Novi Sad, I was informed how a high-standing educator at one of the city's faculties has for decades publicly been oppressive towards minorities, sexes, and orientations. This is a country that is an applicant for the European Union, and such behavior has been shunned in Serbia publicly, as a move towards being progressive. This professor has, however, never lost their status within the society, as the matter of fact, they have only been ascending in the hierarchy of the university, which only symbolizes the power of their academic and social capital. This information is so public that it was often the headlines of newspapers, due to their appearance

in court and the professor's successful outcome. Knowing this, the only way for a researcher to attain more certainty in the interpretation regarding the power of authority at the UoNS is so commit time and effort into researching it more. If a high-ranked educator of a national university can behave this way publicly and remain in a position where they are, what are they capable of doing when they are in the position to grade their students, assistants, or others?

During autumn of 2020., after I had made a handful of acquaintances with students and assistants at the University of Novi Sad, I was invited to start coming to online lectures at the student housing buildings, that were usually held either in a large room, cafeteria or the lobby, with a laptop connected to a TV screen. The limit of people that could attend these lectures was seven because of restrictions from the Covid-19 pandemic. We held onto these rules, wore masks and kept maximum distance. Witnessing how online lectures function was with the intention of studying how the knowledge is being transferred, and analyzing the general atmosphere of classrooms. I tried attending as many of these lectures as the Covid-19 situation, time, and acquaintanceships with students allowed me to, and the more time I spent with certain groups of students, the less constrained our interactions became. This only adds up to the fieldwork's suggestion that ritualistic formality constrains social interactions and the depth of information transfer.

As the spring of 2021. arrived, and the Covid-19 pandemic started being under control with the introduction of vaccines, I got in a position where I can now attend public lectures in the amphitheatre of the University of Novi Sad. Certainly, the atmosphere of education here is far different than it is in online lectures. Unfortunately, soon after the restrictions were taken away, they came back into place and I was not capable of attending more than five of these live lectures. But, as I had conversed with several professors in the past on multiple occasions, I was invited to join two examination periods in the same amphitheatre, to witness how the grading system works. Both the live lectures and these exams were sources of data regarding important factors regarding the problem of this thesis - the pinnacle of formal ritualistic behavior within the University of Novi Sad; the face-to-face encounters of students and professors that do not happen often; the various basis and factors that regulate the students' final grade; and more that will be worked out in the upcoming chapters.

Finally, I spent a great deal of time simply “hanging out” with the students of the UoNS in cafes around the university, and was on several occasions invited to join for a barbeque at someone's cabin. Serbia is a country where the students legitimately spend more time in these cafes, than they do anywhere else. Every time we were sitting in such a place, everyone at the table, regardless of what year students they were, knew every waiter and waitress. I had to emphasize how I will always have laptop with me so I can converse with them regarding my thesis, and write down what I find out. This was a recurring subject because people who have not seen me before would always bring up the fact I am in a cafe with a laptop, and ask me why. Such situations were absolutely relaxed, and the people I interacted with were genuinely always ready to answer my questions. However, we did not have a lot of interactions in these cafes, because of the restrictions related to the virus outbreak. I have been given the impression and subsequently knowledge that most of these students have never interacted with someone who, such as myself, has been through their system of schooling for many years, but has also spent a great amount of time under a foreign educational system. We had a lot to tell each other in regard to comparing these systems, and all of the information I got was taken into consideration to describe the culturally-relative problem of the integrity of education at the University of Novi Sad.

3. The first contact with the field: The encounter with the student services

The initial step I made towards developing this fieldwork was to meet two student employees I talked to a year ago via email, while I was still in Norway. As they work for the student services at the university of Novi Sad, I expected to meet them to gather basic information about what my options are, and to formally introduce myself. The formal introduction has also served as an "anchor" of my entire fieldwork, as these two students have spread the word of my arrival and intentions at the university. This has certainly made my job easier, as I did not really have to go through the process of introducing myself and explaining my fieldwork proposal to everyone I meet, person by person. This was especially true for the higher statuses who often came to talk to me without me asking them, because the student services have informed of what am doing. The meeting with the student services has opened my eyes towards good ways of approaching the environment of education by proposing I spend time in student housing buildings. Most importantly, the meeting had a particular development which made me draw out and present an important distinction for this fieldwork: The difference between *ritualistic* and *unconstrained* behavior. These student services are the university employees and students whom I had previously e-mailed my full fieldwork description. I considered it important to have these "anchor-people" that are well aware of my situation, and in a position to tell others what I am doing. When reaching out to all the informants at the arena of the fieldwork, I have encountered something unexpected: I knew many of them from my past. I either went to the same elementary school with them, or the same high school, or we played some sport together, met each other at a public sports court, etc. Nonetheless, all the acquaintanceships I have with the said people are purely coincidental. Novi Sad counts around 400.000 inhabitants including all the surrounding suburbs, but nearly everyone here (including myself) will agree it is a small and very personal place where people who have met once will forever be remembered and recognized by the other interacting party. At first, I was worried this might infringe the integrity of the fieldwork, as I would not be in "a formal environment" which needed to be described, if I am to converse with friends and people I know from when I lived here. However, after reminiscing with them about the past and what happened in the last ten years that we have not seen each other, I explained what I am

doing, and it was at that moment I stopped worrying about infringing the integrity of the fieldwork. I stopped worrying because I realized that the absence of formality outside of the confines of university environment could potentially be used as a direct point for comparison between a *constrained*, and *unconstrained* behaviour, and what was previously brought up: the access to the 'back-stage' elements of the culture of education at the UoNS. A differentiation between these two concepts will shed light on my initial hypothesis: that there is a conundrum between ritualized formality and education. The upcoming paragraphs are devoted to my interaction with the student services, and will hopefully justify why I got the idea to separate the two types of behaviour, and why I termed them as such.

In February of 2020., (this is still before the first official case of Covid-19 was publicized² in Serbia), I wrote to one of them asking whether we could go out for a cup of coffee and talk about how they would be able to help me get started. Upon meeting them on Saturday 15th of February, I instantly recognized one of them as a class-mate from both my high-school, and my elementary school. He did not recognize me, however, so I purposefully kept my identity a secret from him for approximately fifteen minutes, until he started realizing who I am. This was all just in good spirit, and he seemed to have enjoyed it as well. The reason I kept my identity secret from him was for nothing apart from humor, but it turned out to be a good tool for what I stated in the end of the previous paragraph: "a comparison between a *constrained* and *unconstrained* way of social behaviour".

For those first fifteen minutes of our conversation, we were referring to each other with that formal respect of pluralizing the pronoun "you". We were politely discussing my proposal to attend some of the lectures, they were being very open-minded towards the idea, discussing among each other which of the professors would be "cool enough" to find my subject truly interesting and worth their time. I kindly asked them to help me find a way to approach a greater number of students, and they instantly gave me a great idea: Student-housing buildings! They said how as long as I know someone who lives in those buildings, I can gain access.

² The use of the word "publicized" is purposeful in contrast to "found" in this context due to the wide-spread opinion that the virus was ignored for months due to presidential rallies that were happening simultaneously. When talking to the students regarding this notion, many have told me how they and their close environment suffered from Covid-19-like syndromes in January and February of 2020. Some of them even got their anti-bodies tested later on, and the tests proved how they were once positive.

Also, one of them suggested the "glass shop-windows" I used at the university that are mostly abandoned and used by student activists to promote various activities and such. However, he said he highly doubts I would be allowed to use one of those rooms due to the fact I am not an active member of the university.

It is around this time one of them said:

"Look, man, you look really familiar, and this far into the conversation I am embarrassed to ask, but did you go to the Jovan Ducic elementary school?"

I answered: *"Yes, go ahead"*.

He then continued with sheer disbelief on his face, and I quote: *"You are a fucking idiot, Stefan, you know that? Why the fuck didn't you just tell me that at the beginning?! I'm sitting here like a robot thinking I'm talking to some uptight foreigner, worrying not to say a wrong word so you wouldn't expose me in the newspapers or some shit, Jesus Christ. I could have picked some cozy clothes, I could have had a cigarette and a beer, but I couldn't because..."*.

Even though this quote sounds harsh, this is just an ordinary, *unconstrained* conversation among friends in a non-formal environment. There is nearly always a lot of long monologues, swearing, obscenities and strong opinions. All three of us laughed, he stood up so he would give me a hug and ask me: *"Gde si, bre?"* Meaning *"Where have you been, man?"* He then said: *"So, are you really doing fieldwork or are you just messing with us?"* I answered: *"I am not messing with you, I am genuinely doing fieldwork, even now it turns out."* He then continued to freely say how I have nothing to worry about, how he knows exactly which professors to contact for me because he is on "good terms" with them. He said he can get me a student card that would let me enter student houses, I politely declined as that did not seem moral to me, and I already had access via friends. He also reminded me of the "glass shop windows" at the university and said *"Bro', I just had no clue who you are, of course we can arrange you one of those rooms for research."* After briefly discussing these plans, we went back to talking about life and continued so for at least then next two hours.

Not telling him who I was for those fifteen minutes opened this window which can now serve as an example showing the vast difference between *constrained* and *ordinary* behaviour. Somehow, it feels as if both of these members of the student service literally gained trust in me after one of them realized that we know each other.

As mentioned in the introduction, this encounter also brought up another essential concept to this fieldwork: the concept of *nepotism*. When my conversation with the student services shifted from being formal to being unconstrained by formality, I was nearly immediately offered privileges I was not being offered before. One of the approaches to fieldwork arena was offered to me was the electronic student card which I could use to enter student-housing buildings. Even though the person who recognized me as a friend from school is a friend of mine, I cannot say our friendship was so close for him to have enough trust in me to let me freely roam where the students live. As the matter of fact, in the ten years since I left Serbia we have not met once, and we merely exchanged less than five text messages. This nepotistic fashion of giving 'special privileges' based on the closeness to the person receiving the benefit is noticeable in Serbia on daily basis, so much so I found it impossible to depict it as anything but a cultural trait. As such, it has to be rooted somewhere in this society's history and culture, which is the subject of Chapter 12 in this work.

4. The setting, culture, and the Bologna Process in Serbia.

Serbia is a country that broadly embraces the word "culture", or in Serbian: "*kultura*." It is a word that is often used to describe this society, or the degree of a "culture" of a person. When interacting with people who are older and have been living and teaching at the University of Novi Sad for decades, the state of the society in this city was always described as a place where there are barely any traces of culture left of how it was just twenty, or thirty years ago. Even though the words are nearly "culture" and "kultura" the same with a similar spelling, it is of unconditional importance to stress the fact that my presentation and interpretation of the culture and problem analyzed by this fieldwork greatly depended on the finding the correct way to transpose a description that is not tampered with by the problems of translation and interpretation. In order to reach the elaborate answers regarding the hypothesis of this thesis, an interpretation in a universal language, of how the Serbian culture functions within the European Bologna Process system regarding the integrity of education, the theoretical meritocracy of a university, I rely on taking into consideration as many factors as I found, and I obtained as data from the people I purposefully interacted with as a researcher within the sphere of several faculties of the University of Novi Sad, notably the ones of law and medicine.

One of these factors that is related to how the word "*kultura*" is used here is the concept of "*bon-ton*". These two words are something the Serbian people often get to hear and use when conversing about how social life today is far less well-mannered than what they were taught it was until the very recent past. All the people of higher statuses and of more age that were my informants during this fieldwork unanimously agree upon the fact that the society of the city and University of Novi Sad is deteriorating in ways of the "*bon-ton*", and culture, up to the point of ridiculing the idea that Novi Sad is supposed to be the European capital of culture throughout a part of the year of 2022. (Wikipedia: European Capital of Culture). Furthermore, it was not rare to encounter students and young people aged between 19 to 25 who also freely brought up the subject that there is a lack of manners and proper behavior that they were brought up on. Many of the conversations with all these informants lead to a question wondering why is this the case, but the answers were never simple, and will be elaborated on further on in the text.

These words "*bon-ton*" are of French origin, and they refer to etiquette, or good manners. It is a type of proper behaviour that is expected of every citizen here, and especially academics. It entails social rules such as opening the door for a lady; or pulling out the chair as she is about to take a seat; helping the elderly; giving up your seat in public transport to a pregnant lady; and so on. Thus, it also makes up a part of the context in the atmosphere of education at the University of Novi Sad, as students are not only expected to overcome the obstacle of understanding and interpreting the knowledge they are being taught, but they are expected to dress accordingly to the standard of such an institution; to behave respectfully and deferently; to speak in a loud and coherent manner; and more. All of these social rules and expectations by the university are the norm, and behaving outside of the borders of this norm does not go by unnoticed. Behaviour that does not follow the "*bon-ton*" will nearly always grant the perpetrator an image of being an "uncultured" person, which would in Serbian be "*nekulturan*" or "*nekulturna*" depending on the gender.

Now comes a conundrum raised by the introduction of the Bologna Process: the fact that as of its establishment into the Serbian higher education system, the students are now free to pick which subjects they will do in which semester. This is a problem that every student I talked to has mentioned,

regarding the subject of the quality of education from their perspective. As they are all raised under the notion of "*vaspitanje*" which teaches polite submission and respect, when they were faced with having to pick courses, they realized that there is no 'nice way' of approaching it, because there is a limited number of spots for each semester and exam. Choosing subjects and exams is an online process where a few weeks before the beginning of a semester the website gives the options at 08:00 in the morning, and students are expected to pick them right then, because all the spots always get filled before the clock ticks 08:05. Due to this, students have to rush to choose the subjects they want, and to do so they have to find ways of how to load the site before others have a chance to. This creates an undesirable atmosphere among students, and gives them a negative connotation in regard to their perception of the educational integrity. Prior to 2005., before the Bologna Process was installed, professors tell me the educational integrity was far more obvious than it is now. The subjects were set for every semester, and they could not have been changed. Students that I talked to regarding today's

system of being able to choose subjects tell me how they always feel "*uncultured*" when they have to "*online wrestle*" with others to get the subjects they want.

