

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

WERE THE BALKANS MADE FOR RAP?  
SEMIOSIS WITHIN THE HOMEMADE HIP HOP IMAGINARY

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*For my father, friends, and remaining family — food, folk, and fun.*

“Same dick, different packaging”

(Original: *Isti kurac, drugo pakovanje*; alternative English translation: “same shit, different day”)

— A Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin expression

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## Abstract

In *Were the Balkans Made for Rap? Semiosis within the Homemade Hip Hop Imaginary*, I explore the relationship between media-making and the reimagining of home after socialist Yugoslavia's violent dismemberment. The 1990s included not only the virulent nationalisms so often a part of Western news, but also a painful shift in political economy, an end to a multinational federation, and the supposed triumph of liberal democracy. In public debates, hip hop artists took creatively critical stances on these changes, presaging some of today's most pressing concerns about social well-being, xenophobic populism, and state breakdown. Shifting understandings of what was authentically "homemade" (*domaće*, also "domestic") were reflected in their rap, DJ, and video compositions. Performed with limited mass visibility, homemade hip hop was once widely regarded as yet another foreign import. Over time, however, it came to generate big audiences online who saw artists as increasingly attuned to domestic issues.

Since 2003, as I conducted multi-sited ethnographic research in three peripheral, modestly sized metropolises (Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade), my research attentions were drawn to how artists practiced politics through semiotically rich categorizations and evaluations. I sought to better understand how popular culture addresses changing senses of belonging in a radically altered context of amplified social division and proliferated boundaries. Clad in playfully serious pseudonyms, artists referred to their hip hop scene using a variety of names, including "Balkan," "ours" (*naša*), and exclusive national labels. Among these, the descriptor "homemade" stands out. In the language(s) once widely known as Serbo-Croatian, domesticity shifts its meaning depending on how speakers evaluate the symbolic proximity of signs, including those of audiovisual crafts, commodification, history, health, gender, and racialized alterity. Artists who gravitated toward media that proudly traces a black genealogy became

entangled in social questions about what is – or alternatively, is not – domestic. Such queries are themselves ensnared in troubling and longstanding questions about race, class, and where Europe ends. However, the word also has other uses. Calling something homemade can point to a subtle, anti-fascist critique when one refers to a cosmopolitan, post-Yugoslav scale of shared experiences from Slovenia to Kosovo. Common memories of relatively stable industries now downsized, offshored, and otherwise less productive are likewise interwoven with homemade signification. Domesticity thus supersedes strictly ethnonational connotations, implicating a wide array of politicized and quotidian themes that artists confront.

Like anthropology, hip hop has long made epistemological gestures toward the importance of small but nonetheless potent emblems. Accordingly, my dissertation elevates emblematic themes that transnationally active hip hop artists regularly explore: contemporary mobility, entertainment, and heteroglossic selfhood. These topics reflect broader politics of domesticity in post-Yugoslav spaces. Homemade hip hop artists' play with multiple voices intersected not only with state efforts to promote exclusivist identities, but also with everyday matters of the kitchen table, bed, and bathroom. Artists endeavored to distance themselves from negative elements of post-socialist transformations, which for them included entertainment media said to be in the service of a new oligarchy. In rightwing and leftist discourses alike, the era since the 1990s has too often proven full of different stagnations and intolerable new cultural flows. Through their concert tours across new borders, YouTube appeals to broad publics, and celebrations of antiquated vinyl records, homemade hip hop artists attempted to transcend what they saw as the adverse aspects of present-day mobility. Their alternative uses of technology, audiovisual aesthetics, and unfolding ethical relationships to domestic selfhood, media, and mobility illuminate their perspectives on new forms of social difference.

## Introduction

Hip hop artists in post Yugoslav spaces (henceforth “ex-YU”) have various strategies for actively domesticating rap, DJ, and video compositions. Their creative work unfolds in a context where the shifting meaning of the word for “domestic” or “homemade” (*domaće*) carries affective and ideological weight. For example, in the chorus of a playfully serious 2006 song “Made for Rap” (*Stvoren za rep*), MC Edo Maajka — along with rapper colleagues from Tuzla, Zagreb, and Belgrade — argues how their surroundings are a logical home for one of hip hop’s quintessential elements. The first chorus is Edo’s, followed by Sky Wikluh, then Frenkie.

Edo Maajka (after verse 1)

1 Every day is Ramadan  
2 and every cop is crooked (lit. greased)  
3 every man has empty pockets  
4 People, these Balkans were made for rap!  
(shouted 5 times at the end of each refrain)

*Svaki dan je ramazan  
i svaki drot je namazan  
svaki čovjek ima prazan džep  
Ovaj Balkan je ljudi stvoren za rep!*

Sky Wikluh (refrain after verse 2)

5 Every day is May 1<sup>st</sup>  
6 And only our God, he’s the one  
7 and every man has empty pockets  
8 People, these Balkans were made for rap!

*Svaki dan je prvi maj  
i samo naš Bog, on je taj  
i svaki čovek ima prazan džep  
Ovaj Balkan je ljudi stvoren za rep! (5X)*

Frenkie (after final verse)

9 Every day is a weekend here  
10 we drink beer and a quick, little coffee  
11 and I don’t know where they filled their  
pockets  
12 People, these Balkans were made for rap!

*Svaki dan je vikend tu  
pijemo pivu i kaficu  
i ne znam odakle njima pun džep  
Ovaj Balkan je ljudi stvoren za rep! (5X)*

Each MC tweaks the refrain after their 20-bar verses while implicitly arguing that corruption, divisive politics, and an absence of economic opportunity connect their experiences to those of rappers in imagined elsewheres — both relatively nearby and far-flung. Here, the MCs stereotype and exoticize urban space in the US, and yet argue that life “over there” is somehow familiar.

While holidays (Ramadan vs. International Workers' Day) and exclusionary ideologies differ across "Balkan" spaces and times, the bitter irony of every day being a weekend leaves Edo and his fellow MCs alike with unwanted time off, wondering how an amorphous "they" have "full pockets" while everyone else is broke, facing fast-like deprivation.

To scholars of ex-YU, nationalist music and its discontents are a familiar story. And while Edo has been slow to appear much in scholarly literature, domestic journalists and fans have long viewed him as a master at reworking the signs of exclusivist rhetoric toward nationalism's critique. However, he has also rapped about deindustrialization, dismantled social welfare, and the expansion of unregulated economies. With ethnographic engagement dating back to 2003, when Edo released his first album to great transnational success, I interviewed artists, trained as a DJ, failed as a videomaker, and followed homemade hip hop's performances, spaces, and stories. Listening to Edo's own articulated fatigue with the unavoidable topics of nationalism and war, I slowly became more interested in the incompleteness, frustration, and deprivation which Edo and his peers often playfully and gravely described.

Participants in the domestic scene(s) regularly celebrate their messages and aesthetics as an "alternative" (*alternativa*) to those of the long-established political elite who emerged in the wake of socialist Yugoslavia's violent dismemberment. Artists often seek to maintain their symbolic status as "voices from the margins" (Rose 1994), regardless of whether or not their myriad ethical stances actually do distinguish them as a political alternative. Visiting three modestly sized metropolises — Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade — I watched and listened to artists' rapped treatises and quips, aesthetically experimental beats, and styles of DJ mixing. Hip hop artists often differentiated themselves from more popular hitmakers widely broadcast in post-socialist television, film, and music industries. Despite large followings in each of the

successor states of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY), many artists with whom I spoke in 2011-12 felt that hip hop was frustratingly far less widely broadcast than some performance idioms such as rock and folk pop (often derisively known as “turbofolk”). At times, artists argued that corporations, governments, and other powerbrokers were either indifferent, or even hostile toward their crafts. Nonetheless, over the past 30 years, artists who perform in a hip hop idiom have built a partially interconnected, substantial following across ex-YU. Unlike other markedly local genres, such as folk pop, sevdah, or etno, many see hip hop as a cosmopolitan, foreign style that has become increasingly domestic over time (e.g., Grgić 2007). Homemade hip hop artists often frame themselves and their audiences as a counterpublic to those of the dominant mass media across these transnational spaces.

Artists who perform in a hip hop idiom forge domestic solidarities and distinctions using different crafts – narrative, linguistic, musical, or otherwise performative – along and across broadly recognized “axes of differentiation” (Gal 2016). Given the politicization of ethnonational difference during the 1990s, which itself was embedded in a long history of poetry-laden nationalization projects (e.g., Hajdarpašić 2015), today’s transnational connection-making and -breaking has notable ideological and affective significance. In theorizing the shifting connections between locations, artists, and repertoires across ex-YU spaces, I have consistently returned to Briggs and Bauman’s (1992) consideration of what I will refer to as “gap play.” By minimizing, or alternatively, maximizing the symbolic gaps that separate genres (or, for that matter, canons of national art), performers within a creative field can situate themselves firmly within a tradition, or alternatively, distance themselves from it. For example, homemade hip hop artists use songs, collaborations (including “featurings”), recorded radio shoutouts, album artwork, festivals and other creative means toward manipulating symbolic gaps that exist between ideas, individual

biographies, group histories, and iterations of a single genre. In this sense, I analyze the manifestation of what Čolović (2000) once referred to as a “politics of symbols” in the awkwardly interconnected domestic scene(s). Through their gap play, artists use the internally complex crafts of MCing, DJing, and beatmaking to tighten social alignments. Alternatively, the same crafts can loosen symbolic connections along different axes of social differentiation, including class, professional affiliation, and aesthetic predilection, among many others.

### **Three Constitutive Arguments**

Since the formal end of Ottoman and the later Austro-Hungarian imperial projects in the early 20th century, national belonging, political hegemony, and control have regularly shifted in ex-YU. The fluidity of these phenomena in post-Yugoslav spaces thus remains obviously processual in ways unfamiliar within many other countries. The word for “domestic” also meaning “homemade” thus takes on dynamic, contextually particular aspects and affective qualities across the highly politicized language standards that succeeded Serbo-Croatian. Despite some lexical differences among today’s Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian+Montenegrin standards, the basic grammar (and most of the lexicon) remains identical. In some instances, the adjective “*domaće*” can refer to musics produced throughout the region (“*domaća muzika/glazba*”). Other times, “*domaće*” refers more pointedly to cultural production within a single ex-YU republic. Many – but certainly not all – artists who compose within a hip hop idiom see the scene as transnationally unified and thus singular. Some others actively differentiate the scenes along urban and/or national lines. For example, speaking with a reporter, one member of Beogradski sindikat (BC) argued that despite collective memories like “Comrade Tito” and the fact that rap is at its core is “freedom of expression,” there are limits to cross-border listenings and collaboration:

I know that people also listen to me and Sindikat in Croatia, but I don't want to get anyone into trouble by looking for someone to organize a concert for us there. It is not mere coincidence that the name of the band includes that "Beogradski." Belgrade is the capital of Serbia (Nikolić 2008).<sup>1</sup>

Another with whom I spoke, who had actively collaborated with MCs and beatmakers across ex-YU, saw a single domestic scene:

Regardless of the existence of different states and nations after the fall of Yugoslavia, there is basically one hip hop scene. And here we listen to that which is released in Croatia and Bosnia and Montenegro and even Macedonia, although there is a little language barrier there.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, while symbolic connections across the domestic scene(s) abound, many artists celebrate homemade hip hop's cosmopolitanism, while others see its authenticity grounded in being true to local cultural expectations. Importantly, for many across ex-YU, *domaće* is a category that can conjure cross-border ties across "predictable lines of affiliation," but regularly animates affective meanings in informal, sometimes even multi-species, economies of sharing (Jašarević 2015:39).

I thus offer the glosses "domestic scene(s)" and "homemade hip hop" as ways of pointing to (semi-)shared practices and a multifaceted word in languages whose statuses are likewise dynamic. Apropos, "ex-YU" is a local term that at once both acknowledges but is also partially distanced from historical *Yugoslav* state formations and mediations that have emerged and retracted since the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to ex-YU, one encounters a rich mix of other terms when traveling in Croatia, B&H, and Serbia, including *bivša Juga* "former Yugo," *ovi (naši) prostori* "these spaces ("of ours" is occasionally also added)," *ovi (naši) krajevi* "in

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<sup>1</sup> "Znam da i „Sindikat” i mene slušaju i u Hrvatskoj ali ne želim da ikoga dovedim u nepriliku tražeći da nam tamo organizuje koncert. U imenu benda nije slučajno ono „beogradski”, a Beograd je glavni grad Srbije."

<sup>2</sup> "Koliko god da su to posle raspada Jugoslavije, koliko god da su to različite države i da kažem nacije faktički postoji jedna hip hop scena i ovde se sluša ono što izađe u Hrvatskoj i u Bosni i u Crnoj Gori, pa čak i u Makedoniji iako je tu malo postoji ta neka jezička barijera"

these (our) parts,” *Balkan* “the Balkans,” among others. I use “ex-YU” even though other successor states including Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo are generally beyond the current scope of my dissertation research that I focused, given limitations, on Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia. “Former Yugoslavia” also was contentious as political constituencies in Slovenia and Croatia long aspired to symbolically Europe while shedding the “Balkan” stigma of the periphery (see Bakić-Hayden 1995; Razsa and Lindstrom 2004; Todorova 1997; Živković 2011) Ex-YU is not only a hip toponym increasingly used by online portals to give a contested region a name. The label is also a way of theorizing the region as an outside: one beyond the state, coming after (“post”) socialism, but not yet completely European. For my purposes, as a non-native ethnographer, ex-YU and particularly homemade hip hop are also both decidedly outside of me, my everyday American life at an “elite” academic institution, and my upbringing. No matter how much time, money/debt, precautions, or energy I invested in this dissertation project, there is no need for extensive self-reflexive “navel-gazing” beyond acknowledging that my results are no doubt skewed by these facts.

Many researchers have described regional musical tastes as important signifiers of orientations to nationalisms and their associated political regimes (see, for example, Baker 2010; Čvoro 2014; and Gordy 1999:105). In this scholarship, experts explain how instruments, styles, performers and sites of music performance, distribution, and consumption have the capacity through ideologically-inflected discourse to point to national concepts and histories. Nationalism, identity, and ethnicity also emerge at times as “gate-keeping concepts” (Appadurai 1986; see also Gilbert 2010) for social scientific studies of music in ex-YU, which sometimes demand so much scholarly attention that they inadvertently limit further discussion. Of course, as signs, the people, ideas, and things that relate to nation-building processes which became violently hostile

during the early 1990s are often embedded in deeper pasts, other aspects of the present, and imagined futures. In my research, I am indebted to the scholarship on nationalist musics and its critical consideration of the ideologies and musical practices of social belonging. However, I also follow other scholars of ex-YU who direct their research interests beyond regional nationalisms. A growing body of work has increasingly pivoted toward material cultures and popular musics, thereby expanding inquiries into the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century culture industries under socialism. While nationalism continues to animate significant analytic attention — including that of many homemade hip hop artists — I argue that focusing on nationalism alone occludes other forms of social distinction-making and domestic self-expression.

At times in my dissertation, I consciously dabble in flashy but hopefully useful neologism, thereby **harnessing a medium** to provide a **message** about what I acknowledge as a necessity in current US academic production (Hmm...). With this aside in mind upon which I elaborate further, I emphasize three primary arguments. The dynamism of national categories and the shifting meaning of the word domestic itself point to one of the legacies of the post-Cold War period: the proliferation of states, borders, and the ongoing contestation of identities associated with past and present formations. The lengthy history of state building and dismemberment in ex-YU is one important backdrop to this dissertation's discussion of media production. I thus also argue that domestic hip hop narratives reflect a *semiosis of shifting domestic selves*. Shifting senses of the domestic and subjectivity are not only common to southeastern Europe. The fleeting stability of these categories resonate broadly throughout human history given the ephemeral quality of states. Likewise, despite the modern aspiration to be the final arbiter of identity, pseudonym-clad hip hop artists regularly show that the states do not have a monopoly on identity categories. Given the fluidity of formal categories of

identification in ex-YU, homemade hip hop is a valuable site at which we can consider the role of artists' play with alter-ego, alias, and *nom de plume* adoption. I will ask why a medium that allows artists to conjure multiple selves is attractive in the domestic present.

Second, I analyze how broader discussions of the *morality of movement* within the hip hop scene(s) reflect dramatic transformations in the political economy of ex-YU. In a related discussion, Dent (2012) argues that, in conjunction with transnational trade organizations, neoliberal governments seeks to project images of musical markets sufficiently protected to justify international investment. Institutions thus advocate what he calls "circulatory legitimacy." As an ideology, circulatory legitimacy imagines split subjectivities in the marketplace: on one side are "pirates" (informal actors) who circulate media in illegitimate fashion, and on the other, "good," legal (formal) subjects. Building on Dent's insights and the work of Jansen (2015) on temporality and mobility in B&H, I analyze the morality of movement throughout ex-YU through a close consideration of discourses in homemade hip hop. Since the SFRY's dismemberment, people, things, and ideas were either forced to move or, alternatively, could not move easily enough. Narratives of movement in the present-day often stand in contrast to nostalgic discussions of the post-WWII socialist "good life." The socialist-era red passport and extensive, but not overwhelming, circulation and licensing of Western technologies, including musical media, enabled a certain relationship to Cold War modernity many argue have certain advantages relative to the present (see also Patterson 2011). Many experienced the era since the 1990s as a time of destabilized and often intolerable flow between places and social statuses (Jansen 2015). The EU's recent expansion of the Schengen Area enabled Bosnian and Serbian citizens to finally travel with greater ease. Broader Internet access and peer-2-peer file sharing (p2p) spelled an end to the pronounced irregularities of wartime mass media flow. However,

movement in the second decade of the new millennium has not lost its cultural salience. Performers, tourists, and .mp3s continue to be objects of desire and danger, if not both simultaneously.

Third, I contend that domestic hip hop artists' creative products draw their locally alternative signification in relation to other elements of a post-socialist entertainment landscape. Their discourses on the *social drama of technospectacle* are revelatory of broader arguments, ethical, and political positions that they adopt when considering transformations in a post-war, post-socialist temporal "meantime" of state-building and European integration (see also Jansen 2015). Entangled technologies ranging from Facebook, to video games, to vinyl records; and consumerist spectacles including televised competitions, soap operas, and advertisement become lead characters in unfolding stories of change. To varying degrees, alternative artists and other industry professionals have actively integrated entertainment scenes across the new political geography through travel and cross-border performance, distribution, and consumption (Baker 2010; Čvoro 2014). Domestic artists draw important distinctions between Croatian, Serbian, and Bosnian-Herzegovinian forms of political economy and media industries. However, in expressly cross-national collaborations, artists also regularly thematize the similarities between "getting by" in cities such as Zagreb, Belgrade, and Sarajevo. Artist reflections on entertainment industries are often based on direct interaction with businesses including record labels, the festival economy, and the urban landscape of clubs. Akin to Frankfurt School theorists, many artists argue that technospectacular diversion is a key aspect of oligarchs' efforts to retain political and ideological legitimacy. Artists give technospectacle affective weight in an era they characterize as full of rampant corruption, widespread unemployment, and rapacious control.

I am indebted to other anthropologists who analyze the role of media, especially language and music, in the constitution of political subjectivities (e.g., Askew and Wilk 2002; Fox 2004; Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod, and Larkin 2002). The intimate attention and microanalyses that linguistic anthropologists and ethnomusicologists devote to the contextual unfolding of shifting semiotic ideologies within cultural systems, including those related to language and media, have influenced my own aspirations (e.g., Keane 2003, 2007; Gershon 2010). I also embrace insights of researchers working in other critical fields, including social scientific work that has been done on anthropologies of movement, entertainment and technology. Likewise, making sense of the shifting place of the SFRY and ex-YU in European politics and imaginaries since the beginning of the Cold War would have been impossible without my consulting the efforts of critical historians with their eyes trained on deeper pasts. Following the attention that anthropologists of post-socialism devote to imaginaries of being “in-between” epochs, cultural geographies, and political economies means to everyday practice helped me. Their careful analysis inspired as I dove into a body of cultural production no less influential in my thinking — homemade hip hop itself.

Social scientists have long referred to dreams and the imaginary as ways of conceptualizing how their research subjects relate to the social worlds around them (e.g., Anderson 2006; Živković 2011). While to call something “imaginary” may connote falsehood or fantasy to those less versed in this literature, no such meaning is necessarily intended. Rather, the act of imagining, as the claim runs, is always present as human beings reflect upon and strategize within the cultural expectations of social worlds. Today’s domestic “hip hop-opulism” expressed in rap lyrics, interviews, and other media recovers the idiom of class in order to formulate critiques of a range of transnational social types, especially the elites that consolidated power in

the 1990s. Drawing on social imaginaries, homemade hip hop performers have bitingly critiqued politicians, state bureaucracies, corporate influence, and what they more broadly describe as the corruption of proper social relations between governments, their representatives, and constituents.

## **Ex-YU**

Homemade hip hop emerged in a post-war, post-socialist context of seemingly never-ending political crisis. Stories of crisis told through different media have been a longstanding feature of neoliberalism's incursions into ex-YU since the International Monetary Fund (IMF) imposed austerity measures on the SFRY during the 1980s (Razsa 2015; Woodward 1995). The end of the West's debt financing of the Yugoslav state set into motion widespread unemployment soon followed by the rise of nationalist challenges to state socialism and the wars of the 1990s. In one form or another, "crisis" has been a constant feature of jeremiads across ex-YU for decades (see also Živković 2011). Alternative, anti-nationalist artists often frame the political and economic elite as morally suspect *dramatis personae* of local histories. In rap in particular, signs of "crisis" emerge that go beyond the standard regional news concerning prosecution and ongoing searches for war criminals, the commemorations of victims of wartime violence, and continued manifestations of nationalism. In contrast to the wealth that a small few amassed during the 1990s, macropolitical problems actually do "trickle down" to homemade hip hop discussions of the more intimate politics of misbehaved men and shallow women, unhealthy foods, and approaching audiovisual production with the wrong morals.

In gaining a sense of the shifting significations of US cultural products since the end of the Cold War, one must consider a recent history of US foreign policy and local understandings of directly felt violence during the Yugoslav Wars. The recently rebranded "Western Balkans" is

one of many regions the world over that has long vacillated between so-called Great Power machinations and domestic movements for territorial and ideological control. After an extended, over-exposed cameo in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War and the Soviet Union's dismemberment, the social dramas of post-Yugoslav spaces have slowly become less visible in the stories woven by dominant Western news media. As an era, the 1990s are salient in multiple ways to homemade hip hop. The decade was another period during which stories of US racial tensions, American paramilitary groups, white supremacy, mass incarceration, and inequitable distribution of wealth seeped into otherwise insufficiently critical monopolistic media (Feldman 1994). Commentators also deemed that period American hip hop's Golden Age, given the genre's oft-celebrated capacities for social critique, aesthetic innovations, and ambivalent history of "crossing over" the socially constructed boundaries of race. At the time, the peripheries of Europe were also tense. A newly reunited Germany sought to flex its continental influence. A reconstituted Russian Federation tried to cope with drastic economic woes and an increasingly aggressive NATO. Breaking the promises of George H.W. Bush's administration, the transatlantic "defense" organization sought to increasingly exert military and economic power in Eastern Europe. The NATO bombing of Serbia and Kosovo in 1999, as such moves often do, undermined domestic anti-Milošević resistance and arguably encouraged ethnically motivated violence. Such legacies established dangerous precedents for the better part of the past two decades. NATO's approach was then subsequently glorified and utilized as legal and historical justification for further preemptive "wars for peace" in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya. State collapse, state building, and the violence that often accompany each are normalized, sometimes even unspoken processes that are imminent to domestic understandings of life under post-socialism.

This bird's eye view is important for multiple reasons. At the time of writing, serious challenges are being posed to Euroamerican post-WWII global dominance that are pertinent to the intimate micropolitics of homemade hip hop in ex-YU. Historiographic practice among domestic artists often maps hip hop's origins onto North American urban spaces affected by post-industrial decline and increasingly dramatic socioeconomic disparity along ethnoracial lines. For some, an American historical "transition" from relatively predictable Fordist industrial exploitation to mass unemployment, re-inscribed segregations, and the rise of unregulated economies assumes local salience. Rose (1994) and Chang (2004) famously describe the changes that befell New York in the 1970s which led to the erosion of manufacturing jobs, middle class (largely white) "flight" to the suburbs, and the reinvigoration of structural racism that accompanied the rise of Reaganite "trickle down" economics in the US. Since de-industrialization, violence, and increasingly pronounced wealth imbalance are intimately interwoven into the history of post-socialist ex-YU, some homemade hip hop artists thus feel political ties to artists in the US. More frequently, others cite hip hop's appeal as, relatedly, affective and aesthetic. Others still reject much of US hip hop, seeking to distinguish their homemade creativity. Much of so-called global hip hop studies have been concerned with the historical and symbolic connections between sites of hip hop uptake and the places from which the genre and its associated styles hail, namely New York, Los Angeles, and other primarily urban places within the US (see also Pennycook 2007). One of the paradoxes of hip hop's local uptake is that the genre's expansion is obviously tied to US corporate media, despite often carrying the appealing signification of being a voice from the margins. The diversity of past artists trace points to the necessity of unpacking historical ideologies that are revelatory of ethical positions actors in the domestic scene(s) stake.

Particular, somewhat novel narratives about the past were increasingly *en vogue* on the eve of Croatia's accession to the EU, during Serbia's final achievement of candidate status, and B&H's ongoing unpopular oversight by Brussels and Washington. Among alternative artists, two historical genres seemed to be gaining traction. The first held all leaders of all domestic ethnonational backgrounds to account for the disasters before, during, and after the Yugoslav Wars. A related, if not always parallel, second genre explored the myriad misadventures, misdeeds, and interventions of Western politicians, corporations, and their indivisible ideologies. Indeed, according to many accounts, the austerity programs that the IMF and World Bank insisted upon during the 1980s only fed the nationalist rhetoric and scapegoating for the country's internal problems. As I describe in Chapter 1, "engaged" (*angažirani/angažovani*) rappers often poetically signify domestic histories in ways that bring the domestic scene(s) together a sort of *Straßenvergangenheitsbewältigung*. This "coming to terms with the past" on the (imagined) street often features the genres of historical interpretation that I mention above.

Thanks in large part to the Autotrans, Centrotrans, and other domestic bus companies, I haphazardly schlepped a turntable, mixer, and other schlock around, seeking out homemade hip hop's artists, events, and venues. Wherever I traveled, mass mediated scandals about corruption, nationalists, and celebrity hook/breakups would follow. A need for "cooperation" (*suradnje*) was also on the lips of many of the Croatian, Serbian, and Bosniac political elite, no matter their wartime crimes or post-socialist peccadillos. A hauntingly familiar range of limited and largely duopolistic political parties dominated election spectacles and related news coverage. Disentangling state representatives from those of private industry was often so difficult that remixed and older socialists occasionally found unexpected political bedfellows with anarchists and domestic libertarians. Skeptical critics grasped for and rotated through a batch of depressing

adjectives — “post-industrial,” “transitional,” “neoliberal,” etc. — when describing ex-YU spaces. Each state planned, debated, and eventually carried out a census while I was writing this dissertation, thereby generating past tensions reminiscent of those other observers had observed in observing an earlier generation of observers (Friedman 1996). Vacuous sloganeering billboards mocked the populous from elevated perches and were a near constant feature of the landscape. Rates of joblessness, especially among the youth, were among the highest on the continent. Ever eager to evaluate peripheries while ignoring the gross infractions of metropolises, The Hague tried domestic generals and other army men. Some were convicted, others released. Most decisions often spawned controversy. In short, no matter their differences, populations across ex-YU shared much in 2010-2012. And they regarded much unfavorably, which left artists with plenty of material for critique.

### **Semiosis of Shifting Domestic Selves**

In his discussion of the dramatic shifts in official identity categories in the Balkans over the past century, Štiks (2015) recently offered the telling tale of the life of a 100-year-old citizen in one of the former republics of the SFRY (2-4). Here, one personal biography reveals a dizzying array of potential informal connections and official “statuses, rights, identities, and loyalties (3)” to the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires (respectively active in the region from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries and from 1878-1918); the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs (1918); the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1945), the SFRY (1945-1992), and most recently, the “rump Yugoslav” state of the former Serbia and Montenegro (1992-2006). Beyond passports and citizenship, Štiks’ remarkable legal-biographical profile may have featured any number of ethical orientations to these states that unfolded over time. Of course, this is to say little of such a biography’s personal attachments to the diverse histories, languages,

and dominant mass media that crisscrossed the region in ways that may have even only partially implicated state forms. The variety of state projects that have overlapped the region and their vast array of mass media that were simultaneously promulgated — including those from the so-called Great Powers — continue to build sympathetic publics and critics.

Historian Edin Hajdarpašić (2015) recently offered a useful analytic — “(br)other” — to better grasp the shifting South Slavic nationalist (and often gendered) rhetoric during Bosnia’s turbulent nineteenth century. In a discussion of the significations of slavery in the Americas to the Illyrian movement, Hajdarpašić even wisely notes that the discursive tensions in identifying who is brother and who is Other extends far beyond the South Slavic symbolic field. Through newspapers, epics, and other media, Serb, Croat, and Bosnian Muslim ethnographers, activists, poets, and politicians often imagined one another either as suffering co-nationals under a foreign “yoke,” or alternatively, as enemies to a national cause. Today, contested attempts at state-building in ex-YU frequently prove remarkable and still raw. The centrifugal and -petal processes of nationalism remain contested. “Who are brothers and who are Others?” remains a key ideological question of South Slavic poetics, even its rap form. However, the solidarities that artists and audiences build are thus by no means limited to stances on nationalism, but rather can be built through shared crafts, aesthetics, interpretations of the past, and humor among countless other lines of connection.

In seeking to understand the politics of domestic solidarities in ex-YU, analysts have frequently relied on narratives that imagine somewhat static relationships to centers, be these language standards, nations, or states (see also Brubaker 2004). Two primary abstract forces, closely related to sociolinguistic approaches to language, dominate scholars’ analyses of Yugoslav dismemberment: centrifusion and centripetalism. In a study of language politics and

identity, Greenberg (2008) also adopted a third term — polycentricity — to understand how language planners’ different Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin standardization projects based in Sarajevo, Zagreb, Belgrade, and Podgorica that have vied for control over speakers’ linguistic comportment. When I use the term “BCS” or “BCS+M,” I am thus referring to the acronym that linguists often outside of ex-YU choose for referring to the four language standards (Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin) that emerged after the formal abandonment of Yugoslav-era multiculturalist language policy. Beyond the cohesive, or alternatively, divisive substance of language, other scholarly, filmic, and lyrical interpretations often discuss how media, ideology, and practices related to socialist Yugoslavia’s cohesion and dissolution. Arguments have foregrounded the film industry (Turajlić 2010), the Non-aligned Movement (Jakovina 2011), and sport (Perica 2001) among others.

In his discussions of the conventions of the modern novel, Bakhtin (1981) argues that centripetal and centrifugal forces of language are often co-terminus, in a sort of dialectical relation. Bakhtin contends that on the one hand, the language in which the novel is written has a certain centripetal quality: the novelist presupposes and reinforces an extant readership’s familiarity with a standard language. However, as Bakhtin also insists, successful authors never limit themselves to standards. They are given to considerable play with dialects, jargons, and slangs of individual characters in their imaginings of what he calls “heteroglossic” social worlds. Centrifugal voices make the novel far from a unitary example of standard language than the application of a national adjective such as “Russian,” “English,” or “German” to bodies of literature would suggest. To many observers, the oscillation between both centrifusion and centripetalism, and the sometimes overly neat categorization of groups and people to one or the other social force is iconic of the Balkans. Yet Bakhtin deems ambivalent play central to the

novelist's tools. Centrifusion and centripetalism are always mutually-imbricated and coexist awkwardly alongside one another such that delineating where one process ends and the other begins is not a novelist's concern.

Each of these theoretical models — polycentricity and centrifusion/-petalism — have certain explanatory capacity. A powerful study of homemade hip hop could focus on the relationships of artists to nation-building projects alone. Music, as just one example, often emerges as a Janus-faced substance, capable of facilitating both tensions and connections across social lines. However, by focusing narrowly on symbolic orientations to nationalisms or the practices of states, one can easily miss a wide array of social practices and discourse that concerns how artists regard capitalist economies, provocative cultural production from other peripheries, among other phenomena. Likewise, by declaring defined centers in relation to nation-building projects, one relies on social processes that can be subject to its paradoxes, ambivalence, and ironies. As Bakhtin observed, a novelist's actions with regard to a linguistic center are ambivalent. When considering hip hop, artists' shifting and ambivalent positions toward centers — of government, genres, media distribution, and language standardization — are critical to understand.

States never have a monopoly on the identities through which subjects understand themselves, nor toward which they orient their hopes, beliefs, and practices. This truism could not be more obvious than in the case of homemade hip hop, which historically emerged at a time of austerity under one state with a self-managed, socialist political economy, and continues under similar clientelistic neoliberalisms in seven relatively new, and in the case of Kosovo still contested, states. Hip hop's domesticity thus relies upon artists convincingly demonstrating that their crafts belong despite the fact that they regularly trace the aesthetic and creative histories in

diverse, Afrodiasporic directions, from the urban US to suburban Paris, from Black Atlantic to post-war Adriatic. Artists cite myriad influences as diverse as Long Beach's Snoop Dogg, to Long Island's Public Enemy, to the satirical *Feral Tribune* that lambasted Tudman and Milošević and the oligarchs who followed during the 1990s and early 2000s, to the Catholic and Serbian Orthodox Church. To simplify a movement as diverse as that of homemade hip hop, or any other cultural form, as merely "anti-nationalist" or "nationalist" is to shunt complicated, interwoven forms of production, distribution, and consumption into the narrow analytic confines of complicity, or alternatively, resistance to macropolitical trends that themselves are never static or univocal. This analytic mistake either ignores how performers' interests and inspirations are an awkward and often spectacular amalgam of ideologies, practices, and material closely identified with states, or as is far more likely in the case of hip hop, imagined to be at a far symbolic remove from formal state practices.

The domestic has deep affective meaning not only because of its pertinence to an imagined, shifting, state-mediated sense of "home." One obvious element of life that has often been threatened or even gone entirely lost under post-socialism is extensive domestic industrial production, including that of consumer goods. Anthropologist Stef Jansen (2015) has emphasized the "meantime" (*međuvr/ij/eme*) as the temporal frame of which politicians, journalists, and analytic locals of all sorts imagine today's B&H. When discussing their aspirations and frustrations with this present "in-between," Jansen's informants describe the "meantime" as a time-space neither still socialist, nor fully European. Likewise, many hip hop artists depict this meantime as one plagued by longstanding corruption, violence, and pronounced imbalance on Europe's southeastern periphery. "Home" and "homemade" are thus powerful signifiers in post-socialist, post-industrial context of downsizing, offshoring, economic

emigration, and radically unequal wealth distribution during continued clientelistic accumulation by dispossession. In an economic periphery increasingly unable to resist the competitive pricing and promotion of genetically modified organisms (GMO) in domestic food markets, even the most basic human needs are subject to the incursion of monopolistic, often foreign capital. Similarly, in airwaves often filled with the sights and sounds of American and Anglophone popular musicians, homemade music and film have powerful connotations, which makes their moral stewardship so critical to those who are deeply invested. Alternatively, given the often constricting feel of domesticity and its potential association with nationalism, cultural forms at a symbolic remove from ex-YU also garner great appeal, all the more so if they can strike a balance between the cosmopolitan appeal of the outside and performance done “in our way (*na naš način*).”

In the case of homemade hip hop, the domestic thus implicates matter dramatically ranging from intimate matters of the bed and bathroom, to the shared “health” of the scene(s) and national bodies politic. The explicit descriptions often heterosexual intercourse in one verse, might shift dramatically to the implications of post-socialist unemployment the next, only to be followed by vivid science fiction imaginaries that has included stories of intergalactic battle with Transformers over Serbia’s cows.

### **Morality of Movement**

The politics of hip hop’s movement involves ethical considerations, anxieties, and opportunities. Being this is the case, I depart from the perspective that the particularities of homemade hip hop’s politics of movement should be situated in a broader post-socialist historical frame. In a relevant discussion, anthropologist Anna Tsing (2004) has usefully described “awkward entanglements” as cross-cultural interconnections that produce differing

levels of local friction when they traverse cultural boundaries. Her conceptualization is helpful in multiple ways toward better understanding how American cultural products continue to travel awkwardly at a time of pronounced anger and frustration toward signs of US hegemony. First, Tsing's notion is useful in considering how over time, artists regularly reinterpret their symbolic alignments to the cultural production of the West, other Yugoslav successor states, and beyond. Second, cross-cultural entanglements often are inspired by mobile, transnationally appealing narratives that she calls "charismatic allegorical packages," the global movement of which derives from their sometimes fleeting and often changing relevance to local cultural desires, concerns, and objectives (for a related discussion, see Čvoro 2014). Hip hop scholars have long been focused on the awkward entanglements and unexpected pathways largely African-American hip hop took from the South Bronx and other marginalized neighborhoods to the suburbs (e.g., Bucholtz 2011; Cutler 2009; Kitwana 2006). Despite awkward fit and pronounced cultural divisions, artists throughout ex-YU adopt, appropriate, and generally take up mobile, diverse hip hop stories and their alternative prestige economies (Austin 2001).

Many scholars of post-Yugoslav spaces have analyzed the narratives, nostalgic and otherwise, associated with socialist, post-WWII modernization. As Jansen (2015) notes, even in peripheral cities, Yugoslav socialism produced ever more sophisticated, if still incomplete and flawed, urban grids and mass manufacture for transit. Živković (2014) argues on a related note that "a lot of (ethnographic) mileage is to be gotten out of vehicles (112)," including in retrospective considerations of why socialist production can have affective meanings during present-day austerity. Such literature builds on earlier scholarly considerations of post-socialist transit as sites of moral evaluation. For example, Berdahl (2000) considers how the significations of the East German Trabi shift across time and place, sometimes becoming a site of nostalgic

reflection about an industry that could more successfully approach universal employment. Lemon (2000) reflects on the histories of stations of the Moscow Metro and how they interweave with Muscovite evaluations of the present, past, and future. Stations were renamed after new leaders and places that celebrated ascendant political regimes. More recently, Chu (2016) demonstrates how the “viapolitics” of movement, including the pragmatic technics of space when moving and ventilation, are the subject of today’s moral evaluation in law, mass media, and film. Chu shows how, evaluating movement through moral lenses, migrants insufficiently protected by the law can be “lightning rods of sympathy” and their mistreatment can be discursively and productively compared to the experiences of West African slaves bound for the Americas during the Middle Passage. Extending these powerful discussions, I contend that the symbolic value of grids, moving vehicles, and their manufacture extends to other sorts of moving persons, commodities, and ideas – including musical ones. Embedded as they are in a transnational cultural phenomenon that has both celebrated and policed boundary crossings, homemade hip hop artists regularly discuss the politics of movement. I follow their interests in moving currencies, vehicles, and ideologies, but also their intimate experience of the movements of alternative creative products such as .mp3 files, concert tours, and older vinyl records.

In the immediate aftermath of WWII, as historians of Yugoslav popular culture have often reported, Marshall Tito’s Partisans proved initially hostile to US popular culture, proving more open to facilitating the expansion of schools for classical musical training and Soviet military marches and other genres (Vuletić 2008, 2010). The Party tune then changed. As the government of the SFRY came to rely on US-backed debt, licensing agreements with major recording labels fueled a significant portion of the self-managed recording industry’s economy. Fanzines that followed album releases, trends, and the lives of the Yugoslav stars (*estrada*)

developed passionate publics. In a country that struggled illiteracy throughout its 45-year existence, radio boomed. Television also played a key role in mediating the earliest audiovisuals of Yugorock and other domesticated sounds.

After Slovenia and Croatia seceded from Yugoslavia in 1991, internal tensions that had fermented particularly since Tito's death in 1980 began to express themselves toward the cultural products of once internal Others. Musical styles, instruments, repertoires, and individual performers became charged markers of distinction. According to Pettan (1998), conservative impulses were often driven by monetary gain: "it was impossible to prosper on the music scene for those not willing — for whatever reason — to perform war-related songs (15)." While this may overstate the reality in the shifting republican music industries of the time and partially occludes "alternative" producers, publics, and forms of prosperity, nonetheless the (symbolic) capital entertainers could accumulate by making war-related songs pointed to dramatic changes. An official socialist state policy of "brotherhood and unity" (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*) and Cold War Non-Alignment that played creatively with all sorts of styles that traced Western and Afrodiasporic genealogies gave way to the ascension of exclusivisms.

Single genres, bands, and individual performers that circulated with difficulty in the region throughout the 1990s, began to do so in more open public channels by the beginning of the millennium. Baker (e.g., 2006, 2010) has considered transnationalism and its limits in the movement of popular musics across ex-YU spaces. This "newly transnational" (Baker 2010) creative exchange expanded particularly after Milošević's extradition to the Hague in 2000 (Čvoro 2014). The problematic biographical affiliations that some had to nationalist parties, ideology, aesthetics, conservative lyrics, or public statements during the 1990s left them

stigmatized in today's nationalist, separate, unequal, and yet officially also multiculturalist political landscape (Gordy 1999; Jansen 2005; Živković 2011).

The (re-)emergence of a sometimes regionally oriented entertainment industry in the wake of the Yugoslav Wars demanded that artists themselves adopt new stances in relation to audiences across new boundaries. As Baker writes, “decisions whether or not perform ‘across the border’” invariably became indicative of a position as to whether “national cultural space should continue to be defined by the enclosed, nationalising criteria of the 1990s” or if it should “accommodate newly-transnational cultural products which connoted the Yugoslav era or a present-day ethnic Other (2008:60).” Within the post-conflict, post-socialist landscape still partially administered by Dayton and monitored in Kosovo, certainly state and nation are important considerations to understanding today's mass media production, distribution, and consumption in ex-YU. Yet it bears emphasis that social boundaries did not multiply during the 1990s in terms of new political borders alone. Class, generation, aesthetic preferences are difficult to disambiguate from ethnonational identity, but by foregrounding one, other axes of differentiation can go lost.

Artists spin moral tales that either sanction different forms of circulation, according it with legitimacy (Dent 2012), or frame hip hop movements as ambivalent, or an outright ethical negative. Among hip hop artists, the significations of movement during the socialist past also hold semantic weight. Generalized Yugonostalgia and Titostalgia need not be confused with a critical nostalgia for greater freedom of movement, social mobility, and an earlier era of the circulation of recorded music.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Here I am reminded of a genre of late 19<sup>th</sup> century critique of the Austro-Hungarian administration of Bosnia. Hajdarpašić (2015) cites an editorial from 1889 in the Niš-based *Sloboda* in which a representative polemic argues

## **The Social Drama of Technospectacle**

One of the under-examined aspects of current capitalist formations, including neoliberalism, is the propensity for corporatized political economies to provide spectacle, entertainment, and other forms of “fun” to its subjects (Adams 2010; Giroux 2014; Larkin 2008; Nye 1996; Stromberg 2009). According to a functionalist vein of analysis, critical observers in ex-YU contest that constant innovation in the form of entertainment and hi-tech distractions are key to understanding the maintenance of power (Grgić 2011a). Within this body of work, the narrow elite who emerged in the post-war period did so thanks in large part to limit democracy through distraction. Likewise, through an economy dedicated to provisioning the public with technospectacle in the form of video streaming platforms, anti-depressants, and iPhones, the US also emerged in a global hierarchy of nations in which ex-YU spaces have been increasingly marginalized since the Cold War. “Culturally intimate” portrayals of bodies politic throughout the region often center their critiques on the predominance of spectacle. These emic social theories demand attention, even though they often do not claim the rarefied status of “social critique” (Herzfeld 1985, 2004). In my dissertation, I contribute to the ongoing articulation of an anthropologically informed scholarly field on entertainment and technology studies (Dyer 2002; Grgić 2011a), by emphasizing distinction-making within a field of technospectacles. I consider the place of alternative entertainments in a post-socialist context of state-building.

What do I mean by the neologistic adjective “technospectacular?” What does it mean to orient an ethnographic study to the discourses and practices of a scene that analyze and engage technospectacles? While hip hop shows a historical affinity with many 20th and 21st century entertainments (“spectacles”) driven by an impulse to build audiences through the creative yet

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that the Austro-Hungarian administration: “tries very hard to project a most rosy picture onto a most sorry state of this miserable land, which was not this miserable even under the Turks (186)!”

critical usage of technologically mediated, mass exposure (“techno-”), they often paradoxically critique ways of being differently caught up in the same processes. In meta-performative commentary, hip hop artists, whether discussing rap, fashion, graffiti-writing, or other creative forms, often foreground their capacity to entertain crowds and consumers. However, since they often self-identify as “alternatives,” many domestic artists seek to differentiate their work from the crass financial calculations and impulses for profit that they map onto performers who have close relations to the media houses of the domestic industry.

While the political economy of socialist Yugoslavia was certainly also no stranger to entertainments — even Tito himself was widely-regarded as a leading connoisseur of action films (Turajlić 2010) — domestic cultural commentators have been particularly critical of technospectacles of the post-socialist period. Artists argue that there remains work to be done (Dzihic and Hamilton 2012) in societies that seem to suffer from a broad range of afflictions, one of which is the proliferation of the wrong morals (Jansen 2015), often through mass media.

Many hip hop scholars have commented upon artists’ creative mobilization of technologies of various sorts, from the turntable (Katz 2012; Miyakawa 2007), to DJ controllers (Katz 2012), to the “spectacular vernaculars” captured by the supposedly more mundane pen and paper (Alim 2006; Potter 1995). I explore the relationship of hip hop to technology and spectacle further. Rap lyrics that feature ego-trips, political manifestos, and personal branding (Miszczynski and Tomaszewski 2014), are often evaluated according to this entertaining capacity first and foremost. Multis (multisyllabic rapped rhyme schemes), Digital Vinyl-Emulation Systems, and human beatboxing have more specific publics. Standard languages, political bodies, and laws that police spectacle production, consumption, and distribution are also technologies of particular sorts. Hip hop is a signifyin’(g) technology that artists often use to

comment upon their embeddedness within a field of related cultural production (Bourdieu 1993) including news reports, pop music, and blockbuster film. By referencing technospectacles that influence the domestic vernacular, homemade hip hop DJs, MCs, and beatmakers reiterate, albeit with important differences, and thereby participate in an ongoing conversation about the moral value of post-socialist entertainments (on signifyin(g), see Gates 1988; Jackson 2012).

“Technospectacle” is also intimately related to the performer Rambo Amadeus’ emic, derisive analytic for a significant portion of ex-YU’s creative industries since the 1980s. Rambo, who has been the subject of many scholarly discussions of anti-nationalism and irony in ex-YU (e.g., Gordy 1999; Živković 2012), is known to have coined the term “turbofolk” or “turbo” for particularly sorts of hybridizing performance that have often been known according to the Yugoslav-era category, newly-composed folk music (Rasmussen 2002). Today’s homemade hip hop artists and leftist intellectuals often celebrate Rambo’s early flirtations with rap, musical prowess, and critically-acclaimed “screwing around” (*zajebancija*), including at the 2012 Eurovision competition. “Turbofolk” is a global English neologism Rambo began toying with in the late 1980s. Rambo, who other artists often cite as a key figure in homemade hip hop history, took time to define what he meant by “turbofolk” in a lengthy song treatise on the term that he recorded in 2005. Rambo argues, “turbofolk is the combustion of the nation” and the “flaring of the lowest passions among homo sapiens.” Then, he goes on to list disparate, idiosyncratic phenomena that qualify, including Adolf Hitler, porno-soaps, gambling halls, and Eurovision.

If we follow Rambo, election spectacles that move in cycles throughout the successor republics are one good example of how we can fruitfully apply the analytics of turbofolk, spectacle, and technology to one of democracy’s most hallowed rituals (Abélès 1988; Kellner 2003; McLeod 1999). Kimberly Coles (2007) has argued that the technology of an election

becomes both ritual and science, where the performative display and usage of modern, transparent things is critical to establishing legitimacy. According to Baker (2010), campaign recordings and performances have proven one important revenue stream for a certain cohort of musicians who were close to the duopolistic Croatian parties, the HDZ and SDP. In the aforementioned song, Rambo makes the provocative claim about democratic rituals that proliferated across ex-YU during the 1990s, “turbofolk” is also “the voting ballot that enables every fool to legally fill it out.” To Rambo, turbofolk, a category that I see as one of many forms of technospectacle, can manifest at every level of post-socialist society, from the very form of government and participation to the audiovisuals that one consumes.

My conversations often raised the fact that the end of the wars also historically maps onto another dramatic historical period that would significantly change how audiovisuals were internationally produced, distributed, and consumed. YouTube videos, .mp3s, and the laptops that help create, upload, and play them are now universal hardware and file formats with which the scene almost constantly interacts. These changes, which like other streaming platforms often arrived with a delay, continue to have eminently local effects and resonances. For my informants, less celebrated mass communications technologies, including independent radio and vinyl records continued to have powerful resonance. The largely unmonetized circulation of different file formats posed a serious challenge to newer record labels that followed the dominance of socialist era Jugoton and PGP-RTB. Unlike in the West, post-war, domestic labels were not subsidiaries of massive media conglomerates diversified in other products like blank media, hard drives, and personal computers. Thus hand-wringing about piracy among local label representatives was far less disingenuous than that of international majors (Sterne 2012). Free online distribution threatened the very survival of the domesticity of small companies, greatly

reduced the possibilities for hiring and patronage, and ended label financing of studio time. Companies had to diversify their business portfolios in order to enter more stable commodity markets by acting as local licensees for video games and other products.

In its simplicity, the red herring that Davids Bowie and Hasselhof brought down the Goliath of the Berlin Wall has always been a flawed form of historical explanation for the (fleeting?) fall of socialism in Europe. However, US corporate influence, entertainments, and other forms of “soft power” have regularly been closely bundled and seen as mutually reinforcing in domestic explanations of socialism’s retraction (e.g., von Eschen 2006; Yurchak 2006). Politically controversial government agencies, such as USAID, have invested in regional NGOs that support musicians and cultural center and concert venue reconstruction and expansion (e.g., Razsa 2015), and US investments are not alone. The European Union has also directly and controversially funded concerts and recordings promoting its cosmopolitan brand. Across ex-YU spaces, US, Russian, German, Turkish, Qatari, and other prominent news proxies compete for local audiences, each with their own awkward relationships to local state-building, nationalisms, and artistic expression. While the Western Balkans thankfully no longer remains a space of hot conflict, competitive media and corporate-national affiliates continue to vie for consumers throughout the region through their technospectacular gadgets and entertainments.

Through my ethnographic consideration of how homemade hip hop portrays the moralities of movement, technospectacle, and shifting domesticity, I address key aspects of post-war, post-socialist transformations. The pseudonym-clad voices of the domestic scene(s) offer valuable insights into how recent state-building and concomitant economies have left young people often looking for sounds, words, and feelings that offer resistance (*bunt*) to the frustrations of the post-socialist meantime.

## Zagreb

When I first visited Zagreb in 2003, somewhat narrow war-time histories that I read left me naïvely surprised by cross-border engagements and entanglements that did not conform to the oft-rehearsed tales of animosities. However, these were not limited to ex-YU alone. Unparalleled homemade hip hop impresario, DJ Phat Phillie, had already brought scores of American luminaries whose music I had once played on my small liberal arts college radio broadcasts to the capital and Dalmatian coast. Just before I arrived, Edo released his cleverly titled debut album, *Listen to Your Mother (Slušaj mater)*, which thematized post-war sociality, unregulated economy, and corruption in expressly anti-nationalist lyrics. This expansion that I witnessed followed on the heels of perhaps the apex of Zagreb hip hop's visibility, when groups like Bolesna braća (aka Sick Rhyme Sayazz), El Bahattee, Nered i Stoka, and Tram 11 made regular appearances on Croatian National Television in the late 1990s. Zagreb's artists often cited the DJ Slaven Balin as a progenitor, who began broadcasting a show called *Electro Funk Premier* in 1984. The show became *Rap Attack* and was eventually succeeded by Phillie's *Blackout* on Radio 101. Zagreb's Radio Student also featured a number of shows over the years including *I2 Gauge*, *4 Elements*, and *Mixtape Sessions*. By the early 2000s, Zagreb's beatmakers Dash, Baby Dooks, and Koolade who were active with the big groups of the 1990s continued to cultivate rich résumés by collaboratively producing songs with rappers with broad international distribution. The beat fleet (tbf) and Dječaci brought national attention to rap from Split, and artists like General Woo (formerly of Tram 11), Shorty, Kandžija, and Krankšvester drew audience attentions to smaller cities throughout Slavonia during the period of my dissertation research.

I returned in late 2010 for my second extended stay in the wake of former Prime Minister Ivo Sanader's extradition from Austria under charges of graft and war-profiteering. The

Hungarian energy company MOL had secured controlling rights in Croatia's state oil company INA, and Sanader accepted a 5 million euro bribe to make the transaction possible. After two decades of nearly uninterrupted rule with the short exception of the brief leadership of the SDP (Social Democratic Party) under Ivica Račan from 2000-2003, the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) was desperate to retain power in the elections. Full EU accession loomed. The HDZ foregrounded the efforts of the state anti-corruption office, USKOK (The Bureau for Combatting Corruption and Organized Crime), to bring their own former party member to justice. USKOK draws its acronym for the word for a sort of pirate or highway bandits celebrated in domestic folklore. The *uskoci* (sg. *uskok*) disrupted commerce during the Ottoman period in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the wake of Sanader's fall, Jadranka Kosor emerged as the unelected government head until the SDP won the elections in 2011.

With help from its nation branding campaigns, Croatia rapidly transformed from its isolation in the 1990s, becoming a vacation playground for tourists and elites more than the former republic ever had in the Yugoslav period. Privatization, downsizing, and outsourcing rendered many state industries increasingly unviable.

## **Belgrade**

On my way to study a language advertised as Serbian in 2007, I made a now common pilgrimage of young music fans from across ex-YU and broader European environs to the EXIT Music Festival in Novi Sad. I passed through Belgrade, where I would briefly return for another language program, this time advertised as Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, in 2008. The same year, I also returned to EXIT to see what was billed at the time as a farewell performance by the humorous (and scandalous) rap trio, Bad Copy, who hailed from Kotež near Belgrade. Like many before me, I left impressed by their stage presence and live delivery. The most notable live

show during my lengthier stay in 2012 was the concert that Beogradski sindikat (BC) headlined in the New Belgrade Arena. The venue, built after Marija Šerifović's 2007 victory at the Eurovision Song Contest, was packed with 30,000 fans for the BC show. Given their obvious popularity, the group's anti-globalist rhetoric began to draw fire from the left, particularly when their "moral-pedantic," "nationalist" tone took up the themes of homosexuality, Kosovo, and Serbian pride (Arsenijević 2012). The crowd that BC brought out dwarfed that which even prominent homemade hip hop artists usually expect at live shows.

In multiple visits, I lived in the gentrifying neighborhood of Vračar, home to international embassies still anachronistically sized to better fit the non-aligned capital of a more influential country. In 2011, Serbia was on the brink of becoming a full EU candidate despite ongoing strife in Kosovo, domestic, and broader European crises. By the end of my stay in 2012, centrist Boris Tadić and Serbia's Democratic Party (DS) had fallen to Tomislav Nikolić and the counter-intuitively branded "Progressives" (SNS), ushering in a shift to the right. A familiar story of continued accumulation by dispossession fed into low voter turnout of the left. An aphorism that I heard runs that the EU will only finally allow Serbia to enter when the Union itself falls apart. In the midst of continent-wide mounting sovereign debts, widespread dissent and dissatisfaction, and expanding austerity policies, such cynicism felt prescient.

### **Sarajevo**

On the heels of concerts by Brooklyn's M.O.P. and Berlin's MC Bushido, I returned to Sarajevo for three months in 2011, longer than my previous very short visit. Artists in Zagreb with Bosnian ties wondered why I chose to do research in Sarajevo as opposed to Tuzla, which long was a sort of unofficial capital for hip hop in B&H. The FmJam program on Radio Kameleon had long developed an audience, successful artists, and hosted a festival in the

northeastern city. However, a handful of radio shows, artists, and concert promoters began also making names for themselves in the divided capital. During the summer months, Sarajevo also becomes a place of a variety of music events and its prominent annual film festival.

In a political scientific vein, scholars are often fond of enumerating B&H's internal administrative divisions, including three constitutive peoples (*narodi*), two entities, one administrative district, etc. The Office of the High Representative, which the Dayton Peace Agreement established in 1995, continues to have powers that enable an outsider appointed by the US and EU to override domestic decisions or address issues of corruption. After over 20 years of existence, outsiders continue to undermine the country's sovereignty, as do many in Republika srpska, the Serbian entity, which saw B&H as an illegitimate state since its independence. "Yugoslavia in miniature" (*Jugoslavija u malom*) as the country is domestically known was always diverse, but the war facilitated divisions, political corruption, and temporal feeling of being "in-between" Europe and the socialist past (Jansen 2015).

### **Homemade Hip Hop Studies**

As a scholarly field, Hip Hop Studies has expanded dramatically over the past two decades to include research into a myriad of micro-practices including beatmaking, DJing/turntablism, the linguistic stylization of race and other social identities, regionalism in production and rap aesthetics, hip hop industries, and critical hip hop pedagogies (e.g., Alim, Ibrahim, Pennycook 2009; Alim, Lee, Carris 2010; Bucholtz 2001, 2011; Cutler 2009; Forman and Neal 2012; Katz 2012; Miller 2008; Miyakawa 2007; Rose 1994; Schloss 2004). "Elements" of hip hop, including graffiti-writing, breakdance, and non-traditional subjects have increasingly attracted ever-more specific ethnographic and historical attentions. Scholars now portray the "culture," once sometimes narrowly conceived in a way that downplayed the importance of

fashion, radio and TV production, filmmaking, and other creative disciplines, as more open-ended. Following the strength of this work on US hip hops, the category need not be understood in the exclusive terms of four “classic” elements, nor as a musical genre with particular formal properties.

I instead consider hip hop as a series of awkwardly interconnected creative social formations often glossed as “scenes.” Through their crafts, hip hop artists frequently, if sometimes only partially, shift their symbolic connections to people, ideas, and things across social boundaries. Hip hop continues to “happen” both during and in relation to late capitalism with all of the boundary-crossing artistic conventions, technologies, ideologies, and social movements such temporal co-occurrence implies. When domestic artists call some performance or text, broadly-defined, “hip hop,” this does a particular sort of historical work. In categorizing their creativity this way, Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian performers subject themselves to scene specific evaluative criteria that extend back in time and across boundaries (see also Briggs and Bauman 1992).

Telling the history of domestic, or as artists also sometimes call it, “Balkan” hip hop’s past necessitates articulating a position as to a) what meets the historiographic “threshold of significance” that makes an event, artist, or song worthy of remembrance; and b) a moral evaluation of changing creative genealogies, African-American and otherwise. Many homemade hip hop artists argue that US American hip hop’s virtue has become “corrupted” since the late 1990s by ever more insidious forms of commodification, depoliticization, and civic de-activism. Artists within the domestic scene(s) continue to often trace their creative genealogies to neighborhoods and counterparts in the US. However, they also regularly do so to artists across the new boundaries that emerged in the wake of the SFRY’s dismemberment.

In hip hop scholarship, “hip hop nation” sometimes emerges as a means of conceptualizing creative connections and shared genealogies within and among globally diverse institutions, people, and performances. Despite its playful quality, this term leads to a series of conceptual problems when applied to ex-YU. The nation is a group-based idiom that has provided the abstract ideological scaffolding for exclusivist violence. Through ethnography, we can interrogate symbolic connection and gaps within this globalized, and supposedly coherent music “scene.” A related problem exists in the increasing number of scholarly reports on “global hip hops” that followed Mitchell’s (2001) influential volume, *Global Noise*. Many feature a perhaps unavoidable postcard, *National Geographic* quality, focusing on states in which they occur, to the partial erasure of stories of not only emphatic, but also awkward interconnection, and contested entanglement. Scholars’ focus on nationally distinct scenes (e.g., “Hip hop in Germany,” “Hip hop in China”) sometimes occurs without foregrounding the processual mediations and significations of states. Abstract universals butt analytic heads with parochial particulars, and the romantic hopes of left-leaning scholars can filter research to avoid hip hop uptake that might be uncomfortable within US political worlds. To-date, I have focused my study, for example, largely on those homemade hip hop artists whose ethics have encouraged their transnational engagement. In the pages that follow, expressly *nationalist* hip hop makes appearances, but not yet to the extent that such is perhaps popular among certain prominent rappers and their audiences. The importance of hip hop’s interrelation to states and national mass media should be described and not analytically assumed.

Past narratives about hip hop’s domestic origins are revelatory of ethical and aesthetic positions that artists assume within their own scene(s). Having conducted research not only in ex-YU, but also in scenes in Paris, Dakar, Moscow, Ulaanbaatar, and Berlin, I share Mitchell and

Pennycook's (2009) desire to underscore that artists the world over who claim hip hop as their own often narrate their independence from American genealogies and see their creativity as always-already local. Laudable efforts to differentiate global hip hop scenes from those in the US also run the risk of missing how artists who identify with the hip hop idiom regularly (re-) negotiate an always-unfolding relationship not only to US cultural production, but also that of other states (Mitchell 2001; Pennycook and Mitchell 2009). "Hip hop" is a fluid, cosmopolitan category to which participants in scenes relate through unfolding practices including rapping/MCing, DJing, beatmaking, but also promotion, branding, and management among many others. In journalism and Americanist studies of hip hop, writers sometimes treat the category as self-evident. However, American intimates and even non-intimates alike know that the styles, ethics, and origin stories of "real" hip hop have long been subject to impassioned debates. Perhaps sometimes to a fault, but mainly due to its far from given presence in ex-YU, below I frequently ask: Who is using "hip hop" and related categories and why? Careful ethnographic attention should be shown to how artists trace their creative genealogies and symbolic relations to bodies of work. To refer to homemade hip hop's creative practices and products as "American," "African-American," "Croatian," "Serbian," "Bosnian," "Balkan" or otherwise is to take a stance first on historical genealogy; and second, on the presence (and/or absence) of national or otherwise cultural mediations. National radio, public schools, and standard languages may prove important topics for scholarly observation as each relates to hip hop, but so, too, are the institutions of neoliberal capital and supranational entities like the EU, as well as those of no longer extant states. Memories of nineteenth century Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and twentieth century Yugoslav state practice and governmentality may be explicitly and implicitly pertinent in today's homemade hip hop. How they emerge as important remains an

ongoing historical and ethnographic question that researchers must direct to artists. Narratives about creative genealogy can easily shift within histories that hip hop artists tell to themselves about themselves. At ethnographic issue is less what homemade hip hop “is” than what artists, distributors, and fans purport hip hop to be.

What commentators narrate as homemade hip hop’s “birth” and the early “waves” of its domestic expansion began in the 1980s, prior to the SFRY’s dismemberment. In the early days, radio played a key role in broadcasting sounds that were, then as today, sent out on the airwaves with various labels, including “electro,” “rap,” and “hip hop.” Performance reappeared with real gusto after being partially interrupted by conscription, war, sanctions, and the multinational realignment of the music industries. In the 2000s, homemade hip hop was one of the last genres that industries promoted according to a business model that sold small, but sustainable amounts of CDs. This changed after the expansion of Internet and illegal download. In interviews, artists use health, natural, and other idioms to describe the ebbs and flows of the scene(s) growth. For example, “waves” are often measured in terms of basic mathematics: How many concerts did a particular city organize? How many festival appearances did organizers plan in a given summer? How much audio(visual) programming can one find on television, radio, and label catalogs? Since next to no one is actually counting, waves also have much to do with the subjective feelings of presence or absence, exciting album or single releases. Given the biases built into my research, but also their own predilections, my informants often described the expansion of the scene(s) by way of developments in cities across ex-YU, where lyrics, shows, videos, fanzines, web portals all played roles in establishing shared senses of value as well as the terms of debate.

In interviews, documentaries, newspaper columns, and within songs, prominent acts have publicly discussed the pleasure, pride, but also challenges they faced in collaborating and

performing across ex-YU. Artists have collaborated across ethnonational lines on scores of influential recordings. Thus, when artists refer to “Balkan” hip hop, they frequently do so in a way consistent with hip hop rhetoric the world over: they celebrate and take pride in a geography often otherwise the source of stigma. Some of the bloggers, artists, and listeners who follow the scene(s) make an effort to explore all forms of BCS+M performance, often featuring coverage of Americans and sometimes including Slovenian, Macedonian, or other European scenes. Others, either implicitly or explicitly, focus their efforts more narrowly on their city or country.

When I first began my dissertation project in the mid-2000s, there was very little scholarly research on homemade hip hop. Since then, colleagues have published a number of short articles in journals, edited volumes, and online. Full length monographs are still next to non-existent. In one of the more extensive studies, Bosanac (2003) wrote about “transculturation” and “hybridity” in Croatian hip hop, thereby offering an essential early history of how many Zagreb-based performers actively established and maintained symbolic, creative, and professional connections to prominent American performers, including Ice-T, Public Enemy, and Big L in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This built on earlier work by Perasović (2001) who considered the subcultural practices of Zagreb’s hip hop scene. As Bosanac demonstrates, this community of listeners and artists was particularly interested in musics and styles that they identified with the African diaspora in the US. Writing about the social critiques of the beat fleet (tbf), an act from Split who was massively popular throughout Croatia and beyond, Škokić (2007) argues that “hybridity” proves a problematic analytic in relation to domestic hip hop, because the concept assumes “pure” cultural types that do not exist. Turning to another of Split’s prominent rap acts, Ćurković (2013) has discussed how Dječaci’s extensive calquing on

Anglicisms, particularly associated with hip hop's slangs and African American Vernacular English (AAVE), is a reflection of the continued presence of a hip hop aesthetic in their work.

More recently, Kovač (2013) and Cvetanović (2016) have considered the transnational collaborations, counterpublics, and anti-nationalist and anti-corruption messaging of Bosnian performers Frenkie and Edo Maajka, as well as their longtime collaborator from Belgrade, Marčelo. Papović and Pejović (2015) offer another analysis of hip hop as an avenue for “alternative” politics (for which definitions differ) and its limits, in their consideration of left populism in the more recent emergence of Belgrade's *Bombe devedesetih* (The Bombs of the Nineties). Banić-Grubišić (2010, 2013) worked specifically with Romani artists in Serbia. In some cases, NGOs encouraged their initial gravitation to hip hop's creative practices given organizational logic and rhetoric that saw the position of Roms and African-Americans as structurally similar in their respective societies. Her work offers another valuable extension toward our understanding of how the domestic scene(s) were “built for rap” according to a series of semiotic ideologies, including those of privileged outsiders hoping to advance the situation of the Serbian Romani minority. The extensive work of music journalists, bloggers, documentary filmmakers, and others who cover the domestic scene(s) online has also proven increasingly valuable to my research since I began.

### **Overview of Each Chapter**

In Chapter 1 — *Solidarity Poetics: Hip Hop Historiography and the Stakes of Storytelling* — I argue that domestic rap's historiographic ethics can either solidify, or alternatively, prevent the expansion of a centripetal, unitarian domestic scene. I explore how domestic rappers poetically evaluate the grand themes of the socialist past, the crisis-laden present, and promised European futures. What ethics vis-à-vis the recent past are dominant, contentious, and/or taken-

for-granted in rap lyrics? When do particular rapped pasts and moral inflections of events become a liability as songs move across the BCS-speaking territories? In domestic rap, many events since the 1990s during which transnationally active rappers came of age emerge as important chronotopes rife with lived experiences of nationalism, violence, and the expansion of informal economic trade.<sup>4</sup> “Engaged” (*angažovani/angažirani*) rappers often insist upon a certain approach to the past that is “dangerous for the system” (*opasan po sistemu*) that rappers describe to have certain qualities and characteristics. By inhabiting domestic selves with whom they are in conversation, I demonstrate how engaged performers voice and portray “nationalist” and/or “patriotic” discourses. These same rappers often move past critiques of nationalist voices to poetically reference today’s stop-start EU expansion during a period of financial collapse and accumulation by dispossession; increasingly imbalanced wealth distribution; police corruption; the drug trade; contested futures in Kosovo and B&H; state and NGO-led antinationalisms; and complicity of newly transnational entertainment industries in the post-socialist political economy. Peeling a layer back beyond such hot-button issues *du jour*, I show how rappers also thematize more pedestrian, yet interrelated topics, including empty-calorie fast foods, café-bars, gambling halls, sex, and supposedly “cheap” pop music. Newly transnational entertainment industries are a particularly fertile landscape of signs that can figure as technospectacular metonyms of more abstract political economic change. In Chapter 1, I devote particular attention to the expressly anti-nationalist, but also anti-corporate lyrics of three influential rappers – Marčelo, Frenkie, and General Woo. In their “storytelling” songs they evaluate historical epochs, including the nineteenth century, WWII, and the 1990s. Each MC has garnered a transnational

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<sup>4</sup> Bakhtin (1981) defines the chronotope as spatial and temporal indicators “fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. This intersection of axes and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope (84).”

listenership, while simultaneously exposing themselves to scandals and critique from skeptical peers.

In Chapter 2 — Debating the Industrial Limits of Homemade Hip Hop — I analyze artists’ discussions of professional limitations and the debates surrounding brand acts, or artists’ symbolic range of ambivalent, critical, and pragmatic stances toward media industries (Kohl 2016). The biographies of domestic artists, consumers, and distributors straddle a period of seemingly never-ending, teleologic “transitions.” These range not only from the broad, often violent systemic shifts from self-managed state socialism to clientelistic neoliberal democracy, but also within a regional music industry whose business models, according one informant, have become ever more “murky” (*mutno*). The Yugoslav music industry, which journalists and artists often portray as once the envy of other Eastern European states, underwent a dramatic transformation during the 1990s. Music scholars have explored in detail the war-time politicization of musical differences along national lines (e.g., Baker 2010; Čolović 2008; Gordy 1999) and are increasingly writing about the industry of the Yugoslav era (e.g., Vuletić 2010). However, scholars have yet to as systematically thematize the ongoing local transformations of the newly transnational music industry. Artists often narrate change in the record business in terms that offer interesting parallels and contrasts to the trajectories of other regional industries that have been subject to bankruptcy, offshoring, and forms of “rational” restructuring. Despite the proliferation of music festivals, independent labels, and clubs that distribute and support “alternative” genres, pursuing hip hop in any sort of professional capacity demands that most artists must have other sources of income. By the time of my field research, Apple’s iTunes, Spotify, Amazon, eBay, and other monopolistic online music distributors were slow to arrive in a region more markedly cornered by Google’s YouTube. Regional music rights organizations now

try to curb rampant illegal download and quasi-legal streaming in order to recoup profits. Artists often compare the precarious present of a marginal position within the technospectacular record business in ex-YU using frames that reference foreign and past elsewhere, including an era of “good life” socialism. Many artists debate whose future a new present of European integration laden with brands and industry regulation best serves.

In Chapter 3 — Who’s “More Musical”? Performing Mature Distinctions in the Domestication of Hip Hop DJing — I give an overview of the other domestic genres and styles that surround regional hip hop and offer DJs inspiration as foils, ideals, and creative semiotic fields from which they draw repertoires, samples, and approaches to musicianship. How do DJs describe their relationship to other domestic musics and musicians? In their musical self-understandings, genres ranging from today’s controversial market-dominating *folk pop* to “source” folk music (*izvorna narodna*), “newly-composed” orchestral folk (*novokompanovana narodna muzika/glazba*), and those with an Ottoman intermediacy including *sevdah*, *starogradske pesme* (“old urban songs”), and Balkan brass are all important sites of discursive reference that inspire creative practice. Yugorock/pop, electronic dance music (e.g., dubstep, grime, and house); and Afrodiasporic (jazz, soul, funk) genres also inspire everything from conversation to emulation and frustration. A whole range of sometimes hard to reconcile aesthetic predilections make “hip hop” itself a loose category of affiliation. I argue that, through their evaluations of these genres, DJs underscore their opinions regarding the social types they imagine to produce and consume these sounds. DJs’ implicit and explicit commentary on other genres often also relates to a) hip hop’s relatively peripheral industrial position in the regional musical marketplace; and b) a discomfort with DJ crafts being frowned upon as insufficiently “musical.” Distinctions that exist among domestic DJs are not limited to those that occur within

their feelings toward the region's nationalisms. Now that gigabytes of music are downloaded with swift mouse-clicks as opposed to painstakingly collected, older DJs lament the increased competition for scant gigs and what they see as the deterioration of listening and mixing practices. Their evaluations of the efficiency with which today's music files move through Category 5 cables stands in stark contrast to how they authenticate the challenges they faced in learning about DJing during the 1990s (Moore 2002). I devote particular attention to analyzing DJs' evaluative commentary concerning scratch technique, material relations to records, and repertory decisions. I found that they often valorize jazz, soul, funk, and *sevdah*, i.e., the supposedly "more musical" and mature genres at hip hop's margins. The focus of an older generation on glorifying studied techniques bespeaks their desire for DJing to be more than just a trendy, youthful identity embedded in a field of "cheap" technospectacles. They hope instead that DJing becomes an artistic vocation with greater domestic legitimacy.