In order to apply to these subjects, and later on exams, the students must pay fees of between 20 to 40 euros per course, and per exam. These fees are increased by 100% if the student is late with the registration. The way these payments are made is by going to a currency-exchange office, post office, or a bank and paying them the said amount that they then upload to the students' "university bank-account". This bank account is held by the university, and can be found on every students' online web page. The students can never use this account to withdraw money from it, or interact with it in any way. The reason behind the existence of this bank account is to serve as proof of the students' payments of regulations that have to be fulfilled. The students cannot choose subjects nor exams if they do not pay the required fees. If the students are registered for an exam, and for some reason they want to move it to a different date, they have to pay a fee of around 30 euros to do so. This bureaucratic way of paying for everything the university requires, is just one of the formal conditions that students have to deal with, that is adding to the economic factor of being in higher education.

Another aspect, that is both official and un-official, is the issue of attendance which has proven to be one of the most important factors regarding the grading system of students. On multiple occasions I saw students carrying around a small, dark-red booklet, the same shade as a passport. It is the same type of a document that was used in elementary and high-school to contain all the student's grades and accomplishments. The same booklet is used by the students at the university, for the same reasons, now including also the signatures that the students need to gather as a requirement to continue into the next year. It is called the "*grades index*", and apart from grades it has several pages for practical classes and lectures, where the corresponding professors need to sign their signature in order to verify that the student was present. Only the practical classes are mandatory, and the reason why signatures for non-mandatory lectures exist appears to be the fact that students are graded on their general attendance, as well. The students told me how they truly lack the incentive to go to non-mandatory lectures, especially due to the fact that they are consisted of professors holding long monologues and getting upset when they are interrupted by students who would like to ask a question. However, they will be considered "uncultured" if they were to miss lectures. I was

told by the students how it then looks as if one has no respect for the professor, and becomes nearly impossible to prove yourself to them during an exam. This is another example of how broadly the term "culture" or "*kultura*" is used, as it in this case emphasized how a student is disrespectful towards the institution of the university, and a holder of a higher status simply because they feel the non-mandatory lectures are qualitatively unacceptable.

People are taught the importance of education, attendance, and proper behaviour ("*kultura*", "*bon-ton*") from a very young age in Serbia. Furthermore, every school in this country is called after someone from its history, usually academics, authors, musicians and so forth. This fact merely embraces the wider picture of how people in Serbia value the influence of individuals, and a reflection of this can be seen by the amount of authority the teachers and professors have over their students. It also gives an impression how students owe such praised individuals their respect, and should therefore behave accordingly. One example of ritualistic behaviour pointed toward symbolizing the higher status of a teacher in education is the fact that during both the elementary and high school, for a total of twelve years, students always stand up when the professor enters the classroom. This is called a "student's salutation", and it is an unquestionable aspect of culture, something every student that was schooled in Serbia has always been doing.

This practice of standing up as a salutation towards the university's members of higher statuses is not as widespread as it was in lower education, and I was told it happens on occasions when a renown or famous professor, such as someone who holds the Emeritus Professor³ title is expected in front of the students and the rest of the university's actors.

Throughout the fieldwork I had to also follow these social rules of orderly conduct, including being dressed politely. This has made my image within the atmosphere of the University of Novi Sad be "cultured". Due to my demeanour and proper behaviour, I have gained more access to the opinions of what the higher statuses within the university have to say, because a dose of well-mannered behaviour can be considered a 'trust ticket' that others, especially of a higher status, appreciate. Not wearing clothes that are desirable by the institution of the university would put me at a disadvantage in trying to gather information from actors who all

³ Emeritus Professors are retired professors who have been widely recognized within their fields and still teach.

follow the unwritten rule of being properly dressed. A confirmation of my impression regarding the dress code is information obtained from Marko, my informant mentioned earlier. The rule is influenced up to the point that the security guards at the door will often not allow students to enter if they are wearing flip-flops; shirts without sleeves; short pants; and so on. Due to the help that I got from the student services, an encounter later described in a chapter further on, I had the opportunity to, for a couple of weeks, sit at the university in a small kiosk made out of glass, and advertise what I am doing while sitting inside. This is the previously described "glass-shop window", a place where the data started being extracted from. On the one hand, my deference and demeanour, including the way I dressed, have opened paths towards being able to approach people of higher status at the university, and on the other hand, my understanding and cultural capital of people my age made me be "on the same level" as them, resulting in open-ended conversations with a friendly connotation. Getting to begin this fieldwork required no special preparation of how the researcher was supposed to act, due to the familiarity with the field itself. Hence, it was out of a mutual understanding and likeness with the student services that I was offered to begin conducting my fieldwork from this "glass-shop window". I sat there with a laptop, and people came by to talk to me during their breaks, with a cup of coffee or tea, and this is how I gained a dose of social capital at the arena. More detail on the methodology of data gathering will be given in the upcoming chapter, but for now the idea is to depict the environment that the students live in, in order to better understand the situation of how education here is.

One of the factors that was protruding from nearly every conversation I had with the people who are a part of the UoNS was the economic aspect of families who have their children enrolled into public education. It was during the first day in this "office" of mine at the university that Marko welcomed himself in to talk to me, as someone with a lot of experience and free time due to his status of being an *apsolvent*. After a brief and friendly introduction which was formal as usual, Marko insisted there is no reason we speak to each other as if we're old men, but that he understands it is the norm to start a conversation as formally as possible. He said how he was informed of my arrival, but he was unsure of the details of my intentions. This person was genuinely intrigued with the idea and theme of the fieldwork, and offered me his phone number in the first few minutes of our conversation saying that he will help me with anything he can. I explained to him that my idea was to

show how Serbian cultural traits affect the integrity of education in regard to the Bologna process, and how I need to analyze the 'whats', 'hows' and 'whys'. Marko made a gesture that can best be described as a "rhetorical shrug", and said: *"Well, it is obviously the economy that is the 'whats', the 'hows' is a cultural and societal downward spiral due to this also downward spiraling economy, and the 'whys' is something everyone you ask this question will agree: the currently ruling government, but we can talk about this for a century to come."*

5. The economic factor of education at the university of Novi Sad

Most notably for this research subject, the financial sphere of the university can be seen between the division between two type of students that are being accepted into faculties: The students whose grades and points from the entrance exams were over the threshold for studying at the expense of the country; and a certain number of students that fulfil the available spots at the faculty, but they have to finance the semesters themselves. The difference in the number of students from each of these groups is around 35% to 65% in favour of the ones who study using their own finances. The yearly fee to study at the University of Novi Sad's medical or law faculties equals approximately four whole average Serbian salaries, so the financial aspect of studying is considered to be quite drastic. The group of students that has to pay for their education at the University of Novi Sad, pay just over 1000 euros per year. Both of these groups of students are mixed in classrooms and there is no further division by them. Nothing differs for them in the way or quality of provided knowledge, except for certain technical aspects of school, such as paying for exam applications.

Even though everyone I talked to considered the financial aspect of schooling to be a rather uncomfortable and harsh reality, they told me how it is still an honor and opportunity to be at the institution of the university. But even this honor has limits, as people who are in their third, fourth and fifth years also said how they are gradually getting disappointed in the lack of attention and devotion given to that honor. The impression develops into a picture where the students are not pushed away from education simply because of how it transpires at the university, or because they are limited by external factors. What was important for this fieldwork was the students' opinions on how they view education in Serbia, and instead of asking them concrete questions about it, I brought it up as a subject and noted everything they told me. This was mostly everyone's impression of being a part of the University of Novi Sad, that education is "marketed" and "advertised" as the "cultural thing to do" up to the extent that students feel as if the university can barely wait to give them opportunities. Then they all end

up with grumpy professors that do not want to be interrupted during lectures, and that grade them on factors that are not related to their knowledge, such as their appearance, presentation, or just their perception of them from the past.

Serbia is a rather poor country, with a corrupt and deceitful government which controls most of the media. Serbia's previous president was questioned about his qualifications and the title of his doctorate, he stated how he finished it on a Sunday, and that he cannot remember what it was about. Serbia's current government is riddled with controversies regarding plagiarized doctorates, some of which were proven and internationally recognized, such as the case of Serbia's current minister of Finance, Sinisa Mali. Often in conversations I had with the employees of the University of Novi Sad, some assistants and professors, I got to hear their salaries without ever asking about them. Whenever we discussed the quality of education, it was what they brought up. They always mentioned it to me in a manner of showing a rigid antipathy, and a dose disbelief towards the system that puts so much sentimental emphasis on education, and pays such trivial salaries. Assistants work between 32 and 40 hours a month, and they earn 130e a month for that. The professor's salaries vary from a minimum of 340e, to a maximum of 630e. Considering that an average one-bedroom apartment's rent for a month is around 300e without utilities, one can agree how these salaries are crippling the economic capital of employees within the institution of the University of Novi Sad. The students are entitled to a certain amount of financial help from the ministry of education, but whenever this subject of "student scholarships" was mentioned, it was rather laughed off as ridiculous because of how small the amount is. Students have told me how they usually get between 40 and 70 euros worth of help on a monthly basis, and their impression is that this is not enough to be considered actual help.

Whenever on the subject of the economy, the students and several assistants, including a handful of professors I encountered, explained how there is a "school-book cartel" running the market in Serbia. The students often told me how they spend between 200 and 400 euros just on books every semester, and how those books become unusable the next semester. The reason is that the authors edit minor details, and the university then asks of students to be "up-to-date" by buying those books. But, being a country where the law often appears to just be a suggestion, and a country where photo-copy shops have not been outdated by the digital world, the students, often proudly and with a dose of humor, explain how they just buy one

book together, and copy it twenty or thirty times, depending on how many students need it. There are laws against this, but not against the students, rather against the owners of the copy-shops. The students do often, and in fact, print books so they would pay a fraction of their original price, but the copy-shop owners are frightened to copy books from the law department. Marko has told me how he has tried it on several occasions, and how it would be easier to ask them to counterfeit money than to scan and copy a law book. He said how if anyone was ever caught doing that, they would be closed down, and fined far more money than they can afford. This does not appear to be the case with books for people from the medical faculty, but when talking about this subject to them, they said how it is just a matter of time when all the copy-shops start denying copying books because of the new technology which will replace previous inspections. "*The education is expensive, even for those who study for free*". is a quote I got to hear from a professor regarding the subject of how expensive the books are.

Moreover, once a person does get their diploma and they graduate, even if their grades are all maximum, after leaving the university they are "on the street". There is no system that guarantees a job, regardless of the field. Marko explained how one would be rather negatively amazed by the number of highly educated academics with masters, PhDs and more who work as taxi drivers, store clerks and construction workers. All of the time and money invested by an individual into education can potentially be for nothing. He then said: "*I who was never in anything shady in Serbia, but I have the phone number to a person who can provide legitimate diplomas from any Serbian faculty for a price of one to two thousand euros.*" I could then see how just bringing this subject up made him uncomfortable, and he continued with a dose of sentiment in his tone: "*Really, Stefan. You are aware of how it is here. You do know it costs ten times as much to finish the university in a fair way. Even if you are at the university and you simply cannot make ends meet, you can always find posters all over the city advertising wireless ear bugs. You just put it in your ear and have it during the exam, and someone on the other line will give you all the answers when you are being examined. On top of it all, you are not even guaranteed a job once you get the diploma. Why would someone not save themselves five years of their time, and dozens of thousands of euros they do not have, when they can just buy it for a fraction of that?*"

The subjects of buying a diploma and cheating were brought up several times within groups of

people, and the opinion was always along the lines of not wanting to go through life unfairly, regardless of how much cheaper, easier or shorter it is.

This fieldwork now comes to a point where the expectations and the "marketing" of education become the reality where both lower and higher statuses share similar perspectives and problems, such as the impression that their efforts are under-funded and under-appreciated, whereas the governmental employees can remain in high positions even with plagiarized diplomas. This was an opinion I heard from people of all statuses at the UoNS, that the value of education is unfortunately up to the individual to understand. I was told how true education and advancing in your field are of little to no relevance in regard to one's image or recognition in this society.

Rather, it is the obedience, recognition and regurgitation of the established that does. This is demoralizing for both the professors and students, and the impression is that the amount of people that are not at the university for their own prestige, especially of a higher status, is unequivocally low.

6. Knowledge transfer: Lectures and online lectures

The situation when it comes to lectures and knowledge transfer at the university has drastically changed due to the outbreak of the Covid-19 outbreak in Serbia in 2020. The lectures which I intended to participate in were cancelled from April of 2020., all the way until the end of the autumn semester of the same year. Luckily, I had the option to attend online lectures with students of the law and medicine faculties from the UoNS, at the student housing buildings where they lived. The number of people allowed to be in the same room at these online lectures I attended was seven, and the students and I were always responsible by wearing masks and keeping the maximum possible distance from each other.

Whilst spending time with students in their student-housing buildings, the video lectures were very much like the impression of how I thought live lectures would look like. At first, I realized this is due to the aforementioned acquiescence of students towards their professors (superiors). I noticed what I stated in my initial fieldwork proposition: that the professors are uninterrupted vessels of knowledge transfer. After witnessing a couple of lectures via online classes, I was bound to ask the students about their patient behavior and note-taking. I noticed that the professors would often say crucial statements about a subject rather quick, and skip onto the next point without much consideration for the time it takes to write everything down: *"How come do students never even bother to ask questions to the professor, or ask them to slow down?"*

I asked this question to three students of law, and they shrugged it off as: *"We don't even do it in class, it's much harder to do it via camera. They apparently know exactly how long it takes to portray their day's requirements in knowledge transfer, and they would most likely be very rude to us if we interrupted them."* - quote from one of the students I asked. The other two answered similarly, saying how interrupting a professor would most likely result in a lecture about why you do not interrupt a professor. This is not the case with assistants who are in charge of most practical lessons, as the students describe them as equal and approachable, but they still refer to them formally, by pluralizing the "you".

The unforeseen turn of events regarding the pandemic did not terribly infringe the weight of the theme. The way people behave to each other has most likely changed a lot due

to the restrictions brought up by the spread of the airborne respiratory virus. Usually, people hug each other when they meet, many have different and intricate handshakes, cheek-kisses, and so forth. Now, everyone at the lectures was holding their distance, and I was not able to note how the natural order of behavior would be, outside of quarantine.

The quality of subjects, lectures and online lectures depends on the individual lecturer, but the general impression I got can be directly correlated to what I was told before participating myself. I attended nineteen online lectures lasting either 45 or 90 minutes, with students from the faculties of law and medicine, and I attended five live lectures lasting 90 minutes at the amphitheatre at the UoNS. Every single lecture was held in a fashion of a long monologue by the professor regarding the day's subject. During the live lectures, students were sometimes raising their hands to ask questions, but the lecturer responded with: "*Let us have questions at the end of the lecture*" or "*Please never interrupt me again*". Most often, they were never answered at the end of the class either. These lectures are not mandatory, but the students are more-or-less expected to attend because of the signatures of attendance they are supposed to collect in their grading index.

Ever since the introduction of the Bologna Process, I was told by the professors, the incentive for students to have that grading index book of their filled with the correct information and grades is the fact that if they do not meet the ECTS points requirement for the upcoming year, they will be forced to pay for it by themselves instead of it being free. From the perspective of the students, they feel the same way regarding the requirements for passing a year, and what puts burden on how they acquire the needed knowledge. Hence, the students and the professors have told me of this unfavorable position they are in, where the Bologna Process complicates how they are evaluated for something that does not benefit them, and due to the cultural predisposition of a non-written requirement to attend non-mandatory lectures for the purpose of gaining a better image and recognition. Due to this feeling being so pointed out by the holders of both lower and higher statuses at the University of Novi Sad, I was told how

student protests have been organized here every autumn since 2005. when the Bologna Process was first integrated⁴.

One's success in the meritocracy of a university under the scope of the Bologna Process should theoretically be comprised of their ability to regurgitate and use the acquired knowledge, and present it by attending practical lectures; passing pre-exams called "colloquiums"; and finally, being tested by their professors. One of the professors metaphorically described to me the goal of education. It is a tower made out of bricks, and the bricks are the historical contributions to the field that when placed can only be elaborated on, and never removed. The goal of the university is then to show the students how great and mighty this tower is, and to see who is worthy of continuing construction on it. But, in the case of the University of Novi Sad, the professor says, each person has this tower by themselves, because almost always (props to the individuals) they are at the university for personal gain of the diploma for recognition, and not knowledge. In his words, these "individual towers" are in most cases just unorganized piles of broken bricks, and professors are aware of this situation because of an inherently wrong system of education with no fundamental value other than insisting how it is important. The professor continued on the subject of grading system in regard to the students' success, and said how at the faculties of law and medicine at the UoNS, students are never tested merely on their knowledge. I was told how the stance, presentation, confidence, and even the way a person is dressed get valued as a part of the final grade in a subject.

Apart from these factors, the professors take into consideration the past attendance by looking through the students' grade index book they have in front of themselves during exams. From the perspective of the professors, the shared opinion regarding attendance to non-mandatory lectures in these two faculties of law and medicine is the following: "*How am I supposed to give someone a good or maximum grade of 9 or 10 when I do not know them enough? They are supposed to be this country's future healthcare system, I cannot expect someone who does not come to lectures to be taking his studies seriously*". This is a quote from one of the professors of medicine in a conversation we had within the glass-shop window where

⁴ Even though Bologna shows how it should be possible to go over borders to continue your education, Serbian students simply cannot afford it due to the economic factor, so the main goal of the Bologna is not even spoken about within the educational sphere of the UoNS.

I began my fieldwork. The impression is that professors consider bare knowledge regurgitation insufficient for someone who aspires to become an integral part of the country's infrastructure, and they require acquaintanceship through attendance; presentation; demeanor and deference; and "kultura", a cultured or acculturated manner of behavior. Talking to students who in regard to this grading system has revealed that they acknowledge all these official and un-official requirements for grades, but they strongly disagree that regurgitation is insufficient. My informant Marko has specified how himself along with his colleagues (referring to his fellow students) will often learn a subject word for word and forget what it was in the next semester. He says this is often because of the lack of time and interest in something taught just by tradition, such as classes regarding Roman law. Marko's impression is that it is understandable that the origin of laws is an appropriate theme to know, but he continued to say how spending a whole year meticulously studying something this irrelevant demoralizes the students who have subjects that will matter to them, like constitutional or familial law. With the help of this informant I then managed to attend two lectures in Roman Law. The amphitheater was empty during both, it counted less than ten people, and the professor emphasized how the ones present should be glad that they are there because he does not see how others will be able catch up with the curriculum. Marko attended the second of these two lectures with me, and said, in a rather upset way, how it is "iživljanje"⁵ by the professors to behave this way towards attendance at non-mandatory classes of such an archaic caliber.

From the perspective of the students, these non-mandatory lectures are considered a waste of time. This was visible from the online lectures I attended where they were all focused during, and exhausted after the lectures because of the constant concentration required to note down everything important that is said by the professor. They told me how when they were freshmen at the university, and they were just about to go into their first lectures with different professors, they were full of enthusiasm to see how high education transpires from such professors who have prestige in their field. On the one hand, most of the students told me how coming to only one of those lectures was too much for them to handle, because the professors just read their transcripts or books and refuse to engage the class in conversation. On the other hand, plenty of these same students said how they had enough self-criticism to convince

⁵ The word "iživljanje" is culturally-relative and hard to translate. It describes a person's characteristic to abuse something they care for, and that others do not, in an aggressive and possessive manner.

themselves how their subjective perspective that this sort of education is bad, and they forced themselves to attend to more than that one initial lecture. But the impressions shared with me were the same: those students that went to more than one lecture said how it was always the same, and how there were no ups and downs in the way the majority of professors teach, just a flat line of monotony. The students view the majority of their professors among both the faculties of law and medicine as harsh, and unreachable, emphasizing how they are thankful to have at least had one good professor throughout their time at the University of Novi Sad.

I witnessed how even during online lectures the professor will admonish students if they are not paying attention, or talking, or doing anything that is not writing down. During both live lectures and online lectures, I noticed how professors will stop their teaching monologues to ask students: "*Why are you not writing this down*"? The students did not react to this negatively on the spot, they apologized and started writing.

However, after one such online lecture, a student told me: "*You see? This is why we do not want to go to these lectures. Why do I need to write down what they say? Everything the professor says, word by word, is written in the books I have for this subject. I am just here so I would have a better final grade with the number of signatures and recognition with him I have.*" It is understandable that both the professors and students feel a certain way about these non- mandatory lectures, from their own perspectives, but there is an obvious conundrum when it comes to then giving students grades, in regard to how they are recognized.

Apart from the non-mandatory lectures, there are classes called "exercises" or "practical classes" which are held by all statuses of the university ranging from assistants to the professors. These are usually classes of 10 students assigned to a specific lecturer that will work with students on the practical side of knowledge for 8 to 10 hours a week. The exercises include examining patients for students of the medical faculty, and dealing with paperwork and cases in groups for the students of the law faculty. According to both the students and the ones teaching these practical classes, there are not nearly enough of them to turn the dry knowledge they gain into practice, which their future job titles will require. The problem becomes even bigger when the fact of delegation comes into question, as people of higher statuses will most often give their group of ten students to someone in a lower position than them at the university. This was described to me as a big problem regarding the integrity of education. Having larger groups where individuals all have to go through practical training, in

the same amount of time, becomes impossible. Many students have told me that even when they do get to be taught practice by a professor, they just take them to the place where they do their job, and do it without explaining or commenting or anything. The students are here expected to sit and note information, which is generally understood to be a poor portrayal of knowledge.

The relationship between students and lower statuses that are in charge of teaching, notably assistants and assistant-professors, was described to me as looser than the relationship between students and teachers that hold higher statuses, like professors. The assistants I have conversed with told me how they try to be on the same level as their students, and to truly teach them what they are supposed to be taught, but due to the tight time requirements this relationship is often hard for them to maintain. The students, on the other hand, have given me the impression that they find it far easier to speak to the assistants than to the professors, and this appears to be a consequence of the importance of the higher status influence within the University of Novi Sad. The professors assert themselves as always far too busy for the simple problems that students have. A sort of a hypocritical stance, as established by several assistants I spent time with, is that these same professors insist so much on attendance to their non-mandatory lectures, whereas they do not want to spend a minute of their time outside of the classroom to help their students. This hypocrisy can be emphasized as a factor that justifies the aim of this thesis - how ritualistic formality and submission to authority manifest themselves into these hierarchical, personally-valued statuses that others who have not yet reached the height of their own status cannot bring into question.

Hence, the students and assistants usually have a better and more personal relationship than they collectively do with the professors. Not a single student has negatively spoken of an assistant. Furthermore, whereas the professors I conversed with have never stated appreciation towards their students' efforts, the assistants who were my informants have. Marko, an applicant to become a future assistant, has explained how even though the students spend around as much time with assistants as they do with the professors, they are influenced far more by the assistants.

Assistants are in charge of providing the attendance signatures to students into their grade index booklets, and I often heard from students how they would "go out of their way" to help the students reach the required percentage to advance into the next year. During the final

examination in the first year only the professors are present, as is not the case in the following years when the assistants become a part of the grading committee as well. Marko, a last-year student of the faculty of medicine expressed how in order to ever become a professor, he also has to become and teach as an assistant at the UoNS. The character of this person can be described as enthusiastic towards the idea of sharing his knowledge with students who are willing to learn. Upon asking him about distancing himself from the students he will teach, by using his status, he answered how, for him, the most off-putting and unpleasant factor of the professor-to-student relationship is that very distancing. He explained how he is on good and friendly terms with his assistants who taught him far more than his professors did. His assistants assigned him to carry out as an assistant himself during some practical classes, which is not legal according to the university's rules. One must pass their requirements to be able to teach, but it still occurs in case such as Marko's. But, if most of the assistants that I encountered, talked to as informants, and heard about from my informants, insist on not distancing themselves from their students by using their status, then why are most professors described and perceived as the opposite of this? Marko explained it as a generational difference, by emphasizing how those professors who are so distanced from their subordinates grew up in a completely different time of socialism and prosperity. The assistants are in charge of briefly describing the students and their skills and accomplishments to their professors just as they are about to be graded. Due to the fact that grading is what is the final evaluation of the students' educational competence, this fieldwork has extracted data regarding how students and others are graded from both the higher and lower statuses within the University of Novi Sad. The setting of grading will be presented in the following chapter.

7. The grading system at the faculties of law and medicine at the UoNS

The grades in the elementary and high schools of Serbia scale from 1 for the lowest performance, and 5 for the highest. The grading system at the university is seen as a continuation of these grades, and they range from 6 to 10. There are official, and unofficial factors that influence the grade being given by a professor or a commission of professors, to either a student, or assistants and associates trying to achieve a higher status at the university. The official requirements are 80% or more attendance the practical classes, having successfully passed colloquium exams which are graded by "pass or no pass" system, and the final exam graded by a committee of professors from the field. I had the opportunity to spend time at the examination amphitheater during the spring of 2021, two times. Once was during the examination period of the law students, and the other of medicine students. I was invited to join these events as a researcher by the professors from these departments, and they have informed their colleagues about my presence. Here I did not want to interact with students due to ethical implications regarding the stress of the situation of being examined. My role as a researcher was to be an observer, not a participant, and note the way examinations are being held. Unfortunately, there were not more occasions on which I could participate in these examinations. It is of noteworthy importance to mention the fact that it is the same professors who held lectures that are grading the students that were signed up for them. There is no internal or external factor trying to ensure the integrity of student's knowledge in terms of their acquaintance with the professors.

The exams start at 08:30, and finish when the last student was tested which was in both occasions I was there, around 15:00. Both the times I was present, the professors were over an hour late, and during that time absolutely nothing but chatter from the audience can be heard or seen. There were more than 50 students each time, they were sat in in the large amphitheater which can host over 400 people, and an assistant would call out five names alphabetically to come to the front desk where a committee of three professors was sitting for the law students, and two for the students of medicine. The students were being called out in an alphabetical order. Upon reaching the main desk they were given several sheets of paper each, a pen, and given a box of questions from which they could choose three, without

knowing what they were getting. They were then given 15 or 30 minutes to write answers to the questions, and then prepare to defend those answers against the committee. These examinations had an intense formal atmosphere, where students would be introduced by their full calling by the professors. As the thirty-minute mark was approaching, the students were warned five and one minutes prior, and told that if they do not lay down their pens at the sound of the bell, they will be disqualified.

Upon the sound, the professors ask the students for the questions they got, and then proceed to ask them to first explain what they were writing so far, then they get questioned. The professors will always interrupt the initial student's explanation if they need something explained in more detail, and they seem to have largely based the way of examining the student on the basis of their answer. More precisely, if the student's answers are presented well, without interruptions or unclear ideas, the professors will ask them short buzz-questions, and conclude their grade.

When I asked the students what the most determining factors are for their final grades, their impression appears to be neither of the official or unofficial requirements. The situation is as follows: The professors who are actively grading the exams have the students' grade index booklets in front of them, and they shuffle through them looking at their grades from other subjects, and all of their collected signatures, reading them out loud. The students have told me how they will find what is the average grade the student has been getting so far, and if their knowledge at the exam is good, that grade will be one higher than the average, and the same goes if the student's knowledge is not as presentable as the professor expected it to be - then they will get a grade lower than the average. This can be connected to Michel Foucault's ideas regarding discipline and punishment publicly, and it can also be connected to the fact that both punishment and praise are in Serbia expressed in front of others as witnesses. An implication of this trait is a collective teaching and building of the consciousness, discipline and cultural common sense. (Foucault 1975)

This impression that students are always awarded their average grade from other subjects is not data I got from one person alone. On multiple occasions when I was with a group of people discussing subjects such as this one regarding factors of grading, and this was the general impression of several groups of students who were actively discussing and comparing their experiences for lengthy periods, and all because I was wondering for their

interpretation of the grading system, while in a non-formal environment, such as the times in the student-housing buildings after the online lectures. By non-formal environments, I am describing situations where the groups of students with whom I was attending these online lectures know each other well enough to allow all sorts of language and opinions to be expressed, and debated, often loudly. As a researcher in an established company of people who are good friends with each other, who know each other for a long time, and who pursue same educational goals, I was an outsider. However, being a researcher with cultural capital, I managed to obtain the social capital within this and such groups rather fast. This is because of such a relaxed environment, that it has no external social rules which regulate behaviour, as is the case in formal situations and institutions. Hence, the subject of their collective grading was discussed for what seemed to be an endless amount of time. The students' general impression is that they expected an environment where their knowledge will be the sole factor of their grades, but instead they were met with a network of official and unofficial requirements. Starting by emphasizing how there are very few educators at the University of Novi Sad who are genuinely interested in the betterment of society as a whole, by teaching their courses whole-heartedly, and without the issue of authoritative access to any interference with their monologue by the students. A student continued to portray this situation to me by stating how due to such authority that the professors practice, there is no room for inter-status relationships between them, they just teach because it is their job. *"They (the professors) are unapproachable. Even when we do get to approach them, the situation is always intense, and they are hurrying us up to leave them alone. Since the four years I have spent at this university, there was only one professor that did not mind spending their free time on interacting with students regarding their questions."* Once more, this is not an extreme opinion, but rather the general impression the students have of their relationship with their super-ordinates. In such a non-personal and formal relationship there is not much room for improvement or practice of critical thinking that the university's goal should be to develop. Then, when it comes to grading face-to-face, the professors take a whole new degree of personal behaviour with the students, making notes of every single factor that could influence their final grade: attendance: appearance: presentation: extra-curricular knowledge; experiences and impressions from past encounters: rumors; and so forth.