Next, in Chapter 4 — The Unconventional Voices of the Domestic Rapbund — I analyze BCS-speaking rappers' discussion of their linguistic practices. I argue that rappers' general claim to represent a mass media "alternative" and the post-war regional culture industry's "underground" often implicates debates about language. Regional rappers employ linguistic registers to stylize a wide range of figures (Agha 2005), mobilizing different elements of language as a semiotic marker of social differentiation. I first compare regional rap's present-day compositional poetics to the "purifying tendencies" (Bauman and Briggs 2003) that emerged during the 1990s, when language standardization, literary canons, and orthographies re-emerged as tools of nationalist state-building in the wake of the Yugoslav Wars (see, for example, Friedman 1997; Greenberg 1996, 2008; Žanić 2007). The iconicity of variants of the pluricentric former Serbo-Croatian, including the new standards: Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and

Montenegrin; the dialects of štokavian: ijekavian, ekavian, ikavian; and the other regional dialects: kajkavian and čakavian; all emerge in rap lyrics that linguistically “rep” the “extreme local” (Forman 2000, 2002). However, equally important in domestic rap composition are a variety of urban “slangs,” often glossed as *šatrovački*, class-ed and gendered registers that “sound like” particular social groups, and canonical flows/prosodies. These are no less important to an understanding of homemade hip hop’s significations. MCs creatively deploy heteroglossic domestic voices that can “sound like” not only the extremely local, but also broadly domestic and explicitly foreign codes (including Standard American English, AAVE, and nearby European languages like German, Italian, etc.). Latin, Cyrillic, and non-standardized orthographies that cover designers present in digital and physical album packaging also often implicitly construct particular audiences. Through my analysis of register and metapragmatics in ex-YU hip hop, I show how *both* centripetal (monoglossic) and centrifugal (heteroglossic) social tendencies not only co-exist (see Friedman 1997; Greenberg 2008), but often exhibit a sort of dialectic simultaneity within domestic rap compositions. Domesticity is implicitly defined through the capacity to play with the linguistic signs of a broad range of both powerful and marginalized Others. Rappers creatively utilize the gender, class, racial, and ethnonational significations of linguistic codes to differentiate themselves from, or alternatively, align themselves with domestic audiences and particular peers.

In Chapter 5 — Nasty Notes, Cunninlynguistics, and Shady Sincerity: Voicing, Footing, and Monikers — following others, I demonstrate the limitations of mapping a one-to-one relation between artists and creative products and argue instead that domestic artists creatively deploy the dynamic relationship and symbolic gap between author and text. I devote particular attention to analyzing the beats, lyrics, and masked performances of the Slavonian “pornorap” duo,

Krankšvester. Their “screwing around” frequently involves the parodic stylization of a wide range of “commercial,” nationalist, and sexist social types through play, biting humor, and the layering of iconic signs of Others. Pseudonyms, footing, and voicing strategies make equating compositions with the “true” opinions or worldviews of authors difficult. How are footing and different voicing strategies used to create distance between artists and the moral messages of their creative products? How are social types across ex-YU parodied by performers (in)famous for *zajebancija*? When compositions are framed in terms of domestic hip hop categories like “screwing around” (*zajebancija*), “street” (e.g., *ulična* or “gangsta”), “commercial” (*komercijala*), or “engaged” (*angažovana/angažirana*), these shift expected relations between author, text, and performance.

## **Methodology**

My dissertation research is based on multiple, sporadic, pre-field trips to Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade dating back to 2003, and for a longer stint of 15 months between 2010-12. My first visit to Croatia was part of my broader at least temporarily failed effort to craft a documentary on hip hop outside of the US that also took me to Paris, Dakar, Moscow, and Ulaanbaatar under the auspices of the Watson Fellowship Program. Homemade hip hop first drew my attention when I first began encountering playlists, flyers, and collaborative recording projects from the Croatian scene in particular.

In the influential words of George Marcus (1995) all ethnography is multi-sited, however mine felt especially so. As any state-building project does, Yugoslav socialism sought to give stability to national signifiers whose meaning became extensively unmoored during the 1990s. The wars re-inscribed political and symbolic boundaries, new institutional projects, and imaginaries of ethnonational differences. My constant movement over 15 and many scattered

months allowed me to see this dynamic, but also deprived me of some of the ethnographic intimacy that animates anthropologists' dreams. In my transnational, multi-sited (self-) exploration, I focused on the category "hip hop," which as a research target, often felt far too unwieldy and broad, or alternatively, too narrow and limited.

This initial bias toward Zagreb, which had been a locus of hip hop expansion in the late 1990s, I carried throughout my research, largely due to the expedience closer personal connections provide. My efforts to make my project truly "BCS" remain a work-in-progress. Building on relationships that I made back in 2003, I regularly attended radio broadcasts of decidedly intermittent shows over 7 months. Initially, I had planned to spend significant time at Radio 101, but not long after I arrived in early 2011, the station fell victim to a structured bankruptcy. Thus, after 17 years of continuous, weekly broadcast on the iconic station, DJs Phat Phillie and FRX's program, *Blackout Rap Show* was temporarily cancelled before moving in 2012 to Croatia's first satellite station, Radio 808. In spring 2011, I began instead attending *Mixtape Sessions*, a weekly broadcast on Zagreb's Radio Student, which at the time — disappointing to many who hated seeing their scene shrink — remained the capital's only dedicated hip hop program.

Through my connections at *Mixtape Sessions*, I became involved in the pre-production of another, as yet unfinished documentary with DJs Chill and Dirty Hairy both based in Zagreb, who sought to weave a filmic narrative about their mixtape collaborations and vinyl digging. The objectives of the film were numerous. One goal the DJs had was to better acquaint audiences with the wealth of vinyl and experiments with funk, soul, jazz, and progressive rock that had been produced during the Yugoslav era. Beatmakers had sampled extensively from the catalogs of Jugoton, PGP-RTB, and other record labels, but many young listeners remained unfamiliar

with the sources of these domestic sounds. Another key objective they had was to better communicate to their younger peers that an earlier era of record store visitation and music collecting provided a face-to-face forum for music sociality that was eroding among those who were used to online communication, download, and YouTube. For the bulk of my stay in Zagreb and Belgrade, I also attended DJ workshops twice per week. At the time, these were gatherings that often included 3-5 aspiring DJs, beatmakers, and turntablists, much smaller regional equivalents of the Scratch Academies that have cropped up in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Atlanta, and Chicago since 2002. These workshops were another forum through which DJs sought to gain further domestic legitimacy, through their studied cultivation of beatmixing and scratch techniques.

Throughout my time in the field, I conducted countless informal and 48 formal, recorded interviews with participants somehow affiliated with the scene(s), whether as rappers, DJs, or beatmakers; or in less commonly studied roles of promoters and managers. The overwhelming majority of my interviewees were white, BCS+M-speaking men in their 20s and 30s, who with limited exception, also constitute the bulk of homemade hip hop's most visible artists. When possible, I made efforts to interview women active in the scene(s) in particular, but they often were exceptions that proved the rule. I also regularly attended festivals, concerts, and club performances throughout Croatia, B&H, and Serbia. I followed major news that occasionally reported on and blog media that expressly concerned the domestic scene. These included the entertainment sections of publications like Rijeka's *Novi list* and Belgrade's *Politika*, as well as dedicated online spaces like [blackouthiphop.com](http://blackouthiphop.com) and zine publications like *Bumsquad Magazine* and *My People*.

## Chapter 1

### **Solidarity Poetics: Hip Hop Historiography and the Stakes of Storytelling<sup>1</sup>** *Straßenvergangenheitsbewältigung*

When I conducted my fieldwork in 2010-12, particular poetic approaches to the past enabled journalists, listeners, and artists who composed lyrics and other media to regularly speak of an integrated domestic hip hop “scene.” This stood in contrast to segregated urban or Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin ones. So-called “engaged” (*angažovani/angažirani*) MCs have prioritized forging some degree of historical consensus in their creative works about political-economic transformations and the wars of the 1990s that dismembered socialist Yugoslavia. Some informants described engaged rap as an ethical imperative, a compositional style, a hip hop subgenre, and/or an ideology that circulates within the domestic scene(s). Engaged artists often ground their claims to authenticity in their explicit social and political critique in lyrics “with a message” (*sa porukom*). Music journalism often favorably reviews engaged performances that lyrically thematize national politics and social realities deemed injurious to an imagined body politic. Many also describe the sounds of “social engagement” as a necessary corrective in a music industry many often complain is overly romantic about Yugorock and saturated with “cheap,” “kitschy” folk pop hits, otherwise known as turbofolk, the oftentimes musical manifestation of what I call technospectacle. Many domestic rappers take it upon themselves to comment on historical eras in ways that, they often argue, are generally absent from the mass media and the rhetoric of politicians.

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<sup>1</sup> To my knowledge, the term, “hip hop historiography,” appeared first in Forman and Neal’s edited volume, *That’s the Joint! A Hip Hop Studies Reader* (2004, 2012). Despite the potency of their term, the relevant section of Neal and Forman’s volume offers less a “study of (hip hop’s) historical writing” than a smattering of illuminating early histories composed about graffiti writers, DJs, and political division in post-industrial New York. These were written conterminously with the multimodal performance genre’s earliest North American mass mediations during the 1970s-80s. I mobilize their term somewhat differently: I will explore how rappers in ex-YU consider the ethics of composing past narratives about historically sensitive topics.

Establishing veracity and falsehood about what *really* happened in the recent and more distant past preoccupy many of these rappers' verses. Rapped interventions into history are but one avenue of transnational interconnection across the domestic scene(s), which accompany guest appearances on albums, concert tours, and forms of audiovisual consumption.<sup>2</sup> Conservative voices throughout ex-YU, including some in the hip hop scene(s), are skeptical if not outright critical of cross-national affinities. Nonetheless, even though their ethics are contested, the prominence of engaged MCs has led forms of anti-nationalism to become emblematic of homemade hip hop itself.

Below I explore how artists lyrically and filmically craft social connections, or alternatively, distinctions. They do such through 1) minimizing/maximizing of intertextual symbolic gaps; 2) the ventriloquation of voices; and 3) the construction and evaluation of chronotopes; 4) the citation of ambivalent materials and objects; 5) speculation about supernatural intervention; and 6) the suggestion of possible historic and future alternatives. Historically poetic lyrics often focus on events, eras, places, and figures that feature prominently in the pasts of music scenes, neighborhoods, or cities; in countries and among their predominant national groups; and in regions or the broader international community. Domestic rappers voice *dramatis personae* from the past through the mobilization of direct and indirect discourse, which allows for both role play and flashback.<sup>3</sup> Their verbal art compliments intertextually rich lyrics

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<sup>2</sup> The New Yorker Fresh Island Festival, Pag's massive summer event at Adriatic hotspot Zrće Beach, began in 2012. Longtime Blackout Entertainment veterans, Phat Phillie and Stupni, organized the event. The star-studded festival lineup, including KRS-One, Nas, A\$AP Rocky, Snoop Dogg, Eve, and Iggy Azalea, builds upon Blackout's history of inviting prominent US American hip hop performers to tour in the region, while coupling them with regionally-popular acts. Bad Copy, Frenkie, Struka, and VIP among a whole slew of DJs from around Europe were among the first to attend.

<sup>3</sup> Alim (2006:152) has discussed American rapper Pharoahe Monch's use of flashback, role play, suspense, and imagery in the song "God Send," in which the MC's storytelling blends events marked as "fictional" with ones that have "actually occurred." I am also indebted to Alim's discussion of narrative sequencing in rap lyrics, which he argues is affected by flow, generally defined as "the relationship between the beats and the rhymes in time (94-95)."

that creatively play with various canons within hip hop and beyond. Short historically-grounded similes and metaphors interpellate audiences who understand them. By verbally deploying temporal markers, rappers make morally-weighted references and thus editorialize and evaluate the past. They also use non-verbal action to point to possible pasts, presents, and futures mediated through music videos. I close the chapter by examining the role of documentary films about homemade hip hop, the poetics of which run in many ways parallel to the techniques rappers deploy in lyrics. Through the poetic use of filmic references to material culture, archival audiovisual citation, and interview prompts, documentarians also assist the construction of an anti-nationalist scene with common approaches to the past.

According to Jakobson (1960), the poetic function of language extends beyond the rules of grammar to consider the importance of language in social context. The poetic element of any semiotic code, whether fashion, literature, film, or music, derives its meaning not merely from synchronic rules, but its diachronic deployment. To Bakhtin (1984), the revolutionary innovation of Dostoyevsky as an artist was the poetic polyphony that he brought to his novels, which broke from the standing nineteenth century Romantic tendency. Bakhtin argued that in the Romantic tradition, the author's voice was monologic and generally not filled with the dialogic world of "several author-thinkers — Raskolnikov, Myshkin, Stavrogin, Ivan Karamazov, the Grand Inquisitor, and others (5)." Bauman and Briggs (1990) have written extensively on the unfolding processes and political meanings of entextualization, decontextualization, and recontextualization of poetic forms. Each of these processes are shot through with politics, insofar as texts, once en-, de-, and/or recontextualized, inevitably shift their meanings once performed in distinct cultural spaces. In a related discussion on poetic process, Renov (1993) describes documentary film poesis to include four fundamental active tendencies: 1) to record,

reveal, or preserve; 2) to persuade or promote; 3) to analyze or interrogate; and 4) to express (21). All of these highly pertinent approaches treat poetics not only as a rarefied field of scholarly study that dates back at least to Aristotle, but also as an active set of different artistic processes. As any form of cultural production, artists' work occurs within cultural context, that necessarily is a construction of the author's imaginary. These scholars' emphasis on poetics—as-creative-process is relevant to my own discussion of "historical solidarity poetics." I also define this as an active process, whereby homemade hip hop artists utilize aesthetic and rhetorical techniques in lyric composition and their participation in documentary filmmaking that facilitates social coalition building (or breaking) in the domestic scene(s) (see also Bohlman 2011; Bohlman and Petković 2012).

The careful construction of allegory and synecdochic relations of vignettes and biography to broader national current events concerns MCs as it does anthropologists, historians, and others busily *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Thornton 1988). MCs Marčelo, Frenkie, and General Woo, the authors of the lyrics that I analyze, self-identify, at least occasionally, as a Serb, a Bosniac-Bosnian, and a Croat, respectively. Their selection out of a putative Adriatic Sea of possible domestic rappers should not be read as an outmoded Yugoslav-era, or new-fangled European multiculturalist political correctness on my part. Instead, reasons behind the appearance of Marčelo, Frenkie, and General Woo here abound. First, their ethnonational backgrounds are critical to their artistic decisions to advocate the *overcoming* of such divides through rap composition. Each MC constitutes part of what Holt (2007) has defined as "center collectivities," or "clusters of specialized subjects that have given direction (21)" to a larger "genre network" that composes, distributes, and consumes hip hop throughout Croatia, B&H, Montenegro, and Serbia. These artists and their songs received critical acclaim and broad

regional distribution at various points during my short pre-field (2003; 2007-09) and longer field (2010-2012) stays in Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade. Their influence was recorded and amplified by the music video and documentaries that I describe in the final section, the most recent of which, *Stand in (Stop on) the Way* (2015; *Stani na put*), casts all three as key experts on and participants in the history of the domestic scene(s). Importantly, each MC whom I describe below takes a position on discourses about nation and nationalism through their well-traveled rap lyrics, which often offer explicit moral stances on temporality, place, and public figures.

As many hip hop scholars have often observed, intra-scene discourses often demand that artists have lived experiences of personal struggles, that they symbolically “pay dues” to their artistic craft and its innovators, and that they aesthetically invoke certain sounds in order to be considered “real” by peers (for related discussions, see Marshall 2006; Rose 1994; and Schloss 2004 on sonic authenticity among American beatmakers). Domestic rappers who self-identify, however fleetingly, as “engaged” often valorize their own historical and prognosticating commentary on the basis of an honesty that audiences evaluate. Anti-nationalist MCs frequently portray politicians, rightwing musicians, and media moguls who fan national distinctions as “ethnopolitical entrepreneurs” (Brubaker 2004:10) in the back pocket of business elites and mafiosi. Artists argue that the relative absence of hip hop on ex-YU airwaves represents both an aesthetic deficiency and a dearth of moral and political messages that include preferable histories. This perceived lack means more authentic interpretations of the domestic past might go unheard without, ironically enough, Google’s YouTube. Artists’ feel that their poetic interventions should be disseminated to improve the “health” of broader bodies politic. A lost socialist-era “good life” is eminently felt on the body or in the ways of describing one’s health

(Jašarević 2017; see also Patterson 2011). Domestic rappers often take it upon themselves to demystify the “truths” that other mass media seem to occlude.

However, homemade hip hop’s representations of the past are rarely exclusively historicist. They are instead laden in the troubling and hopeful presence of supernatural interventions, similarly ambivalent objects, and suggestive alternative realities. Lyrical and filmic explorations of the supernatural — including encounters with the dead, Transformers, and space aliens — invade a sense of the past that homemade hip hop artists creatively weave. Throughout my intermittent fieldwork, rappers across ex-YU lyrically conjured fictional worlds that bled into more conventional history in different ways. In the 2003 track “Apparitions” (*Prikaze*), Edo Maajka narrates how he is haunted by aggressive creatures in the middle of the night. After relieving himself on a NATO base, a black cat and other frightening creatures interrupt his walk home from what should have been a mundane night of drinking and watching a soccer game. The everyday becomes corrupted by unexpected terrors. Groups like Dječaci have also lyrically and visually played with the animation of the dead. MC Vojko Vrućina addresses the violence of urban experience in the 2011 song, “Lovrinac.” All of the Dalmatian city of Split — which Vojko stereotypes as full of depressed, unsavory characters including drug dealers, pedophiles, rapists, and burglars — ends up at the cemetery for which the song is named.<sup>4</sup> In the “Lovrinac” video, Dječaci are pictured in the cemetery’s mausoleum rapping to a crowd of zombies. Through such deployment of unruly objects, the historical or present-day

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<sup>4</sup> Many of the imagined social figures rappers lyrically animate are indeed fictional, and even the public figures that emerge in rap are stereotyped to become signs of particular qualities that the artists attribute to them. Michael Lambek’s discussion (2002) of the *tromba* spirit mediums among the Sakalava in Madagascar bears mention (I discuss his work further below): “The centrality of character is of particular note, as well as the manner in which characters are constructed primarily by means of synecdoche (use of the part to represent some quality presumed to inhere in the whole) as the refinement of the once living person. Indeed, the ‘heart’ of characters is frequently to be discovered in the form of their deaths, and posthumous praise names further distill the quality. The personage is, in turn, synecdochal for his or her epoch, epitomizing its central qualities (65).”

“real” blends with the fictional. The supernatural living dead also become actors in the unfolding of urban and national histories.

In the social sciences, humanities, and within NGOs, anti-nationalist discourses focus often on the contemporary need to “come to terms with the past” (*suočavanje s prošlošću*) in the tradition of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung(-en)* since World War II. Despite the passé nature of the “ancient hatreds” narrative that described Yugoslav successors as being supposedly driven by a pre-modern fratricidal tendency, prominent domestic rappers often argue that ex-YU remains tainted by ideological excess. Frenkie, for example, describes how his experiences of a German school curriculum that developed in a post-WWII pedagogical atmosphere of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* had a powerful, inspirational effect on him as a refugee reflecting on domestic nationalisms:

I lived in Germany. And in the eighth grade, some of my friends from school started a bit to wear those boots with white shoe strings and to shave their heads bald. That is, that kind of Nazi vibe grabbed them (*uhvate ih taj neki Nazi fazon*), that fashion and all of that. They started listening to that music. And then came that day when we went on a school field trip to Dachau. Dachau was a concentration camp in German territory. And when we circled around those spaces, chambers, pictures, inscriptions... when we saw what happened there... I could literally follow their change after that when I saw two days later that they no longer wore those boots and began growing their hair out again. Let’s say a school trip from, I don’t know, Banja Luka goes to Srebrenica. Children from the Federation should maybe need to go visit Kazani. I think that after a couple years, we would soon see changes in them and the coming generations, that there would not be any more of those chants (*parola*) at stadiums, that it wouldn’t be still seen as *cool* or *in* (orig. English) and dangerous (*opasnim*, used similarly to mean “bad” meaning “good” or “cool” in American vernacular) and desirable, and that people would start to be embarrassed about what they say and how they think (Sokolović 2014).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Ja sam živeo u njemačkoj. I u osmom razredu neki od mojih školskih prijatelja već počeo malo da nose ove čizme i bijele pertle i da briju glavu ćelavu. Znači uhvate ih taj neki Nazi fazon, ta moda, i sve to, počeli su slušati tu muziku. I onda je došao taj dan kad smo otišli ekskurziju u Dachau. Dachau je bio koncentracioni logor na njemačkom teritoriju. I kad smo obišli prostorije te komore, slike, napise, i kad smo vidjeli šta je se tu dešavalo. I ja sam mogao bukvalno da pratim njihovu promenu nakon toga kad sam video da oni dva dana nakon toga više nisu nosile te čizme, i kad su ponovno počeli da puštaju kosu. Recimo ekskurzija iz ne znam Banja Luke ode u Srebrenicu. Djeca iz Federacije bi možda trebalo da obiđu Kazanu. Mislim da bi kroz par godina već vidjeli

Here, Frenkie clearly invokes the pedagogical imperatives of “coming to terms with the past” that he would see applied not only to curricula in Germany, but also in B&H. Notably, in the filmed interview, Frenkie establishes his position regarding the past by way of a story of a school trip to Dachau. As in much domestic rap, the signs of the nationalist Other — boots, stadium hooligan chants, skinheads, certain forms of music, places of genocide and mass murder — are set in distinction to anti-nationalist homemade hip hop. Interviews here run parallel to rappers’ techniques. To invoke “the Balkans” as a shared space is not politically innocent, but constitutes an appeal to an identity that the divisive nationalisms of the 1990s often sought to deny. Engaged rap denies that certain forms of ideology are temporally coeval with their own philosophies of history which MCs believe should dominate (Fabian 2002). “Uneducated” nationalists, “lying” politicians, and other “hypocrites” become the culprits behind the region’s supposed allochronicity and separation from an increasingly unmoored modernity. I say “unmoored,” because at least during my period of field research, the assorted trans-Atlantic crises of sovereign national debts, the Occupy Movement, and revelations concerning Western surveillance states struck many domestic observers as indices of the West’s imminent wane.

In Marčelo’s “Shadows” (2005; *Senke*) Frenkie’s and “*Nerko*” (2009) poetics that implicate domestic history open slowly. In his rapped story of a veteran friend, Frenkie maintains narrative suspense through the careful revelation of details and timing. In both songs, the rappers mobilize person deixis, and thus the problem of point of view takes on special interest: their rapped reported speech is often double-voiced and the question of who specifically is being addressed is difficult to parse. General Woo’s 2011 song, “Why Are You Silent Now?” (*Zašto*

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*promene na njima i na sljedećim generacijama da više ne bi bila takva parola na stadionima, da ne bi se više to smatralo cool i in i opasnim i poželjnim i da onda bi ljudi počeli da se srami što govore i kako razmišljaju.”*

*sada šutite?*) likewise mobilizes a wide array of intertextual symbolic gaps and links toward its evaluations of the past (see Bauman 1986:35). Listeners, journalists, and artists themselves often celebrate rap's ability to tell "densely indexical" evaluative stories (Ibid. 76), describe events, and to present biographies that appear otherwise absent or inadequately represented within the present-day mass media as one of hip hop's greatest strengths. Yet despite this morally-inflected "strength," what rappers frame as corrupting "threats" of technospectacular industries of which nationalism remains the cheapest product always loom on the horizon.

In the direct, ambivalent, or oblique evaluations of the past one finds in song, album packaging, concerts, music videos, documentaries and other media, artists often consciously adopt orientations to audiences that might be seen between two poles on a spectrum. Neither orientation is discrete. In fact, they often co-exist. First, hybrid orientations toward audiences are ones that artists know feature portrayals of the past likely to have *broad* appeal across locally salient boundaries of social differentiation, such as ethnonationality, class, or aesthetic predilection. Alternatively, purifying orientations might include those approaches to the past that appeal to a *narrower* or intimately conceived imagined audience. Here, I am drawing on Bauman and Briggs' description (2003) of the "hybridizing" and "purifying" strategies that are inherent in the ideologies of modern language philosophy.

Beyond aesthetic and class debates that I address in the bulk of my dissertation, engaged MCs' orientations to history implicate national identity. In the cases that I identify, artists' hybridizing narrative orientation has allowed a whole cohort to build an ethnonationally diverse (but still largely heterosexual male and BCS+M-speaking) listenership that spans newly transnational borders. In no particular order, the experiences of multiple education regimes (and approaches to history), deindustrialization, corrupted privatization processes, living with one's

parents, (hyper-)inflation, un(der)employment, hustling and counterfeiting, state dismemberment, looking for a job, socialist self-management, Cold War Non-alignment, international oversight and sanctions are chronotopic themes that emerge in domestic rap narratives. Likewise, back-in-the-day reminiscences that include tasty meals, memorable parties, and great songs are every bit as important to crafting a cohesive domestic scene.

In short, I discuss the different ways in which homemade hip hop artists use their creative work to establish what the historian J.G.A. Pocock (1962) once referred to as “past-relationships.” Pocock defines the “past-relationship” as the “specialized dependence of an organized group or activity within society on a past conceived in order to ensure its continuity (213).” Pocock’s charismatic term, one that can be applied to any action, individual, or group that maintains a relationship of any sort to the past, is one that has been adopted in recent social scientific work concerning the anthropology of history. Below I turn to this literature briefly in an effort to illuminate the multiple ways, often oblique and ambivalent, that homemade hip hop artists establish their own past relationships. I foreground three idioms in my discussion of historical poetics in homemade hip hop practices: supernatural intervention, material citation, and the alternative imagination.

In order to capture the diverse range of historical practices that exist in homemade hip hop, I have found it necessary to employ a broad theoretical frame. Recent scholarly work on the anthropology of history has insisted on questions such as: What assumptions, principles, and practices lie behind the representation of the past? What is the social praxis of history, and what does it do in the world? According Palmié and Stewart (2016): “The anthropology of history requires new vocabulary, since ‘historiography’ is manifestly inapplicable to dreaming, dancing, spirit possession, walking through newly reforested areas, or even collecting postage stamps

(226).” To anyone familiar with literatures on so-called “cultures of memory,” interpretive moves that take a range of “commemorative” practices seriously will not seem foreign.<sup>6</sup> However, an anthropology of history is directed toward more than “memory” and “commemoration” alone. The field seeks to instead illuminate different cross-cultural conceptions of and ethical obligations toward the past itself. Lyrical evaluations, documentary films, and music videos, among countless creative forms, establish homemade hip hop artists’ dynamic relations to the past, thus any observer must engage past-relationships crafted outside of those found in formal historical writing.

One ostensibly distant example from an influential writer in this emergent field will hopefully serve to illustrate the cultural particularity of writerly historiography. Anthropologist Michael Lambek (2002) analyzes how the Sakalava of Madagascar practice a spirit mediumship, wherein they embody the presence of dead former rulers. According to local cosmology, these former leaders from different historical epochs continue to live and exert influence over the present. Practitioners re-animate known figures who led biological lives dating back to the colonial era and beyond with whom they can talk and interact in the here and now. As Lambek (2002) writes, “the history in question proceeds less by means of abstract theorizing or objective marshalling of facts than by embodying the forces, characters, and arguments of history, bearing them forth and engaging practically with them (4).” What Lambek calls “historical poesis” includes those moments of practical engagement. History is thus a matter of both ideation and practice, wherein significations of historical events and figures are constantly being re-performed

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<sup>6</sup> Klein (2000) and others are dubious as to the value of “memory” as an analytic. Quoting Young (1994), Klein skeptically refers to such as “psychoneurotic jargon (cited in Klein 2000).” Given the amount of scholarly work produced under the sign of “memory studies,” I am reluctant to be equally dismissive. In fact, here I am instead suggesting that some of the practices subsumed under the category of “memory” and subsequently studied might be more productively considered as anthropologies of historical practice.

and reshaped.<sup>7</sup> Sakalava historicism, like that of the West, is frequently lodged within a “plurality of alternative practices (Palmié and Stewart 2016:207).” Such is certainly true of the homemade hip hop scene(s). Becker’s anachronistic but appropriately gendered terms, “everyman [is] his own historian (1932),” is applicable to a field of creative practice dominated by male rappers.<sup>8</sup> However, the conventions of establishing past-relationships in homemade hip hop assume many forms beyond formal histories.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Here, I am also reminded of Buchanan’s (2006) eminently useful term, “ethnohistoricism,” which she defines as “ethnographically solicited perceptions of the past, whether connected to historical events, customs, or conceptualizations of tradition (27).” The emphasis she places on the “ongoing process” of history and its “dialectical and mutually grounding” connection to ethnography during the post-1989 Bulgarian transition resonates greatly with Lambek’s “historical poesis.” Indeed, no “history” of the Sakalava that takes their cosmology seriously seems possible without ethnography. Is such not also true of the West and its semi-periphery, regardless of historicism’s dominant, formal academic position?

<sup>8</sup> Becker reflects on the porous boundary between history as a profession and the everyday, mundane historical practices of a character he calls, “Mr. Everyman.” While he writes in a tone that bears the (hauntingly familiar) ethnocentricity and gender biases of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, he nonetheless captures the bleed of historical practices into other fields beyond professional historiography:

What then of us, historians by profession? What have we to do with Mr. Everyman, or he with us? More, I venture to believe than we are apt to think. For each of us is Mr. Everyman, too. Each of us is subject to the limitations of time and place; and each of us, no less than for the Browns and Smiths of the world, the pattern of remembered things said and done will be woven, safeguard the process how we may, at the behest of circumstance and purpose (1932:230).

His article on “Mr. Everyman” thus presages some of the same impulses of anthropologies of history, which seek, among other things, to analyze fashionings of history in a range of “mundane” media beyond Western academic historiography. Becker writes that Mr. Everyman:

can readily recall the days of his youth, the places he has lived in, the ventures he has made, the adventures he has had — all the crowded events of a lifetime; and beyond and around this central pattern of personally experienced events, there will be embroidered a more dimly seen pattern of artificial memories, memories of things reputed to have been said and done in past times which he has not known, in distant places which he has not seen. This outer pattern of remembered events that encloses and completes the central pattern of his personal experience, Mr. Everyman has woven, he could not tell you how, out of the most diverse threads of information, picked up in the most casual way, from the most unrelated sources — from things learned at home and in school, from knowledge gained in business or profession, from newspapers glanced at, from books (yes, even history books) read or heard of, from remembered scraps of newsreels or educational films or *ex cathedra* utterances of presidents and kings, from fifteen-minute discourses on the history of civilization broadcast by the courtesy (it may be) of Pepsodent, the Bulova Watch Company, or the Shephard Stores in Boston. Daily and hourly, from a thousand unnoted sources, there is lodged in Mr. Everyman’s mind a mass of unrelated and related information and misinformation, of impressions and images, out of which he somehow manages, undeliberately for the most part, to fashion a history, a patterned picture of remembered things said and done in past times and distant places (Ibid. 229).

Since 2000, which marked the year of Milošević's extradition to The Hague and the first anniversary of NATO's supposed "humanitarian" effort in Kosovo, domestic rappers have mobilized signs of economic stagnation, a corrupt political-economic elite, and the purported moral detachment of the younger generation to describe the often never-ending horizon of EU candidacy. As director Nemanja Đerić and his artist interviewees thematize in the aforementioned documentary, *Stand*, the turn of the millennium also marked the release of Tram 11's celebrated album *Man, Don't Get Mad/Annoyed* (*Čovječe ne ljuti se*), which inspired young would-be rappers and beatmakers across ex-YU.<sup>10</sup> Lyrics such as those which I analyze below often argue that the nationalisms of the 1990s served to achieve goals of a narrow class of interests removed from the more humble, authentically domestic aspirations of most of ex-YU's population. Certain forms of poetic emphasis and evaluation indexically point to the engaged rapper.

In the three sections that follow, I will first explain why I chose the rapper and lyrics that I provide on the basis of a short overview of relevant details from each MC's biography. Second, I will offer a brief description of each song's potency as music, a discussion which is grounded in ethnographic observation of domestic hip hop artists' considerations of value. Rapped stories are embedded with values above and beyond their referential content (Bauman 1986:3). Despite my emphasis on the lyrically poetic strategies of communicating a historical message, I will

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Becker's description of the non-standard history of Mr. Everyman is thus useful in thinking of Western historicities that co-exist alongside historicism — not only in heyday of Pepsodent, but also in the age of Twitter, "fake news," and homemade hip hop. Each become a platform for mediating a sense of the past.

<sup>9</sup> The point here is not to say homemade hip hop is any more discrete in its historical practices than are those of the Sakalava. Indeed, standard fact-based historicism certainly circulates as an ideology among spirit mediums and domestic rappers. Instead, what I hope to capture here are the broad ways of being historical that emerge from the domestic hip hop scene(s). In this sense, Lambek's "historical poesis" likewise becomes a useful analytic.

<sup>10</sup> The album name references the popular European board game, known in German as *Mensch ärgere Dich nicht*, which Josef Friedrich Schmidt first developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and ended up being popular among soldiers in the trenches and the war-wounded in German hospitals during WWI.

devote some words to music, which is an essential component of each songs' affective weight. Third, I closely analyze verse excerpts, explaining their place within the song's broader lyrical narrative. Many of the "imagined" characters with whom rappers dialogue are indeed fictional, and even the public figures that emerge in the text are stereotyped to become signs of particular qualities that the artists attribute to them. Of course, these MCs draw on all-too-real personal experience in their creative work, of which their interviews with ethnographers, journalists, and documentarians are a part. In my own space-bound writing process below, I make no secret of the fact that I am engaged in a heavy process of selection, omission, and rhetorically strategic emphasis. In my defense, I believe that the exercise of considering shared elements across a broad array of rich performances requires such imperfect tactics.

**Marčelo's "Shadows" –  
Your Tragic-Comic Nationalism Misinterprets Our Beautiful Folklore**

By the time of his *Puzzle Shock!* album release in 2005, MC Marčelo was well on his way to becoming an active member of the Serbian political commentariat. Today, Marčelo is an accomplished novelist who has collaborated with celebrated writers (including David Albahari). He has performed in concert venues, festivals, and book clubs across ex-YU. As Marčelo discusses in biographical writings, his meteoric rise also made him a lightning rod for debates internal to Serbia's hip hop scene. Šelić proudly claims the historical distinction of authoring the first post-war rap album to feature a Serbian, Bosnian, and Croatian musical co-production. Some of his most popular collaborations include those with Edo Maajka, Frenkie, and Elemental. Alongside his studies of Serbian literature at Belgrade's Faculty of Philology, these songs are a source of pride and social capital he references not only in his lyrics, but at live performances, in

public interviews, and in his promotional material.<sup>11</sup> Below, I purposefully limit myself to the consideration of three poetic aspects of Marčelo’s rich lyrical messages. Drawing an early song from *Puzzle Shock!* from 2005, I first consider his intertextual play with and re-imagination of canonical literature and technospectacular pop music. Second, I examine the MC’s ventriloquation of nationalist discourse. Third, I show how Marčelo seeks to expose hypocrisy and anachronism in the time-spaces of the Serbian rightwing. As we shall see, the overwhelming intertextual connections that Marčelo draws involve the symbolic manipulation of a series of gaps between genres, performers’ significations, and repertory references.