Coming back to the situation within the amphitheater for examination, the professors will ask the five students at the main desk questions one by one, but they will give opportunities to those students that are not currently answering a question, if the professor was dissatisfied with the asked student's answer. However, apparently, in most cases the students were awarded a grade that would approximately be an average of their other grades. In a couple of situations when the students did not show a satisfactory amount of knowledge, the professors made some derogatory comments, such as: "*Well, colleague, if you spent more time in the classroom and less time in cafes where I see you every day, maybe you would not have been this stupid today.*" Obviously, the number of signatures from non-mandatory lectures and from the practical classes goes into the grade, and that concludes the segment describing official requirements for a student's final grade.

The unofficial requirements, as opposed to the official, are a scope of culturally-relative factors that form the image and recognition of a person who is about to go through their rites of passage, that are exams in the institution of the University of Novi Sad. These unofficial requirements are not something to be taken for granted, and they are not my guesses of how students are being graded. The reasons I enlist are an aggregation of what I have heard from informants in the field who have been through the grading system at this university. This is where a lot of the burden of this fieldwork lies - in the perception that there is a ritualized way of formal behaviour and presentation of self-image to professors that affects the integrity of education, which is under the scope of a non-cultural relative setting, the Bologna Process.

It is not rare that a professor will comment on the students' appearance when they are just starting the oral part of the examination in the amphitheater, regardless of their gender. At one occasion, a student was told by a professor how they "*smell like a damn French perfumery*", and that they should stop using such strong odors when at the university. This comment was made in a demeaning connotation. Also, several professors commented on the looks of female students along the lines of: "*Colleague, putting on that amount of makeup for an exam is not appropriate, please respect the institution of the university*". Upon asking one of the professors whether this type of appearance really gets counted into the grade, the answer was: "*Up to an extent, absolutely, yes. Their clothing, shaving, haircut and everything is something that I appreciate as a professor of medicine, because these students are in the future*

going to have to leave a presentable image of Serbia's health system. Do you really want a Dr. Marie Antoinette?" This comment regarding Marie-Antoinette, as I understood it, was made to symbolize the resentment towards possible future medical workers that are incapable of putting themselves into the shoes of others in a serious situation regarding issues such as health problems that need to be explained to families that are not medically literate. The students were asked similar questions regarding appearance during exams, and they are well aware that this impression truly matters to their professors. Hence, a noticeable number of students comes to the examination periods wearing suits with ties, or bow ties, or clothing that can be considered formal, and official.

Proper clothing and appearance give a student's image a certain dose of positive recognition, and all of that recognition cannot be based in the period of the exam because it is simply too short. Rather, due to the fact that the professors who are teaching courses, are the same professors that are grading those same subjects. They require of students to appear on as many non-mandatory lectures as there are, but we have discussed earlier how the students refuse to do so voluntarily, and often only attend those lectures to be there for the formality of signatures.

This view that the professors have of the non-official requirements from their students can be described as prejudice, and talking to the students regarding this subject proved that their impression is the same. Marko, an experienced student, explains that he understands that professors that are old have grown up in a different time that counted far less people that could be brought in line with the country's system of healthcare and legislation. But he continued to explain how in today's time people simply have their own styles, ways of presentation, and behaviour which have little to nothing to do with their true knowledge, and future aspirations within their respective fields. This is a subject that was brought up with my informants, most often by themselves. The mere fact that the subject is so often talked about shows the significance of the students' feeling that their efforts are not valued or graded by the logic of a meritocracy.

When the exams come and the professors have shuffled enough through a student's grade index booklet, they will always comment on the number of signatures they have from the lectures. If the student has not attended many, or they have attended very little to no

lectures, the professor asked them: "*Do you really think this is alright? That the country and university spend so much funds that so that you could get educated, and you do not even want to attend, for free?*" It has never happened that a student complains or responds negatively to this question, rather they respond with: "*Please excuse me, Professor (surname), I was stopped from coming due to illness / due to factors I could not control.*" The response was most often along acceptance, but reluctant acceptance of such an answer. In rarer situations the professor would ask the student more questions regarding their absence from these non-mandatory lectures, and these questions can be described as intrusive and personal. However, when I asked the students why they did not go to the non-mandatory lectures their professors asked them about, they told me how the reason is the poor quality, and it turns out to be a waste of time for something they could have done alone, at home. I also asked why they do not just tell the professors that they are dissatisfied with the quality of the lectures, and they said: "*Pfft, yeah, do you think he would let me pass his subject if I argue with him? I best just study as much as I can and hope for the best.*" Here arises that problem that is accentuated at the University of Novi Sad - the fact that culturally-relative factors of proper behaviour and recognition count as aspects that regulate the students' final grade. This is rather controversial and outstanding for a system of education that has been brought to the comparison level of the universities within the Bologna System.

In relation to a universal sphere of education, a sufficient portion of the focus of this fieldwork will depend on the depiction and installation of the Bologna Process into the already existing Serbian system of higher education. It is an international process that began by a course of ministerial meetings and compromises made by European countries with the goal of ensuring comparability in the quality and standards of higher education, introduced to Serbia in 2005. However, all this process brings is the dichotomization of studies into undergraduate and post-graduate, along with the ECTS (ESPB in Serbia) point system, and leaves the rest of the educational system's structure organization up to the host country. In this case of Serbia there is a substantial differentiation of power capitals and capabilities of administering the mentioned power held by people of higher statuses and in high positions, that are also in charge of teaching and evaluating the future generations which will replace them in the profession of preserving and formulating knowledge via the institution of the

University of Novi Sad. There is no external system ensuring the quality of the reproduction of higher statuses in education, and so here is where the fieldwork worked on analyzing the context, and drawing important concepts out of the Serbian culture with the goal of showing the conundrum between the local culture's traits, and the universal Bologna Process' aims.

The mentioned controversies regarding the Serbian system of education may be highlighted by the fact that the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), which is a branch of the Bologna Follow-up Group, has removed the membership status of the National Entity for Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Higher Education (NAT, Serbia) in 2018., and it was declared as being "under review" with the option to re-apply in 2020. In February of 2020., the application was deemed insufficient due to the poor maintenance of quality assurance, and Serbia lost its membership.

Apart from this controversy, several more regarding the cultural sphere of Serbia alone are to be mentioned before being analyzed in this thesis:

- An embedded feeling into students that the professors and teachers are an unquestionable authority, and vessels of knowledge transfer;
- The public use of physical and verbal violence in recent history by the teachers and professors, equally as unquestionable as their authority;
- Having a holiday commemorating a Saint of Education;
- The fact that the Serbian minister of Finance has had his diploma nullified due to proof it was plagiarized, and is still in the government, on an even higher position than where he was when the controversy regarding him was proven to be true.
- The extensive amounts of different subjects and the sheer amount of information contained within them with archaic sentiment, or no relevant use.
- Being taught, not just by governmental educational institutions, but by family and close environment that: "*If the master tells you to tie the horse to a place where you are sure it will die, you still better do just as he says.*" In other words, lower statuses are deferential towards authority, and positions of authority grant substantial power capitals.
- And the prominent and often obvious practice of *nepotism* which drastically (if not absolutely) affects the progress and power capital of groups and individuals.

Thus arises a situation where on one hand the universal image of education should be to teach the individual critical thinking and constant questioning, and to bring the student up to the standard and comparability level of other actors involved in the Bologna Process, and on the other hand a blanket concept of behavioural upbringing that teaches compliancy to authority along with conformity to age and status. This conundrum between critical thinking and culturally-learned deference is the problem which was analyzed throughout the length of the fieldwork, with the aim of studying its influence on the integrity of education at the University of Novi Sad in respect to the Bologna Process.

The above-mentioned controversial factors remained as the general impression of education within Serbia, and many others, as if we were indoctrinated into submissiveness of authority in schooling, and it took time and experience to start comprehending how education and personal perception of our superordinate can even be different.

The pinnacle of this analysis is the integrity of education at certain faculties at the University of Novi Sad, in regard to the Bologna Process. In order to reach this pinnacle, the work has focused on widely describing the context and culture of how behaviour which is ritualized by the notion of "*vaspitanje*", interacts with the actors and structure of education. The factors influencing the goal of the research are the context and concepts of the culture at hand. Due to the fact that "*vaspitanje*" is such an old and integrated conception of behavioural upbringing that subconsciously and consciously dictates social rules and self-presentation, and due to the fact that recognition of such behaviour is greatly valued by the institution of the university, it is where this work will begin introduce the readers to the culture of demeanour in Serbia.

8. The concept of "vaspitanje" and the setting of social behaviour in Serbia

Conveniently for this work, such an approach at upbringing is the central pillar of the Serbian behavioural education which results in what can be translated and described as a cultured "*kulturan*" citizen, and is termed "*vaspitanje*". Similar to how several other concepts and words from the Serbian language used in this analysis, it cannot be directly translated into the English language, but it does have some corresponding ideas with concepts such as "*dannelse*" and "*bildung*", and also "*upbringing*" or "*bearing*". This concept of "*vaspitanje*" plays a substantial role in shaping the Serbian culture, social relations and cultural capitals, what is expected of you and what you expect from the parties you interact with, and it makes its way into every interaction in everyone's life. The majority of behavioural education conveyed by this concept of "*vaspitanje*" comes from early age and continues throughout high school with a specific grade for behaviour, which is valued as a grade from any other subject.

8.1 Non-formal behaviour:

When one spends some time interacting with the same people in an environment here in Serbia, as soon as some mutual acquaintanceship and trust is formed, the formality of conversation usually reaches an abrupt end, and keeps decaying even further over time. This transition from formal to not formal most often happens in one sentence. The way formal respect is portrayed in conversation is by "pluralizing" every pronoun "you" directed at each other, among other ritualistically-shaped social traits such as the difference between a formal handshake, and a friendly salutation; or the difference between a formal salutation such as "*Good day, sir*" and a non-formal one like "*Hey, man*". There often comes a point in a non-formal conversation where one person or the other suggests to stop using this plural form, and the parties agreeably do. The notion of using this plural form to convey respect has a specific term in the Serbian language: "*persiranje*". It is important to reiterate this point that "*vaspitanje*" is a form of behaviour that is mostly preserved for formal social occasions and institutions. As such, it is focused on maintaining appearance for recognition, and often leaves

out elements of the profane life in which the other part of the sentiment of culture of behaviour is contained.

Behaving non-formally does not exclude the guidance of the concept of "*vaspitanje*", as swearing, profanity and unexplored, controversial opinions are still kept 'grounded' or 'hidden' when two parties with a dose acquaintanceship indulge in a social conversation. It is mostly in long-lasting friendships or familial relationships that the acting parties will go 'all the way' with their controversial use of language and opinions, and this is when their use of controversial social bearing or curse words will not be judged by the ones that know them well. Then, they are not considered "*uncultured*" or "*nevaspitan*", as would most often be the case in relations between those who have just recently stopped being formal with each other. Evidently, the less constrains a social interaction entails, the more 'back-stage access' to how behavioural culture is conveyed a researcher can gain. The same applies to my experience as one during this fieldwork at the University of Novi Sad.

However, in the process of meeting someone new, being formal for an unspecified amount of time is not something that can be avoided. The general feeling and flow of any conversation I start with a person of a similar status and age (student-status) I have not met before, would be very different if, instead of a formal introduction such as "*Good day, my name is Stefan and I would like to talk to you regarding the system of education at your university.*", I was to introduce myself as: "*Yo, bro! Come help me with something.*" Importantly, one would never talk in a non-formal way to anyone of a higher status in an educational setting and expect mutual respect. I would not be taken seriously in the atmosphere of the university, I would be viewed as impolite and uncultured, whereas this distinction between formal and non-formal would not matter nearly as much in a convenience store or a street market. But it cannot be said that it does not matter at all, due to the fact that every individual was raised to respect every other individual. What is more, if I were to be non-formal with people of higher statuses at the university such as professors, and if I were to talk to them without showing formal respect which is characterized by "*vaspitanje*", in most of the cases I would get an ear-full of how uncultured I am, and my image would be diminished in that person's perception. Hence, behaving politely and respecting social rules and proper language use in regard to whom one is speaking to, are crucial for the introductory period within two actors that recently began interacting. It was also essential of me as a

researcher to adapt to the high-degree of formality required in order to show the proper amount of respect towards all statuses I interacted with. In a newly started acquaintanceship, it is as if the interacting parties are testing each other's degree of culture, whose curve can be described as exponentially very long and steep, but with a flattening top. Once this top is reached and the parties become comfortable with one another's show of respect, they gradually become uncomfortable using formal language to refer to each other, and deem it redundant.

8.2 Formal behaviour

The initial idea of the purpose of this fieldwork was to show how there is a conundrum between the formal upbringing of Serbian citizens, and the integrity of the education at the University of Novi Sad. As stated above, in the Serbian culture, the whole notion of the upbringing of an individual's or group's social awareness, politeness, outwardness, formality, or briefly: respect and regard for oneself and the world around, is termed in the language as "*vaspitanje*".