One of the most prominently featured forms of intertextual gap play to be found in “Shadows” (*Senke*) is Marčelo’s recurrent reference to the chorus of the nineteenth century romantic poet Jovan Jovanović Zmaj’s “Bright Graves” (*Svetli grobovi*) which the MC cleverly re-signifies. Marčelo’s reference to the poem is most clear in the chorus of “Shadows,” which runs:

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| 1 We are all shadows of the past                           | <i>Svi smo senke prošlosti</i>               |
| 2 Tomorrow is yesterday, where are we today,<br>you and I? | <i>sutra je juče, gde smo danas ja i ti?</i> |
| 3 Are the “graves bright?”                                 | <i>Dal’ su “svetli grobovi?”</i>             |
| 4 Or are the dead already long tired?                      | <i>ili su mrtvi već odavno umorni?</i>       |

Schools often place Zmaj within the pantheon of Serbian revolutionary thinkers. According to Erdei (2007), Zmaj’s aforementioned canonical composition “speaks of the promise of

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<sup>11</sup> For the collaboration with Elemental, see “Escape” (*Bekstvo*) from Marčelo’s 2003 album *De Facto*. The biographical insert on the inside cover of Šelić’s first novel (2008) reads: “Alongside his other activities, through his activism (Šelić/Marčelo) advocates tolerance among young people of the Balkans: he supports the initiatives of the Belgrade Anti-Violence Center, and his collaborations with Edo Maajka (Bosnia) and Elemental (Croatia) was the first musical collaboration and united message of young people from the ex-YU territories after the wars of the 1990s (*Kroz svoje aktivnosti, između ostalog, zalaže se za toleranciju među mladima Balkana: pomaže akcije beogradskog Centar za nenasilje, a njegova saradnja sa Edom Maajkom (Bosna) i Elemental (Hrvatska) bila je prva muzička saradnja i zajednička poruka mladih ljudi sa ex-YU terena nakon rata devedestih.*)” It should be noted that NGOs are also a part of ex-YU’s modest “hip hop industry.” In contrast to the US, academic institutions in ex-YU do not play a significant role in supporting hip hop artists and scholars with any form of financial support.

descendants to continue what their ancestors began, the continuous sacrifice of many generations for the noble cause” of Serbian independence (82). In a classic nationalist vein, Zmaj frames the graveyard of Serbia’s fallen heroes as not only a place for the dead, but also the “cradle” of a nation’s life. The opening 19 lines of his 1881 poem follow:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 Have you been, my young brethren,          | <i>Bejaste li, braćo moja mlada,</i>     |
| 2 Have you ever been to a graveyard,         | <i>Da l' bejaste vi na groblju kada,</i> |
| 3 To a large graveyard?                      | <i>Aj' na groblju, na golemu?</i>        |
| 4 – Well, we are always in a graveyard.      | <i>— Ta uvek smo mi na njemu.</i>        |
| 5 The earth we walk on is a graveyard;       | <i>Groblje j' zemlja kom se hodi;</i>    |
| 6 The water we sail on is a graveyard;       | <i>Groblje j' voda kom se brodi;</i>     |
| 7 Yards and gardens are graveyards;          | <i>Groblje — vrti i gradine;</i>         |
| 8 Hills and valleys are graveyards,          | <i>Groblje — brda i doline,</i>          |
| 9 Each foot                                  | <i>Svaka stopa:</i>                      |
| 10 Grave next to grave.                      | <i>Grob do groba.</i>                    |
| 11 The monument of all times is a graveyard; | <i>Groblje j' spomen doba sviju,</i>     |
| 12 The books we read are a graveyard;        | <i>Groblje — knjige što se štiju,</i>    |
| 13 The history book of all lands,            | <i>Povesnica svih zemalja,</i>           |
| 14 Of the olden emperors, kings,             | <i>Starostavnik cara, kralja.</i>        |
| 15 And the obituary of higher images         | <i>I čitulja viših slika</i>             |
| 16 Of the chosen ones, of martyrs,           | <i>Izbranika, mučenika,</i>              |
| 17 From as far back as memory goes;          | <i>Od početka pamtiveka,</i>             |
| 18 It’s all a graveyard –                    | <i>Sve j' to groblje —</i>               |
| 19 But a cradle too.                         | <i>Al' je i kolevka.</i>                 |

Zmaj’s poem resonated among his contemporary readership, when Serbia’s independence from centuries of Ottoman rule since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century was formally recognized by Europe’s imperial powers at the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

Marčelo’s “Shadows” opens with what sounds like a sample drawn from Carl Orff’s compositions for *Carmina Burana*. A melodic phrase played on the violin looped over a 4/4 rhythm at nearly 100 beats per minute feels faster thanks to DJ Raid’s virtuosic introductory double-time scratch solo. When the song and video were released, turntablist technique was extremely rare in homemade hip hop production, which added to the aesthetic impact of

“Shadows.” As yet unidentified vocal samples drawn from American rappers are scratched and otherwise sampled during the initial few bars of the beat: “chelo...,” “This is how we exist,” “We’ve waited too long,” “The future looks better than the past,” thereby adding an English language philosophical scaffolding to the lyrics that follow.

The first 16 bars of Marčelo’s syllable-laden first verse follow. The numbering below corresponds not to the bars, but to formatting of the lyrics as they appear in a 2009 collection:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 Conspiracy theories in the skull of a psycho  | <i>Teorija zavere u lobanji jednog sajka:</i>                       |
| 2 a hanging rope attached to mothers – give it to me and run!                               | <i>gajtan do majka – daj ga, pa hajka!</i>                          |
| 3 like a typhoon – that’s what I am for that plague   | <i>tajfunu ravan – taj sam za gamad</i>                             |
| 4 Anthrax for hillbillies – it’s a scary farce  | <i>antraks za ljaksad – strašna je farsa</i>                        |
| 5 Give us all the dough in the registers, because I vote                                    | <i>sav kajmak iz kasa daj nam jer glasam,</i>                       |
| 6 At the top of my voice...and what now?  | <i>iz sveg glasa ...i šta sad?</i>                                  |
| 7 Tsunamis and SARS for all the people’s painful cries                                      | <i>Cunamija i sarsa za sav taj narodni vapaj</i>                    |
| 8 - so die, you nation of cancer!   | <i>- pa skapaj, nacijo raka!</i>                                    |
| 9 A dream woven by the crutches of club-footed patriots                                     | <i>San satkan akcijom štaka ćopavih rodoljuba</i>                   |
| 10 am I really an embarrassment to my parents   | <i>- zar sam sramota roditelja,</i>                                 |
| 11 if I don’t fuck with wars, because they all have an editor?                              | <i>ako ne jebem ratove jer svaki ima reditelja?</i>                 |
| 12 You’re shitting me, man, reducing me to a traitor to our “great race”!                   | <i>Seri, tebra, svedi me na izdajnika naše “više rase”!</i>         |
| 13 Yo, people, it’s planned for you – but you are suited to the shade                       | <i>Ljudi bre, vama je smešteno – al’ vam ladovina paše...</i>       |
| 14 A flyer from a protest of the radicals: “The whole planet is Serbian, by god”!           | <i>Anketa s mitinga radikala:</i>                                   |
| 15...All they [you can] hear is Alka Kurvica [Allie the Whorlet] from the “pink station”... | <i>"Cela planeta srpska, vala!"</i>                                 |
| 16 meanwhile its “let’s impale Marčelo and that chick from Elemental”                       | <i>...samo se sluša Alka Kurvica s “ružičastog kanala”...</i>       |
| 17 “What desertion, blablabla – their hand slit our throat!”                                | <i>...al’ zato na kolac Marčela i “ribu iz Elementala”:</i>         |
| 18...as far as I am concerned, beat your dick with the CD, but you’re not very bright.      | <i>"Ma kakvo 'Bekstvo', tralalala – njihova ruka nas je klala!"</i> |
|   | <i>...što se mene tiče, nabij disk o kurac, al’ nisi mudrac.</i>    |

19 You're a messed up disco brother, what you say and the positions that you have. *Jadni disko buraz, tvoja zika i tvoj stav koji furaš.*

Throughout “Shadows,” Marčelo frames Serbian nationalism as tragically anachronistic, a temporal black hole sucking both present and future backward. Nationalism is an ideology that has become a source of potential exhaustion for the already dead. In contrast to Zmaj’s romantic exaltations to Serbia’s young, Marčelo argues that grandfathers would not want him or his age cohort to continue to suffer in the name of what the rapper frames as a false (or outdated) national consciousness. In the second verse, he implores young listeners not to die “in the name of order,” which is the party’s “chess game” (*deco ne ginite radi reda, sve je to partija šaha*). Marčelo’s rhetorical question from the chorus in which he invokes the title of Zmaj’s poem: “Are there ‘bright graves?’ Or are the dead already long tired?” (*Dal’ su ‘svetli grobovi?’ ili su mrtvi već odavno umorni?*)

Zmaj’s suggestion that patriotism lies in continued corporeal sacrifice is called into question. Marčelo offers an opportunity for his public to challenge the wisdom of romantic poetry that demands continued fighting, when “we also have prettier things to be proud of than graves.”<sup>12</sup> He imaginatively grants the dead agency to change their minds. Marčelo begins his first verse by conjuring apocalyptic imagery, which he successfully navigates. In Lines 1-4, we are set in a battle rap composition, in which the MC uses hyperbole comparing himself with natural disaster and disease to suggest that he is capable of dealing with the “plague” of “hillbillies.” The destruction that he describes may unfold in the skull of a psycho. He implies that politics are a scary farce: voters believe that they will be rewarded for participating in

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<sup>12</sup> “*imamo i lepše stvari za ponos, nego grobove!*”

elections.<sup>13</sup> Then the disaster continues. Tsunamis and SARS produce people's cries. The setting in which the remainder of the song unfolds is filled with such chaos, and the negatively-inflected "psycho," "scary," "farce," and "cancer" suggest a crisis situation bordering on the absurd.

### *Contrasting with the Nationalists*

The first instance in which Marčelo makes nationalist discourse is on Line 8, when Marčelo commands the "nation of cancer" to die directly through the imperative and vocative case. Marčelo hopes that his nation, "a dream made by the work of crutches of clubfooted patriots," will stop producing national pride through exclusionary politics. The message is direct (e.g., "Even though the Fatherland is a mother/she's committing infanticide") and involves heavy intertextual reference that links canonical poetry with the personal histories of politicians, pop stars, and even the artist himself.<sup>14</sup> Marčelo suggests that parents can still be proud of their children even if they aren't soldiers (Line 11).

Here, the MC also begins to voice discourses marked as nationalistic, and often these are set off by quotes in the published version of his lyrics. Here, despite the lyricized violence, Marčelo inhabits a non-violent stance in comparison to the violence that lingers behind the actions of his rightwing peers. In Line 12, we have the reappearance of the second person through the locution: "You're shitting me, bro" in which the MC deploys a well-known *šatro* slang word, "*tebra*." Marčelo attacks his interlocutor for reducing the MC to a "traitor of our 'great race.'" According to the imagined flyers at the protest of Marčelo's radicals, and here the lyrics are doubled and the voices deepen to a monotonous, masculine shout, characteristic of

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<sup>13</sup> This is one of the few instances in which Marčelo offers metacommentary on "Shadows" in his collection (Šelić 2009:26): "Here, in the first person I said the position of those who regularly vote. Otherwise, I have only voted a pair of times in my life, and then only *against* and never *for*. Although those *against*s of mine are really always *at the top of my voice* (*Ovde sam, zapravo, u prvom licu izrekao stav onih koji redovno glasaju - a inače, glasao sam samo par puta u životu, pa i tada samo protiv a ne za. Premda to moje protiv sve vreme jeste iz sveg glasa*)."

<sup>14</sup> See the first line of the second verse: "*Ako je otadžbina majka, fakat fura čedomorstvo*"

other parodic stylizations of chauvinist-speak, “The whole planet is Serbian!,” which harkens back to Milošević’s efforts to unite the region’s Serbian-speaking Orthodox population in one contiguous Serbian political entity, this time lampooned through the desire for a most extreme terrestrial desire. This is a throwback to nineteenth century nationalist politics that were revived by the Serbian Radical Party (SRS) in the 1990s. The oft-discussed politics of “Great(er) Serbia” seem particularly ludicrous when cast as a transglobal ambition, which underscores Marčelo’s disdain for the irredentist-expansionist project that dreamed of a monoethnic state in a way that constituted a real nightmare for Others.<sup>15</sup>

In the video to “Shadows,” Marčelo’s lyrical battle is accompanied by images from protests of the SRS, footage of which was shot on the streets of Belgrade. In addition to Ceca (the notorious turbofolk star and widow of paramilitary criminal, Željko Ražnatović Arkan), images of other prominent Milošević-era leaders such as Radovan Karadžić and Vojislav Šešelj can be seen in the “Shadows” video. Up until the summer of 2008, the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) had long sought Karadžić for his role in the Yugoslav Wars first as head of Bosnia’s Serbian Democratic Party and later as the first President of the Serbian Republic in B&H. A politician, poet, and musician, Karadžić was found guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity after more than a decade in hiding as a “New Age” doctor before his capture in 2008. Marčelo’s visual inclusion of Ratko Mladić, Radovan Karadžić, and Vojislav Šešelj’s images being sold by street vendors on keychains, t-shirts, and other rightwing “merch” is particularly notable within a song that draws part of its affective weight through a critical reevaluation of Zmaj’s romantic poetry. Trained on the *gusle*, Karadžić was known to

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<sup>15</sup> See Živković (2011) and Gordy (1999) for discussions of “*Velika Srbija*” as a political platform. The expression, “speak Serbian so that the whole world understands you” (*govori srpski da te ceo svet razume*) often is deployed in a similarly double-voiced fashion to poke fun at nationalist discourse through its exaggeration.

have had a deep reverence for Serbian and Montenegrin epic poems. Not only did he claim descent from Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, the nineteenth century philologist and language reformer, but he also drew dangerous inspiration from the “Mountain Wreath” by Petar II Petrović-Njegoš.<sup>16</sup> The work of Njegoš held a parable for Karadžić, as he imagined the supposed “threat of Islamicization” faced by his Bosnian Serbs in the early 1990s.<sup>17</sup> Within the context of Marčelo’s battle rap, nationalists like Karadžić serve as foils that have misunderstood what the “grandfathers say” fantasizing about the false heroism of “Bright Graves.” Marčelo draws intertextual connections to folklore and literary works in order to re-signify them within a post-war critique of nationalist discourse.

#### *Pop-py Intertextual Links and Gaps*

A value implication is made on Line 15, when Marčelo replaces Alka *Vuica*, with the slur, “*kurvica*,” the diminutive of “whore.” He thereby employs a double-voiced sexism to state how either he or his nationalist interlocutors might feel about the Croatian pop star’s approach to the music industry. Her association with the private channel TV Pink (“that pink station”) is notable, insofar as Pink is regularly mobilized in discourses both on the left and right as one of *the* symbols of moral decline and the technospectacular “dumbing down” of mass media in recent decades.<sup>18</sup> The channel not only points to the audiences will to consume such programming, but to a supposed “cheapening” of music through *American Idol*-style competitions, and the “erosion of culture” in the ex-YU era.

Another reference being made here is to Remi, an artist from the Zagreb-based band Elemental, with whom Marčelo collaborated on different songs. In “Shadows,” Marčelo frames

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<sup>16</sup> Orig. “*Gorski vijenac*” (1847).

<sup>17</sup> See Hemon (2008) and Živković (2011).

<sup>18</sup> Its discursive framing is comparable to that of Fox News in discourses on the US American left.

his critics' desire to brutally kill him on the basis of his collaboration with Elemental as hypocrisy, particularly in light of the fact that many who voice such anti-Croatian positions often consume what he sees as transnationally distributed kitsch, despite their ideology. The "stake" (*kolac*) to which Marčelo refers on Line 16 above is rich with meaning as a political symbol that it derives largely from Serbian epic poetry: a nineteenth century affective image that recalls the horrors of crucifixions or slave lynchings in the US. The "stake" here refers to the stakes that were driven through the perineum of subversives by waning Ottoman authorities in an attempt to maintain political control over the Belgrade Pašaluk during the Serbian Uprisings of the nineteenth century. Here, this "enhanced interrogation technique" of late Ottoman statecraft, a favorite historical fact that regularly justifies local Islamophobic discourse, is counter-intuitively deemed suitable by the imagined Radicals for the domestic traitor, Marčelo, who records with "that chick from Elemental," MC Remi. Marčelo frames Remi as the opposite of PINK, i.e., as a valuable female collaborator in a technospectacular transnational stream of degraded women.

Marčelo's collaborations parallel a phenomenon that Jeffs (2005) described among musicians in the hardcore and metal scenes in Sarajevo. During the years of the city's siege between 1992-1995, Jeffs argues, musicians promoted a "difference-blind multiculturalism," which involved a conscious adoption of metal as a means to achieve "*strategic inauthenticity*, a move away from the expected cultural form pertaining to a certain ethnic or national collectivity." In contrast, Marčelo does not strategically aim for inauthenticity, but rather situates the "real" authentic in a pride connected to cultural heritage *and* a cosmopolitan outlook that can productively align itself, at the very least, with other BCS+M speakers. By the conclusion of "Shadows", it is clear that for Serbia to be "smart" in Marčelo's eyes, the country should abandon its narrative of victimhood and that which has made the nation's dead "tired," or, in a

sense, “more dead” or “even more dead” or perhaps “dead tired.”

In “Shadows,” Marčelo asks: how should “we” approach the reality of a shared interethnic political past and the Yugoslav Wars which followed the dismemberment of the SFRY? Marčelo’s willingness to align himself with performers of a variety of national backgrounds represents a decision critics continue to associate with an underlying Titoist ideology marginalized in among transnational publics during the buildup to war. To critics, such transnational appeals also have a pro-EU tone that smacks of center-left politicians who have also capitalized on the austerities of Serbia’s post-socialist economic transformations. Later in the song, Marčelo distances himself from “Yugonostalgic” discourses, which he also does in a *Politika* editorial re-published in his collected works (Šelić 2009):<sup>19</sup>

The song with Edo was called “Tears” and it was, oh yes, very engaged. The idea was to send a message - at least to young people - that enough is simply ENOUGH. In the sense that *one must respect the dead, always - but let’s turn a little toward the living also...I don’t give a fuck about (jebe mi se za) the myth of Tito and the melancholic stories about a time that I didn’t even see - why do they keep talking about that as if it is something finished and past?*<sup>20</sup>

He contrasts his pride with that of the “shadows” that haunt Belgrade’s streets, particular during the protests of the Serbian Radical Party. The first person singular and plural are both left indefinite, although certain contextual clues suggest that they refer to specific groups. “We” and “you” are indefinite here: the latter may refer to a specific interlocutor, or the MC’s fellow Serbs,

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<sup>19</sup> “Because we have (what?) applause for a master key/a character that loves to watch “Counter” live/plus, home video blockbusters/Severina and Suzana let brotherhood and unity come back/In a second, our character masturbates to former Yugo and again we are brothers, brother! (*jer imamo (šta) aplauz za kalauz, karakter/što voli uživo ‘Counter’ – plus, kućni video blokbaster: Severinu & Suzanu da nam bratstvo & jedinstvo vrate/ - u sekundi, bivša juga drka i opet smo braća, brateee!*)” “Counter” is a criminal story on television. Severina is a Croatian pop artist and Suzana Mančić was a host on Pink TV. Each were known for having unauthorized pornographic images and videos leaked online.

<sup>20</sup> “*Pesma sa Edom zvala se “Suze” i bila je, o da, jako angažovana. Ideja je bila poslati poruku - makar mladima - da je, naprosto, DOSTA. U smislu, treba imati poštovanja za mrtve, uvek - ali, hajde da se pomalo okrenemo i živima...jebe mi se za mit o Titu i setne priče o vremenu koje nisam ni video - zašto se o tome uvek govori kao o nečemu što je završeno i što je iza?* (Šelić 2009:23)”

or more broadly to listeners across ex-YU spaces. Marčelo thus lyrically opens a possibility for a form of Serbian patriotism unique from both socialist *and* Milošević-era political discourse, meditated through hip hop poetics.

Much of “Shadows” is composed as a classic written battle rap, that is, its composition involves stylistically performing the language, referencing the practices, and criticizing the figure of a social type (Alim, Lee, Carris 2010:120). Since the rhetorical condemnation of others alongside cleverly delivered lyrical self-aggrandizement are the goal in this tradition of rap composition, battle lyrics reveal rather obvious signs of a rapper’s expressed source of pride. Within Marčelo’s growing opus, he often criticizes ideological hypocrisy that he maps onto imagined nationalist interlocutors. Throughout the song, Marčelo can be said to be discrediting what are framed as their myriad fabrications (Bauman 1986:45). “Nationalists” profess chauvinistic, exclusivist ideology in public, while in private they quietly consume what Marčelo suggests is kitschy, less valuable pop. “Shadows” is framed as one of many anti-nationalist texts that takes notable pride in a further re-interpretation of Serbian folklore, literature, history, and language that allows for regional collaboration and integration. In “Shadows,” Marčelo argues “smarts” is taking “pride” in a “beautiful language, beautiful culture,” not unproductive isolation and the false “strength” of territorial expansion. This is a curious coupling given the substantive and substantial research that has been done into misuses of “culture” and folklore in drawing distinctions during the 1990s and beyond (see also Čolović 2008; Žanić 2007; and Živković 2011). However, Marčelo articulates a clear symbolic gap between his creative work and those who glorify tradition and intolerance.

## **Frenkie's "Nerko" – The Tragic Ironies of Our Betrayed Elders**

I first saw Tuzla-based rapper Frenkie nearly 15 years ago provide the back-up vocals for his frequent collaborator Edo Maajka at Zagreb's "alternative" club Močvara (The Swamp) along the banks of the Sava River. In 2011, I interviewed him in a modest skate shop that he runs in Tuzla's small city center. At the entrance to the store, a small exhibit behind glass could be seen proudly displaying mainly Tuzlan-made hip hop CDs, material evidence of the many occasions the northeast Bosnian city's artists had embedded themselves in wider domestic discographic relations. Before the emergence of Pag's Fresh Island and Belgrade's All as One (*Svi kao jedan*) Festivals, Tuzla somewhat counter-intuitively laid claim to the only annual homemade hip hop festival, which was organized thanks in large part to Frenkie and DJ Soul of Radio Kameleon's *FmJam Hip Hop Show*. The former has been prodigious in his release of studio recordings, which include the 2009 release *Anti-Venom (Protuotrov)* on which the song "Nerko" appears.

In a 2012 interview entitled "Fascism is Alive, But You Are in Coalition with It" for the widely-distributed weekly magazine, *BH Dani*, Frenkie mentions that "Nerko" has the same basic message as a track that he recorded with Edo Maajka "Let's Bring Them Down" (*Hajmo ih rušit'*) in 2005.

One shouldn't just act smart, bullshit, and condemn, but put oneself into the whole story. I am a part of this society, which means I'm a part of the problem, but I can also be a part of the solution. For me, concretely that means the following: you mentioned "Let's Bring Them Down;" it was really fierce (*žestoka*) and direct, and because of that, for some maybe even a little too much. Today I would say everything in a different way, through a story let's say. On the last album, I have a song called "Nerko." It's about a war veteran and his life today. That is, the

message is the same, but it's told in a different way and just with that it's easier on some people's ears.<sup>21</sup>

Frenkie argues that the message of both songs is effectively the same, but that "Nerko" is "easier on the ears" (*lake uđe u uho*) because it is told *through* a story, which makes it potentially more efficacious with audiences and thus "part of the solution."

The album artwork of *Anti-Venom* features a clever logo design that utilizes the green-and-white color scheme and symbology of a European apothecary (a circle with an asterisk instead of a cross in the center). In the place of the Bowl of Hygieia or Asclepius' Staff is what looks to be Shure Microphone with a snake coiled around it. Like Marčelo, Frenkie has collaborated occasionally with NGOs, including the well-known Enough! (*Dosta!*) campaign, which also has worked extensively with massively popular reggae-rap, so-called "Balkan Funk" crossover act, Dubioza kolektiv, another act regularly promoted on MTV Adria. Enough! is frequently engaged in anti-corruption campaigns believed to have cross-entity appeal in B&H, which since 1995 has been internally divided according to the terms of the Dayton Peace Accords. Frenkie's work often appears on Zagreb's *Blackout Rap Show*, and he has toured by and large the same festival circuits as his sometime collaborators, Marčelo and General Woo.

"Nerko" is set to a 90bpm tempo with a heavy kick-snare-kick-kick-snare drum beat with a march-like quality and a bass that, to this listener, seems to aspire to blow speakers.

Stylistically, the beat is sample-based 1990s New York "boom bap," which at the time of its release in 2009 remained the prestige style among prominent beatmakers and MCs in ex-YU.

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<sup>21</sup> The title of the article ("*Fašizam je živ, ali vi ste u koaliciji s njim*") plays on a statement by former SDP member Željko Komšić about the durability of nationalism, which Frenkie in turn used to critique Komšić's compromises (Mujkanović 2012). "*ne treba samo pametovati, srati i osuđivati ljude nego i sebe svrstati u cijelu priču. Ja sam dio ovog društva, znači dio problema a mogu biti i dio rješenja. To konkretno kod mene znači slijedeće. Spomenuo si „Hajmo ih rušiti“, ona je bila dosta žestoka i direktna, samim tim za nekog možda malo i previše. Danas bi sve to rekao na drugi način, kroz neku priču recimo. Na zadnjem albumu imam pjesmu koja se zove „Nerko“. Radi se o ratnom veteranu i njegovom životu danas. Znači poruka je ista, ali ispričana na drugačiji način i samim tim nekom uđe lakše u uho.*"

Frenkie's vocals flirt with the well-timed recurrences of a horn riff that recalls classic film soundtracks. This accentuates the lyrics at moments when his imagined interlocutor is particularly animated in his assessment of the political landscape in B&H and during Frenkie's refrain, which he repeats four times, after the three 16-bar verses:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 Who wants a Golden Fleur de Lis?                                     | <i>Ko hoće jednog zlatnog ljiljana?</i>   |
| 2 the president will give everybody one immediately                    | <i>predsjednik ga odma' svima da</i>      |
| 3 You will be recorded in books as a hero                              | <i>bićeš zapisan k'o heroj u knjigama</i> |
| 4 You will be a worried hero without a Convertible Mark in your pocket | <i>bićeš heroj bez marke u brigama</i>    |

The Golden Lily figures as an important metaphor in Frenkie's song, and continues to be a symbol used in the iconography of predominantly Bosniac cantons and municipalities, including that of Sarajevo.

The Lily was originally used in the Coat of Arms of the House of Kotromanić, the last Christian rulers of medieval Bosnia before the Ottoman conquest in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> However, it has come to be seen as an integrationist symbol that some Bosnian leaders have embraced to appeal to Catholic Croatian, Serbian Orthodox, and Bosniac Muslim populations of B&H. The Lily is thus ambivalent for at least two reasons: a majority of the first two constituent peoples polled favor incorporation into the neighboring states where their ethnonational group forms a majority; and 2) the symbol was used as the highest medal for soldiers who fought for the Army of the Republic of B&H. In Frenkie's song, the Lily is re-signified once more as a symbol of broken promises, unfulfilled dreams, and a state that barely supports those who fought on its behalf. This sidesteps the Golden Lily's unevenly shared qualities, re-signifying it in a way to

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<sup>22</sup> For an extended discussion of the complex topology of Bosnian post-war political symbols, see Lovrenović (2006).

which a broad audience across B&H might relate. With few alterations, Nerko’s narrative is one that could have been written from any ethnonational perspective. The signs of political and economic stagnation, the detachment of the younger generation, disillusionment, and corruption are far more crucial in Frenkie’s narrative of the 1990s, which highlights how broken promises are not unique to a single one of B&H’s constituent peoples. To Frenkie, the “ancient hatreds” narrative is a dangerous fairy tale cynical elites mobilize to achieve self-serving goals. In this effort, “they,” a pronoun that shifts its referent throughout, also have technospectacle as a convenient distraction at their disposal. Lines 29-32 read “And the children are little illiterate villagers/just cell phones, cars, and folk songs/they don’t worry nor are they bothered by their stealing/I am getting to the point where I want to enter the government building with a bomb (*A djeca su mali nepismeni seljaci/samo mobiteli, auto, i narodnjaci/nit ih je briga nit im smeta što krađu/dođe mi da uđem sa bombom u vladu*).” Here, both complacent children and a “they” who “steals” has pushed Frenkie’s character Nerko to an unexpectedly high level of frustration for a veteran who received the Golden Lily.

Below, I describe in more detail Frenkie’s poetic techniques, which in their lyrical complexity only add to his material references and interview commentary. The effect of his play with shifting pronouns is that the never-ending emphasis on ethnonationalism is less central to today’s politics of all B&H sharing in the exploitation led by a narrow political class. The numbers below mark the lines of the first 16-bar verse:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 Nerko my old friend the Fleur de Lis is golden | <i>Nerko moj stari drug zlatni je ljiljan</i>   |
| 2 I have a war-worn picture of him               | <i>Jednu ratnu izlizanu sliku od njega imam</i> |
| 3 He was wounded twice and when he recovered     | <i>Ranjen je dva put bio kad se oporavio</i>    |
| 4 He returned to the front line and didn’t hide  | <i>Vratio se na liniju i nije se krio</i>       |
| 5 three long winters he was in the trenches      | <i>Tri duge zime bio je u rovu</i>              |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 6 He didn't fight for Alija, but for his family | <i>Nije se borio za Aliju</i>                     |
| 7 buddy, there's no state on the planet         | <i>Neg' za familiju svoju</i>                     |
| 8 that I love more than my little daughter      | <i>Nema bolan te države na svijetu</i>            |
| 9 You can add a million more states             | <i>Koju više volim, neg' svoju malu kćerku</i>    |
| 10 and it still isn't worth as much as her      | <i>Uz ovu državu mo'š milion dodat</i>            |
| fingernail                                      | <i>i to opet ne vrijedi k'o u moje male nokat</i> |
| 11 Fuck the flag and this new anthem            | <i>jebo zastavu i ovu novu himnu</i>              |
| 12 I defended her! – He said to me over beer    | <i>Ja sam nju branio! – rek'o mi je uz pivu</i>   |
| 13 Today on Koševsko Hill at a get-together at  | <i>Danas na koševskom kod njega na sijelu</i>     |
| his place                                       |   |
| 14 He supports Sarajevo and, of course, shits   | <i>Diže Sarajevo i naravno prca Želju</i>         |
| on Željezničar                                  |   |
| 15 I listen to him, and I admire him for how    |   |
| modest he is                                    | <i>slušam ga i divim mu se kako je skroman</i>    |
| 16 He didn't hide during the war and he isn't a |   |
| sell-out  | <i>nije se nakrio u ratu nit' je prodan</i>       |

In the song, Frenkie mixes first-, second-, and third-person speech, direct and indirect discourse, and describes a discussion that he and Nerko, two friends separated by an age gap and experience, had one night over beers. Like Marčelo's "Shadows," Frenkie also here makes use of temporal markers including past, present, future tenses. "Three long winters" (*tri duge zime*) and "as the city slowly sunk into night" (*kako lagano noć grad potapa*) to indicate the progression of the interlocutors' talk over time and the embeddedness of multiple stories in a narrative event. In "Nerko," however, the point is less to reject a romantic nationalism of the past, but rather to suggest that a "we" all share in the broken promises of the post-socialist, post-war state no matter the ethnonational background.

Above Frenkie claims to have great admiration for the war veteran, Nerko, as he does at various points throughout the song: "I listen to him, and I admire him for how modest he is/he didn't hide during the war and he isn't a sell-out" (Lines 15-16). Frenkie-*qua*-narrator's evaluation of Nerko's character directly contrasts with that of the aforementioned indefinite third person plural "they." Various signs mapped onto this "they" point toward the region's political

and economic elite described as thieves, who through their lies treated Bosnia's war veterans like "unimportant pawns" (Line 42) in a sinister, self-interested chess game.

On Line 6, we learn that Nerko did not participate in the war because of "Alija" (i.e., because of B&H's first president Alija Izetbegović and rallying around religion and ethnonational identity), nor was he inspired by any particular desire to establish an independent Bosniac state (as personified by Izetbegović). Instead, listeners learn from the unfolding verses during which Frenkie voices Nerko's perspectives that the primary motivation of the rapper's friend was to protect his family (Lines 6, 8). Line 6 clearly marks Nerko's ethnonational identity as does reference to the Golden Fleur de Lis, but Frenkie quickly makes this detail of subordinate importance to the song's historical evaluations. Adding another "million" monoethnic new states, new national anthems, and new flags to the map was never Nerko's primary ambition in defending his family (See Lines 7-13). This lyrical piling of stories and a frustration with the multiplication of states runs parallel to the layering of state-like entities drawn up by the Dayton Peace Accords, which left the former Yugoslav republic of B&H with two entities (Republika Srpska and the Bosniac-Croat Federation), 10 cantons in the Federation, the Brčko District, three constitutive nations/peoples (*narodi*), and an Office of the High Representative (OHR) appointed by and only formally responsible to a so-called Peace Implementation Council established in 1995 to guarantee international oversight.<sup>23</sup> Readjusting his lenses beyond Dayton's political dysfunction and ethnonational identity politics, Frenkie illuminates how an obsessive focus on

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<sup>23</sup> The OHR has broad powers, including the ability to remove public officials and adopt binding decisions when local parties fail to reach a decision. The recitation of these factoids can be seen in any contextualizing descriptions of B&H that compulsively narrate the formal aspects of post-Dayton divisions. Hayden (2000; 2013; see also Woodward 1995) has argued that the constitution of B&H reinforced the monoethnic, nationalist logics of the war from the very moment the Dayton Peace Accords were signed in Ohio, since it established separate entities, the internally divided Bosniac-Croat Federation, and an unworkable constitution. See Gilbert (2008) for a pointed application of Appadurai's notion (1986) of the "gate-keeping concept" within the context of B&H; and for a particularly eloquent critical take on the erasures of this form of nation-bound analysis, see Jašarević (2015)

such has even erased the bitter realities of those who actually once served and fought in the wars. His character never buys into the macropolitics. In the song, Frenkie layers multiple narratives. There is Nerko's story of serving, defending his family, and being cast aside by the state. As Frenkie voices Nerko, we hear about the legacies of the 1990s and see them weave in and out of the tale.

As Frenkie and other MCs regularly argue, the divisiveness of B&H's politics is often seen to have musical equivalents in the practices of musicians and audiences. Nerko refers to a debate between politicians in B&H over the lyrics that would accompany the music to their national anthem, which was originally composed in 1999 by Dušan Šestić, a Bosnian Serb from Banja Luka. A decision concerning which lyrics were to be used was finally reached in 2009, but those that were accepted were widely regarded as a dull, politically correct compromise. In 2012, these were then rejected by B&H's Parliament (Halimović 2012, 2013). Thus, the debate concerning which lyrics will adorn the national anthem continues. The selection of B&H's flag, a blue-white-and yellow triangle design meant to index each of the three constituent peoples, on the other hand, was never subject to open political debate. Carlos Westendorp, the former High Representative who selected the anthem's tune, also chose the flag by fiat.

In the narrated event time of the song's recounting, the tiny war pension that Nerko receives feels like a slap in the face after all the tragedy that he experienced after spending three long winters fighting in the trenches Nerko feels betrayed by forces that deliberately manipulated soldiers of all participating backgrounds in the name of their own private gain.<sup>24</sup> Below, I re-join Frenkie for his final verse, during which he exclusively stylizes the figure of Nerko before the

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<sup>24</sup> “And that money that they give you every month/is the same as if they spit in your face at the end (*I ono para što ti mjesečno daju/isto ko da te pljunuo u lice na kraju*)”

refrain, in which our hints as to who might be speaking disappear completely. The tense and pronoun-play is particularly pronounced:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 33 <b>They</b> used <i>us</i> and threw <i>us</i> out at the end (Past)  | <i>Nas su iskoristili i na kraju bacili</i>             |
| 34 <b>They</b> manipulated <i>us</i> , <b>some</b> haven't even understood (Past, Present, Perfect)                  | <i>Izmanipulisali, neki nisu ni shvatili</i>            |
| 35 It doesn't matter what side <u>you</u> are from, <u>my friend</u> <sup>25</sup> (Present)                         | <i>nije bitno s koje si strane drug</i>                 |
| 36 If <u>you</u> believe <b>them</b> today, then <u>you</u> are stupid (Present)                                     | <i>ako im danas vjeruješ, onda si glup</i>              |
| 37 <i>We</i> bought and sold from one another (Past)   | <i>Jedni od drugih smo kupovali i prodavali</i>         |
| 38 I am sorry <b>to the people</b> who suffered because of <b>them</b> (Present, Past)                               | <i>žao mi je ljudi koji su zbog njih stradali</i>       |
| 39 I am sorry, because <b>they</b> believed in some things (Present, Past)   | <i>žao mi je, jer su vjerovali u neke stvari</i>        |
| 40 I am sorry, because <b>they</b> believed in lies (Present, Past)  | <i>žao mi je, jer su vjerovali u laži</i>               |
| 41 Frenk, <u>you</u> know who <b>those people</b> are (Present)  | <i>Frenka, znaš koji su to ljudi</i>                    |
| 42 <i>We</i> weren't important, <i>we</i> were pawns (Past)  | <i>mi nismo bili bitni, bili smo pijuni</i>             |
| 43 Listen to ME well, what your friend is telling <u>you</u> (Present, sampled horn riff shifts to signal crescendo) | <i>slušaj me dobro šta ti drug veli</i>                 |
| 44 <i>We</i> were just numbers on a chart (Past)   | <i>bili smo samo ona cifra u tabeli</i>                 |
| 45 And now MY daughter will start school (Present)   | <i>i sad će mi od kćerke škola početi</i>               |
| 46 And I will have to keep things from MY mouth again (Future)   | <i>i morat ću od usta odvajati opet</i>                 |
| 47 So <u>you</u> see what I have gotten from the state (Present)   | <i>eto vidiš šta ja od države imam</i>                  |
| 48 And now tell ME: how would <u>you</u> look at this Fleur de Lis? (Present, Frenkie's voice intensifies)           | <i>i sad mi reci: kako bi ti gledao u ovaj Ljiljan?</i> |

In the verse above, I have marked the **third person plural**; second person; *first person plural*; and the **FIRST PERSON SINGULAR** with associated “clues” that Frenkie uses while deploying

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<sup>25</sup> The term, “*drug*,” offers multiple translations and is thus multivalent. On the one hand, it could mean “friend” or “buddy” and is more frequently in markedly Serbian or Bosnian ways of speaking. On the other hand, it has the capacity in contexts such as these, to point to the socialist past given its additional meaning as “comrade.”

each pronoun, which are largely indefinite.<sup>26</sup> Nerko explains to Frenkie that whoever still continues to believe “them” must be “stupid” (Line 36). The identity of this unnamed guilty “they” (33-36), a shifter, is never explicitly stated. However, on the basis of the artist’s discography, it seems likely that Frenkie seeks to hold a domestic political-economic-religious elite to account who have been frequent targets of his composed battle raps in the past.<sup>27</sup> The next “they,” the victimized people (38-40), are evaluated to contrast directly with the first. Nerko is “sorry” today, because “they” believed in “lies” and someone suffered as a result. The soldiers were also “unimportant pawns” in someone else’s game, “numbers on a chart” (44) who now barely have enough to feed themselves and their families. In a final flourish (48), the first-person Nerko asks the second-person Frenkie: “How would you look at this Fleur de Lis?” Of course, the powerful and playful use of pronouns, allows Frenkie as MC to pose the same question of his audiences, whereby the material badges of honor from the war are rendered empty given the failures of B&H’s present-day politics.

### **General Woo’s “Why Are You Silent Now?” – Elite Failings of Past, Present, Future**

In spring 2012, things were decidedly looking up for my closest Zagrebian research informants. After months of silence caused by the ongoing labor disputes and bankruptcy at Radio 101, the *Blackout Rap Show*, Zagreb’s most-longstanding and successful hip hop radio program had begun broadcasting again on Croatia’s first Internet station (Bogdanić 2011; Jutarnji.hr 2011). Supposedly facilitated by politicians hoping to combat the “nice, but boring” label, Zagreb’s nightlife had garnered in influential tourist publications, a series of new clubs had

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<sup>26</sup> I grateful to Gabe Tusinski and others for helping me articulate this key. The lingering shortcomings here remain entirely my own.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Frenkie’s “Hey, Hodja” (*Ej, hodža*), widely-believed to be a critique of the former Grand Mufti of Bosnia and University of Chicago graduate, Mustafa Cerić.

opened downtown. For musicians, these offered the promise of easier transit, more gigs, and bigger crowds. Despite the pains of the never-ending “transition” and its latest economic crisis, even the imminent summer festival lineup gave the feel of more action, relevance, and even a modicum of increased economic opportunity. This general “vibe” contrasted greatly with the narratives that I collected a year earlier, when some of my informants had pronounced the scene “dead.” Gigs were few and far between and they paid poorly (Arslani 2011). Only a handful of hip hop artists could get a worthwhile record deal, since the labels now expected most rappers to pay for their own publishing and studio time. Therefore, even relatively prominent performers by the standards of the shrunken market of 4.5 million were engaged in digital *samizdat*. And aside from the *Mixtape Sessions* show on Zagreb’s Radio Student, all of the hip hop speciality radio programs in the Croatian capital were off the air, causing an unwanted media “blackout” the likes of which had been rare since the period of the genre’s local “birth” in the mid-1980s. In short, the “health” of the genre and that of other electronic musics seemed dramatically improved in April 2012.

According to a “big man narrative” of history, some argued that longtime hip hop veteran General Woo’s critically-acclaimed *Verbal Delict* (*Verbalni delikt*) album that he released the preceding fall played a key role in facilitating the excitement of renewed crowds and the tempered optimism in evaluations of homemade hip hop’s domestic futures. His previous solo album released 5 years earlier did not garner *Verbal Delict* received. In contrast to some of the other songs released during the major political protests that broke throughout cities in Croatia during spring 2011, Woo’s latest album was reviewed as a “brutally honest” “masterpiece,” and “one of the best 10 albums of the year” (Devčić 2012; Grgić 2011b; Jagatić 2012). Many saw

Woo's latest as a sort of renaissance of the influence his earlier band, Tram 11, had over the growth over the domestic scene(s). Woo himself was not shy about the topic:

Tram 11 started everything. We were the first rap in former Yugo (*u bivšoj Jugi*), in this part of Europe. I know that when Marčelo or the boys from Bad Copy say, "In Serbia (*Kod nas*) there wasn't fucking anything. When we heard "[Croatian] Greats"...it was like, push that little bit to the side... "The Fall of the System" in some club at a hip hop party caused more ruckus than KRS-One or Wu-Tang," which was peaking at the time. It means a lot to me that we had such influence and that so much went into motion, because at the end, in all of those countries all of those characters developed a profile and later brought forth some hip hop scene. They kept it going when we split up. Even Edo (Maajka) when he appeared after us said: "Brother, you are a god to me, if you didn't do Tram 11, I would never have been a rapper." It means a lot to me when you can inspire someone (Devčić 2012).<sup>28</sup>

Through discographic reference, Woo voices other members of the domestic scene(s) and the stories that they told him regarding Tram 11's influence before homemade hip hop was more integrated. Stories such as these abound not only in interview commentary, but also in the poetics of hip hop documentary production, which I discuss further below.

The lead track on General Woo's *Verbal Delict* album, "Why Are You Silent Now?" also bears the aesthetic markings of boom bap with its 90bpm tempo, "dirty" kick-kick-snare drum beat, funk-oriented bass line, accentuation of horn stabs and scratches. This embrace of a production style that points to a particular temporality demonstrates that the 1990s, rather than just a time of violence and crass accumulation by dispossession, can be ambivalently remembered:

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<sup>28</sup> "Tram 11 je sve počeo, mi smo bili prvi rap u bivšoj Jugi, u ovom dijelu Europe. Znam kada mi Marčelo ili dečki iz Bad Copya kažu 'Kod nas nije bilo ništa, jebiga, kad smo čuli Tram 11, kad smo čuli 'Velikane', ono pusti neku malu na stranu, 'Pad sistema' u nekom klubu na hip-hop partiju, to je bio krš i lom veći nego na KRS-a ili Wu-Tang", što je bilo tada u špici. Meni je drago da smo imali toliki utjecaj i da se to toliko pokrenulo jer su se na kraju u svim tim zemljama isprofilirali svi ti likovi koji su osobe, koji su iznijeli kasnije neku hip-hop scenu, držali su vodu kad smo se mi raspali. I sam Edo kad se pojavio poslije nas rekao je 'Brate ti si mi bog, da niste vi radili, Tram 11 ja nikada ne bih bio reper.' Meni je drago kad inspiriraš nekoga"

The 1990s were magnificent, a bunch of innovations in rapping and production, and I don't even need to mention the themes and lyrics. Revolution! There was everything and anything and sadly, the industry chose plastic, bling bling, and millionaires for the new millennium. I want to show that one can do it like this, the right way. Not all people have died, they are just sleeping and one needs to wake them up (Grgić 2011b).<sup>29</sup>

In the interview excerpt above, *Woo* contrasts the technospectacular image economy of “bling bling, plastic, and millionaires” of the present with the positively marked “revolution” hip hop mediated during the 1990s. *Verbal Delict* is filled with disses of the mass media, Croatia's current political economy, and the “banksters” propagating conspiracy-laden New World Order.<sup>30</sup>

As is the case with the aforementioned artists, it might also be said that Woo's stories “convey an attitude toward...situations and a strategy for dealing with them (Bauman 1986:76).” In the song, “Eugenics” (*Eugenika*, which in BCS+M is conveniently pronounced, “EUgenics”), we gain insight into the album's articulated worldview and how Woo interpellates subjects still familiar with socialist history:

5 The truth is that the whole world is in crisis  
6 But sheep believe that edited shit from television

*Istina je da je cijeli svijet u krizi je  
a ovce vjeruju u tom režiranom sranju sa  
televizije*

7 Because the majority of people are owned by corporations

*Jer većinu ljudi poseduju korporacije,*

8 When I say the “majority,” I am thinking of whole nations

*Kad kažem većinu, mislim na cijele nacije*

9 Mafia is brotherhood

*Mafija je bratstvo*

Money is unity

*Novac je jedinstvo*

10 For legal murder approved by the ministry

*za legalno ubojstvo koje odobr'o ministarstvo*

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<sup>29</sup> “Devedesete su bile sjajne, hrpa inovacija u repanju i produkciji, a o temama i tekstovima ne moram ni pričati. Revolucija! Bilo je tu svega i svačega i žalosno je da je industrija izabrala plastiku, bling bling i milijunaše za novi milenij. Hoću pokazati da se može na ovaj, pravi način. Nisu svi ljudi zamrli, samo spavaju i treba ih probuditi.”

<sup>30</sup> See “Banksters” (*Banksteri*).

Here, Woo repurposes *the* slogan of Marshall Tito’s Partisans and later the Yugoslav Communist Party, Brotherhood and Unity, which sought in the post-WWII period to again unite the multiethnic peoples sandwiched between Greece and Austria, into an explicitly multilingual, multi-confessional, and arguably patriarchal state under the banner of self-managed socialism. To Woo, the *post*-socialist slogan bears only a slight distinction: “mafia” define today’s “brotherhood,” while the pursuit of “money” is the only factor providing “unity” in a world in which whole nations are owned by corporations, murder can still be legally ordered through government ministries, and technospectacular television turns viewers into “sheep.”

Woo’s “Why?” likewise stakes an unapologetically critical position, replete with insults directed toward regional nationalists of all backgrounds, pop musicians, and center-left politicians who busily pushed accession to the EU. In the single couplet chorus, Woo asks listeners the song’s eponymous question, and concludes that his audience-*qua*-adversary must be too busy fellating the MC to speak up against the region’s problems. This deliberately vulgar insult frames the rapper as sexually dominant, which in this case, equates to his being bolder in his public commentary and more “manly” than his peers. The fact that the album’s lexicon is filled with obscene references to excretory functions, private parts, and sex, as well as with homophobic and sexist slurs is so consistent with regional rap ethics as to be unsurprising, and requires more systematic commentary, which I provide in a more sustained, concentrated fashion in Chapter 5. In short, Woo’s conclusion concerning why his listeners are silent appears to be deliberately crass and insulting, and carries a blatant, arguably feminized evaluation of their complacency.

In “Why?,” Woo covers an extensive amount of interpretive ground, providing rapid evaluations of tragic historical events, the music-industrial context, and the figures who shape

both. Corrupt, nationalistic, and “kitschy” practices in the musical realm are framed as fundamentally intertwined with state-level political trends and the historical past. Rather than burden the translation with footnotes, I provide a combination of literal and idiomatic translation, which will be followed by exegesis. I have chosen French to render the effect of Anglicisms in the original (to create a distancing effect), and I have used English idioms in places where literal translation was possible for the purpose of rendering affect:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 Josipović, je m'excuse that I am not in your campaign commercial     | <i>Josipoviću sorry što ti nisam na spotu</i>    |
| 2 I don't kiss ass because I can't stand shame                         | <i>ne virim iz šupka jer ne podnosim sramotu</i> |
| 3 We have a beef, I know that we don't see eye to eye                  | <i>imamo beef, znam da imamo probleme</i>        |
| 4 I don't sell my bum for fucking royalties                            | <i>ne prodajem guzicu za jebene tantjeme</i>     |
| 5 the guy who's rubbing his hands together is filling accounts at ZAMP | <i>ko trlja ruke, buksa lovu na ZAMPu</i>        |
| 6 they collect gold for him like the Nazis did for the Pope            | <i>skupljaju mu zlato k'o nacisti za papu</i>    |
| 7 And someone pays well so that his track can be spun more             | <i>a neko dobro plaća da mu više vrte stvar</i>  |
| 8 so that he can be given a platinum record and sell like a superstar  | <i>da platinastu ploču proda k'o superstar</i>   |
| 9 Tuđman-Vukovar, like some Roms do their kids                         | <i>Tuđman-Vukovar, neki Romi klince</i>          |
| 10 like Šušak did Posavina, and Pavelić did Dalmatians                 | <i>k'o Šušak Posavinu, Pavelić Dalmatince</i>    |
| 11 the great patriots raise children                                   | <i>veliki domoljubi odgajaju djecu</i>           |
| 12 who after Škoro, slash their wrists for Ceca                        | <i>koji nakon Škore režu žile na Cecu</i>        |
| 13 then comes Thompson, and then Lepa Brena                            | <i>onda ide Thompson, a onda Lepa Brena</i>      |
| 14 the dancefloor is swimming with sliced veins                        | <i>plesni podij pliva od izrezanih vena</i>      |
| 15 nothing against the genes, they pick around in their anuses         | <i>ništa kontra gena, čačkaju si anuse</i>       |
| 16 pulling out shit so as to clone retarded fetuses                    | <i>vade govna da kloniraju retarduse</i>         |
| Refrain:   |  |
| So how come you're so quiet?   | <i>Zašto sada šutite?</i>                        |
| Because you are sucking me off [and your mouth's full]                 | <i>Zato što me pušite</i>                        |

Somewhat surprisingly, Woo begins his verbal assault by focusing on the once popular paragon of regional reconciliation, President Ivo Josipović of the Croatian Social Democratic Party (SDP), who Woo criticizes for his controversial leading role in Croatia's music rights organization, ZAMP (The Protection of Authorial and Music Rights; *Zaštita autorskih i muzičkih prava*). In 2003, Josipović re-wrote Croatian intellectual property law, which is aimed, in Woo's words, to collect "gold for him like the Nazis did for the Pope." This harsh criticism sets Josipović and his "more European" IP regime as its target while simultaneously and fundamentally casting aspersions on the historical role of the Catholic Church in Europe's fascist movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, especially the position of Pope Pius XII vis-à-vis Hitler.

Recent music scholarship has critically considered Croatian musicians' involvement in national politics as an opportunity to be compensated for their efforts in a market where sales of physical and/or digital music media are difficult to garner (Baker 2010). In Woo's track, he overtly rejects these sorts of political affiliations, which might be read as an implicit evaluation of his rapper colleagues, some of whom performed with Josipović during his 2010 campaign. By beginning with a critique of Josipović, Woo also took one of Croatia's most popular political spokesperson for EU integration on the eve accession. Josipović was also an avowed anti-nationalist, who in the words of alternative media mogul Matija Babić, was nearly beyond reproach particularly on the left, until a disputed scandal broke concerning a significant percentage of ZAMP's royalty collections, which were awarded to a company owned by Josipović's friend. Given Josipović's musical affiliations and experience as a composer, he serves as an interesting figure to choose in a verse that critically analyzes the complex historical relationship between domestic pop music and politics. In contrast to his unnamed peers, Woo

underscores the legitimacy/authenticity of his own popularity: he has not paid anyone in order to have his songs broadcast. Lingering in the background of this song is the specter of “the sell-out,” he or she who will do, say, or perform anything in order to gain platinum album sales or a political advantage, regardless of the ethical costs and the damage done to the “health” of the genre.

Before lambasting domestic technospectacular musicians, Woo presents a series of Croatian “great patriots” who “sold out” their co-nationals in recent history: WWII fascist leader Ante Pavelić struck a deal with his Italian counterparts that allowed them to assume control Dalmatia. Croatia’s first president, Franjo Tuđman ignored local calls to evacuate Vukovar’s civilians, Woo’s hometown, during the 1991 siege. And former Croatian Defense Minister, Gojko Šušak ceded Croatian claims to the Posavina territory in return for expanded Croatian control in Herzegovina. Tuđman reappears later in the song with Slobodan Milošević (“Slobo”) when both are accused of “splitting atoms with Bosnia.”<sup>31</sup> In the first verse, Woo also deploys references to “some Roms” who “sell-out” their children’s labor, which represents the very beginning of the MC’s sweeping critique of scores of social groups, political leaders, and musicians that inhabit the Balkan landscape. Woo here reinforces an ethnic slur about Roms (that they are “more prone” to domestic abuse than their fellow Slavic citizens) in discussing the violence of politicians, thereby promoting a hierarchy that is otherwise the subject of his critique.

Likewise, the truly “alternative” status of Woo’s song is again questionable when he poetically imagines and criticizes a domestic political relationship between the mafia, Milorad Dodik of Republika Srpska, and the Wahhabi presence in B&H as a “gay scene” (“the mafia dicks around, parading the courtyard/a gay scene, like when Dodik sucks the Wahhabis”; *mafija*

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<sup>31</sup> “God is an old bearded man, Death walks with a scythe/Franjo and Slobo split atoms with Bosnia (*bog je stari bradonja, smrt hoda sa kosom, franjo i slobo cijepaju atome bosnom*).”

*se kurči paradira po avliji/gay scena k'o kad popuši vehabiji*). Given the constantly articulated animosity between conservative adherents to Islam in B&H and Dodik, the line trenchantly suggests that both the Bosnian Serb nationalist and the fundamentalist Sunnis are a sort of “enemies with benefits,” akin to Osama bin Laden and George W. Bush once were before Seal Team 6 “canoed” the former F.C. Arsenal fan (Cole 2017; Mirror.co.uk 2011). Here again, however, the equation between mafia, Dodik, Wahabbis, and the “gay scene” is flirting with the homophobic opposite of an alternative, given the abuses the LGBTQ population faces across ex-YU. While Woo’s negatively imbued “gay” is typical for the domestic scene(s), Woo’s frequent collaborators Krankšvester (see Chapter 5) and Kandžija take a clearer stance, despite their double voicing. Kandžija's recent anti-homophobia recording, the sarcastically-titled “Heavy Faggotum” (*Teški pederluk*) and public activism against the “In the Name of the Family” (*U ime obitelji*) movement is notable. In December 2013, “In the Name of the Family” successfully led a ballot initiative to change the Croatian constitution to define marriage as a union between a man and woman only. The point here is domestic poetics often travel to the most culturally intimate of themes: sexual orientation, trips to the bathroom, and the underground economy. This parallels the actions of a domestic political elite who often also seek to legislate at the most intimate of levels.

Woo implies that the reason for his audience’s complacent silence is a false consciousness spread by a domestic mass media that feeds consumers’ narratives about dangerous ethnonational Others. Miroslav Škoro, Marko Perković Thompson, Svetlana Ražnatović Ceca are singled out, presumably not only for their political, but also for their music industrial, and aesthetic positions. Škoro and Thompson are notorious musical spokesmen of the Croatian rightwing who regularly feature prominently in lyricized critiques launched by

Slavonian and a variety of domestic rappers. Ceca, the aforementioned widow of war criminal Arkan and folk star, is framed as their counterpart on the Serbian right. Finally, Yugoslav-era pop star Lepa Brena, the one musician of Bosniac descent mentioned in the text, is known today for her domination of the domestic industry with televised competitions, the Grand Productions record label, and her support of technospectacular celebrity culture that rappers often criticize for what they argue is crass commercialism and aesthetic compromise. The imagery that Woo conjures is that of a horrific *kafana* (café/club) bloodbath, where the feeding vampires are purveyors of exclusivist Herderian ideologies, on the one hand, *and* aesthetic-economic entrepreneurs on the other. To Woo, the sometime multiculturalist sensitivities of these latter entrepreneurs do not excuse their predilection for crass accumulation. Woo mobilizes cross-national(ist) listenings as a sign of hypocrisy among his co-regionals, who regularly vote for their own nationalist politicians while happily consuming their neighbors', in some cases, most nationalist musicians.<sup>32</sup> Mutually intelligible language(s), political economies in which instantaneous music distribution is possible and widespread, and the forever enticing temptation of domestically forbidden fruit make these sorts of listenings more common than the narrow logics of identity would dictate. Identity-based expectations can be fundamentally misleading when it comes to consumption. After all, lyrical messages, political orientation, and personal background are not the only axes along which audiences receive or evaluate music.

Woo ends the first verse of “Why?” with a final grotesque metaphor concerning imaginary in-breeding through genetically re-engineered reproductive fecal matter, which allows

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<sup>32</sup> For more on the *kafana*, see Chapter 5. Academic, journalistic, and other forms of musical meta-commentary often express a certain degree of surprise that cross-national listenings should occur when overtly nationalist musicians are in question. This is surprising given the propensity for American Ivory Tower film courses to assign Leni Riefenstahl’s fascist visions. Unsurprisingly, illicit, unexpected listenings have parallels among hip hop audiences as well. It was revealed to me privately, for example, that despite some explicitly “nationalist” songs, Belgradian street rappers like Марлон Брутал and Шкабо have both garnered a small listenership among Bosniac and Croatian hip hop fans.

ideologies that Woo assesses negatively to be handed down from generation to generation. On the remainder of Woo's album, there are also longer treatises about state surveillance and a personal description of the financial struggles he experiences as a musician who depends on traveling the Balkans in order to survive.<sup>33</sup> Woo's text simultaneously widens *and* narrows the symbolic gaps between narratives, genres, and historical figures. *Verbal Delict* is an album saturated with rapped events — the signs of its context of production — and with harsh historical evaluations of political economies past, present, and future.

### **Priki's "Yustalgija" — Reimagining Time, Space, and Mobility**

In 2012, a Bihać-based rapper by the name of Priki, posted a relatively big budget music video to YouTube as part of the release of his first single through Menart Records.<sup>34</sup> His album, *In the Shoes of My Father (U cipelama moga oca)*, features many themes not uncommon in homemade hip hop. Some lyrics focus on relaxing and partying. Self-affirming rejections of haters appear alongside intimate, arguably misogynistic, and vulnerable tales of Priki's heterosexual gaze.<sup>35</sup> His lead single and the accompanying video, however, adopted an expressly

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<sup>33</sup> See the 2011 songs "I Know" (*Znam*) and "When I Stroll Across the Balkans" (*Kad se prošetam Balkanom*).

<sup>34</sup> In a dangerously dynamic Age of Rebranded Drumpfs, the poetics of solidarity and breakdown surround us minute-by-minute, hour-by-hour. Their affective weight has been amplified due to a number of factors, not least of which is ongoing violence and its often cynical occlusion, or conversely, ratings-driven mass mediation. These poetics, which represent a nexus of the material, practical, and ideological, are often laden in semiotic markers — linguistic, musical, and so on. Often, these signs are also eminently historical, with a differentially experienced indexical whiff of the past. In the contemporary US, such signs, ranging dramatically from Confederate monuments to Black Lives Matter pins, can further hasten social solidarity or lubricate breakdown as they are deployed through time and space. One might compare, for example, the differential feelings experienced across ethnopolitical lines when one encounters red caps emblazoned with the nostalgic and dog-whistle supremacist, "Make America Great Again." Affective reactions no doubt contrast radically when compared to those observable when presented with a re-appropriation I recently saw in the proudly diverse, ever-gentrifying neighborhood of Hyde Park, in Chicago's otherwise disenfranchised South Side. A t-shirt with the slogan, "Make *Africa* Great Again," plucks very different nostalgic, historical strings. This footnote tangent hopefully does not only serve as distracting, cheap cross-cultural comparison. The abstract point here is that semiotically mediated senses of the historical and nostalgia have a political "stakes" that is critical for group identification and social differentiation.

<sup>35</sup> See "Punije žene" and "Ćao mala."

political and historical message.<sup>36</sup> In the song, “*Yustalgija*,” Priki lyrically conjures an alternative history of the 1990s, one in which the Yugoslav Wars never happened. In the music video, animation and computer generated imagery bring Priki’s lyrics to life. His alternative present includes a rejuvenated JAT Airlines and advertisements for a YugoTesla automobile. In Priki’s alternative reality, internationally popular Anglophone periodicals like *National Geographic*, *Forbes*, and *Wired* report that Yugoslav domestic products have conquered the hearts, minds, and pockets of Western shoppers. Priki reimagines post-Yugoslav time, space, and mobility. His lyrics and the associated music video, directed by Philatz, obliquely reference supernatural

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<sup>36</sup> The lyrics to Priki’s “*Yustalgija*” run as follows: “I look in the sky to see what waits for me/but there’s no signs only the traces of a Star Trek/there’s no medicine for people who spread hate/because those leave a sad story behind them/I go outside, I want the truth/before the aliens touch me with their finger/some year now everything will be different/ comrade, that damn Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, bro/I send a hill of love to all the Yugonostalgics/for all the crying mothers, and the fathers with blisters/ for all the children who are on the wrong paths/Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade/for some future smart step/that won’t be bitter like wormwood/ I hope that I don’t have to move from here, because

Refrain 2x I want everything to be okay with us/I won’t this damned darkness (obscurity) to pass

The fast pace of life slaughters us/ the fast food that you can’t resist/ and you spill blood like water for freedom/ and you can’t get work/ because you’re not related to the owner of the firm/ all of a sudden your name is wrong/ the one your mother gave you in idyllic love/ in the city, kilos are sold, where gorillas fix problems with the help of force/ and I ask myself where I belong here/ because I mostly dream of freedom like it’s Amsterdam/ and it’s not that I complain when I know it could be better/ I hope that sometime the one above hears us/ I wait on a dawn when problems collect/ they know better, what’s up, Remi?! I know that it will be better, isn’t that right, Marko/ I believe in love as long as the sun bright, and so...

Refrain (*Gledam u nebo da vidim šta me čeka/al' nema znakova samo tragovi Star Treka/nema lijeka za ljude što šire mržnju/jer takvi iza sebe ostave priču tužnu/Izlazim napolje, želim istinu/prije nego što vanzemaljci me prstom dodirnu/za koju godinu bit će sve drugačije drug/uništiti će nas ovaj prokleti Facebook Youtube i Twitter, care/Saljemo brdo ljubavi za sve Yugonostalgicare/za sve uplakane majke i za očeve sa žuljevima/za svu djecu koja su na krivim putevima/Zagreb, Sarajevo i Beograd/za neki budući pametan korak/koji neće biti gorak kao pelin/nadam se da neću morati da se selim odavde jer*

Refren 2x *Želim da je sve OK sa nama/želim da prodje prokleta tama*

*Brz tempo života kolje nas/brza hrana kojoj ne odoljevaš/i proljevaš krv kao vodu za slobodu/i ne možeš dobiti posao/jer nisi u rodu sa vlasnikom firme/Odjednom pogrešno je ime/koje dala ti je mater iz ljubavne idile/u gradu prodaju se kile, gdje gorile rješavaju sve probleme uz pomoć sile/A ja se pitam gdje tu pripadam jer naveče sanjam slobodu kao da je Amsterdam/i nije da se žalim kad znam da može bolje/nadam se da nas nekad čuje onaj gore/Dočekujem zore kad skupe se problem/oni znaju bolje šta ima Remi/znam da bit će bolje, je l' tako Marko/vjerujem u ljubav sve dok sunce je žarko, i zato Refren)*”

intervention, while explicitly conjuring an alternative reality in which materiality and movement are eminently political.<sup>37</sup>

In a discussion of how time is often represented in present-day Bosnia, anthropologist Stef Jansen (2015) argues that one of the symptoms of what he calls “Daytonitis” is a widespread feeling of pattering in place (173). Hierarchically organized rankings in professional sports and quantitative economic indicators and ever-shifting EU benchmarks help to shape understandings of how time unfolds while “on the road to Europe” (176-180). Such top lists regularly reveal the country in a spatiotemporal position of “lagging behind” from where other “healthy” countries should be. The imaginations of time in Priki’s “*Yustalgija*” reverse this logic. The West instead measures itself in relation to the rapper’s reconstituted Federal National Republic, one that is still whole and thriving like never before.

Poetic play with supernatural intervention, material citation, and alternative speculation all emerge in specific ways in Priki’s music video. At the beginning of the video, Priki drives an automobile with the look of the 1980s through a mysterious fog through which we emerge in a new space-time. He arrives at the socialist-era monument at Petrova Gora, which commemorates the WWII uprising of the people of Kordun and Banija. The rapper checks an antiquated pocket watch before beginning his first verse, which signals that there is an otherworldly aberration in the familiar flow of 1990s events.

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<sup>37</sup> In an interview for Index.hr (La. 2012), Philatz contended, “One should look at the whole story as fiction that offers us the opportunity to imagine an alternative reality. It’s exactly for that reason that we distanced ourselves from the video, figuratively, temporally, and stylistically such that we returned to the beginning of what we know and understand to be the break-up of the 1990s. However, in our video, it’s the fictional beginning of the growth of Yugoslavia for which the roads are different from those of today. For that reason, that window of opportunity gave us the freedom to invert the course of action that we know today (*Cijelu priču treba gledati kao fikciju koja nam je pružila mogućnost da zamislimo alternativnu stvarnost. Ovdje se ne radi o pokušaju mijenjanja ili utjecanja na trenutnu stvarnost. Upravo zato smo se u spotu udaljili, figurativno, vremenski i stilski te se vratili na početak onoga što mi znamo i poimamo kao raspadanje 1990-tih. No, u našem spotu, to je fiktivni početak rasta Jugoslavije za koju su putevi drugačiji nego danas. Upravo zato, taj prozor mogućnosti dao nam je slobodu da izokrenemo tijek radnje kakvu mi poznajemo danas*).”

Through his play with time and space, Priki takes the viewer on a tour of the imaginary Federal National Republic in an alternative present-day. We are led past shared “Yugoslav” national banks, parliaments, and theaters instead of Croatian and Serbian ones. Tito has replaced Ban Jelačić on Zagreb's main square. Sites damaged in the Wars are shown without a blemish, including the Vukovar Water Tower. At newsstands, Priki reveals a passion for the bibliographic. A whole series of eclectic books and magazines appear that not only celebrate some of Priki’s rapper colleagues who are stars of this alternative Yugoslavia. They also return viewers to mostly 20<sup>th</sup> century writings that blend both the ostensibly real and imagined. Excerpts from works of the astronomer and ufologist, Josef Allen Hynek, occultist Christopher Hyatt, Milan Kundera, Milovan Đilas, and Heraclitus all appear in newsstand windows. Iconic brands of the post-WWII Socialist Federal Republic also dot the landscape as if their associated firms were more profitable than they ever had been prior to the 1990s.

Not only do we see a rejuvenated JAT, but other forms of homemade mobility also take center stage of the video. Windfarms and the streaks of airplanes dominate the horizon. The implication from magazine covers is that Yugoslav energy going into the vehicles pictured is clean, green, and healthily domestic. Consumer products also appear to be in enviable motion. Konzum supermarkets have become “Unikonzum,” and tourists are clamoring to visit all of the Federal National Republic, even beyond the Dalmatian Coast. The video is edited not only in ways that punctuate Priki’s lyrics. Cuts emphasize the movement of iconic modes of transportation, including Belgrade’s buses near Republic Square and Zagreb’s trams along Ilica. The song, while provocative, sends love to all, including those kids, who are “on the wrong path,” that is, moving in a direction that is contrary to the one Priki advocates. The morally

inflected positive movements are contrasted with the homeless and lonely shots of smokers walking their dogs, reminders of the “real” everyday that also are featured in the video.

Despite a largely positive response on social media, in the press, and in YouTube commentary, Priki’s video was not without controversies. First, the “yugonostalgic” feelings and those who possess them to whom the song is dedicated remain polarizing, such that celebrating Tito’s return to a square now dominated by Ban Jelačić provoked questions. Second, maps of Priki’s imagined, still united Federal National Republic also show the once autonomous provinces of the SFRY, Vojvodina and Kosovo, as separate from Serbia in the same way as Macedonia, Slovenia, and other former republics. Thus poetically rendered relationships to the past found in rap lyrics, scene-specific blog posts, and documentaries are also the subject of occasional tensions that undermine the solidarity of the scene(s) and its artists across ex-YU.

### **The Poetics of Border Crossing in Homemade Hip Hop Film**

I turn now to the poetics of domestic films about the hip hop scene(s) that directors have made with ever greater frequency since the mid-2000s. One of the consistent themes of these films is an ongoing discussion of the political stakes of homemade hip hop’s border crossings. These documentaries utilize poetic strategies to illustrate how homemade hip hop is a connective, cosmopolitan substance, often while eliding explicit references to nationalist rap. The documentaries devote significant attention to how artists assess the ideologies of audiences and experience transnational performance and distribution. The films thus run parallel to other media about the domestic hip hop scene(s), especially the journalist interview, that are often eager to thematize prominent hip hop artists’ emphasis on anti-nationalism. Arguably, this reinforces homemade hip hop as a sign of anti-nationalism, sometimes to the erasure or downplay of other themes and inconsistencies.

Before the trend in documentary production, homemade hip hop artists already had made multiple appearances in domestic dramatic films since the late 1990s. The 2002 film, *One on One (I na I)*, is a Serbian “cult classic” that features members of the rap duo VIP in prominent roles. The film concerns how the lead uses his skills in basketball to cope with the criminality in his surroundings in urban Belgrade of the post-socialist period. Edo Maajka and other rappers composed the soundtrack for the 2003 film, *Summer in the Golden Valley (Ljeto u zlatnoj dolini)*, on Tuzla’s FmJam label. In the 2006 film, *Esma’s Secret (Grbavica)*, the young lead actress listens extensively to Edo Maajka as she makes sense of familial wartime tragedy.

A variety of documentarians have also focused on hip hop specifically, although few have had more formalized theatrical release. These are dominated by a number of short YouTube video releases, the numbers of which are in turn dwarfed by the longer history of music video production. I turn now to discuss three documentaries in further detail: *A Sevdah about Storks* (2007; *Sevdah o rodama*), *Border* (2014, *Granica*; a shorter subtitled version of which was released as *A Letter*), and *Stand in (Stop on) the Way* (2015; *Stani na put*). I will again focus my attention on three poetic elements of each film: the directorial selection of material signs, use of archival and especially music video footage, and interview-based discussion of the challenges, necessities, and pleasures of social connection-making across predictable lines of affiliation (see also Jašarević 2015).