This concept is thoroughly connected to the structure and function of education in Serbia. Education can best be described as intertwined with, and also under the scope of the notion of this term. Freely speaking in the Serbian culture, a "cultured person" who has been under the influence of "*vaspitanje*" by their family and environment is also an educated person, as proper deference and demeanor are highly respected personal traits that form one's image. Erving Goffman uses the concept of "*face*" in his work from 1967, titled "*Interaction Ritual*", which differs from "*vaspitanje*" because "*face*" takes its shape and form during interaction and its recognition highly depends on others, whereas "*vaspitanje*" is the 'culture' of a person. Goffman states how "*... the more power and prestige the others have, the more a person is likely to show consideration for their feelings. The importance of feelings varies in close correspondence with the importance of the person who feels.*" (Goffman 1967:10) This statement is relative to the reality of status-relationships at the arena of the fieldwork which was empirically described as one of the main reasons for this work. Just as students and other lower statuses at the university (assistants or assistant professors) have feelings of more importance towards their superiors, they will also behave differently in comparison to how they interact

with someone of their age and status, as to adapt or maintain their "face" in correspondence towards the status they are interacting with. This effect is a consequence of the ritualistic formality that "vaspitanje" teaches and preserves.

Simultaneously, "vaspitanje" teaches polite and proper behavior towards people who are older, and of a higher standing in regard to their success. It teaches that one should always refer to such people with respect, and to do so in a formal way, they refer to them by using the plural of the word "you". The younger people are always expected to be the first to salute, this always involves a firm handshake if the parties know each other.

This term, thereby, is ridden with such social rules which separate statuses and social standings into superiors and subordinates. On first glance it can be described as a concept that exists to uphold a social order and withhold a structure; and the "culture of people". Relevant ideas regarding social structure and the cultural relativity of cultural traits are discussed by Radcliffe-Brown and Emile Durkheim, interpreted by Maurice Bloch from 1977., in his work titled "*The Past and the Present in the Present*":

Bloch states how Radcliffe-Brown has adopted key theories from Durkheim, and the one this fieldwork is concerned with is that "*A society is a homogenous, organized and self-reproducing entity.*", and hence: "*Since we all had different systems of thought, but lived in the same world, the differences must come from society.*" (Bloch 1977:239). Furthermore, Bloch argues how "*...not only is it easy to build up social structures if one concentrates only on ritual communication, but also, that we find in it, given to us in the very words of the people we study, the academic theory of structure.*" (Bloch 1977:246) Hence, I interpreted the concept and consequences of "vaspitanje" as formal and *ritualistic* behavior. I expected to find that the structure will stem vastly from the ritual communication induced by formality, which is generated by "vaspitanje". This ritual communication, or factors of communication have, when analyzed, revealed how they themselves affect what they supposedly protect - the integrity of education.

To add more emphasis on the value of structure in my study of ritual of formality, using the works of Victor Turner from 1966. titled "The Ritual Process", where he argues that: "*Structure has the positive quality of organizing a society so it can meet its needs, but more, it*

creates and emphasizes differences between human beings." (Turner 1966:177). The "differences between human beings" which are brought up by structure, are what I refer to as social statuses. The statuses and the differences they impose are what the fieldwork has elaborated on - how important are they; how do they affect the transfer of knowledge; the distribution and management of power at the university. To better explain how subordinates help bring forth the power of their superordinates, another term used by Erving Goffman is to be elaborated on in this study: the concept of "*deference*". Goffman explains: "*In thinking about deference it is common to use as a model the rituals of obeisance, submission, and propitiation that someone under authority gives to someone in authority. Deference comes to be conceived as something a subordinate owes to his superordinate.*" (Goffman 1967:58-59). Deference can precisely be described as a trait that subordinates such as students and assistants of the University of Novi Sad show to their superordinates that are assistant professors, associate professors, professors, the chairman of the department, the rector and the dean. On many occasions, it turned out, groups of students of the medical faculty and the faculty of law, assigned to a certain person from the higher statuses, were delegated to an assistant or assistant professor and this always resulted in their dissatisfaction because of an overwhelming number of students to give practical training to. The assistant deferently still accepts these new groups of students, even though they are aware they now have to find a patient, or several patients, who are willing to be examined by twenty medicine students that are not trained as doctors or nurses. If they were to disagree or complain to someone within the system, their image would only forever remain stained in the eyes of the person they complained about. And, when the time comes to be promoted to a higher status, they will have a less of a privilege due to standing up to someone who has a higher status themselves. My informant Marko has told me of a situation where another applicant was about to go into the amphitheater for examination in order to defend his master thesis, but a member of the commission in charge of grading him remembered him from when in the past he stood up against a professor. As I was told, the student was in his fourth year of studies, about to do his final exam from the same subject this mentioned commission member, and the student criticized the professor for their unprofessional behavior. As he entered the amphitheater and the said commission member noticed him, they said: "*Haha, you - get out. Perhaps next year. Bye, colleague.*" Marko explained how this student came next year to do the same, just to defend his master thesis, and

the same member of the commission "shoo'd him away" again. The student finally defended his master thesis in the following year, with the same member of the commission. Without going into too much detail, this particular member of the committee in charge of grading was sitting with two other members, who could not affect the decision. This is the degree of power that certain academics within education have over their students. It is of an unquestionable character, based on a reason that is not correlated with the value of one's knowledge when it comes to grading.

Just like these certain individuals with enough social and cultural (and maybe even economic) capital are capable deciding the students' fate based on non-educational factors, some other individuals have the power of delegating groups of students to others, which is justified by the university's rules only in situations of immediate emergencies, but it is practiced for far less than that, and the subordinates are powerless to stop it.

With the behavioral education of cultururation on one hand, and traditional education via governmental institutions on the other, a problem arises: If the university and other structuralized institutions of education are meant to develop critical thinking; broaden points of view without limitations; and construct and educate individuals capable of reproducing knowledge as well as gaining, developing and interpreting new knowledge, how come the concept of "*vaspitanje*" and similarly "*deference*" then teaches the blind acceptance of others' abuses of power based solely on their age and status within the structure? The theoretical background of this thesis along with the half a year-long fieldwork in the physical arena of the University of Novi Sad have attempted to work out the implications on the integrity of education, under the pressure of highly authoritative superordinates, in relation to the concept which develops formal behavior in Serbia.

In situations where there is a lack of acquaintanceship, or when people of differentiated statuses converse, or when there is an age gap between the interacting parties, the conversation gains the 'intensity' that "*vaspitanje*" accentuates. In other words, during non-formal conversations between parties that know each other, family members, and other established social relationships, there is nearly never a need for clinching onto the social rules maintained by the concept of "*vaspitanje*".

9. How can the concept of formal upbringing in this education be labelled as ritualistic?

Formality in the proposed arena can be argued to be of ritualistic nature, in a sense that it appears to be following certain patterns (codes of social conduct) of predisposed, imprinted behavior, modelled by and to "*vaspitanje*". This formal way of behavior holds a deeper meaning, and serves a cultural purpose to society. To quote Erving Goffman and his work from 1967., "Interaction Ritual", he states "*I use the term ritual because I am dealing with acts through whose symbolic component, the actor shows how worthy he is of respect or how worthy he feels others are of it.*" (Goffman 1967:18). And, in accordance to Goffman, every actor here could reasonably be the presenting (re-quote) "... *how worthy he is of respect of how worthy he feels others are of it.*"

But, how does this demeanor, or polite submission, affect interaction whose goal is to share knowledge? Having elaborated on the aspects of formality as ritualistic behavior, using Goffman's ideas once more: "*One way of mobilizing the individual (in a manner, or face, related to his culture) is through ritual. He is taught to be perceptive, to have feelings attached to self and a self-expressed through face; to have pride; honor; and dignity; to have considerateness; to have tact and a certain amount of poise.*" (Goffman 1967:26) And this theoretical view of "mobilizing individuals through ritual" is what supports the idea that there is a consequence of ritualistic formality - demeanor - and that this consequence of demeanor has its consequences in the shape of possible constraints of access to "the bigger picture". Furthermore, the height of one's status is thought by Goffman to include senses of "pride; honor; and dignity", and these three concepts can best be interpreted in face-to-face, situational moments, when the person who has achieved (or is achieving) a social status is manifesting it in some sort of a communicational factor (i.e., talking "from above"; not respecting the codes of conduct; being rude; etc.). On the basis of this theory, it is feasible to expect a meaningful binding of how Goffman interprets ritual, to how the concept of "*vaspitanje*" is grasped as having effect on ritualistic, formal upbringing of individuals and groups. This is where the role of an observer has provided an amount of data. The role of the observer has allowed for witnessing, not only how people speak to each other, but how they behave, dress, self-present, share meaning, etc. Considering that all of these 'social

stakes' are interpreted as merely conditional facets of an intricate ritualistic regularity of behavior in the form of formality, it is found that Goffman refers to such stakes as "*Status rituals*", or "*Interpersonal rituals*." (Goffman 1967:57) In my research, status and interpersonal rituals are merely terms for status-to-status communication.

In a footnote in Goffman's mentioned book 'Interaction Ritual', he quotes Radcliffe-Brown's interpretation of ritual: "*There exists a ritual relation whenever a society imposes on its members a certain attitude towards an object (education), whose attitude involves some measure of respect expressed in a traditional mode of behavior with reference to that object*" (Goffman 1967:57). The imposed ritual relation in Serbia is the formality, and as a result, the "use" of social statuses in formal interaction. Out of the context of the meaning of the ritual, I extracted data relatable to the hypotheses presented in the introduction. To have accomplished this, I have witnessed how classes are being held at the said university in Novi Sad. It is impossible to imagine gathering "all the rituals" from a recipient, but the more - the merrier.

10. Social statuses within the University of Novi Sad

What is more in regard to the structure of education is that "*vaspitanje*" is what stands behind the integrity of the social structure of education at both the University of Novi Sad, and Serbia in general. The social order goes as following at the university (and education), from lowest status to the highest:

- student
- assistant
- assistant professor
- associate professor
- professor
- the chairman of the department
- rector
- minister of education (specific branch)
- minister of education (general)
- ministry of education

This system is as intricate and layered as the structure of statuses can reveal. What is impactful for this thesis is the fact that both the status exploitation, which is not a rare occurrence, and submission to status are rooted in the social guidelines taught concept of "*vaspitanje*". The lower statuses know that their deference towards the higher statuses is mandatory if they are to avoid consequences that can be brought down on them by the same people that hold authority over them, just as the higher statuses know that they have been through their rites of passage, and that their power is deserved. These rites of passage are the requirements asked by the structure of education to applicants for higher statuses. For example, in order to become an assistant lecturer, one must: have a master thesis and an average grade of at least 7.5 (the grading system is from 6 to 10); one must pass through an exam for his or her position; have published works within his branch of education; and, as the fieldwork has shown, the applicants for higher statuses must always have a dose of 'non-written' recognition by their

superordinates. It is this 'non-written recognition' that is so intricately intertwined with the concept of "*vaspitanje*", because the behaviour of lower-status applicants towards their superordinates holds great value towards how they will go through their rites of passage.

11. Nepotism and characteristics of ritualistic and unconstrained behavior

The encounter with the student services has revealed how there is a structurally and socially influential problem, that of *nepotism*, which arises from acquaintanceship held with parties that have capabilities of power administration at their disposal. Nepotism is the favouring of family members or acquaintances, notably by giving them power capital, rather than distributing it via the institutionalized and universal ways, as would be the case in a theoretical meritocracy of a university. Due to the origin of the word 'Nepos', which means 'nephew', it is meant that *nepotism* is a term referring to consanguineal relations in regard to these unprincipled disbursements of power capital, but throughout my fieldwork it was necessary to introduce an additional term: *expanded nepotism*. It refers to favouring and power distribution of not only family members, but friends, neighbours and political party affiliates⁶.

In regard to the past paragraphs delineating the contrast between two types of social bearing, this distinction between formal and non-formal social behaviour has been shaped into more precise terms: *ritualistic* or *constrained* social behaviour under the impression and sentiment of "*vaspitanje*", and *ordinary* or *unconstrained* social behaviour. The reason I stress "social behaviour" is because I collected data from and about how actors at the University of Novi Sad interact with one another, and how their perception of the educational system is, and not merely behaviour of an individual. Furthermore, the term "*constrained*" which refers to formal behaviour expected (especially of lower statuses towards the higher) at the university delineates how this type of social bearing is bound by the concept of "*vaspitanje*".

Additionally, the behaviour under the scope of formality can be termed as *ritualistic* is because it follows a certain set of predisposed social guidelines which are expected to be followed by every member during all sorts of formal or informal occasions. A ritual can be described as a set of actions which are guided by a pre-disposed arrangement. They may

⁶ The current political party is best described by quoting both the students and the higher statuses from the UoNS: "It's a dictatorship pretending to be a democracy". The ruling party appears controls everything except for only small and non-influential businesses. What rules is "*Do you even know who I am?!?*", which is what "powerful individuals" here say as to symbolize how interfering with them carries consequences of their status.

involve behavioural patterns; language and body language; expressions; sentiment; phenomena; material objects, and many more. Moreover, rituals may be (or may become) traditions. This is the case with how throughout history it appears traditional to follow the manners taught by "*vaspitanje*", especially in public and educational institutions in Serbia. This tradition of ritualistic social behaviour required to uphold the formality and recognition of what is dignified in Serbia, such as educational institutions, courts and the public political events, is coincidentally what is so controversial about the way education works at the University of Novi Sad. This controversy's key suggestion is that "*vaspitanje*" puts a social barrier between people: who differ in age; of contrasting statuses or positions in society; are involved within the same sphere, and furthermore has repercussions on the integrity of education.

Social life of Serbia's citizens can shortly be described as unusually personal and easy-going if the participants of the social relation know each other well, and impersonal and formal if they do not. This statement has been detailed by a description and analysis of face-to-face encounters during the fieldwork. My empirical knowledge about the subject generated the idea that this ritualistically formal way of behaviour is a repercussion of "*vaspitanje*". Before this work goes into concluding how ritualistic formality affects the integrity of education at the UoNS, several cultural factors apart from "*vaspitanje*" have to be elaborated on, because they are as important in shaping the culture of Serbia as they are important to me in trying to interpret the hypothesis of this work. These factors make up the base which will be developed to reach the previously mentioned pinnacle of this thesis. These factors are:

- The differentiation between social behaviour outside of formal institutions and situations, and within (described in the Chapter 3);
- The importance of behavioural education taught by "*vaspitanje*" and general emic cultural opinions on the value of education;
- The subject of nepotism and its influence on power capitals, distribution and education with the UoNS;
- And the unique Bologna Process application onto the structure of the educational system at the studied faculties of the University of Novi Sad.