As I describe further below, video-making played a key role in my engagement with the scene(s). My objective in 2003 had been to make a documentary about hip hop outside of the US. I hoped that Zagreb-based performers could be a part of this. In contrast to ethnography, music video, film, and documentary were media formats far more legible to those hundreds of artists whom I met during my Watson fellowship research year. In Paris, Dakar, Moscow,

Ulaanbaatar, Zagreb and elsewhere, I faced little obstacle organizing meetings with artists, who could easily see the potential benefits of presenting their work to an American videomaker, no matter how self-evident my limited formal production training was back in 2002-03. My education at the University of Chicago made me much more conscious of the uneven politics of representation, but in a way that was also flawed in terms of anthropology's unabashed comfort with and frequent celebration of the inaccessibility of its own poetic strategies. For the most part, ethnographies are simply not (yet?) forms that are broadly legible, interesting, or particularly inspirational to my informants. While most forms of ethnographic publication are in many ways distant from the practices of homemade hip hop crafts, the same cannot be said of the documentary film and music video. Given the low cost barriers to access, YouTube and its precursors were everywhere emergent and later dominant during the periods of my field research.

#### *A Sevdah about Storks*

Mirošničenko's documentary focuses on Edo Maajka, who all three aforementioned MCs acknowledge as one of the key conduits of integration in the domestic scene(s). HRT funded *A Sevdah* four years after another documentary *Permanent Alien Resident* (see Babović and Konjikušić 2003; *Trajno nastanjeni stranac*) about Edo appeared on Slovenian television, which reacted to the massive interest he generated across ex-YU. *A Sevdah* draws its name from an eponymous track on Edo's first album that resembles spoken-word poetry set to guitar. In the song of the same name, Edo describes how storks are no longer interested in the Balkans: "Even the storks no longer come here/Our bottles don't agree with them/ The Balkans simply don't suit

them/Because it's a sin to give birth to a child where bullets fly."<sup>38</sup> The narrative of *A Sevdah* follows Edo's multiple biographical border-crossings when he fled Brčko during the early 1990s as a Bosniac refugee, landed in Zadar and eventually migrated to Zagreb, then returned to Tuzla to study criminology, only to re-settle in the Croatian capital to begin recording his first album, *Listen to Your Mother*. The directors then follow Edo, Frenkie, DJ Soul, and others on another trip, this time to a performance in Novi Pazar, the capital of Serbia's Sandžak. At the time, Edo had already performed in Serbia before, but never in the predominantly Muslim region of the southeast. Edo once rendered his name in English as the "The Mother MC," but the translation does not do his pseudonym full justice. When the first vowel of *majka* (mother, mom) is elongated as in *maajka*, one gets a Bosnian slang word equivalent to "the man," "boss," or "the king" in American slangs. The gendered nature of this vernacular, coupled with its standard equivalent, is something that Edo regularly uses to his poetic advantage. The emphasis on storks and the failure of reproduction in the film's title is consistent with other such tragically playful games Edo plays elsewhere such as in his first album title, or his own favorite song from 2004, "Motherfucker" (*Mater vam jebem*). The "fucking" of the original BCS+M latter title is the action of a first-person "I" who is unclear. Thus, whether Edo is verbally humiliating the nationalists and politicians whom he critiques, or they are metaphorically destroying him, or both, is part of the song's poetic prowess. Since the mid-2000s, Edo has consistently made clear one line of social division within the domestic scene(s). Musicians, particularly folk and rock stars, who addressed audiences with "patriotic" songs risked becoming targets of his anti-nationalist lyrical broadsides.

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<sup>38</sup> "Ovdje, više ne dolaze ni rode/Ne gode im više naše flaše/Balkan im više jednostavno ne paše/Jer grijeh je rodit dijete tu će meci lete"

As in *Permanent*, a series of interviews with Edo and others bolster the narrative about Edo and his performance in Novi Pazar that unfolds in the film. The cast of interviewees is dramatically extended to include family, friends, former teachers, fellow artists, journalists, and others. We hear stories of Edo's troubles as a Muslim refugee in school, how he once sold counterfeit cigarettes, and how he shocked his eventual collaborators in Zagreb with all of the gripping, unrecorded material that he had written. Descriptions of the personal challenges of growing up poor with packages from the Red Cross and limited contact to his family in Croatia are coupled with stories of his improbable capacity to overcome grief and his outsider status to rise to fame across ex-YU.

In a technique that each of the documentaries share, Mirošničenko leads the viewer through cleverly selected snippets of Edo's music videos. This audiovisual sampling dovetails with the interview-based character development that viewers receive in the first half of the film. In the second half, the musical elements come largely from live recordings of Edo's show in Novi Pazar. As the viewer enters Novi Pazar, the soundtrack switches to Zorica Brunclik's newly-composed folk hit recorded in 1977, "Oh, My Mother Only Has Me" (*Aj, mene majka jednu ima*), yet another directorial play with Edo's moniker. While the overwhelming majority of songs in the film are Edo's, signs of Yugorock classics, folk, and sevdah also emerge from the soundtrack, interviews, and stills. The concert venue in Novi Pazar, which Edo describes as typical of unremodeled socialist spaces, looks much different from the better lighting, sound systems, and branding that fill Zagreb's clubs.

Landscape contrasts thus play a key role in the *A Sevdah*, which follows Edo through clubs and squares in Zagreb, across the hills and to stops in B&H, and on to the particular urban geography of Novi Pazar. Viewers see Edo's first home and the corrugated red rooftops and

modest, smoking chimneys of Brčko. The sparsely populated Bosnian landscape alongside the road reveals a number of mosques, which Mirošničenko includes to mark the religious differences between Edo's adopted Zagreb and B&H. While the explicit, material signs of Catholicism are not in the film, former teachers and Edo himself nonetheless explain the difficulties he experienced as a Muslim in dealing with schoolmates. The implication of the poetic inclusion of these material signs is that they advance a story of cultural border crossing that serves as a visual accompaniment to Edo's interview snippet discussions of the challenges, ethics, and rewards of transnational artistic engagement.

### *Border*

The smaller budget 2014 documentary *Border (Granica)* by Ada Sokolović likewise features a series of poetic strategies for communicating messages. The film revolves around screenings of and responses to Frenkie's music video for "A Letter to Milan" (*Pismo Milanu*), itself a powerful commentary on the continued politics of nationalism in B&H. In the song of the same name, Frenkie describes a letter he has written to a Serbian friend (with a stereotypical name). In his rapped letter, Frenkie attempts to understand where Milan is coming from with his fears of Bosniac nationalist rhetoric. He also seeks to explain his own fears regarding Serbian nationalism that he encounters in Republika Srpska. According to Frenkie, both the song and the film seeks to raise the question of why across ex-YU, few are ever the first to raise the hand of reconciliation.

In an Asch-style documentarian technique, the director uses Frenkie's music video and another interview with artistic metacommentary to prompt students born largely between 1995-1997 to reflect on the status of interethnic relations in their own lives. The juxtaposition of interview commentaries by the students, who were still in high school when the film was made,

reveals a series of discourses about the past and continued challenges for the present in navigating ethnonational difference in daily lives. For example, the students describe what it means to have an ethnically-marked name in certain parts of the country late at night. They also explain their own frustrations with check-boxing censuses and politicians especially who insist on nationalist rhetoric. After observing recordings of the interviews, Frenkie and Milan in turn agree that political rhetoric inhibits any kind of “healthy” alternative from emerging, because fears are stoked the minute such different candidates begin winning support.

As in *A Sevdah*, Sokolović uses archival footage. She shows scenes of a decimated Dobrinja in Eastern Sarajevo after the war. As Frenkie describes his own wartime memories before his family fled to Germany, shots of Serbian paramilitary leader Arkan and his Tigers flicker quickly on the screen. When the students talk about their own experiences with rightwing discourses, we see the largely male spaces of stadiums full of chanting hooligan crowds, which is in visual distinction to the mixed genders of the interviewees who offer reflective, individual perspectives. The footage features audio of the standard nationalist chants, “A Knife, a Wire, Srebrenica” (*Nož, žica, Srebrenica*) that Sokolović juxtaposes with “Kill the Serbs” (*Ubij Srbina*). As in the poetics of the lyrics above, a documentarian’s b-roll gives voice to nationalists, primarily to demonstrate the dangers of such rhetoric that Frenkie, Milan, and the other interviewees frame. Shots from the music video take the young viewers to memorials across ex-YU that Frenkie and Milan visit together. They do not limit themselves to the memorials of any given national group, so we thus see lingering destruction in Vukovar, the sites of siege memory in Sarajevo including the Markale market, Suada and Olga’s Bridge, and Ferhadija, the memorial complexes Čardak in Derventa and at Kravica in Bratunac. The final camera tilt lifts up to reveal Frenkie and Milan together looking at the grave markers at

Srebrenica. The lyrics dovetail with the documentary's material poetics of shared historical victimhood:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 It's difficult to express to condolences to others | <i>Teško je drugima izraziti sućut</i>    |
| 2 Yours will kick you, and they will spit            | <i>tvoji će te šutnut' a oni pljunut'</i> |
| 3 Misuse push it into a new conflict                 | <i>zloupotrebiti u novi sukob gurnut'</i> |
| 4 And that's the way fire will again ignite          | <i>i tako će vatra opet buknut'</i>       |

Multiple journalist interviewers compare “A Letter to Milan” to the message Frenkie composed in “Nerko.” Here again, we see the powerful play of shifting pronouns and Others that resemble the self.

### *Stand in (Stop on) the Way*

In this 2015 documentary, the viewer can see multiple shots of the artists featured pass cans of Red Bull, which operates as an amusing testament to product placement and the conditions of the film's production. The latter, of course, may have proven impossible to realize financially without MTV and Red Bull, two companies which as I describe, have played a large role in the expansion of homemade hip hop. Nemanja Đerić's *Stand* is a largely historical film, which is set around a series of recording sessions in which a group of markedly transnational, largely old-school domestic artists, some of whom had yet to collaborate, record a track together at Zagreb's Studio Morris. The shared recording sessions serve as a time for the artists' reflection on the earliest days of homemade hip hop, its key figures, and early practices in Croatia, Serbia, and B&H. Marčelo, Frenkie, and General Woo join a whole host of others from around ex-YU, but the film focuses primarily on artists who either live in or associate to varying degrees with Zagreb, Belgrade, and Tuzla. The filmmakers evince obvious dedication to chronicling minute details about the histories of Zagreb, Belgrade, and Tuzla's scenes. They present these through

targeted, standard documentary interviews with the artists, on-site location recordings of scene-specific *lieux de memoire* including studios and gathering spaces, and title screens with chronological information detailing what happened when.

The resulting mostly celebratory film offers a detailed history of the scene(s) that while approaching hagiography at moments, also thoughtfully weaves together archival footage from music videos with interview prompts for information about artists' earliest encounters with hip hop. In the film's first sequences, viewers get a sense that despite years passing before collaboration across national lines were commonplace, there were varieties of ways in which the political borders and official rhetoric emerging in each newly separate state ran counter to young people's unofficial, porous experiences with music, fashion, and informal cultural exchange. In *Stand*, Đerić also expends valuable effort to digging through the extensive homemade hip hop videography to share examples of influential music videos.

Again, the documentarian mobilizes material culture toward the end of telling a shared story of uptake. Aesthetic predilections for fashion, music, and lyrics become readily apparent through the montage that *Stand* presents through its video sampling. We learn in the interviews charismatic copied tapes of radio shows changed teenage hands, making it across transnational circuits. Those who fled violence to Germany or had connections abroad, shared their new knowledge of hip hop elsewhere when they returned home. The baggy jeans, thick gold chains, and other now somewhat anachronistic fashion staples of the 1990s offer a number of amusing, self-deprecating reflections about how teenage fans who would one day become artists recognized one another. The viewers learn that the borders that rose during socialist Yugoslavia's dismemberment and sometimes continue to "stand in the way" eventually prove no

match for the shared aspirations — ethical, audiovisual, material, and otherwise — that unite the featured artists.

## **Conclusion**

In a relevant discussion on ethnographic writing, Bruner (1986) argues that it is incumbent upon anthropologists to compose stories that are sufficiently recognizable to their peers. Their so doing affords them professional success in their travels through conferences, journals, book reviews, and grant applications. Bruner’s critique and revelation of shared convention echoes Bourdieu’s understanding of a “field of cultural production” (1993), wherein artists may only adopt a limited range of what he calls “position-takings,” or risk being unacknowledged entirely by the value system of their creative field. Soon after its emergence, homemade hip hop opened avenues for anti-nationalist poetics, which creatively rendered domestic pasts as timespaces of shared tragic folly, unwanted foreign intervention, and capitalist excess. Given the popularity of Marčelo, Frenkie, Woo, Edo and others, there exists a widespread public imagination that homemade hip hop is always alternative and anti-nationalist.

Regardless of such poetics, many rappers including БС, Марлон Брутал, Vinkovci’s Shorty, and others unsettle the stability of hip hop’s anti-nationalist significations (Arsenijević 2012; Baker 2010). Two particular Q+A sessions at papers that I gave over the past six years were telling in this regard. At the first in Belgrade in 2012, one respondent wanted to know what I thought of Serbia’s increasingly visible rightwing rap that seemed to run counter to a sense of a shared domestic scene. Particularly in the lyrics of some prominent Belgrade groups, jokes and much more polarizing nationalist rapped histories and epithets often target Albanians and Roms, and to a lesser degree, Croats and Bosniacs. This same can be said of certain Croatian acts that have occasionally found market success, albeit with the target sometimes being Serbs. At the

second, a conference in Chicago in 2014, another equally informed respondent insisted that homemade hip hop was made by leftists, implying that anti-nationalist tendencies were thus logical. Both somewhat contradictory positions correctly identified dominant trends, and to this day, I believe that I failed in the ultra-quick time allotted to unpack the selections and omissions that such nonetheless helpful responses implied. I will thus efficiently close with what I should have said.

Today, many homemade hip hop artists regularly speak of a domestic scene in the singular. This implies that artists across ex-YU who identify with hip hop share a value system, however partially, incompletely, and awkwardly. This shared value system, which implicates musical aesthetics, language use, business practices, and a whole range of other social phenomena that I describe in the chapters that follow, has also often featured a common poetic “coming to terms with the past” about events that transpired during the 1990s and at earlier polarizing historical moments. More often than not, this *Straßenvergangheitsbewältigung* is directed toward developing a shared understanding of the past among BCS+M speaking young men. They form the overwhelming majority of consumers, distributors, and producers of homemade hip hop. Despite its gender biases and ethnolinguistic limitations, the primary rhetorical targets of such rap are not internal Others. Instead engaged domestic rappers rail against technospectacle, corrupt elites, the immobile stagnations of the present; that is, what they see as the abuses of post-socialist political economy. Without a doubt, a nationalist poetics also exists in homemade hip hop. Its relative absence here reflects my dissertation project’s biases from the moment of conception through my final composition. With that said, we should perhaps abandon the rigid analytic dichotomy that pits nationalism against anti-nationalism. For various

reasons, the rhetoric of self-Other distinction-making in the latter is rarely entirely absent from the former and vice versa.

The politics of leisure and “fun” have changed in post-socialist ex-YU, and “alternative” entertainments such as homemade hip hop offer visions of the past and present with transnational charisma. Objective “truths” regarding the past and other markers of historicism are often sidestepped. Historicist conventions, however, do also bleed into homemade hip hop. In music journalism, academic articles, and documentary films that describe the scene(s), one can find historicist assumptions. Temporal linearity, objectivity, causality as a mode of explanation, the sharp separation of temporal zones, and an empiricist’s emphasis on evidence all emerge (Palmié and Stewart 2016:210). These conventional historical modes, however, do not fully capture the multiple, dynamic past-relationships one encounters in the domestic scene(s).

## Chapter 2

### Debating the Industrial Limits of Homemade Hip Hop<sup>1</sup>

In fall 2011, a markedly multinational MC battle, sponsored by Red Bull Energy Drink, brought rappers from around Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia to Sarajevo for a regional freestyle championship. Highlights from the verbal rap competition were subsequently broadcast by affiliate stations of the MTV Adria network. In the exciting afterglow of the finals, I sat down with a busy concert organizer in the relatively affordable food court of an otherwise expensive local mall. He spoke to me in laudatory terms of what the Austrian-Thai energy drink firm had achieved. For weeks, slick videos broadcast on MTV featured a slew of prominent rappers, DJs, and beatmakers from a range of cities to promote the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian event. The already existing collaborative connections in the domestic scene(s) were audiovisually brought together through diverse voiceover tracks and interspliced b-roll cutaway shots. For example, coppersmiths' handiwork from nearby Bašćaršija was juxtaposed with sharply dressed crowds near Republic Square in Belgrade and shiny blue trams along Ilica, Zagreb's main thoroughfare.

The promoter argued that Sarajevan hip hop in particular was in need of such good marketing and public relations: "These domestic companies don't understand what a brand means." He maintained that Red Bull grasped the value of professionally aligning itself with artists who have established fan bases and suggested that local music businessmen did not fully comprehend the utility of embedding their own brand in symbiotic relation to a relatively young performance genre. For many in attendance, the elaborate lighting and professional sound engineers of the USAID-remodeled venues, the broad mass media attention, the transnational artist competition and the productive marketing that accompanied Red Bull's battle offered a

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<sup>1</sup> I recently published a version of this chapter under a similar title for the journal *Signs and Society* (see Kohl 2016).

needed glimpse of how a healthy music scene should look and sound (for further discussion of the event, see also Kovač 2013).

Since so many substantive critiques posed in domestic rap lyrics negatively or ironically depict the processes the academy often describes as “neoliberal,” I was surprised to hear branding and marketing spoken of as so necessary to hip hop’s further local development. Prominent artists have long been known to find sponsors among a range of multinational companies, yet their critiques of capital have often been withering. Through different forms of commentary, rapped and otherwise, artists in the domestic hip hop scene(s) in post-Yugoslav spaces (henceforth ex-YU) often discursively frame spatiotemporal elsewhere as preferable to the current economic stagnations. The ex-YU present, rife as it is with youth unemployment and widespread ongoing dismay with political elites, is thus comparatively seen as insufficient, uncertain, or, as I later describe it, “murky.” The variety of political economies to have emerged and passed within a region treated historically by both West and East as a Balkan buffer gives artists a rich comparative frame, encompassing industries, states, and broader value systems beyond their own. Artists’ playful, critical, and pragmatic treatments of the brands of myriad places and times reinforce for participants in the scene(s) both capitalism’s present ascendancy and their awareness and imagination of other political economies. While I was conducting my field research, artists described well-funded opportunities around which their scene(s) could coalesce, like the Red Bull Battle, as too few and far between. Hearing these frustrations, my naïveté slowly eroded (if only slightly). I increasingly saw pragmatic relations to corporations like Red Bull less as a paradox than as an imperfect corporate necessity for continuing the expansion of homemade hip hop in an era of ongoing state crisis.

Historically, the Yugoslav Wars (1991–2001) coincided with the premillennium North American surge in branding that included the heavy encroachment of the brand form on music in general, including hip hop (Klein [1999] 2009, 45– 50). Hip hop emerged as a field of cultural production in which brands were at once ubiquitous and a site at which artists’ relations with the world of commodification were semiotically debated. Multiple forms of product placement were lodged in music videos with lyrics and shoutouts linking branded commodities such as cars, sneakers, liquor, and jeans to venues, songs, and artists. The 1990s golden era of “conscious,” “boom bap” rap, as narrated by some in a nostalgic mode, transitioned by the early 2000s to a more corrupt sell-out period of sample policing, broadcast monopolies, radio-friendly programming, label mergers, and other corporate imperatives (Chang 2005). After 9/11, the ongoing commodification and branding of hip hop entered a new stage when even the image modeling of Brand America was accompanied by attempts to coopt or leverage hip hop as a diplomatic tool in North Africa and the Middle East (Aidi 2011).<sup>2</sup>

Hess (2012) among others also notes that in lyricized narratives of rap careers, artists themselves thematize their interactions with the music industry, establishing their own brands and different ideologies of authenticity and success. Branded affiliations were one avenue through which some African American performers were able to secure higher positions than ever before in a historically racist industry (see, e.g., Rose 1994, 2008; Negus 1999; Forman 2002;

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<sup>2</sup> The broadcasts that first transmitted the genre, including MTV and its program, *Yo! MTV Raps*, also were entangled with various national culture industries and their flagship music brands. These included the German network VIVA and Croatian National Television’s *Pepsi (Top) DJ Mag*. Yurchak (2006) has written about the significance of Willis Conover’s radio program, *Time for Jazz*, on Voice of America stations during the Cold War. According to Yurchak, the show played a critical role in building audiences for US American music and speakers of the English language in the Soviet bloc, where authoritative discourse criticized excessive Western fashions and fascinations, but nonetheless tacitly tolerated their expansion. In ex-YU, *Yo! MTV Raps* figures prominently in narratives among an elder generation of Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian hip hop artists, who remember how the limited satellite television hook-ups that broadcast the program to neighborhood apartments before and during the wars inspired early domestic interest in the genre.

Brackett 2003; Chang 2005).<sup>3</sup> Beyond serving merely as a sign of commodification or materialism, entanglements with brands can also become powerful semiotic markers of generational, aesthetic, and ideological distinction that serve to link marginalized voices to wider social worlds (Ralph 2010).

Compared to the United States, in ex-YU spaces the commodification of hip hop is less pronounced given the fact that most who compose in an expressly hip hop idiom are seen as an “alternative” (*alternativa*) within an otherwise marginalized European music industry. Nonetheless, Levi’s, T-Mobile, and myriad local brands have helped domestic artists realize albums, videos, and concerts. In a related discussion, Miszczynski and Tomaszewski (2014) describe the particularities of brand references in the lyrics of Polish rappers, where in addition to many of the roles they perform in American hip hop, brands are also used to critique the expanding class inequalities born of recent neoliberal shift. Brands in homemade hip hop in ex-YU have an eminently relatable but ultimately distinct historical background from that which is observable in American and Polish hip hops. In ex-YU, the 1990s saw not only the growth of class inequalities as in neoliberal Poland but also violent state dismemberment and the emergence of new political borders.

Today, in ex-YU Western backpacking tourists and foreign capital circulate throughout the region, in stark contrast to the wars, sanctions, and forced migrations of the 1990s and the

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<sup>3</sup> In the 1980s, Adidas missed and later realized the potential of a marketing affiliation with Run-DMC, and ever since companies increasingly clamored to gain branded synergy with Diddy (Puff Daddy), Eminem, 50 Cent, and Jay Z among many others. Given their often strategized symbiosis, it becomes deliberately difficult to completely disentangle the connections between artists and the brands they promote. Likewise, corporate strategies themselves are indebted to the informal “guerrilla marketing” of graffiti writers, rappers, DJs, and dancers who sought the “all-city” ubiquity of logos, tags, DIY/independent clothing lines, and perhaps most iconically, whole-car pieces on New York subways in the 1970s. The recent mobilization of Jay Z and Alicia Keys’ collaboration on “Empire State of Mind” in New York State’s brand campaign represents an ironic new marketing plateau, insofar as hip hop, once framed as a “threat” to (white) bourgeois sensibilities and “buffed” subway mobilities (see Austin 2001), has become a desired audiovisual accompaniment to promotion schemes that extend far beyond the South Bronx.

restrictions of the Schengen visa regime of the 2000s. During that period, limitations or undue pressures on the movement of people and goods were locally experienced as the depressing and humiliating inverse of the once relatively prized red passport (*crveni pasos*) of the SFRY (1945–91). Jansen (2009) has argued that since it was one of the most flexible in the world during the Cold War, the Yugoslav passport was an important symbol of relative socialist-era mobility in contrast to present-day postwar entrapment in B&H and in Serbia (see also Jansen 2014).

By the time I conducted my fieldwork in 2010–12, the circulation of brands and music figured as topics of moral and aesthetic debate among my artist informants in Croatia, B&H, and Serbia. The mobility of the MP3 and digital music distribution fundamentally changed the music business in the newly transnational spaces of ex-YU, as it did elsewhere. The easy movement of digital files posed opportunities as well as challenges insofar as they enabled cosmopolitan emblems of connection while threatening one of the revenue streams of an already precarious industry.

In this chapter, I analyze ex-YU domestic hip hop artists' brand acts, that is, the myriad pragmatic, sincere, and/or ironic stances they have assumed in relation to an evolving institutional framework in postsocialist times. Following Bourdieu's (1993) abstract but useful language, one might say these position takings occur within transnational fields of cultural production newly saturated with (nation) brands that seek economic viability in contexts of postindustrial scarcity. Place brands, corporate brands, and artist brands all circulate in ex-YU, at once both independent and mutually reinforcing, strategic and subject to moral evaluation. Below I, first, attend to the ways hip hop artists embrace, celebrate, or otherwise align with brands and other signs of musical-historical change; and, second, I consider how such stances shift, since ethical discourses often place value on an artist's symbolic distance from economic

pragmatism. Drawing again on Briggs and Bauman (1992; see also Živković 2011), I am particularly interested in exploring the narrative techniques through which these artists lyrically craft social connections or, alternatively, distinctions through minimizing/maximizing intertextual gaps between narrations of their biographies, music distribution, and brands. Artists across the domestic scene(s) exhibit a range of convictions, motivations, and stances toward branding and historical shift. Pragmatism within the industry often came up against different economies of value. The ethical tensions over how to navigate one's relation to capital, commodities, and brands is one of many shared elements across homemade hip hop. Below I analyze rap lyrics and the activities of music rights organizations in which one can observe brand acts of states, bureaucracies, and citizen-artists in relation to two key elements of the new political economy: tourism and entertainment industry regulation.

### **Post-Socialist Brand as Epoch and Debate**

Manning (2009, 2010) has argued that brands in postsocialist space have a capacity to point to “old,” “transitional,” and “new” epochs (see also Manning and Uplisashvili 2007). Based on his ethnographic work in post-Soviet Georgia, Manning argues that brands can work beyond product and class distinction, representing more broadly an epoch of capitalism itself:

For example, the arrival of western branded goods, in particular Magna cigarettes, in large quantities in Tbilisi in the early 1990s seemed to herald the coming of a new capitalist epoch, so that the transition might instead be called ‘the Epoch of Magna.’ Thus a specific capitalist brand that was particularly ubiquitous was seized upon as a ‘meta-symbol.’ This brand no longer worked to differentiate one product from its competitors nor to persuade consumers, but had instead a metaphoric function of envisioning changes and demarcating boundaries within the social whole or space-time in which the object originates or circulates. (2009, 924)

As Manning observes, “brands are attached individually to goods, indexing specific producers and addressing specific customers,” but, importantly, they also can function as “metonymic indexes of capitalism” (925). Brands often prove “good to think” insofar as they are semiotic resources that postsocialist discourse imbues with the ability to index ever-increasing class distinctions born of political-economic transformations.

In homemade hip hop, digital distribution, corporate sponsorship, and brands could index possibilities, threats, and the ongoing “rationalization” of regional music commerce. Brands thus not only emerged as a signal of a newly hegemonic capitalist era (see also Grgić 2011) but also served as an important vehicle for debate. How was one supposed to support oneself making so-called alternative art in the transitional present? Could one have a hip hop career—or at least, as was far more likely—draw small compensation for disseminating one’s work? Juxtaposed with uncertain futures was a Yugoslav past that continued to hold rich semantic meaning as a symbolic counterpoint. Brands and their absences became powerful signs of change and an important means of evaluation for MCs, DJs, and other performers in the region.

Volčić (2012) has described how throughout ex-YU spaces, nation-branding campaigns have sought to attract fitful tourist capital and investment in a post–Great Recession climate of ongoing crisis. These centrally organized brand campaigns often reduce national, urban, and regional populations and histories to a set of consumable slogans. Urban and national identities are marketed by transnational consulting and advertising firms that seek to attract trade and visitors, but their supposedly “most competitive” images simultaneously fortify local hegemonies of class, race, and gender (see also Sussman 2012, 42). Graan (2010, 2013) has referred to nation-branding debates in the Macedonian context as a “politics of *imidž*” that points to a multitiered public discussion about what national face to present an outside world imagined

as full of watchful, judgmental, and powerful observers. Rather than critiquing the medium itself, complaints are often directed to bad branding (2013, 170), which reflects a new consumerist politics of citizenship.

While domestic hip hop's discourses on authenticity set a value on maintaining distance from nation brand campaigns, older artists do not view advertisement only as a compromise. Collaboration with corporate firms is also an opportunity musicians often willingly make to support themselves and their craft (Ryan 2011). Such musical compositions for political parties (Baker 2010), sports team anthems, ads for beverage, telecommunications and other companies, sonic projects for NGOs, and the Eurovision Song Contest can interweave with what scholars differentiate as nationalism, nation-branding, and "commercial nation-making." On the basis of ethnographic research in Papua New Guinea, Foster argues (2002, 78) that through commercial nation-making "the nation takes the form of a collection of people united by the commodities they jointly possess and consume in common." Foster demonstrates how ads for banks, airlines, cigarettes, and an array of other commodities evoke Papua New Guinea as a nation, and "presuppositions of capitalism and nationalism interpenetrate and reinforce one another" (84). In ex-YU, advertisement after the wars also regularly invoked newly dismembered nations and consumers as national subjects, ones who were now citizens of multiple successor states as opposed to a federal Yugoslav polity.

Music in the region including hip hop demonstrates a shifting relationship not only to iconic, epochal brands new and old, but also to the Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian nation brands that have sought to attract capital investment in an era of ongoing economic crisis. Geared as they are to garnering tourists and mobile capital, nation and city brand campaigns often mobilize generational and temporal logics to compete for and appeal to a wide range of capital flows.

Mijatović (2012) has described how regional nation-branding's use of music sometimes spawns cacophonous sponsorships of aesthetically diverse artists and festivals in ways often complex, even politically contradictory. For example, since 2006, Serbian government agencies have supported dramatically different music festivals, such as the traditional Guča and the modern, cosmopolitan EXIT, which has hosted a range of genres including hip hop, both foreign and domestic. Dumnić (2012) has argued that the Serbian government, in its "Strategy for the Development of Tourism in Serbia" from 2006, adopted a sort of "autobalkanism," a deliberate attempt to capitalize on the exotic brand valences of the term Balkan for an imagined Western tourist subject (349; see also Bakić-Hayden 1995; Todorova 1997). "Brand Balkans" imagines a hodgepodge of musical signs that agencies believed would appeal to tourist outsiders.

Expressly antinationalist, anticorporate composition in hip hop across ex- YU stands at odds with these place brands. To date, homemade hip hop is only tangentially if ever mobilized in Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian nation-brand campaigns concocted by government bureaucrats, PR experts, NGOs, and multinational marketing consultancy firms. Instead, what Goffman (1959) might term "front region" performances of nation-branded dramas are recast "backstage" in BCS+M lyrics and videos that interpellate regional listeners familiar with both nation brands, commercial nation-making, and stories that creatively deconstruct such crafted images. Relatedly, Bošković (2013) has considered how ironic and nostalgic commentary on socialist-era commodities can serve as a political statement to unsettle the post-war politics of memory prone to nationalist historiographies that obscure other industrial pasts with broader employment (see also Manning 2012). While homemade hip hop artists have certainly also been known to fortify local hierarchies of gender and, to a lesser extent, race in their imaginations of

place, firmly in the crosshairs of their social critiques are the expanding class distinctions born of postwar transition.

### **The Murky Present Considering Its Resonant Past**

Since hip hop's earliest uptake in Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade in the mid-1980s, the genre's development is said to have been impinged upon by different factors. Compared to the socialist era, the present proves impossible to disassociate from the ongoing downsizing of local music labels, increased challenges in surviving economically from music making, and the mass media blackouts believed disproportionately to affect alternative genres. The 1990s, a decade that the popular singer-songwriter Đorđe Balašević once anthropomorphized and then told to go fuck itself, are not unrelatedly described by hip hop artists as a time of profound detachment, one marked by sanctions and violence that distanced the West and its media industries from the region (see *Devedesete*, cited also in Jansen 2005). Legal copies of the latest album releases became harder to acquire, and so-called dance and folk pop reigned (see, e.g., Gordy 1999; Čvoro 2014). In postwar, postsocialist ex-YU, quasi- and illegal Internet distribution and foreign-owned streaming services have narrowed this imagined distance, but the present-day strictures placed on musical professionalization remain manifold. Performing hip hop and other alternative genres in ex-YU is rarely more than a hobby for the vast majority of artists involved. Viewed in terms of indicators such as record sales, opportunities for live performance, and mass-mediated broadcast, hip hop's popularity still feels tertiary in relation to regional rock and folk pop.

This feeling that something was still fundamentally incomplete about the present was a recurrent theme when my conversations with DJs, MCs, beatmakers, and other producers switched to the topic of hip hop as a business. Rappers and DJs regularly pointed to the threat of

potentially oversaturating young audiences with live performances, because disposable income was limited, as were venues willing to host hip hop shows. As elsewhere, living exclusively from touring was reported as completely exhausting, but given paltry royalty payments, even the most well-known hip hop artists were forced to hit the road constantly (Peršić and Fabijan 2011). DJs with professional aspirations often relied on the festival season (*sezona*) of the summer months (Arslani 2011). Some prominent acts had started avoiding distant concerts altogether, because they could not recoup their travel expenses. Despite regular appearances on MTV, one prominent MC explained how he was often forced to be his own manager and PR firm, hanging posters himself in advance of shows. Older DJs lamented that the “torrent generation” had come to expect free download in a context where a successful infrastructure for paid digital download did not yet exist and young people especially lacked the disposable capital necessary to purchase physical music media or regularly attend concerts. A veteran manager described the future of the local industry as “murkier” (*mutnija*) than ever before and argued that it required constant adaptability, especially if one refused to compromise by collaborating with folk pop artists. Could one ever expect to earn in an era when illegal download had given way to YouTube streaming?

As a descriptor, *murkiness* stuck with me since it applied to many of the opinions of my informants, who expressed ambivalence toward changes in distribution and music’s branding. Different narrations framed each as a symbol full of possibilities as well as threats to existing forms of hip hop sociality. Teleological framings of how homemade hip hop or the music industry more generally “should be” often assumes a story of imagined spatiotemporal elsewhere that I will interrogate throughout the course of this essay (see also Yurchak 2006, 158–237). Reading signs of murky times alongside one another reveals a variety of possible

futures unhitched from the failings and successes of political economic paradigms past, present, and elsewhere.

One industrial “elsewhere” that regularly served as a foil to today’s regional music business was that of the United States. Of course, given the size of Croatian, Bosnian, and Serbian diasporas in North America, many of my consultants built their social imaginaries upon direct personal experiences. One DJ explicitly contrasted what he saw as the ease of the music business in the United States with that which existed in the border-ridden realm of ex-YU spaces. The former was “built for business” (*stvoreno za biznes*), while the latter suffered under the weight of a political geography that was violently wrought twenty years ago:

Border barriers represent a big problem for the market. A terrible problem. You have the United States, you have 250 or more million people, there’s no customs, no customs nothing. And you can have a store in Pittsburgh, you have a website and you have FedEx, and I order something, and by tomorrow, the next morning the postman brings it. I don’t have to go anywhere. That is a brilliant business. That’s built for business. But here the market is too small.<sup>4</sup>

This DJ spoke about how the fractured marketplace (already “too small”) affected those who sought to make a living by selling any kind of musical product, equipment or otherwise. FedEx here functions as a poetic brand act, indexing the circulatory efficiency and ease with which stores in Pittsburgh can garner broad customer bases. He used the company name to distinguish the relatively unproblematic distribution across the United States from his border-ridden local map after socialism’s retraction.

In addition to the United States as a geographic elsewhere, artists also articulated sentiments toward the temporal elsewhere of socialist Yugoslavia. As concerns music, the

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<sup>4</sup> “Granični barijeri predstavljaju veliki problem za tržište. Užasan problem. Ti imaš, ono, United States, imaš 250 ili više milijuna ljudi, i nema carine, no customs, ništa, ništa. I ti možeš imat jedan dućan u Pittsburghu, imaš websajt i imaš FedEx, i ja nešto naručim, i to je sutra, ovaj, donese ujutro poštar. Ne moram nigdje ići. To je genijalni biznes. To je stvoreno za biznes. A ovdje je tržište premalo”

Yugoslav era is often retrospectively portrayed in terms of greater clarity: it had certain industrial benefits. Among these was the existence of an industry that produced millions of records, consumer electronics, and an estrada (celebrity culture) that still sometimes proves the stuff of nostalgia—especially when the playback and reproduction technologies of the MP3 and cloud services like YouTube are dominated by foreign conglomerates. To some, Yugoslav brands have now also become the stuff of lore: Fiats, JAT Airlines, and even Marshall Josip Broz Tito himself continue to lead branded lives. The aforementioned expediency of the red passport had an analog in the music industry. Reflecting on the success of Yugoslavia’s pop stars like Šaban Šaulić during the 1970s, and comparing their sales with those of today, an MC marveled to me about how well he and his peers might live if they could only convert a modest fraction of their YouTube views into actual records sold. Marshall Tito’s oft biographically mythologized ability to play West off East is matched in narratives that describe Yugoslav record labels’ ability to negotiate foreign licensing deals with the US majors. The music industry of the SFRY is often cited as one of the more successful state-building projects in the forty-five years of the country’s existence. State and public-private companies in the SFRY built a music industry that in some ways represented a sonic parallel to the state’s political-ideological programs of self-managed economic organization, its official policy of “brotherhood and unity,” and participation in the Cold War Non-Aligned Movement.

Throughout the earliest years of the state’s existence, party officials articulated negative authoritative positions vis-à-vis jazz, rock, and other Western musical imports. However, musical purism, such as that enforced by the Independent State of Croatia that emerged as a regional ally to the Axis powers during World War II, was also deemed undesirable (Ceribašić 1998). The Titoist state was left in a position of finding the means to govern a diverse

multiethnic polity that had been devastated by internal conflicts, external invasions, desperate poverty, and a myriad of other challenges to the pan–South Slavic impulses of the communists. Popular music was seen as having the capacity potentially to convince the populace of the benefits of a supranational category of civic and self-identification (Vuletić 2010).

Tito’s official break with Stalin in 1948 had profound implications for the planning of production, distribution, and consumption in the Yugoslav music industry that expanded during the period of the state’s rapid economic growth from 1953 to 1960. The operations of the two biggest record labels, Zagreb’s Jugoton and Belgrade’s PGP-RTB, expanded rapidly during the 1950s and eventually were joined by other distributors. The post-World War II period of self-managed state socialism also coincided with radical developments in mass communication that occurred elsewhere throughout the twentieth century. In the SFRY, this process included the local production and distribution of domestically manufactured radios, record players, and televisions. Perhaps the most influential medium of music’s broadcast during the Yugoslav era was radio, which after World War II was an important index of development and modernization to central planners who struggled to combat economic disparities and illiteracy throughout the SFRY’s forty-five-year-long existence (Vuletić 2008). These new mass media technologies also distributed the now no longer standard linguistic technology most frequently known as “Serbo-Croatian,” a compromise borne of two language-planning conferences that had occasional but ultimately fleeting success in establishing a centrally monitored and standardized linguistic unity.

Citing different factors, new scholarship on this period describes Yugoslav diskografija (music industry/production) as a vanguard of socialist-era Eastern European popular music production. Such narratives often situate the guiding light of post–World War II popular music production in the United States and United Kingdom, not in Soviet markets. Given its partial

incorporation with Western “scenes” and national industries, the SFRY is retroactively portrayed to have occupied an enviable space, neither fully East nor West in the terms of Cold War symbolic geography. Thus, record labels like Jugoton, PGP-RTB, and Sarajevo’s Diskoton have become nostalgia-laden brands that have a particular sort of value to record collectors, DJs, and beatmakers: they are proud emblems of a history of domestic discographic and industrial success.<sup>5</sup>

In the wake of the SFRY’s dismemberment in the early 1990s, historical, ethnographic, and ethnomusicological literature on ex-YU has productively described how music and national ideologies were often co-constructed in the constitutionally nationalist states that emerged (see, e.g., Gordy 1999; Žanić 2007; Čolović 2008; Baker 2010; on constitutional nationalism, see Hayden 2012). Repertoires, genres, individual artists, and even instruments were mobilized in Croatian, Serbian, and Bosniac nationalist discourses and nation-building projects during the Yugoslav Wars.<sup>6</sup> Čolović (2008, 133–82) discusses the constructed iconicity of particular instruments in nationalist discourses of the 1990s, when the *gusle* became equated with Serbian, the *tamburica* with Croatian (see also Baker 2010, 58–63), and the *saz* with Bosnian Muslim histories and political causes.<sup>7</sup> Scholarly, journalistic, and artistic descriptions frequently portray ex-YU fields of cultural production in the 2000s as centrifugal forces, capable of splitting apart populations, multiethnic states, and culture industries. In a similar historical register, music is frequently imbued with the capacity to transcend (narrow) national categories of affiliation.

Centripetal musical and mass media forces are also seen to abound. Journalist Ante Perković

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<sup>5</sup> For example, Zagreb’s Jugoton label alone boosted its production output from 33,000 records in 1947 to 2,371,600 by 1961 (Lipovšćak 1972, cited in Vuletić 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Their scholarly rigor would also be most welcome in critical analyses of Toby Keith, Katy Perry, and other conservative balladeers of “Make-America-Great-Again exceptionalism.”

<sup>7</sup> A *gusle* is a bowed instrument that often accompanies the vocal melodic line of epic poetry. The *tamburica* resembles a long-necked lute and is plucked and multistringed. The *saz* has a variable number of strings, often tuned to the same key, and has a longer neck than the *tamburica*. All three instruments are shared across the region.

(2011), for example, imagines a seventh republic (*Sedma republika*) in order to conceptualize the place of transrepublic Yugoslav pop and rock scenes in the SFRY (which was in reality divided into six republics and two autonomous provinces). To Perković, the seventh republic could sometimes overcome the SFRY's divisive internal politics and the nationalist wartime pop that followed.

Of course, the Yugoslav music industry has also been subject to different critiques. PGP-RTB and Jugoton infamously created an artificial scarcity by insisting through state corporate policy that Western recordings be published by their own presses. From the listener's standpoint, Western records thus often arrived with a multiyear time delay that undermined consumer satisfaction with state labels. In some discourses, the Yugoslav era is also sometimes characterized by its low-fidelity records and, more importantly, politically uncontroversial sounds.

Nonetheless, the socialist era of music production is often narrated as a period of relative success and expansion that has yet to be replicated on the same scale in any of the independent successor states. The SFRY's expansive material culture of vinyl record production, distribution, and collection continues to inspire musicians in the present. Moments of mythologized greatness, like the era of Yugoslav new wave (*novi val/talas*), continue to stand out. While Western styles came too late, they nonetheless stimulated unexpected, innovative musical fusions upon their arrival. Many artists not only grew up listening to their parents' domestically produced vinyl but also continue to sample older popular genres that trace their lineages to so-called Yugofunk, soul, and progressive rock, which are seen as musical precursors of domestic hip hop.

By contrast, many rap songs present the current era of "transition" as beset by challenges, including the uneven distribution of economic opportunity along generic lines, unlivable

compensation, unsatisfactory conditions of performance in clubs, and the broad deprofessionalization of musicianship. Today's versatile apps make video and beatmaking, cover design, and mix production easier and more accessible. However, for artists, musical commodities under the current political economy appear to generate less domestic value than they should.

So-called Yugonostalgic glorifications that celebrate the past remain controversial. Indeed, foregrounding the “yugo” when describing lamentations about what was preferable about the past can easily equate nostalgia for cultural production with nostalgia for the former state.

However, for many, the socialist era music industry remains an important emblem. It was a time when many well-regarded performers began their careers, played to big crowds, and recorded classics that continue to attract present-day publics. Now grappling with the fallout of an uneven era of streaming and download for which foreign conglomerates like Google and Apple are often better prepared, domestic labels must adapt. Selling hundreds of thousands of vinyl albums recorded by a single artist is a distant memory.

### **Artists' Ambivalent, Practical, and Creative Stances toward Brands**

Hip hop's professional alignments to brands in ex-YU can seem paradoxical: audiences often expect transnationally distributed engaged rappers to represent an alternative, one that polices and maintains semiotic distance from national, supranational, and corporate sponsors. Yet the genre's survival and expansion relies to some degree on branded affiliations that often index Western and domestic spatiotemporal elsewhere. In a context of growing scarcity, just how to balance survival with creative moral credibility frequently becomes an ongoing debate.

Circumventing sponsors and affiliations with branded corporations is difficult if one ever wants to organize a concert, get extended studio time, or appear in the mass media, that is, to get

paid and become, however fleetingly, a professional. Miszczyński and Tomaszewski's (2014, 748) interviewees argued that in Polish rap, branded sponsorships supported hip hop culture and were not subject to the same censorship as those in mainstream media. Likewise, across ex-YU, branded sponsorships are a constant feature of concerts, club events, and festivals, and thus play a critical role in the support of hip hop's newly transnational expansion. Despite this support, the ambivalence of domestic hip hop artists with respect to the underlying political economy of brands mirrors the broader society and is reflected in the ambiguous, shifting brand acts in the scene(s).

Artists' embrace of branding assumes a variety of forms of which creative self-promotion is the most ubiquitous. Facebook profiles, Twitter feeds, and YouTube channels live alongside the physical and digital design for covers of singles and albums, stickers, flyers, posters, t-shirts, hoodies—and even rolling papers. Online event listings and profiles at Soundcloud and other web portals involve countless creative decisions and demand that musicians often realize their artistic identities as (increasingly digital) commodities. This coincides, somewhat paradoxically, with the mobilization of iconic socialist brands and commodities as signs with newfound values.

Paid music work, performers explained, never involved just selling CDs, “merch,” or even gigging but also a variety of cross-professional entanglements that could include finding corporate sponsors. In 2010, regionally popular acts participated in a supranational brand campaign called “Diversidad: A Unique European Urban Experience.” A compilation album, concert tour, and online portal project supported by the European Commission and Music Office recruited artists from candidate states to collaborate with an ethnonationally and linguistically

diverse mix of other rappers from around the European Union.<sup>8</sup> While the Red Bull battle noted above spawned side debates about who really distinguished himself as the best MC, the *Diversidad* album produced discussions of another sort. In a polarizing moment of impending EU accession in Croatia, some wondered aloud: Was Brussels money a tainted source? Did earning in this way constitute *faux pas* for illustrious, engaged careers (Grgić 2011c)? At the time, other rappers busily sought aesthetic means to close the gap between themselves and the antigovernment protests that became a nightly ritual in Croatian cities throughout spring 2011. Music videos, CD cover designs, and rap songs all dutifully incorporated the protest chronotope, which was often markedly critical of the European Union and the pro-EU political parties.

Domestic rappers thus creatively strive in many ways to distance themselves from the iconic brands of postsocialist transformation. Brands are often sarcastically, ironically, and parodically deployed in composition. Through the stylized figuration of a variety of social types and personae (Agha 2005)—including scandalous politicians, lecherous old men at clubs, brand-obsessed shopaholics, and meathead mafiosi—domestic rap regularly features parodic storytelling.<sup>9</sup> Brand names for cars and clothes of mostly Western origin often become emblems of hedonistic obsession, greed, and inauthentic superficiality and social fragmentation.

Rappers implicitly critique new strategies of governmentality that seek to attract tourists and multinational investment capital through lyrics that poke holes in the “image” economy and inauthentic rhetoric of states. Such is the case with MC Struka’s track “Welcome to Belgrade” (*Dobrodošli u BG*), which I discuss below. Struka continues in a now lengthy tradition of ex-YU songs that represent places in what artists often argue are more honest terms than those that

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<sup>8</sup> What Piškori (2006) calls the “festivalization” of music consumption in Croatia brought forth related discourses that insisted on demonstrating that the newly dismembered state could be a non-xenophobic, comfortable branded home to “multiculturalist” world music.

<sup>9</sup> See also the discographies of Bolesna braća, Prti Bee Gee, Dječaci, Bad Copy, and Krankšvester.

circulate in mass-mediated news, advertisements, and local tourist industries. According to tragic forms of narrative emplotment, today “crisis rap” abounds across the genre’s myriad aesthetic and ideological divides. The privatization of state property, the increasing wealth imbalances associated with unregulated trade, ongoing nationalist rhetoric, and the limited employment opportunities for young audiences—all are figured as signs of moral, urban, and national decay.

A related discography of Belgrade rap alone might then include tracks such as Bvana’s song “The State Wants to Kill Me” (*Država ‘oće da me ubije*), which lyrically reimagines the supposed four Cyrillic S’s of the Serbian state’s heraldic emblem (*Samo sloga Srbina spasava*—“Only Unity Will Save the Serbs”) as “The Serbs are completely fucked” (*Srbi sjebani su skroz*). The former phrase was supposedly uttered in the twelfth century by Saint Sava, who implored his followers not to abandon the Orthodox Church for Roman Catholicism.<sup>10</sup> In the song “Iron” (*Pegla*), the aforementioned outspoken antinationalist Marčelo tells a biography of a right-wing young hooligan in the third person who falls prey to his own tragic past and thirst for self-affirmation by deliberately beating and then, once overwhelmed, killing a classmate from school given the peer’s perceived homosexuality and outsider status. The more conservative group BC’s “Welcome to Srbija” is a battle rap, which identifies an amorphous “they” (i.e., corrupt politicians) as coercing the characters of the song to the point of terrorism for a “better Serbia.”<sup>11</sup> More pedestrian stories include Ajs Nigrutin’s 2012 “Parking servis,” which offers a myriad of mostly sexist epithets for Belgrade’s new privatized parking system. Since the mid-2000s songs such as these gained Nigrutin, his ever-irreverent partners from the group Bad Copy, and many of the aforementioned artists substantial, devoted followings (and some critics) across the region.

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<sup>10</sup> The graphemes in their Cyrillic form, in the same shape as Latin *C* were originally stylized crowns, their tops facing outward from a central cross.

<sup>11</sup> See Arsenijević (2012) for a critical extended discussion of the “hip hop nationalism” of BC.

In contrast to highly locally focused rap such as this, ex-YU nation-brand campaigns become advertisements of a detached political elsewhere, externally oriented toward tourists and investors.

### **Struka's "Welcome to Belgrade"**

Struka's "Welcome" serves as a notable example of how artists creatively play and lyrically resignify places across the region by either implicitly or explicitly evoking city advertising and branding. Struka's song is set to an ominous beat produced by Priki, an MC and producer from Bihać, Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose aforementioned 2012 release "Yustalgija" drew wide journalistic attention since it reimagined the history of the 1990s as a decade in which the Yugoslav Wars never transpired.<sup>12</sup> Through "Welcome," Struka sought to discuss the aftermath of attacks on foreign tourists in an "ironic and sarcastic way" that he argued some young listeners missed. The lyrics feature Manichean play that includes images of day/night, violence/enjoyment, heaven/hell, and the signs of local patriotism. However, for those familiar with the biographies of Struka and Priki, whose backgrounds trace to the Serbian capital and northwestern Bosnia, respectively, the song is marked as one of many cross-national collaborations in domestic hip hop.

Priki's beat for "Welcome" is emotive, featuring a sampled choral loop, heavy major chordal interjections, a high short figure on the piano, punctuated with heavily processed synth blasts, slow tempo kick drums and a pronounced snare, the thwack of which resounds throughout the song. The chorus features a simple release-cut-release-stab scratch production pattern that employs Struka's filtered vocal and is reminiscent of the simple, but clean DJ Premier-style patterns made internationally famous on Gangstarr records. "This is b, BG, b, BG South" (*To je*

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<sup>12</sup> The Yugoslavia of Priki's lyrical imaginary not only remains a unified federal state but is able to avoid joining the European Union on the strength of its own economy and legacy brands.

*b, BG, b, BG jug*) in the scratches refer to the section of Belgrade (*Beograd*) from which the MC hails.

In the first verse, Struka lyrically voices a polite but painfully honest tour guide who rhymes some inviting couplets to his tourist-listener. Yet, breaking the typical frame of a crowd-pleasing tour, Struka suddenly takes his imagined group on a macabre turn. While Belgrade's branded fairy tale is filled with the "best nightlife," fortress monuments, and *splavovi* (flotilla clubs/bars), Struka simultaneously reimagines the city as full of contrasting threats. Below we join Struka for the second verse:

Verse 2:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 17 Don't miss walking around Belgrade's projects                          | <i>Ne propustite da obidete beogradske blokove</i>                    |
| 18 and the fine restaurants when you go down to the docks                 | <i>i fine restorane kad se spustite na dokove,</i>                    |
| 19 It isn't recommended that you dick around in the city                  | <i>nije preporučljivo po gradu da se kurčiš</i>                       |
| 20 There are Grobari, Delije, even Radovci, Zemunci here                  | <i>tu su Grobari, Delije, pa Radovci, Zemunci</i>                     |
| 21 The gray color and social realism will make you depressed              | <i>Deprimirate sivilno i socirealizam,</i>                            |
| 22 here a new world is rising on the ruins of communism                   | <i>ovde niće novi svet na ruševini komunizma</i>                      |
| 23 a wonderful country, a wonderful nation, and natural beauty            | <i>divna zemlja, divan narod, prirodna bogatstva,</i>                 |
| 24 the wars are long over, we're ready for new brotherhood                | <i>ratovi su davno prošli spremni smo za nova bratstva,</i>           |
| 25 new unity and new gods and leaders for a new religion of Holy Writings | <i>nova jedinstva i nove Bogove i vođe i za novu veru sveta pisma</i> |
| 26 we'll kiss their ass if they'll only end that visa                     | <i>Ljubićemo dupe da se ukine ta viza</i>                             |
| 27 and for a new influx of that damned Western currency                   | <i>i za novi priliv prokletih, zapadnjačkih deviza</i>                |
| 28 buy a book about my city, you'll get a free DVD                        | <i>kupi knjigu o mom gradu imaš gratis DVD</i>                        |
| 29 even BBC is broadcasting our video advertisement                       | <i>naš reklamni spot vrti i BBC</i>                                   |
| 30 time has run out unfortunately, we                                     | <i>vreme je isteklo na žalost stigli smo do</i>                       |

|                                       |                                   |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| arrived at the end of the verse       | <i>kraja strofe</i>               |
| 31 hopefully you had a good time here | <i>valjda se ste lepo proveli</i> |
| 32 Come again                         | <i>dođite nam opet</i>            |

Struka’s rhymes are replete with the ubiquitous well-known positive tone, spin, and distanced intimacy of a tour guide — “Don’t miss” (*Ne propustite*) and “Come again” (*dođite nam opet*) — using the formal form of address, while stylizing one of the key social figures who present and maintain the municipal brand to foreign visitors (lines 17–18, 23, 31–32). In lines 18, 23, and 28–29, Struka even adorns his text with familiar signs of the tourist trade: video ads in primetime slots on prominent Western television channels (BBC), promotional DVDs about the city, gastronomic recommendations, and positive citations about the country’s natural beauty and people. However, the song is filled with moments during which Struka, breaking the expected frame, points to sites of the city’s history that are all too easily downplayed in tourist narratives. In the second verse, he mentions that the local population is still desperate for foreign currency, Serbia’s prominent hooligan groups threateningly roam the streets, and the “ruins of communism” linger in the landscape (lines 20, 22, 27).

As tour guide, Struka recommends visiting New Belgrade’s blokovi, apartment blocks that constitute one of ex-YU’s gray testaments to urban planning and socialist-realist architecture first built in 1947. Notwithstanding some recent movement of business and finance capital to the area, given its proximity to the historic city center and relatively cheap property values, the landscape here continues to be dominated by these, to some, severe exteriors. As Struka commented, “everything is presented as shiny and terrific, but really, when you scratch the surface, it’s not that way.” Struka’s darkly playful allusions to the branding of Belgrade and Serbia require that you “read between the lines.”

Signs of hooligans and organized crime also populate Struka's lyrics. The Grobari, Delije, and Radovci mentioned in line 20 are the hooligan groups of [F]udbalski [K]lub Partizan, FK Crvena zvezda, and FK Rad, respectively, Belgrade's most (in)famous soccer clubs. When a French tourist was murdered in broad daylight in 2009 along Knez Mihailo Street, Belgrade's main shopping district, representations of Belgrade and Serbian soccer fandom suffered in the international press. While mass-mediated representations of Serbian soccer fans sometimes promote a primitivist image of young men and facilitate stereotypes about the Balkans, the overlaps between hooligan groups, far-right organizations, and politicians continue to unsettle a "smooth" picture of Serbia's European integration. Both hooligans and the far right are frequently aligned in their stances against minority rights, homosexuality, Serbia's candidacy in the European Union, and the rulings of ICTY (Pavasovic Trost and Kovecevic 2013). While Struka's "Welcome" does not explicitly condemn the soccer fan clubs, reading between the lines, hooligans are cast as one of many threats behind the violence that disrupts the branded city image.

The term *Zemunci*, or *Zemunites*, refers in this case not to residents of the historic town across the Danube from Belgrade that once marked the border between the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires but instead to the once powerful Zemun gang, which continues to figure prominently in narratives about organized crime in Southeastern Europe (Glenny 2008). Members of the Zemun gang were held responsible for the assassination of Zoran Đinđić, Serbia's prime minister closely associated with the left-leaning intellectual elite, who was murdered in 2003. Đinđić's murder constituted a post-Milošević moment of national crisis and public discourse about the past, democracy, and transition to the European Union.

In lines 24–25, Struka says that the wars are long over and offers an irony: that he and his audience are “ready for a new brotherhood and unity,” that is, for a new period of collaboration across ethnonational lines, the aforementioned hallmark of Titoist political ideology. According to Struka, the bitter irony in this line refers to “politicians feeding us bullshit about unity and brotherhood with other Slavic nations in the Balkans one day, and then making us hate and kill each other the other day, depending on their interests.” The rapper implies that the “new gods” and “[new] Holy Writings [or Bible]” of the “new religion” to which believers orient is an “influx of damned foreign currency” and the possibility that the barriers to the Schengen Area visa regime will end for Serbian passport holders (line 26). By introducing social demographics, places, and frightful images that well-heeled visitors would likely not otherwise encounter in a typical city tour, Struka’s narration insists upon the complex multiplicity of urban stories in the present.

Struka presents the dangers of Belgrade’s wild nightlife—a period of social activity that city officials, advertising consultants, and others have often sought to promote. Arguably, Struka’s “Welcome” exoticizes the Belgrade streets through tropes of the dangerous big city. Less pleasant sides of capital city life are described in grim detail to the erasure of the more mundane lives in “Île de Serbie.” Yet Struka uses his sonic platform to expose the violence and imbalance otherwise erased through glossy appeals for Western tourists and foreign investment. He troubles any of the repeated, straightforward, and ultimately simplistic representations of Belgrade that persist in advertising, tourism, and nation branding. Generally, according to Struka, more working-class neighborhoods like Rakovica, Karaburma, and New Belgrade are underrepresented in the city’s branded images. In my interview with him, he argued this shouldn’t be the case, because all the good that a place offers should “come first from people,

and then historical landmarks, buildings, or natural wealth.” Through irony and sarcasm, he argues that the present is more ambiguous than it is often packaged and that “hate leads to self-destruction and presents us in an ugly way to the eyes of the world.” Homemade hip hop production by artists such as Struka offers an important and critical reflection on image-making in relation to place (Forman 2002).

### **Incomplete Legal Regimes in Transitional Markets**

Reflecting on music piracy in postdictatorship Brazil, Dent (2012) has argued that the transnational influence and governmentality of international intellectual property regimes have given states incentives to improve the domestic perception of what he calls the “circulatory legitimacy” of commodities within their borders. This includes brand policing and copyright, trademark, and patent protection. According to Dent, neoliberal discourses that insist upon circulatory legitimacy imagine split subjectivities in the marketplace: on one side are “pirates” (informal actors) and, on the other, “good” legal (formal) subjects. He argues that this split subjectivity and piracy are key to understanding current neoliberalisms (30).

In addition to ambivalent (anti)brand acts of rap poetics, split subjectivity can also be seen as we follow the debates surrounding copyright law’s application to music distribution in postsocialist ex-YU. In reading journalists’ reports surrounding music rights organizations in Croatia, B&H, and Serbia, one observes that the application of copyright law insists that consumers, musicians, and corporate labels also have a stake in projecting an image of cleanliness and circulatory legitimacy. The image of market efficiency projected—or challenged—by industry artists, professionals, and even politicians is one that positions domestic music industries in relation to imagined elsewhere, including the European Union on the eve of Croatian accession.

Even before the Yugoslav Wars came to an end, the Croatian organization that I call the Protection Office for Copyright (POC) was a regional forerunner in inserting itself into this legal-musical playing field and has consistently sought to exert its influence in the name of protecting, Europeanizing, and cleaning up what is often portrayed as a messy marketplace.<sup>13</sup> Discourses concerning how to protect the distribution of music demonstrated some pro-EU parallels to state rhetoric in other fields since Croatian independence. Did the Croatian media marketplace-qua-brand continue to index a “wild” semiotic surfeit that had never been quite excised in the wake of 1990s (on brands and their surfeits, see Nakassis 2013)? Could it protect itself from the piracy on unlawful online data pathways? Could it justify infrastructural investment again in the form of a commercially viable means of digital download and streaming? Would the Croatian musical marketplace extract itself from what was once framed as Balkan “mud” and protect the rights of authors? Throughout my fieldwork in Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade, music rights organizations, broadcast licensing, and copyright figured prominently in mass-mediated debates concerning the shifting music industry, EU expansion, and crony capitalism. Being perceived to conform to international and EU “checking” and “standards” was viewed as one way music rights organizations sought to build legitimacy with labels, artists, and a range of commercial businesses. Safeguarding circulatory legitimacy was also important in courting the big players of paid digital download and on-demand streaming services. Apple’s iTunes and Sweden’s Spotify among others had yet to be available to customers in Croatia, B&H, and Serbia in 2011–12 (Krapac 2015).

Scholars have done considerable work to demonstrate how an ideological insistence in US copyright law on demonstrably unique authorship is problematic with regard to forms of

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<sup>13</sup> POC is an acronym of my fashioning. While the reporting and opinions referenced are drawn from news articles in the public domain, I have modified original references in the bibliography.

creative practice that traditionally foreground bricolage, layering, and creative citation, such as sample-based beat production. As Marshall and Frith (2004) argue, since the emergence of Napster in the late 1990s and subsequent peer-to-peer file sharing (p2p) platforms that altered the landscape of the recording industry's profits and hence business models in the new millennium, music copyright and its enforcement have been forerunners in determining the shape of intellectual property policing in other realms of entertainment. Schloss (2004) has argued that hip hop's sample-based beatmakers have their own particular ethics that operate outside of the formal law when it comes to sampling citation, versioning, and the alteration of another musician's creative work (see also Rose 1994).

Since the 1980s, American hip hop beatmakers have thus been targets of legal technologies that fix a one-to-one relationship between an author and a musical product (Schumacher 1995). In the eyes of the law, versioning and creative riffs on already existing musical material are often deemed to be insufficiently creative. Facing legal sanction, many beatmakers in the United States have long abandoned samples of jazz, funk, and other genres that were the rhythmic backbone of golden-era hip hop in favor of sampling global sonic snippets believed not to face the same risk from so-called sample police (Marshall and Beaster-Jones 2012). This is one among many reasons why regional beat production styles available in (sub)genres like crunk, hyphy, bounce, trap, and drill that gained national visibility since the early 2000s have a digital feel that highlights original software-based keyboard, drum machine, and synth composition (Marshall 2006). While sample policing affected some prominent domestic beatmakers, such legal action is regarded as less of a serious threat to beatmaking creativity. Sales figures of most domestic hip hop album and single releases are often way too small to attract speculative lawyerly attentions. Thus, while concerns in the particularly litigious

US context are instructive, interesting distinctions can be observed when considering the contrasting legal challenges to alternative genres like hip hop in ex-YU. Through the lens of brand acts, below I read and emphasize elements of the diverse mass-mediated debates surrounding copyright and licensing that arose during my fieldwork in 2011–12.

### **Debating Regulation on the Verge of Accession**

In early 2011, at what was likely one of history's first meetings between a sitting head of state and a collective of professional DJs, Croatia's then immensely popular president met with a group of five performers to discuss their grievances concerning the legal policy of requiring the purchase of temporary licenses in order to play digital music in the country's clubs, festivals, and other sites of public performance (Dalje.com 2010). In a press release, the DJ collective argued that Croatia's music rights organization, POC, "has issued a royalty fee for 10,000 duplicated titles annually, but the average DJ only buys 240 titles annually. The fee that [POC] demands drastically exceeds even the fees of many richer and more developed countries, for example England and Sweden" (Dalje.com 2010). When first introduced in 2010, these DJ licenses were granted on a daily, semiannual, or annual basis. Before the fee model was changed in response to DJs who organized the appeal, a license for a single club event would cost DJs 180 HRK (approximately \$32 in 2010), even though according to some estimates, established performers could only earn 750 HRK (\$135) for a club event outside of the summer months (see Arslani 2011; Kocijan 2012).<sup>14</sup> Artists argued that the license fees did not correspond to their earning power and that there was also an obvious class distinction between domestic and foreign DJs visiting Croatia from abroad that fees did not sufficiently take into account (Arslani 2011; Kocijan 2012). In its theoretical justification, these DJ licenses (1) were designed to allow DJs to

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<sup>14</sup> These are rough estimates based on local reporting.

publicly reproduce other authors' music copied onto a computer and (2) protected the marketplace from those who would spin music files in live mixes without compensating copyright holders (Brkulj 2011; Mandić 2015).<sup>15</sup>

The introduction of licenses led to questions. First, presumably POC would have to check the contents of computer drives in question to make certain whether, in fact, they were free of illegal content and every author was compensated (Mandić 2015). When a DJ license was purchased, POC also required the submission of a comprehensive list of all the song files contained on DJ hard drives (Brkulj 2011). Second, today's tastemaking DJs who regularly use DJ controllers or digital vinyl emulation technologies like Serato are often sent free download links directly to their email addresses from record labels, artists, and distribution sites located across the globe (Kocijan 2012). Making absolutely certain whether or not each track was legally acquired on registered "lists of reproduced works" that in some cases included 10,000 songs would be massively time-consuming, and what DJ could possibly spin so many songs at one club outing (Mandić 2015)? Thus it was argued that the licenses seemed to have a limiting effect on (1) who could afford to DJ; (2) what sorts of digital musical material could be used; and (3) the sorts of collection practices that were appropriate in the eyes of the law (Kocijan 2012, 2014; Mandić 2015). In a related discussion, Vukobratović (2010) has argued that while copyright enforcement has raised awareness of the rights of authors, some amateur traditional music ensembles are at a disadvantage because they need to pay performance rights fees despite their lack of commercial viability (102). Concerns over the DJ licenses affected a modest number of

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<sup>15</sup> Compare these discussions with those that Ceribašić (2009) follows. She argues that copyright meant to protect musical and dance folklore often belongs exclusively to choreographers and music arrangers, not performers, thus meaning that the "protections" of UNESCO do not necessarily translate to particularly well-distributed compensation among musicians.

musicians, but other efforts to regulate the marketplace were subject to broader public scrutiny in the mass media.

Despite regulatory attempts to control and clean up the circulation of music in Croatia, continued questions emerged about POC's relationship to the government, their fees and taxes, and the philosophical underpinning of their legitimacy as the exclusive rights holder to collect royalties (see, e.g., Bajto 2012a). On the one hand, many musicians pinned hopes on the emergence of an effective copyright protection regime by joining the music rights organization, so that they could potentially recoup sales of physical media lost in the era of digital download and streaming (Kocijan 2014). Even though royalty payouts among alternative artists were often small, obtaining copyright struck some as the only way that there was ever to be sufficient protection and remuneration (Pavelić 2012). After all, one way to earn, assuming rights were protected, included composing music originally intended for corporate advertisement. Without the means of copyright enforcement, the dream of earning a livelihood from one's craft felt even more unlikely for the vast majority of those who performed and distributed alternative styles and genres. Others argued that increased licenses, fees, and taxes in the music industry created a framework for new categories of legal-political opportunism, conflicts of interest (Obradović 2011, 296), and corruption (Obradović 2011; Bajto 2012b; and V. 2015). To the broader populace, the postsocialist enforcement of regional music copyright law manifested itself in other troubling ways. The Croatian government had long permitted POC to levy taxes on the sales of all blank CDs, DVDs, external hard and thumb drives (Obradović 2011; Bajto 2012b). As Obradović (2011, 304) argues, the tax is justified under an assumption that these digital storage spaces are being used for the reproduction of musical works, thus justifying taxes. Likewise, Croatia's plethora of hotels, hostels, and other private accommodations must pay taxes

to POC for the use of music in rooms, lobbies, and other spaces deemed to be sites of “public” gathering, regardless of whether or not visitors are even present, actually listen, or fit the legal definition of being in “public” company (294).

In spring 2012, a new scandal broke that brought into question the excesses of postsocialist economic transformation and the legitimacy of a new public-private relationship in the music industry (V. 2015). Despite his efforts at post-war reconciliation—including public apologies for the Croatian government’s ignominious role in the Bosnian War that had endeared him to the anti-nationalist left—Croatia’s president suddenly faced greater public scrutiny from many political vantage points, not just from his numerous right-wing critics. POC’s large payment of a subcontractor drew multiple mass-mediated critiques when it was discovered that the subcontractor was close to the president (see, e.g., Bajto 2012a; Pavelić 2012; V. 2015).

Trained as a musician and a lawyer, the president had overseen Croatia’s adoption of musical copyright protections in the Law on Copyright and Related Laws adopted in 2003 and amended in 2007 (Vukobratović 2010, 100; Obradović 2011, 285–92). The aforementioned private firm received a lucrative no-bid contract in the early 1990s initially in order to provide the computer technology for paying and distributing royalty payments (Bajto 2012a; V. 2015). Regardless of where the truth regarding the disputed facts lay, new questions emerged about what the “transition” to Europe meant for yet another sector of the Croatian economy and the future of royalty collection, equitable distribution, and professional musicianship (V. 2015). Could the president’s involvement with POC be productively framed as yet another example of postwar corruption? In addition to the press that broke the story, the Croatian right wing also propagated the scandal. Nationalist critiques of the president had often focused on his supposed communist leanings and insufficient patriotism, and now detractors had a story about potential

corruption. This business relationship struck diverse commentators as just the latest in a series of moments in which leaders compromised their high-minded rhetoric through shady deals in which well-positioned businessmen were profiting at the expense of the electorate (see, e.g., Đikić 2012; V. 2015). Second, the news story underscored the dangers of blindly hurrying toward the legal-industrial expectations of the European Union without a thorough consideration of who was to benefit. Third, it revealed internal divisions among musicians themselves, some of whom seemed more closely aligned with government officials through their performance for political campaign ads, at pro-EU concert events, or on national television (Baker 2010; Kocijan 2014).

Nearly a year earlier, I was in attendance when POC and government agencies held an antipiracy and anticounterfeiting event in conjunction with the World Intellectual Property Organization's International Intellectual Property Day on Zagreb's Flower Square (*Cvjetni trg*). Over the past decade the Flower Square has been one of many public spaces in Croatia serving as the scene of large protests. Uzelac argues (2014) that public squares in downtown Zagreb were key sites of EU promotion and intensive debate over impending EU futures in the build-up to Croatia's accession in 2013. An iconic occasion was when construction permissions for a new shopping mall were granted by city authorities, threatening to change the complexion of the square, one of Zagreb's most historic locations. Many felt that the populace was already saturated with malls on a scale that did not correspond to the purchasing power of Croatian consumers.

Larger demonstrations cropped up across Croatia in spring 2011, which united an extremely diverse coalition of anti-HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) activists, supporters of Croatian war generals on trial at the ICTY, and various Euroskeptics on the left and right. On April 15, right-wing parties and their supporters were particularly incensed when Generals Ante

Gotovina and Mladen Markač were convicted by the ICTY for participating in a “joint criminal enterprise” led by President Franjo Tuđman against the *krajina* Serbian population in eastern Croatia, which sought the Serbs’ permanent removal and the fantasy of a “pure” state.<sup>16</sup> By the winter 2011 elections, a coalition of political parties led by the center-left Social Democrats (Sozialna demokratska partija, or SDP) swept aside the HDZ’s interim prime minister, who had been appointed without a popular vote after her predecessor resigned his post and was later arrested on multiple indictments of corruption charges. Mass protests and shifts in power have continued since the election victory of the SDP and Croatia’s accession to the European Union. These crises of legitimacy, mass protests, and corruption cases were coupled with a growing awareness of massive state debts that dwarfed those accumulated in the Yugoslav era, a general disgust for the political class among the populace, and a rapid government push to accede to the European Union.