Not describing and analyzing these four clusters of factors which are culturally embedded into the educational system of the University of Novi Sad, would be entirely ignoring the context of the cultural sphere regarding the social interactions and the transmission of education, which make up the structure of education that is highly influenced by power capitals held by social statuses. The following chapter will combine and analyze the notions brought up in chapters of "*vaspitanje*" and *nepotism*, by correlating them to the first encounter I had with the field, and the culture's history.

12. The history and factors influencing the culture of social relationships in Serbia

(The importance of behavioural education taught by "*vaspitanje*" and general emic cultural opinions on the value of education.)

After experiencing that dose of nepotism myself, and realizing how something I grew up with is universally different, I looked into the history of Serbia regarding nepotism, but there is no direct mention of it as a part of this culture. Soon after I started asking the informants in the arena of my fieldwork about their opinions on the subject of nepotism in Serbia, and most of the answers I got were summed down into regarding two main factors:

- The fact that Serbia is located in an ethnically, historically and politically turbulent and multicultural area where "sticking to your kind" is the obvious thing to do. A short glimpse at the mere number of wars on these territories is sufficient enough a reason for ethnic groups to give privileges "to your own" when the choice encompasses a person of different ethnicity.
- The history of Serbia's people.

The history of the Serbian people prior to the battle in the field of Kosovo 1389., can be considered less relevant in the attempt to interpret the specific way of personal relationships and nepotism in today's Serbia. This battle was the end of The Despotate of Serbia as an independent entity, and the beginning of a 415-year long rule by the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the 17th century, the House of Habsburg also gained control of the country's northern territories. At the beginning of the 19th century, from 1804 to 1813. and then from 1814. to 1817. the Serbian people fought to overthrow foreign rulers by two revolutions. This is when the state has become an independent Principality of Serbia within the still existing Ottoman Empire.

Thirty years later, the Serbian people fought in a battle for Vojvodina, against the Hungarian people of Austria-Hungary, and lost. However, the nation's goals were changed with the progress of the First World War. The complete riddance of the Ottoman military presence has happened only in 1867., a whole 478 years since the occupation started. Serbia

becomes a kingdom in 1882., and gains territories from the old Ottoman empire in the south, including Macedonia, and along with parts of today's Northern Albania. Just before the end of the First World War in 1918. after Serbia was occupied by the Central Powers, the country has gained even more territories from the surrounding states including today's Montenegro, and it changed into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slavic Peoples. This name for the kingdom stood for eleven years until it became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929. During the Second World War the Axis Powers divided the Kingdom of Yugoslavia into the Independent Croatian State, the Government of National Salvation (Regierung der nationalen Rettung in German) or as Serbia calls it, the Nedic's government, and Montenegro. During the Second World War in 1943., the Kingdom of Yugoslavia loses territories to the Powers by annexation, and becomes a Republic known as the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia, while the royal family was exiled from the country, never to return. Merely three years later the status of Democratic Federal Yugoslavia already gains a new recognition: The Federal National Republic of Yugoslavia, with an even more altered territory.

With the constitution of Yugoslavia in 1963., it finally becomes the Socialistic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRJ). This was followed by another constitution of Yugoslavia in 1974. which gave all the provinces of Yugoslavia the right to autonomy, which lead to the breakup of Yugoslavia in the last two decades of the 20th century. The last component of the dissolution of Yugoslavia happened just fifteen years ago in 2006., when Montenegro gained its independence from Serbia.

Several religions are practiced here by various people, and they were always considered as separate cultures. Serbs and Macedonians are Orthodox Christians along with Montenegrins and Bulgarians; Albanians conform to a variation of Sunni Islam, and but also Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant Christianity in smaller numbers; Croatians, Hungarians and Romanians are Catholics and Protestants; and Bosnia is apparently equally split into Orthodox Christianity and a branch of Sunni Islam, along with a small percentage of Catholic Christianity (Wikipedia: History of Serbia).

Now, this brief history description was only focused on the changes that this country and its people have experienced since the change became drastic in 1389., with the start of a long period of domination by the Ottoman Empire. All of the territorial shifts either changed

the people where the borders once were, or made them migrate to the territory where "their people" are in charge.

It was of utmost importance to briefly go through the history because it shows the sheer number of changes and nationalities that were involved in shaping today's culture and behavior. The stories told from the times while the Serbian people were occupied by a foreign power share the moral how "sticking to your kind" is the safest and fairest way of life.

What also became embedded into the culture of social behaviour of Serbian people, stemming from its turbulent past, appears to be the submission to authority. Throughout the history the kings and rulers were glorified, and submission to them was viewed as the natural order of interaction, apart from the two revolutions at the beginning of the 19th century which was politically a turning point, but apparently not behaviourally. External factors regarding deference towards authority, such as occupations and foreign takeovers which brought leaders that held their absolutistic power capitals with force and fear, in combination to Serbia's hierarchical internal political organization during periods of independency (Kingdom of Serbia, Tsardom, Principality, Despotate, Communistic), show how this culture has always been ruled by a 'strong hand'. The obedience ingrained into lower statuses with little to no capitals of power, towards the higher ranks in society that do possess dispositions of power administration upon anyone lower than them in this very hierarchical system, has sprouted a specific stance taken by people in interaction. This stance is another term that is culturally-relative to Serbia, and I have not found a translation that demystifies its sentiment to this society. The word in Serbian is "*strahopostovanje*", and it can be split into "*strah*" which means "fear", and "*postovanje*" which means "respect". Essentially, it is a 'feeling' a person has towards someone of more age, or someone of a higher social standing. Perhaps the closest universal translation of this word would be "*acquiescence*", but the information I gained from fieldwork does not emphasize the reluctance in acceptance that the term acquiescence highlights.

On the one hand, throughout most of my encounters with the lower statuses, the students, and assistants who are not yet well-recognized within the University of Novi Sad, I conversed with them regarding their stances towards their superiors. In nearly every encounter with the informants of the arena of the UoNS that regarded the subject of "*vaspitanje*"

(deference), I was told how they began their higher education with a large dose of the feeling of "*strahopostovanje*" towards all the higher statuses there. On the other hand, the higher statuses I conversed with most often told me how they expect to be treated as such, respectfully, because it upholds the order of the interaction between statuses that have been thoroughly evaluated by the educational system that is teaching its newcomers how to reproduce it themselves.

My main informant, Marko, had a lot to say regarding the subject of nepotism in regard to "*strahopostovanje*". His impression is that the minority of professors are the ones towards whom students truly have this stance, whereas in most cases the students just have the "strah" or fear towards their superiors. They understand it becomes legitimately impossible to ascend in the ranks of the university's hierarchy, or simply get good grades if they do not show a large dose of formal respect towards the professors. They are aware that there are several professors who fulfil those positions, especially at the faculties of law and medicine, who are far less qualified than they are supposed to be. These professors have obtained their positions of power within the university because of their accordance with the currently ruling political party.

From the previously described sentimental value of education within the Serbian culture, mostly based on its historic integrity and success, and from the historical influence on the acceptance of authority, this term "*strahopostovanje*" seems to have been formed as to stabilize, and to prevent extraordinary master-to-worker (higher status towards lower status/professor-to-student) relations. The 'fear' part of this concept comes from the fact that higher statuses at the university, such as professors, who can directly affect grades and quality of education simply because there is no external service to whom students can complain about being treated unfairly. This is due to the fact that higher statuses at the university are precepted as unquestionable and focal components of the structure of education, and a student, or a group of students complaining to the chairman of the department about being treated unfairly can be depicted in context of capitals: On the one side, professor that is the subject of a student's complaint has gathered a large social and educational capital at the university, and is as such expected to be a moderator and mediator of both the integrity of proper behaviour under the scope of "*vaspitanje*", and the integrity of education. On the other side, the student is a newcomer at the university who is expected to be deferent and knowledgeable, so their

social and educational capital barely even exists. Based on how relationships of acquaintances lack the impersonal factor, and become more unconstrained over time, this has a great effect on how colleagues of higher statuses know each-others' capabilities and capitals. Hence, what I found out from students is that most of the time they do not even want to engage into complaining even when their superiors are behaving unconstitutionally, and the reasons are the mere consequences they would experience from the person they complained about, and the fact that they would not be taken seriously by whomever they complain to. After hearing many students tell me how professors are nearly always late for the exams, and often by a couple of hours, I was bound to ask them why do not complain about it. The response was always: "*Because I would never pass that subject as long as that same professor is grading it.*" The quote from this situation is a delineation of the feeling of "*strahopostovanje*" that lower statuses have towards the higher.

Thus, within the notion of "*strahopostovanje*", the "*strah*" (fear) part appears to also be rooted in the history of forceful authoritarianism, and the "*postovanje*" part emerges as an inclination towards the historical and cultural sentiment of education. Together, these two concepts and aspects of behaviour meet at the institution of the university where they exist as to maintain the status quo among the lower and higher statuses. It can be argued that "*strahopostovanje*" is a behavioural requirement at the University of Novi Sad due to the fact a person of a lower status cannot advance onto the higher statuses without obstacles if they do not behave accordingly to their position. A student simply has to have and show this type of respect towards the ones deciding his grade, because in the literal sense, it is the professors who are in charge of the fates of the ones under them at the university. Students who respect the educational system and show an appropriate dose of "*strahopostovanje*", earn their recognition by time and merit from their superordinates. My informant, Marko, is the example of a person who is recognized by assistants and professors as a student who has taken this stance of someone who shows a respectful dose of fear towards his superiors. The higher statuses in education have earned their spots and recognition by going through the same rites of passage as their colleagues of the same status, and they recognize Marko as someone who is going through this same process. It was noticeable that he, unlike the majority of students from his generation, was able to get into contact with the professors and not have a negative

experience as was the case in most described scenarios so far, such as when students simply ask questions during lectures.

The people of higher statuses recognize each-other as worthy of their positions in the professional world of teaching, and this predisposition towards status is what creates a sort of a bond between colleagues of similar standing, that in return prevents interference from lower or higher statuses to them. This bond is what was described in an earlier chapter as an acquaintanceship between two parties that loses its formality throughout time, and becomes more unconstrained.

Such unconstrained relationships often quickly become more valuable assets for expanding one's social and academic capital than the professional world they are involved in, and this results in the re-emergence of the age-old question of nepotism. This is especially true if the parties are long-term acquaintances, family members, or political party affiliates. This system of giving privileges against the official regulations degrades the intricate concept of behaviour under the impression of "*strahopostovanje*" over a long period of time, which is inaccessible to many that do not have connections which would help them achieve their educational goal easier. However, in the case of Marko, he seems to have earned his recognition within his faculty based on his merits. He explains that he started his education towards "*strahopostovanje*" towards everyone, including assistants, because that was how he was raised, to respect others. Marko now has certain privileges, such as being able to teach classes, and gain more experience and recognition than others who cannot be put in the position of a substitute assistant. The system of privileges often works on the "favour-for-a-favour" scheme, and it can be described by an example obtained from working in the field and conversing with professors of one of the studied faculties at the University of Novi Sad.

13. The subject of nepotism and its influence on power capitals, distribution and education with the UoNS

Firstly, the history of Serbia was analyzed with the goal of consolidating the idea that nepotism is a historically-rooted cultural trait. Then, I embarked on the task to ask the informants of the university why do they think there is such a severe dose of nepotism in Serbia. In nearly every conversation I had on this subject, we first went through several examples of what nepotism is to make sure 'we are on the same page'. The most commonly held opinion was that everything involving unfairness in favouring of services of any sort is to be considered *nepotistic*. From the simplest examples such as a person knowing a cashier in his neighbourhood shop and getting to cut in line due to their acquaintanceship; over situations such as when I was offered a student card by a friend, even though I am not a student at the UoNS; to the more serious examples such as not being able to get a job against any other competitor for the same position who is in the currently governing political party, this social system can be described as ridden with nepotistic behaviour.

On many occasions during conversations in fieldwork regarding behaviour at the university, I was told by the students how: "*We are not graded according to what we know. We are graded according to what they think of us*". In relation to this quote, at one point in a setting of a live online lecture from a cafeteria in the student housing, where I was present as a researcher and guest with four other students we got to hear a professor saying: "*I do not care that these lectures are not mandatory. When the exams come, I am going grade everything, including your face. The less I can recognize your face from our lectures, the lower your grade will be.*" The professor was aware of my presence. In a theoretical meritocracy of a university that is in the Bologna Process for the reason of being comparable to other universities taking part in this multi-national project, it feels as if appearance should not be considered a factor deciding one's grade. These two experiences combined grant an image that "*who the student is*" does indeed seem to be the focal point for the standards of being graded by their professors. Furthermore, "*who one is*" is the basis for the practice of nepotism, and social behavior such as

the behavior of the professor insisting from his students to attend non-mandatory lectures embraces the idea that the academic capital is less important than social capital.

To reiterate the point how nepotism is a daily occurrence and something nearly everyone indulges in, I had to ask every person from the field with whom I conversed whether they think they ever engage in this trait of favouring someone based on acquaintanceship, rather than merit. Whether it is accepting or giving a favour based on nepotism, most of the people said how it is a completely normal thing to want to favour someone close to you, rather than someone you do not know that well.

I always asked: "*Hypothetically, if you were in a position to employ someone into a company you run, and you had to choose between two applicants, one that is a friend with low qualifications you are on good terms with, and the other who you do not know at all, but his qualifications are presentable, would you favour your friend?*" On most of the occasions I was told something along the lines of: "*I would definitely have to favour the friend. Even if the other person was far more qualified, personal acquaintanceship simply means more here.*" As the matter of fact, no one has ever said how they would not favour the friend, because they would not even be able to initiate a conversation about it with them if they were to decline them. It is an "us and them" awareness of both the friend, and the hypothetical employer.

An example of something similar happening at the UoNS revealed itself to me from having several conversations with a professor from one of the faculties I conducted fieldwork at. Not only this professor, but several others as well have children at the same faculty where they teach. This conversation was initiated as we were discussing the subject of nepotism on an occasion, and I was told how certain aspects of nepotistic behaviour are unavoidable within the system. Whenever this professor finds themselves in the position to grade a child of another professor, they are aware that their own child will, sooner or later, be in the same place in front of the other professor. Because of this, when professors who have children at the university grade their colleague's children, they are inclined to give them a good grade so their own child would not face consequences in the future from their colleague who will one day grade them. This example is not an exception, it is rather the system of "*strahopostovanje*" in a combination of the system of "favour-for-a-favour."

The great amount of educational and social capital gathered by the higher statuses at the University of Novi Sad is rigid and unquestionable up to the extent that not a single

assistant, assistant-professor, associate-professor or professor was ever fired from the faculties I conducted fieldwork at. It appears as if the system of reproducing these higher statuses is convinced in its success so-much-so that it lets them have indisputable jurisdiction regarding their position. When such an authoritarian system encountered the universal concept of comparability among members of education, introduced by the Bologna Process, several challenges in regard to the integrity of education arose in this system of education at the University of Novi Sad. This is not my idea, rather an aggregation of all the answers I got from higher statuses upon asking them the question: "*What is the biggest challenge for the integrity of education at the University of Novi Sad?*" Unanimously, the answer was always: "*Definitely the introduction of the Bologna system.*" Briefly, the reason appears to be the fact that the higher statuses in education now lack the incentive to tutor their students, due to striving for their own recognition in the field.

Furthermore, the introduction of the Bologna Process has opened up a new challenge: that of ECTS points. Both the students and their superordinates at the UoNS have frequently been pointing out how this new grading system is inconvenient, mostly due to the fact that students became eligible of choosing which subjects they will take during what semester, unlike it was prior to the introduction of the Bologna Process in 2005.

14. The unique Bologna Process application onto the structure of the educational system at the studied faculties of the University of Novi Sad

So far in this analysis, several important concepts stand out as the most prevalent in regard to the problem at hand, which is the influence of ritualistic (constrained) behavior on the integrity of education of the UoNS. These concepts are the implementation of the Bologna Process; "*vaspitanje*"; nepotism; "*straohpostovanje*", and the power capital of statuses holding high positions in the hierarchy. All of these concepts are a part of the Serbian culture, and I was bound to talk about them with the actors of my fieldwork arena. Similarly, whenever I found myself in a position to talk to people about their lives as students at the University of Novi Sad, I brought up the subject of the Bologna Process.

It was introduced to shorten the time needed to finish higher education; to connect students from all European countries as to support the idea of solidarity and collective spirit; to enlighten students of all member states regarding the world's political and economic atmosphere; to use the power of integrating different cultures as to become competition to the world's most prestigious universities; to help students and university employees become more mobile, free to move within their fields and over borders, due to the comparability brought up by introducing the Bologna Process. It is argued that the mobility and freedom to move within the field in search of a better position is the most prominent characteristic that the Bologna process offers, but I have encountered an oddity in the field when discussing the situation with students of the UoNS.

What was rather surprising is the fact that out of dozens of students I talked to, not a single one of them could tell me why the Bologna Process was introduced to education in Serbia. The only answer they could give me was that it changed the way they are given points for each subject they finish, and it has given them the right to choose in which semester they will take which subject. But, none of them could tell me that the system was introduced so that they would become comparable to other European universities, with the goal of being able to freely move across borders in search of a better education and position. They would often continue to tell me how the biggest flaw of the system is the ECTS point system which is a requirement for getting enrolled into the upcoming year at the university. One of the biggest

problems is that, in a sense, one can buy an ECTS point, or two, or three, or four, depending in which school year they currently are. The faculty of law at the UoNS requires of students a total of 37 ECTS points to be able to continue into the next year. Their available subjects are split into four 'smaller' and three 'greater'. The smaller subjects carry a value of five points each, whereas the greater carry a value of eight. If the student finishes the four small ones, and two larger ones, they end up at 36 ECTS points. This is problematic because they are only one point away from continuing into the next year, and for that one point they would have to do an entire greater exam, which were described to me as quite extensive. Instead, the university offers the students to buy the one missing point as to fulfil the requirement for the registration into the second year, and the price is around 50 euros. This point, obviously, is not considered to be 'real', and is not counted towards the final sum of ECTS points. To the student who bought that one point, the same would happen at the end of the second schooling year, but he would be missing two points which can buy again for the same price of 50e per point. It would be the case in the third year, as well, the student would be missing three points which are available for sale.

What is the consequence of such a system? It is the fact that when the fourth or fifth year of studies comes, the students are left with an overwhelming number of greater exams in a short period of time. When I was conversing with students from the first, second and often third year of their studies, they were not bringing up the issue of having five or six greater exams within one semester. However, when I was interacting with students from the fourth and fifth year, that overwhelming number of greater exams was what they talked about the most. The Bologna Process leaves autonomy in place for every university under its cover. This autonomy has allowed for another controversy to appear within the Serbian system of education. If the student does not collect the required 37 ECTS points in a double-semester, and they miss more than one point which then forbids them for purchasing them, they will be forced to pay for the next school year by themselves. This puts a substantial amount of pressure on students according to what I have heard, and it makes them focus on fulfilling the requirements no matter what. This includes just learning subjects word-for-word without understanding what their concepts are trying to teach.

The professors whom I have spoken to regarding the Bologna System also had nothing positive to say about it. On multiple occasions I was told how the system brought a complete

lack of incentive for helping students or establishing tutor-student relationships. Before the Bologna Process was introduced, according to the professors, the incentive was the reproduction of the institutional body of the university in a local sense, and the fact that in tutor-student relationships, the mentors would benefit from publishing a student's thesis. In order to advance in the hierarchical system that existed prior to 2005., the number of successfully mentored thesis was viewed as an accreditation given to the mentor, a type of a prestige in the educational sphere. Today it appears to mean nothing to professors. Moreover, multiple professors told me how the people who are in charge of reporting statistics to the Bologna Process administration do not even do it, and when I asked for the reason why, the answer was a vague: "*Because someone, somewhere, somehow benefits from it*". Unfortunately, I never got this statement cleared, and I still do not understand what the reason is to not report the statistics.

The most prominent statement I heard professors tell me is that the educational system in general in Serbia has been deteriorating for decades, and that the university itself is not to be blamed alone, but everything leading up the university as well. The whole system revolves around the idea how students need to just learn and absorb information, but nowhere in education is it stressed that critical thinking, and personally coming up with opinions is how students should be prepared for higher education. It is not their knowledge that is being tested, it is directly their obedience.

For example, at the faculty of law the preparations for all non-colloquial exams consist of having a book with 200 or 300 or 400 questions, five out of which will be on the exam, word-for-word.

Why is it that the system is not organized so that they (the students) need to think for themselves to progress? The professors collectively think that the reason is because obedience is still more of a qualification for a job than is competence.

15. Briefly about the concepts and literature related to the problem at hand

15.1 General behavior and culturalization in Serbia

A person can be said to be "*vaspitan*" which directly means "cultured" or "brought up well", or they can be "*nevaspitan*", which characterizes someone as "uncultured". As a researcher going into an environment that is domestic to me, my personal "*vaspitanje*" can be considered as my cultural capital, which has helped ease my way into gaining social capital which was needed to obtain data from actors in the educational system I have studied face-to-face, and by a variation of participant observation⁷. Without cultural capital here, I would have never gotten the quality and quantity of information I obtained while having it. This social and cultural capital is generally viewed as the degree (or level) of "*vaspitanje*" of an individual, and for more robustness in analysis it will be partially compared to Erving Goffman's use of the term "*face*" in his work from 1967, titled "*Interaction Ritual*", which is in his words described as: "*An image of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes - albeit an image that others may share, as when a person makes a good showing for his profession or religion by making a good showing for himself. A person tends to experience an immediate emotional response to the face which a contact with others allows him: he invests emotional and physical energy into his face; his "feelings" become attached to it.*" (Goffman 1967:5-6). It is due to the reason of making a good show for oneself and the group one represents that a person should have proper "*vaspitanje*", or "*face*" in social interaction, and this is the prominent way of shaping general behaviour in the Serbian culture.

Up to an extent, his use of the term "*face*" correlates to the idea of the concept of "*vaspitanje*", as the idea of "*face*" is described by Goffman in terms of having self-respect, but also as consideration for the *face* of the other present actor in order to "save" his or her feelings. Much

⁷ Variation of participant observation: I have to emphasize how I did not feel as if I am a participant in most of the social interactions within the sphere of the university, rather how I was just observing when I was not interacting with actors of the arena. During lectures, both live and online, I was an observer, but I was not a participator.

like in the Serbian system of education where the use and degree of "*vaspitanje*" at the university does not mean equality, it does appear to be symbolizing equality. Throughout Goffman's work on the rituals of interaction he uses the term "*face*" to pinpoint the individual social bearing of an actor within a social exchange situation, in which he also includes the attention towards other involved actors. Perhaps the most important concepts and analysis he uses that are relatable to the situation of how subordinates interact with super-ordinates are the ones of *deference* and *demeanor* as they correspond to how esteem, recognition, and respect are given to higher statuses in education, and how demeanor is expected to be the default pattern of behaviour by the lower statuses.

15.2 Ritualism of behaviour

Having recognized deference and demeanour, and Goffman's work in general regarding the rituals of interaction, Victor Turner's work titled "*The Ritual Process*" from 1977., and its ideas were used in an attempt to analyze how the Serbian concept of behavioural upbringing "*vaspitanje*" is a form of ritualized sustenance needed for this culture to preserve its formal identification within the higher spheres of the society. This was noticeable at the arena of the fieldwork - the University of Novi Sad. In his thoughts, the ritualistic formal behaviour I witnessed can be described as psychological, or societal need for ritual, as opposed to a biological one.

Furthermore, Turner's insistence on structural-functionalism of rituals and rites of passage, which he often bases on the works of Arnold Van Gennep, goes hand-in-hand with how structure and function of the UoNS are enforced by the ritual of proper behaviour, "*bon-ton*", and "*vaspitanje*".

Additionally, Victor Turner stresses the fact that even though structure organizes a society in order for it to be able to meet its needs, and ritual creates differences among statuses of the relations within (Turner 1977:177). These differences created among participants in the sphere of education within the arena of research are achieved by going through rites of

passage, which have specific requirements, and are evaluated by a set of people who have themselves been through these rites of passage. What Turner has focused on, and what is one of the most prominent factors of using his work in this fieldwork, is the image he creates by insisting on the symbolic and functional aspects of ritual. The function of the ritual of behaviour under the scope of "*vaspitanje*" was regarded to as such due to the reason it exists to uphold some of the key differentiations among people of different age and status within this culture, and to create a formal environment which both interacting parties can use. Out of this structure and function, this fieldwork analysis has constructed arguments towards justifying the hypothesis that such ritualistic formality interferes with the integrity of education, which is universal, as it is bound to the Bologna Process.

15.3 Rites of passage within the hierarchy of the UoNS

To advance in the career of education there are several requirements for each upcoming promotion that applicants have to fulfil. These requirements have been established by the institution of the university of Novi Sad, along with the guidelines it follows administered by the Ministry of Education of Serbia, and finally connected to the international system of quality assurance and comparability named the Bologna Process. In order to depict these requirements and how they are influenced by Serbia's cultural factors, the works of Arnold Van Gennep on the subject and work titled: "*The Rites of Passage*" from 1960., will be used throughout, due to the fact the whole organization of education at the University of Novi Sad is a system of lower status individuals earning a higher status by fulfilling the aforementioned requirements, and being evaluated by the ones who already have gone through such rites of passage. What plays a substantial role in passing these rites of passage while being assessed by experienced actors with a high degree of capital in education, both social and cultural, is the degree of "*vaspitanje*" of applicants going through what van Gennep describes as the "*liminal stage*" (van Gennep 1960:21). This is due to fact that one's degree of "*vaspitanje*" delineates one's face, or how they are being recognized by actors in relation to them.

In this liminal stage, van Genneep argues, applicants become sexless and 'statusless' (van Genneep 1960:102) as is the case with the students and applicants for higher statuses at the University of Novi Sad. As such, they comprise what I emphasize as the universal view of what a university is - a theoretical meritocracy. In such an atmosphere there comes a separation between what is considered to be "*secular*" in the words of Arnold van Genneep, and what is considered to be "*sacred*". In the case of this fieldwork the "*sacred*" is the atmosphere at the UoNS, where behaviour and social rules are governed by the ritualistic suggestions of the concept of "*vaspitanje*", and the "*secular*", or better yet "*profane*" is the unconstrained type of behaviour that looks over age and status, and bases relations on the degree of acquaintanceship the interacting parties have.

15.4 Habitus and capitals (social, cultural, economic)

Additionally, the concept of "*vaspitanje*" was analysed in terms of Pierre Bourdieu's use of the notions of *capital* and *habitus* in his work from 1979, titled "*Distinction: A Judgement of Taste*", as individuals in Serbia obviously have varying degrees of being 'cultured' or "*vaspitani*". He explains habitus as "... a system of dispositions characteristic of different classes and class fractions". (Bourdieu 1979:6). In this analysis the focus was not on the hierarchy of classes, rather it has targeted the hierarchical organization and power manifestations of social statuses at the University of Novi Sad. Using Bourdieu's ideas of capital and the concept of a thick description of the educational system in Serbia, and culturally-taught ritualistic formality of behaviour of the bourgeois in higher education, a correlation has been made between Serbia's system and the Bologna Process cultural capital expectation of such quality that students from different sides of borders of all the member countries are comparable, and in a position to transfer their knowledge and diploma over those borders in search of advancing in career. Bourdieu also touches upon the subject of nepotism to show how it exists at the university, or at least used to exist, as a tactic of reproduction of a rare profession within the family. In another one of his works from 1984 titled: "*Homo*

Academicus", Bourdieu mentions "the imponderables of practice" trying to suggest a factor that is hard to access, which in the case of studying ritualistic formality at the University of Novi Sad is the aforementioned unwritten recognition that every lower status needs to have by their superordinate higher statuses in order to be accepted into the group. (Bourdieu 1984:56). As one of this book's most prominent themes is that many stances and positions taken by academics are due to their own interest of a good position in the academic field, it has become obvious why my fieldwork data found its correlations in this interpretation of higher education. Furthermore, Bourdieu brings forth an idea regarding the relation between power and knowledge which is the main deciding factor in the reproduction of a structure at a university

15.5 Discipline and punishment

According to Michel Foucault and his history of punishment, it was a ceremonial and ritual thing to do from when his analysis starts around the 18th century, and the audience is as important as the accused in this situation. (Foucault 1975:47-48). Similar ways of public punishing are still applied to the way behavioural education works in the culture of Serbia. Ill-mannered behavior nearly never goes unattended by someone who is close-by, and a superior in age or status. At the University of Novi Sad, public punishment is, of course, not as drastic as Foucault talks about regarding history, rather it is public shaming of under-performance; improper or "uncultured" behaviour; swearing; not dressing appropriately for the institution of the university; being late to class; eating during lectures; and so on. The public shaming is in a form of scolding done by professors onto their students, and this is not something that is kept aside to be practiced in private. Rather, the professors who witness ill-mannered behaviour of their students will either remove them from the classroom, or give them an ear-full that all other students can hear. Interacting with professors and asking them why this public way of verbal punishment is practiced, instead of calling the student after the class and explaining to them what the problem is, the answers and impressions I got were versatile. Some professors emphasized how it is due to their status as the authority that should not be challenged by improper behaviour, other how it is to set an example of them as to instigate to the other students how they will also be punished if they do not submit to the teaching of proper

behaviour of "*vaspitanje*". Foucault depicts public punishment as a tool that upholds something he refers to as "*public morality*" (Foucault 1975:110).

In Serbia, the publicity of criticism can be interpreted as a sort of a punishment because it is rarely motivational or educational. Also, the individuals in this public light of critique find themselves with a recognition of someone with a poor degree of "kultura", or personal degree of culture, which reflects on their final grade, and hierarchical ascension. Criticism is far more frequent than praise in this arena of the UoNS, but praise is just as public. During both live and online lectures, there were occasions where the professor would call out a student to give them a commendation for something they have said or done. A professor once told a student during a lecture in the amphitheater: "*Colleague, I noticed your presence in classes and practice is one hundred percent, I hereby congratulate you, your efforts will not go unnoticed. As for the rest of you, you this is what it means to take a subject seriously*". This public praise can be described in terms of ritual, just like the aforementioned punishment in form of criticism, as Foucault stated "*a political ritual*", when he was referring to public execution and torture. He explains how this is a ceremony that has to be spectacular as to leave a mark on the perpetrator, and teach the spectators a lesson, by making them remember the situation, the pain, screams and shame brought upon an individual (Foucault 1975:34, 47). Even though the students are not punished or awarded in any spectacular or ceremonial way, the fact it is still done publicly means it is a part of the behavioral culture of the people. It links the idea of the crime to the idea of the punishment, but constantly implementing the idea of discipline. Public punishment and praise at the University of Novi Sad seem to still exist to uphold a social order by showing the audience, or spectators, what is right, and what is wrong. Also, the expressions of these punishments and praises can be seen as from the perspective of power capitals: it expresses how superordinates here have the authority to impose their will onto not just individuals, but whole groups of students who are powerless to fight against it, because they will also gain a negative recognition within this sphere of the university. Not only is the students' power capital insufficient to contradict a professor, but their academic, social and cultural capitals in regard to the university are also far less developed than those of their superiors. And, that is where the integrity of education at the UoNS, in regard to the Bologna Process, suffers the most. In the fact that punishment and praise is done by and appreciated by the ones who hold power over the students, who are not

in a position to do anything but follow the rules. These rules were often described as irrelevant to the theoretical meritocracy of a university, such as the image, attendance to non-mandatory classes, and several factors governed by the notion of “*vaspitanje*”. The students are being disciplined, rather than developed into critical thinkers, which is most likely the reason one of the professors has told me that the issue of culture is not the body of the university itself, but all behavioral and cultural education leading up to it. Foucault explains discipline as “*general formulas for domination*” (Foucault 1975:137), which seems to be the case in raising students at higher education in Serbia.

16. Conclusions

The educational culture regarding an *emic* perspective of the University of Novi Sad, including a historical and an analytical approach resulted in an impression that this sphere can be described as Bourdieu-esque in regard to his work titled:” *Homo Academicus*”. It is a national and governmental, autonomous institution under the scope of the international Bologna Process, that holds a recognition of a meritocracy of academics in pursue of advancing scientific fields. But the reality is a politically-related “authoritocracy”, as from Bourdieu’s book (Bourdieu: 1988), that is consisted of highly-qualified and skilled professors. However, in the situation of Serbia, this part of the description of people in the highest positions cannot be interpreted as just a group of academics, but also authoritative individuals from a different era who have often gained the most prestigious places in education by being elected by the ruling political party.

From analysis of the data gathered from informants within the University of Novi Sad, it can be concluded that the lower statuses begin higher education with high expectations of enlightenment by knowledge, and soon realize how the ones in charge of providing the said knowledge, in most cases, only give the bare minimum their position offers in regard to teaching. Students have the impression that their superordinates purposefully distance themselves by highlighting their authority and status, which was described as a historical and cultural consequence of submission to status due to fear and respect, or “*strahopostovanje*”. Throughout history, the Serbian education has been emphasized by the general public as the most important cultural trait a Serbian person can have. In the past, knowledge transfer was so prevalent that the Serbian culture celebrates a patron saint of education, and makes artistic representations of the integrity of education via TV-series and films. It is out of this history that the concept of “*strahopostovanje*” stems from, but it is far different today than what it used to mean in the past. This concept of fearing and respecting superiors in the hierarchy of the UoNS adds up to the distance between the higher and lower statuses, which interferes with the integrity of the education which should have a tutor-to-student relationship connotation. Instead, the theory of Victor Turner and his work on the structure and functions of rituals were applied to the behavior taught under the notion of “*vaspitanje*”, which results in the analyzed formal, ritualistic behaviour that is the constraining factor of communication between

disparate statuses. This ritualistic formality appears to serve as a factor that is to be critiqued if ever crossed, and less to uphold a status quo at the university. The integrity of education at the UoNS is affected by this factor that hinders cross-status communication so far that all the students who are at the university which is a part of the Bologna Process, are not aware of that fact. Whether the reason is that they cannot take advantage of such a system to pursue a career over the border, or something else, the lack of communication between disparate statuses is a factor that influences education.

Another influential factor that infringes the integrity of education is the cultural and historical trait of nepotistic favoring of individuals but person in positions of power, who hold a high degree of capital in some of the spheres such as the economic, political, academic or social. Initially, this thesis was not intending to take it into consideration, but upon interacting with the field for the first time, it was introduced to me as a factor that exists in regard to power capitals and administration of the UoNS. Due to the fact that Serbia is a part of the Bologna Process and its international goals of over-border comparisons, and opportunities for all the actors of universities under this scope to continue their education in a more specialized or preferable environment for them, and due to the fact that Serbia's students are clueless as to what the Bologna Process even is, it is safe to conclude how the integrity of education is drastically influenced by cultural traits, notably the trait of nepotism and nepotistic predispositions of authoritative figures in high positions.

Moreover, "*vaspitanje*" as it was described and as analyzed presents a barrier between lower and higher statuses that should, by all means, work together for the reproduction of the knowledge the university provides. The distinction between currently different statuses at the UoNS, ostensibly, cannot even be overcome by passing through rites of passage of status advancement at the university. This situation was interpreted to me by students and higher statuses as that age is what matters even more. Two professors of same callings and qualifications are not the same if one is older. In every case, the older professor will have the advantage, whether he is in a debate or in a process of decision-making. The informants of my fieldwork, of both lower and higher statuses, have in the most genuine expressions possible explained to me how Serbian education is stuck in the past because of the professors that grew up in a completely different time. They explained how obedience and mere regurgitation of knowledge are what is asked of from students instead of the

development of critical thinking, because it is someone's incentive in this country to have a generation of obedient workers, rather than critical thinkers. A reason for this is the fact that academics and educated people see the reality of how poor Serbia is, in regard to both the financial and educational sphere, and that they will use their developed critical thinking to leave Serbia for work and life in a more prosperous place, where their efforts will be appreciated. Hence, it appears that Serbia's students are still "kept on a leash" by the country itself, and cultural traits which mostly have something to do with power capitals.

The integrity of education at the University of Novi Sad is as important because of its membership in the Bologna Process. But, as this process only introduced several formal rules and left the rest of the legislation autonomous and for the university and country to decide, it brought forth specific culturally-relative clashes between traits and goals of the Bologna. Students are pushed away from education which has this international connotation and they are overwhelmed by the number of factors that influence their ascension in knowledge and hierarchy of the UoNS. One of the most prominent of these factors is the generally poor economic status of families, and the fact that after their education, the students do not have a body of assurance that will grant them jobs in their respective fields. Regardless of how difficult and expensive it can be to study in Serbia, most of my informants have emphasized how regardless of the quality of education, they still are not demoralized because they understand its sentiment and value. The students still aspire towards being academics, regardless of the difficulties of becoming one. But the problem with becoming a well-recognized academic is the very recognition which is formed by holders of higher statuses within the UoNS. The students can only behave according to what is found acceptable by their professors and the institution, and they are entirely powerless to interfere with this system.

On the occasion when I was told by a professor that they do take more factors into consideration for final grades rather than just the knowledge of a student, I realized how that also greatly affects the integrity of education that aspires to an internationally-bound process of Bologna. Marko elaborated on this issue by saying how one's image today is drastically different than what was acceptable during the times when the professors were growing up, and that the moral has changed from then until today. And yet, several professors today will take into consideration traits such as: appearance; hygiene; way of speaking; past

encounters; other grades; and attendance to non-mandatory lectures, when concluding students' final grades. In cases that appear extreme for the integrity of education, the professors' power capital goes as far as being able to deny a student his right to defend their master thesis simply based on a past experience with the student. And their power is often so rigid, that their colleagues who are in the same commission in charge of grading are powerless to comment on this, most likely because they are aware they can also suffer consequences for criticizing a status that has power over theirs, by age or capital. Whereas on one hand it is understandable that the professors of law and medicine want to make sure that the people they are grading and letting into the circles of higher society, which will be the future lawyers, legislators and judges; nurses; doctors and medical workers, are capable of doing jobs that require a high amount of responsibility, on the other hand these same professors appear to be abusing that power. They insist of students to show up to non-mandatory lectures, but often refuse to interact with them outside of the classroom if they need help.

Moreover, these statuses accredited to individuals who are trusted with responsibility, the professors, create a large issue with their abuse of this status. This is when they are supposed to have practical classes with the students, and instead they delegate their group onto someone with a lower status. Both law and medicine require a lot of practice and practical classes to develop students into lawyers and doctors, and the assistant left in charge of delegated groups explain how practical knowledge transfer becomes nearly impossible because their superordinates abuse their statuses. Here, the integrity of education within the UoNS is affected because there is no internal or external body that can solve this issue. The assistants have to work more, the students lose the quality of education in large groups, and this in turn results in a lack of practice for future skilled workers. The ritualistic formality of "*vaspitanje*" appears to be the core reason for this situation to have arose as it creates social barriers between people. Instead of having the genuine concept of "*strahopostovanje*" ingrained in them, which is in theory a meritocratic tool of recognition of a higher statuses, the lower statuses rather just have the first part of the concept, "*strah*", which means fear, because they are in a position where their fate is being decided based on factors they can, and cannot control. The students live a life where they are taught not to question authority, and even if they do, they will suffer social consequences for it, sooner or later. This

unquestionable aspect of social bearing is nearly never questioned, and the results can be seen in the way that authority has nearly absolutistic power over inferiors in education.

This recognition of students is what they brought up the most in our conversations regarding the integrity of education. Most of them expected a meritocracy where their efforts towards learning will be the deciding factors in relation to their grades and status at the university, but ended up having to worry about far more official and unofficial requirements for their final grades. Out of the unofficial factors, students have to show a formal dose of respect and fear, “*strahopostovanje*” towards their superordinates and the institution itself; they have to dress appropriately; speak and behave deferently and with a dose of demeanour and culture, “*kultura*”; they have to attend non-mandatory lectures and follow the professors’ instructions regardless if they are applicable to their knowledge acquisition or not; and they are not in a position to contradict anyone of a higher status because of the consequences of a bad image they would gain due to their bad recognition. The official factors the students have to have in their education range from having financial obligations to the university which must be fulfilled; the signatures they have to collect from assistants and professors which also shape their recognition; registering for classes and exams via an undesirable online way which leaves students feeling uncultured throughout the year because they had to “online wrestle” with their colleagues for spots; and the collection of ECTS points in order to fulfil the requirements of passing the year, and not having to pay for the next one from your own pocket.

Both the students and professors have explained how this ECTS system of grading and awarding points is what influences the integrity of education the most, because of the fact it makes students so scared of not passing, that they will learn the subjects word-for-word instead of learning them by trying to understand them. Furthermore, the threshold for passing a year is often reached by buying a missing point and skipping one greater exam, so the majority of the students of the fourth and fifth year end up in a position where they simply have too many difficult subjects to finish at once. The professors, on the other hand, pointed this out by emphasizing how students who put themselves into that situation had no clue what was waiting for them in those last years, and the problem is that one point that is most often bought instead of earned. In more detail, the university obviously has ways of making the ECTS point system more accessible to the students, by changing the number of

exams, or points they carry, but buying points is good business. Hence, the higher education of the UoNS can be better described as an authoritocracy whose incentive is financial, and not the reproduction of education and knowledge. This business-model of a university, with all the financial requirements for exams, semesters and points needed to pass a year is directly what affects the integrity of education at this university.

One of the reasons behind this monetary incentive in education is the general poor stance of Serbia's economy and the corrupt government, which was explained earlier in terms of salaries awarded to the university's employees. Another reason is the delegation that comes from the corrupt top, resulting in nepotistic predispositions in the power transfer. Knowing this, even students like Marko who are well-recognized feel that they understand why it is possible to just buy diplomas, instead of wasting years of time on education. This terribly infringes the integrity of education at the UoNS, which can be seen from the fact that Serbia's body of quality assurance in higher education (NAT) is no longer a member of the ENQA quality assurance group, after being removed due to such controversies as plagiarized doctorates of governmental representatives.

Finally, the fact that professors punish and praise their students publicly as to set an example out of them might be one of the most prevalent factors which affect the integrity of education within the UoNS. The reason is that public shame or praise symbolizes equality and sameness of students, rather than elevating them by letting them be themselves. The general impression is that here lies the lack of critical thinking development that is supposed to be affected by higher education. Instead of publicly setting examples out of others, the system would be far more productive if it was revolving around the idea of the potential of an individual, rather than obedience of the group.

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