The antipiracy event in Flower Square thus not only occurred at a time and in a place of continuing heated contestation but became a moralizing spectacle geared toward “educating” the Croatian consumer about the impact of illegal download and p2p sharing on the “domestic” music industry (which, in this case, referred to Croatia specifically). The agencies sought to inspire those present to think of the effects of their past and potential infractions in broader, nationally-salient terms. Since the expansion of individual DSL use in the early 2000s, POC representatives argued that 99 percent of all music downloaded in Croatia was acquired through illegal means. A centrally located stage featured short performances throughout the afternoon by pop musicians, who proffered their own public service announcements imploring passing listeners to be more accountable to the law when they consume. As both a brand and soon to be

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<sup>16</sup> In November 2012, to some observers’ surprise (and in many corners, disgust), the initial rulings were overturned.

full member of the European Union, Croatia's national music market could not continue to be sullied by the illicit practices of a population framed as particularly wayward—this, despite the fact that illegal music download of course remains a challenge for industries elsewhere in the European Union and beyond.

In the intermission between musical acts, an animated series of three cartoons was screened that could best be categorized as consonant with a genre of children's infotainment. Silly "splat" and "boing" noises, cute humor, and a playful fatherly register in a singsong voiceover were embedded in the cartoons. "What is an Author?," "What is an Authorial Work?," and "What is an Association of Authors?" each tried to put complicated legal language concerning intellectual property and copyright infraction into a "transparent" register that even a child could understand. The voiceover insisted on a narrow definition of creativity that equated "originality" with both invention and the subsequent conversion of ideas into ontologically discrete forms that would be defined as such by copyright holders. Thus, the intermission videos clearly propagated an ideology that insisted on unique authorship while infantilizing viewers.

What do DJ licenses, royalty collections, and the fuzziness of musical properties in postsocialist music markets and beyond have in common? They all prove fertile ground for debate about the proper role of the state, the law, and music rights organizations in an industry that has experienced dramatic shifts—both technological and political—since the 1990s. Given the decade's historical ties to war and accumulation by dispossession, the era of post-Napster digital distribution is already laden with symbolic meaning in ex-YU. These fields of music industry practice are also tied to the images of legal and economic "rationality" that states, sometimes unsuccessfully, project to domestic and outside observers. As I argue above, crafting a relationship with (nation) brands becomes important for homemade hip hop artists in

pragmatically supporting their craft and/or symbolically signaling their political opinions in a transforming industry. Beyond capital, other systems of social value exert pull in different ethical directions, splitting one's subjectivity even beyond the pirate and the good legal subject that copyright law imagines. Both the observance and critique of regulation involve state, legal, and citizen brand acts that construct images of the nation and its industries for powerful outside observers and domestic audiences.

### **Conclusion**

Commentators often mobilize brands, tourism, and intellectual property as indexes of multiple levels of inequality: between the European Union and its post Yugoslav peripheries, between social groups internal to the region, and between individuals. Hip hop, a genre which is iconically tied to both critiques of de-industrialization and pragmatic negotiations of what Klein ([1999] 2009) calls the "web of brands," finds practitioners in ex-YU who implicitly and explicitly critique branded erasures and ellipses concocted to attract visitors, foreign direct investment, and industrial production back to these deeply indebted states.

Hip hop's own discourses of authenticity that frame "brand proximity" as tainted stains on an artistic career may indeed insist upon a romantic fiction of ethico-creative "purity," one completely disentangled from corporate affiliations that remain the *sine qua non* of capitalism. However, such insistence simultaneously forces hip hop composition into an economy of values for which a musically overdetermined term, alternative, may indeed be most appropriate, especially in an era of inequitable capital encroachment. Under capitalism, other systems of value persist and thus subjectivity is often split along multiple lines, including in the eyes of the law and according to even the most alternative artist's pragmatic needs. The narrow mapping of ethnonational identity onto Yugoslav citizens created a complicated, often tragic legacy for one-

to-one equations between subject, identity, and property. In ex-YU, negotiating between creativity, branded images, and increasingly privatized individual ownership has emerged as an important terrain of debate.

## Chapter 3

### Who's "More Musical"? Performing Mature Distinctions in the Domestication of Hip Hop DJing

Behind the Šumatovačka Painting Academy in the central Belgradian neighborhood of Vračar was a scene that provided a stark visual contrast to the rest of the building grounds. Unlike the main studio which was tightly and chaotically lined with easels, dirty paint brushes, and other creative signs of a "higher" art-in-progress, one found a smaller hi-tech shed across a modest terrace. This back room housed the latest branded equipment that DJs and turntablists employ during performance. Macbook laptops, Rane mixers, and Vestax turntables sat huddled side-by-side on a surface criss-crossed by audio cables and power strips. The arrangement of the gear allowed for collective training and occasional "sessioning," during which taking turns, each student in the class would practice basic scratch technique over four bars of an instrumental. In workshops that I attended in Belgrade and Zagreb, not only did DJs underscore their relative sophistication, expertise, and musical maturity through masterful mixes or live showcase performances. Among older DJs, value also lay in the studied cultivation of skill, proper relationships to gear, and well-researched discographic collections. In ex-YU, which many often portray as a region riddled with ethnonational differences replayed along musical lines, these discourses among DJs pointed to the importance of other social categories, namely those of "youth," "domestic," and "music".

In this chapter, I focus on these three culturally constructed, interlocking constellations of categories, which each shift their cultural referent depending on context. These constellations intersect and become entangled with a myriad of other descriptors that prove important in any discussion of homemade hip hop, including "turbo," "commercial" (*komercijala*), and

“alternative” (*alternativa*), which I discuss further in earlier chapters and below. Artists often imagined domestic audiences as still unsure of homemade hip hop’s musicality.

By insisting on the musical value of their creativity, DJs drew multiple lines of social contrast in the domestic scene(s). First, they could maintain symbolic distance from the “immature,” trendy practices of beatmakers, rappers, and DJs who lacked sufficient devotion to their craft. Second, in the workshops and other performance sites, DJs sought to correct for sloppy mixing, inaccurate scratches, and a greater interest in popularity than practice. Third, the discographic worlds that inspired, repelled, or otherwise shaped DJs musical interests were also tied in idiosyncratic ways to the relative success and local prestige of other genres. In sharpening their skills, domestic DJs could also develop expertise often elusive in the formal market. Since “transitional” economies in the European semi-periphery have often extended youth by denying many the attainment of professional status, DJing provides an attractive alternative hierarchy of value (Austin 2001; Bourdieu 1993). In 2011-12, at the time of my work in the DJ workshops, major political protests manifested on the streets of each capital that challenged the broken promises and un(der)employment delivered by the Serbian and Croatian leaderships.

### **The Cosmopolitan Categories of Domestic DJing**

At the outset, DJing in a hip hop idiom in ex-YU is often a cosmopolitan orientation that symbolically puzzles together the creative works of sonically and ethnically diverse range of domestic and global performers. Among all homemade hip hop artists, DJs and beatmakers have proven particular adept at establishing creative relationships with peers both across ex-YU and further afield in places like Germany, France, and especially the US. These affinities often span time and space in ways that implicate a broad range of socially recognized identities. Hip hop DJing generally lacked regional national(istic) and consumerist markings and thus linked

practitioners to particularly cosmopolitan worlds. To older DJs with whom I spoke extensively, “music” as a category had the additional strength of not being genre-bound in a way that justified their particular skill sets.

To-date, there is no secondary literature of which I am aware about the handful of professional DJs in ex-YU who perform regularly in a hip hop idiom for whom technological advancement has expanded the scratch-, sample-, and otherwise usable discographic lexicon. Expanded dialogic and heteroglossic possibility has led to an ever-greater, but still incomplete sense of hip hop’s domestic belonging. Two small examples will hopefully serve to illustrate possibilities here. First, in 2011, a limited-edition Serbian compilation called *Scratchatorium (Grebatorijum)* that features an album-length series of turntablist compositions became the first of its kind in homemade hip hop. Second, when DJ Dirty Hairy, who I discuss further below, used the same Digital Vinyl Emulation System technologies to scratch a digital sample of tbf’s lead MC Saša Antić saying “One, two, Kandžija” at the eponymous rapper’s live performance, he generated a hugely positive crowd response. Not only does the original Croatian (*Jedan, dva, Kandžija*) rhyme, but the ability to scratch auto-referential shout-outs in solos simultaneously further connected homemade hip hop to its American genealogy *and* the process of ongoing domestication. Spinning and scratching in diverse domestic registers, both musical and linguistic, was difficult before, particularly after once vast Yugoslav record production virtually ended during the early 1990s.

While many scholars have described rap as a sociolinguistic phenomenon, less has been written about the nexus of language and hip hop’s other musical crafts such as DJing, beatboxing, and turntablism/controllerism. Exceptions include Miyakawa (2007) who considers the politics of musical notation among US American turntablists and Katz (2012) who describes

some histories of “speech” among DJs including tracing the origins of samples on battle records. However, linguistic anthropological hobby horses like addressivity, intertextuality, the politics of register, voicing and footing, metapragmatic function, to name a few topics, could all be discussed more extensively with greater ethnomusicological attention, especially in hip hop’s US American, Japanese, and West European contexts. Despite the understandable bias toward rap in global hip hop studies, other musical forms including beatmaking, -boxing, and DJing are also involved in processes artists discuss in terms of domestication. The use of domestic instruments, samples, and repertoires occurs among artists who, perhaps paradoxically, also regularly underscore their global, extra-local connections. For example, domestic DJs do not regularly include homemade hip hop in their club, festival, and radio performances or playlists, but they do make compositions sound more “homemade” in other ways. While more remains to be said concerning the role of language in performance DJing, in this chapter, I am primarily concerned with shifting categories artists use to frame practice in a marginalized scene on Europe’s margins.

Older DJs with whom I conducted a significant portion of my research devoted great attention to different musical categories, which often simultaneously related to a shifting sense of what was valuable in the “domestic” and the “foreign.” “Hip hop” was never a pure musical category when it emerged during the 1980s in the SFRY. While some artists articulate the opinion that genre itself is evil, or at the very least has limitations, categories and associated ideals are nonetheless important to achieving musical success, debating systems of value, and distinguishing oneself as an artist. In the ears of ex-YU listeners outside the scene, homemade hip hop still was often heard to be inauthentically domestic and insufficiently musical. Was there

a way of resetting the balance between American and homemade sounds in a way that was authentically domestic without being nationalistic?

Homemade hip hop constituted one genre within a whole spectrum that listeners often conflated with Western, US American, and more specifically in the case of DJ workshops, African- and Filipino-American creative genealogies. In 2011-12, electronic (e.g., dubstep, grime, house) and what are locally called “black” (*crna*) or Afrodiasporic (jazz, soul, funk) tracks were most likely to appear alongside musics marked as “hip hop,” which is also a category that only emerges through the process of composing, presenting, or commenting on scratches, mixtapes, and beats. Regardless of this expansionist orientation, DJs also implicitly and explicitly commented on more markedly domestic genres ranging from “source” folk music (*izvorna narodna muzika/glazba*), to “newly composed” orchestral folk (*novokompanovana narodna*), and today’s controversial market-dominating folk pop. In DJ talk and creative practice, one could also hear about musical categories many see as having an Ottoman or earlier American intermediary including *etno*, *sevdah*, “old urban songs” (*starogradske pesme*), Balkan brass, and (Yugo)rock. 19-20<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and Yugoslav musical categories might exert a lingering influence, but DJs rarely discuss musical pasts of the former two state projects. DJs consider some categories as always-already indigenous. Contrastingly, the domesticity of musics whose artists trace genealogies internationally is often a matter of degree. In the oftentimes informal historiography of hip hop(s) outside the US, journalists, artists, and other writers describe the domestication of the genre as a staged process through which the genre becomes slowly recognizable as more “native” through hip hop’s local sonic, linguistic, and otherwise creative innovations.

Yet even at the domestic level, informants made distinctions along lines of commercial success and youth. “Turbo,” the supposedly worst kind of folk, was a genre that supposedly appealed to the “lower passions” (*niže strasti*) in contrast to music that was more “demanding” (*zaht[j]evni*). In a sense, turbofolk was the apotheosis of what I, following the lead of my informants, have called technospectacle, a combination of technology and spectacle that served a morally suspect purpose. Collaborating with an artist from a more broadly-distributed genre, incorporating folk pop aesthetics into one’s compositions, or rapping along with the pieces that comprise a full classic rock band (e.g., electric and bass guitar, drum set) could draw the stigma of the related “commercial” label.

As such, homemade hip hop’s commercial vs. alternative axis of differentiation (*komercijala/alternativa*; also spoken of using the Anglicisms *mejnstrim/andergraund*) resembles the aforementioned older discursive forms of musical differentiation. For example, “source” folk music (*izvorna narodna muzika/glazba*) evinced important differences from state-supported newly-composed folk music (*novokomponovana narodna muzika/glazba*) in the socialist period. Discourse imagined the former as closer to the symbolic *Urquell* of the romanticized, or alternatively, vilified village (*selo*). Today’s EU policies and discourses also often frame linguistic registers both in terms of “pride” and “profit,” that is as “cultural treasures, exemplary of tradition, usually a national tradition” and “in narrower economic terms, as a means to material gain (Gal 2012:22).” In discourses concerning linguistic and musical performances in the idiom of hip hop on Europe’s periphery, this pride/profit axis of differentiation also manifests itself. To make “commercial” music is equated with self-interestedly gaining material “profit” at the expense of passion, tradition, and edifying an imagined audience. Interestingly, homemade hip hop artists are also often very aware of what

aesthetic and moral “sacrifices” are involved in pursuing music as a professional career. Veterans of the scene(s) are thus also more lenient in evaluating performances in terms of frameworks that guided a fellow artist’s composition: creating successful or lucrative “commercial” can be a source of pride, even though “engaged” or “underground” hip hop remains widely framed in terms of prestige. Relatedly, artists frame “underground,” “engaged,” or “alternative” hip hop compositions often as relatively “pure” of the corrupting forces of capital and symbolically closer to the “street.”

In research among DJs in the US, Katz (2012) similarly analyzes how artists use scientizing and musicalizing language to describe their crafts of mixing, scratching, and beat juggling. This lends a layer of sophistication to practices that established American musicians critical of hip hop and their audiences would sometimes question as insufficiently musical. Domestic DJs likewise had practiced and discursive means for justifying their creative work to those who might question its legitimacy. In ex-YU, making claims to “music” meant differentiating oneself from folk pop and other commercial sounds. As I describe in Chapter 1, homemade hip hop artists often identified a multiethnic cadre of folk pop artists as culpable for the erosion of audience expectations of quality. This talk was reminiscent of a broadly shared disgust for “corrupt politicians” (*korumpirani političari*), who drew ire regardless of ethnonational background and often despite, sometimes quite suddenly, embracing multiculturalist rhetoric.

The next categories of importance implied both age and a certain craft-based standard. Among an older generation of domestic DJs, the elevated category of “music” took on greater value than the “youth” that mass media often attributed to hip hop given its presumed domestic inauthenticity. At DJ workshops, in making musical documentaries, and in mixtapes, the figure

of the young, inexperienced DJ emerged as one needing to be educated and domesticated, that is, made authentically local without discarding the positive significations of global practices.

Hesitant to criticize peers directly to a note-taking graduate student, many of my DJ informants would map onto their earlier biographical selves certain lamentable qualities that underscored the fact that by the time we met, they invested a lot of time, energy, and money in improving their proverbial chops. By implication, DJs criticized others who did not evince the same desire to hone their skills, discographic knowledge, or understanding of equipment. Thus, the inexperienced DJ was one who was not well-rehearsed or like the folkies.

In this sense, DJ discourse was similar to local battle rap, which was rich in disses that described other MCs as inexperienced or immature. “Young” (*mlad*), “cheap” (*jeftin*), and other descriptors would congeal with negative nominal categories that marked some hip hop as like “turbo” (meaning among other things, that it was deliberately made to sell), a “bread and circus” (*hleb i igara*), “kitsch,” or “plastic” (*plastika*). These categories refer to performance in terms of sensuous qualities or qualia (for a discussion of qualia, see Chumley and Harkness 2013; Munn 1992; and Peirce 1955).

I often heard the stereotype that one does not listen, perform, or otherwise “do” hip hop in ex-YU beyond a certain age. One well-traveled MC complained that older crowds, particularly in his native Bosnia, continued to be unsure of what to do with their bodies at rap shows. They felt swindled of their ticket price when rappers appeared on stage without a traditional rock band. Luminaries such as tbf, Elemental, Kandžija, Frenkie, Marčelo, and Edo Maajka often performed alongside rock drummers and guitarists, which many audiences preferred to seeing a rapper supported by a DJ alone and thus somehow incomplete. A promoter with whom I spoke lamented these ongoing dominant conceptions, wishing that hip hop could become a sound not

only high school students would consume, but also older, paying professionals. Another MC complained that his local scene in Belgrade had become increasingly prone to vacuous trends, separate from the revolutionary ethos that inspired many to perform hip hop as engaged alternative to Milošević in the city's old school. The "youth" genre was thus, to borrow Irvine and Gal's phrase, "fractally recursive" (2000): the old vs. young distinctions could reemerge at various levels within analytic homemade hip hop discourse. Similarly, artists would use semiotic contrast pairs including music vs. turbo, authentic vs. fake, and domestic vs. foreign to describe a whole host of musical materials. Through discursive erasure, artists framed songs, peer performers, and shows as either one or the other.

Scholars have argued that, as a category, "youth" shifts its descriptive relation to apply to a range of social groups irregardless of age and depending on context (e.g., Durham 2004). Thus, what also gets labeled as "mature," like "domestic" or "music," is always culturally constructed. The long history of continuous and often violent reinvention of Balkan states over the 20<sup>th</sup> century has produced many political discourses that have either embraced or, on the other hand, increased the symbolic gap between nations, musical styles, youth, and transnationalism. After socialist Yugoslavia's dismemberment, newly separate states often favored discourses that established their historical roots in a deep and naturalized past. As I describe in Chapter 2, more recent nation-branding since the 2000s is more ambivalent. For example, while the Croatian Tourist Board has branded itself as "The Mediterranean that Once Was," thereby grounding the country in a supposedly timeless past, Kosovo's advertising campaign framed the country as a place of "The Young Europeans." Since the 2000s, state branding campaigns also evince more complex, shifting relations to musical genres. Baker (2010) has described how political campaigns have also used different popular musics. In the build-up to their 2012 electoral

success, the rightwing Serbian Progressive Party used domestic rap and reggae in their rallies (they were later threatened with lawsuits, as the party had no performance rights to broadcast the “hip” tracks that they did). Such advertising and electoral discourses not only conflate so-called alternative genres like hip hop with youth, but also sometimes can muddle, or alternatively, build on the idiom’s broad “anti-nationalist” and “anti-establishment” significations.

Different forms of music journalism, advertisement, and artistic practices construct hip hop in relation to youth as a social category across ex-YU. For example, in 2011-12, corporate TV, radio, and billboard ads for Austrian Banks, German body-care creams, and even socialist Yugoslav legacy brands like Gavrilović meats made symbolic links between hip hop and youth. Likewise, NGOs concerned with youth education, unemployment, and violence in schools have historically worked in tandem with homemade hip hop artists and other “alternative” musicians (Banić-Grubišić 2010). Domestic rap lyrics further underscore the “youth” of hip hop and its associated styles since they are often laden in *šatrovački* or *šatro*, a BCS+M youth and urban linguistic register shard across the newly separate standard variants of former Serbo-Croatian.<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in Chapter 2, even the EU specifically marketed its transnational governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta 2002) in advance of Croatia’s accession through artists who claim the categorical mantle of being both “youth” and “urban.”

The attributions of “youth” to nations and musics in ex-YU is thus complex, and the prestige status of some musical arts is mirrored not only in aesthetic discourse, but also concert booking, performance, and public projects. Despite extensive mass mediation in socialist Yugoslavia, across ex-YU spaces, “young” genres are less likely to appear in established music

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<sup>1</sup> *Šatro* is comparable to French *argot* or *verlans*. The register allows for the inversion of syllables, and speakers often associate *šatro* with urban slang. *Šatro* or *šatra* are also distinct lexicos comparable to the word “*argot*” in French, “Cant,” or Rotwelsch among others (for more on *šatro*, see Chapter 4 and Sabljak 1981).

academies, recital halls, and folkloric concert lineups. Two of the most prominent venues that regularly host hip hop shows are socialist-era institutions, Dom omladine (House of Youth) in Sarajevo and Dom mladih (The House of the Young) in Belgrade, that each retained their names after the official retraction of socialism. According to Greenberg (2014), leaders in socialist Yugoslavia regularly sought to narrate their authority in terms of a mandate that supposedly emanated from multicultural youth support. This discourse ran parallel to the SFRY's relative openness to "young" Western musical products, particularly after the 1960s (Vučetić 2012; Vuletić 2010).

In my experience, hip hop artists sometimes objected to the uncritical ascription of "youth" to the genre, the negative characteristics the category could imply, and the coupling of immaturity with hip hop aesthetics. In domestic "street" (*ulični*) rap, an experiential authenticity closely related to a re-signification of one's native, and otherwise marginalized class and urban geographic background tends to be a defining thematic subject. The re-signification of artists' experiences on the imposed urban peripheries of socioeconomic and political power has been thematized in the lyrics of diverse artists like Zagreb's Nered i Stoka, Belgrade's Sick Touch or Juice, and an increasing number of Sarajevo rappers like Buba Corelli and the Capital City Crew. Here, maturity equates to navigating hard urban experience.

However, despite three decades of domestic live performance, recording, graffiti-writing, breakdancing, and fashion, one promoter complained that snippy journalists often still asked sarcastic questions about why rappers gesticulated with their hands in videos. Relatedly, local mass media made light of those domestic artists who would dabble in an American "gangsta" pose. Some critics and peer performers stigmatize domestic street rap as *too* direct a translation of American hip hop. Inhabiting roles deemed to too closely resemble the essentialized linguistic

and thematic *image* of (African-)American urban experience as presented through global media channels like MTV can easily emerge in discourse as a sign of the “foreign” and inauthentically local.<sup>2</sup> Thus homemade hip hop parody sometimes internalizes broader public discourses about inauthenticity. Sarcastic artists focused on bodily hexis, fashion, ways of speaking, and musical aesthetics of homemade hip hop that felt inauthentically domestic. In one sense, the dismissive coupling of supposed youthful qualities and hip hop together conflated signs of an expressly “black” creative genealogy with imagined immaturity and domestic inauthenticity.

### **Genre and Music through DJ Eyes: Creative Distinctions and Genealogies**

Domestic rap lyrics and journalist interviews are filled with evaluations, pithy or more extensive, of genres, performers, and styles throughout ex-YU. Musical kinship, interrelation, and symbolic distance can go lost in talk and writing about music that parrots “us vs. them” or “either/or” structuralist categories that while sometimes revelatory, are, in reality, always processual. Below, I demonstrate how DJs that use homemade hip hop describe unfolding symbolic relations to musical categories with a range of origins. Rather than describe homemade hip hop as a delineated formal set of properties that can include rapped lyrics, scratched ornamentation, some autotune, and looped melodic phrasing over a 4/4 rhythm at somewhere hovering around 90 beats-per-minute, I am more interested here in describing shared discourse about a cultural field of musics. An enumeration of aesthetic markers does not tell us much about their ideological signification or the phenomenology of unfolding symbolic solidarities.

DJs pepper their live performances, radio shows, and mixtapes with musical material only after engaging in complicated strategies of both selecting and omitting different song possibilities. DJs can also selectively trace a musical genealogy in describing their own work. In

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the 2008 song “You Too Can Be (MTV)” (*Budi i ti*) by Edo Maajka ft. Ajs Nigrutin.

their childhood, many DJs, beatmakers, and rappers listened to their parents' domestically made vinyl record and cassettes, which often featured the Yugoslav hitmakers. Such symbolic affinities are regularly partial, sometimes awkward, and invariably subject to shift. Similarly, local ideologies of authenticity also became awkwardly entangled with those from American hip hop. Joint concert performances, "shout-outs," album "featurings," and radio "drops" can draw connections to other performers and underscore affinities. In contrast, rapped insults, parodic imitation, and a wide range of "disses" can widen imagined social distance between artists, songs, and genres. While the absence of certain musical material in DJ playlists need not be viewed as a critique, the marked excitement DJs had about some performers, songs, and styles can be read as a statement about value.

When I first inelegantly introduced my planned research on "hip hop" to DJ Venom during one of the final broadcasts of the *Blackout Rap Show* on Radio 101, he politely pointed out that his musical interests went far beyond hip hop. Venom implied that the category that I introduced in conversation was self-limiting. Venom began his musical training by learning how to play the accordion in a village near the small city of Osijek in Slavonia, the easternmost region of Croatia contiguous with the Serbian border. His uncle on his father's side worked as a DJ in a nearby disco. A neighbor gave him his first copies of 12" vinyl singles that included Public Enemy, a group that has become canonically "hip hop" in a range of mass media writings, but also Technotronic, what might be retroactively called a Belgian "edm" act given their flirtations with house and techno, and Snap!, a German group that likewise wrote English language rap lyrics. When solicited for interviews, like Venom, artists often expressed some minor discomfort at being associated too closely with "hip hop," which I primarily interpreted as concern that the category erase their interests in other genres or claim to authentically represent the scene(s).

For many hip hop audiences, folk music less tied to salacious commercialism like “turbo” also pointed to a sufficiently respectable “alternative” form. *Etno*, a category that re-emphasizes the supposed authenticity of folk purity, could include *klapa*, *tamburica*, *sevdah*, and *starogradske pesme*, and was imagined as closer to the “source” of unadulterated folk music. However, imagined authenticity buries histories of source folk music’s relationship to the state and to corporate entities with vested interests in its promotion, including different tourist industries. Nonetheless, homemade hip hop and rap in particular regularly re-emphasizes the prestige of these musical forms insofar as artists sample, positively cite, or collaborate with traditional performers. In one popular 2011 collaboration, “For You” (*Tebi*), Frenkie and renowned folk interpreter, Damir Imamović, performed a love song that incorporated rap, 4/4 beat with a guitar riff, and a chorus sung by the latter that featured some of the powerfully elongated notes characteristic of *sevdah*. Imamović, in a vein akin to the anti-nationalist rhetoric of Frenkie, has been critical of those who seek to erase *sevdah*’s diverse origins by claiming, on the basis of Ottoman historical connections, that it is a specifically Bosniac genre as opposed to one shared across ex-YU.<sup>3</sup> The aforementioned 2007 documentary about Edo Maačka, *A Sevdah about Storks (Sevdah o rodama)*, takes its name from a poem of the same name on Edo’s first album, which is filled with domestic samples and melismatic singing. At a performance in the Novi Pazar, his first ever in Serbia and a town with a Muslim majority, Edo closed his concert with Silvana Armenulić’s “What Is Life to Me” (*Šta će mi život*), recorded in 1969 and one of

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<sup>3</sup> Speaking of the multidirectional, multiethnic genealogies possible to trace for *sevdah*, Imamović argued: “*sevdah* in its history was ascribed to at least five different categories. First it was the music of Turks, then it was the music of Muslims, then music of Slavs versus Turks, then at some point it was the music of Serbs, at one point of Bosnians. Today they are trying to make this entire Bosniac identity, which is like a Muslim-Bosnian identity, and ascribe *sevdah* only to them. So in terms of ethnic categories it’s really stupid. For example, one of the most important authors in *sevdah* in the 20th century was Jozo Penava from Kiseljak, he was a Croat. Another one was Jovica Petković. He’s a Serbian accordionist who lived in Sarajevo his whole life – and made some of the most beautiful songs. ... So, prejudice like that you know (Lencek 2012).”

the top-grossing commercial successes in Yugoslavia. Armenulić performed *sevdah*-inspired songs under a stage name and died at the age of 38. By making symbolic connections to *sevdah* artists through covers, collaborations, and other positive citations, frequent partners Edo and Frenkie situate their work in a domestic category with prestige.

Local popular music differs across ex-YU. Sometimes award shows and news publications refer to pop as “entertainment music” (*zabavna muzika/glazba*), which in my experience, had a somewhat outmoded, socialist-era connotation. I also heard the catch-all category “domestic mainstream” (*domaći mejnstrim*), which uses an Anglicized loanword to describe a wide range of styles, with a diverse set of ex-YU origins. Elements of markedly traditional *klapa*, *sevdah*, and *starogradske pesme* might all appear in domestic “hits” (*hitovi*), as can signs of global rock and edm. With “*mejnstrim*,” the connotation of intended and perhaps actual market success is the same in English. Hip hop artists regarded some musical combinations and attempts at market success with greater scrutiny than others. As mentioned in Chapter 2, hip hop regularly did not garner the same record sales as rock or folk pop. Unlike homemade hip hop, folk pop regularly appeared on broadcast television, including in song competitions akin to *American Idol*. Through her record label Grand Productions, Yugoslav-era star Lepa Brena created a show called *Stars of Grand* (*Zvezde Granda*), which was one of the most visible forums for the distribution of folk pop aesthetics. DJs and other homemade hip hop artists often spoke derisively of folk pop, referring to the category as “turbo(folk),” and songs as *cajke* or “folkies” (*narodnjaci*), a word that can double as a critical label for consumers, who were also known as “Grandies” (*Grandovci*) after Brena’s industry-leading label.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Živković (2012) has used the Anglicism “folkies” for *narodnjaci*. “Folk pop” is also still known newly-composed folk music, NCFM, or *novokomponovana muzika*. In recent discussions with Serbian colleagues, the second of the

The Balkanist secondary literature on turbofolk is expansive given how the generic category often emerges as a negative character in stories about post-socialist “transition” (Baker 2010; Čvoro 2014; Gordy 1999). The aesthetic markers that are characteristic of folk pop’s composition include melismatic cadences, vocal timbre, and so-called *orijental* trills that ornament a melody. In terms of live instrumentation, accordions, electric guitars, electronic keyboards, and synthesizers are often present (Rasmussen 2002, 2007:68-69). During the 1990s, turbofolk often took on a “nationalist” or “Serbian” connotation in Croatian and Bosniac discourses that abhorred the proximity of some of the genre’s biggest stars like Ceca to paramilitary organizations and conservative television channels such as PINK or Palma. Historically, scholars, journalists, and artists have often mapped rock onto youth of urban, Western, cosmopolitan leanings; and folk pop onto their supposedly more rural and nationalistic counterparts who, to some, somewhat counter-intuitively or even hypocritically enjoy a hybrid blend of Eastern aesthetic markers and the latest electronic music trends. As Gordy (1999) describes, educated, urban demographics showed particular disdain toward folk pop, because of the Milošević regime’s active effort to marginalize influential rock acts given their anti-war, politically subversive leanings, and popularity among audiences in Western-oriented media. However, as Simić (2007) has also argued, the present-day correspondence between folk and nationalist ideology is often overstated, and scholars have been known to reproduce elite critiques of the genre’s supposed “problems” by emphasizing its 1) importation of unwanted “foreign” stylistic elements both from West and East; 2) its dilution of supposedly “pure” source folk music; 3) its connection to “anti-Western” politicians, mafia, and platforms; and 4) its introduction of overtly sexual performances read as either too promiscuous or too objectifying.

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three terms seems to be more often used among Croatians, who use it to criticize a genre which is more typically associated with Serbian and Bosnian publics (Rasmussen 2002).

Homemade hip hop artists similarly saw folk pop stars, venues, and videos as distant from their domestic scene(s). One prominent MC described folkies as “just some, let’s say, it’s music that awakens in people very low passions and for...you know...for fucking drinking. That’s it. You get drunk and terrific! They lead you to dance, but without purpose (*bez veze*), you know?” Comparing folk pop to a key element of Roman political economy, another MC offered the following critique: “the masses are easiest to control through media, by serving that which they want them to think. And you have to hold the masses according to the principle of bread and circus. That means that you have to give them what they like to hear: those are folkies.” However, the structural opposition between hip hop and folk pop was complicated by many realities that made for ongoing discussion, debate, and introspection, including among DJs.

First, despite some folk pop stars’ relationship to nationalist rhetoric, folk pop hit singles, albums, and tours were often shared across the newly transnational music industry like those of homemade hip hop. Homemade beatmaking often coupled samples, riffs, or stylistic elements from markedly traditional musics in ways not entirely dissimilar from folk pop production. Folk pop artists regularly appropriated the stylistic signs of hip hop, reggaeton, dubstep, and other globalized genres and employed similar production software. Artists in the domestic hip hop scene(s) exhibited some tendency toward pursuing material reward or its glorification, which was a theme common to folk pop lyrics and music videos. DJs who mixed in a hip hop idiom occasionally took relatively lucrative wedding or birthday party gigs during which requests, however ironic, for folk pop would invariably emerge. Sometimes in moments of scene specific cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 2004), some DJs even admired folk artists ability to move a crowd or success in the music industry. These forms of unexpected overlap led one night to the intriguing cross-cultural metaphor that a DJ and a colleague offered me after a lively performance: they

argued that the US and Western Europe had their own folkies, many of whom were rappers themselves. Here a domestic musical category, “folkies,” became useful to understand longstanding commercial trends in US hip hop, the limits of which have been a regular topic of debate and introspection since they began.

Those handful of domestic rappers who have performed for the diaspora in Austria, Germany, the US, and beyond are often billed with rock and folk stars, which as one MC put it to me, often seemed to directly counter homemade hip hop politics. Exasperated with such ambivalent opportunity, he said:

I mean, you want in your music to distance yourself from folk music the whole time, you know and...it's not that you are judging it, but rather you are showing through your songs that folk is the easiest form of expression. You understand? It's like someone who can write with a pencil, but you want to write with a computer.

Here, different “simple” and “complex” writing implements (a pencil and computer) are poetically used to describe the distinction between folk pop and alternative genres like hip hop. As the quote demonstrate, many homemade hip hop artists were wary of seeming too judgmental of other musicians and their styles, which was one reason that explicit critiques were often directed to the biggest successes, not minor artists. Indeed, much of the social differentiation was of an implicit form that included DJs’ studied forms of training, selection, and omission.

The tagline of one of ex-YU’s largest hip hop events, the Fresh Island Festival, calls out a mobile English-speaking subject: “Have an Unforgettable Hip Hop Summer in Croatia!” This is a far cry from the aforementioned “Mediterranean as it Once Was” campaign, however both have seen success at garnering paying visitors at different scales. As mentioned, Zagreb’s famous Radio 101 was headed for a structured bankruptcy in 2011, meaning that Blackout’s

impending absence from the airwaves was going to leave the city with even fewer radio programs strictly tailored to “rap,” one of hip hop’s classic “elements.” However, Phat Phillie’s specialty radio program was only one platform the tireless impresario worked to make into an unlikely domestic profession. For Phillie and a handful of artists like him, the term “DJ” alone is too narrow to describe his variety of creative and business endeavors.

Blackout was also the name of an independent management company that organized numerous collaborations between Croatian beatmakers and American rappers. While on the radio, Phillie is known to broadcast a remarkable range of radio drops and shoutouts recorded primarily by African-American performers, especially those recognized to be part of the “classic” hip hop canon. While such forms of broadcasted symbolic connection-making are common to hip hop throughout Europe, Phillie’s metaphorical Rolodex never fails to impress, which he also regularly utilizes in concert booking. Phillie also remains integral in the coordination of the Fresh Island Festival, which began in 2012 on Zrće beach, and bills itself as “Europe’s leading hip-hop and urban music festival,” featuring a range of top-selling luminaries such as A\$AP Rocky, Snoop Dogg, and NAS. Each of Phillie’s “services” served to narrow the imagined distance between homemade hip hop and key cities and artists from the US.

Phillie explained that such efforts at expansion can offend younger, dedicated fan bases. Commercially viable music industry ventures can draw accusations of “selling out,” which in homemade hip hop terms means becoming more like the folkies. However, Phillie cites generational gaps internal to the domestic scene(s) as being the culprit behind younger audiences’ sometime frustrations regarding DJs gigging in ways that require playing more popular sounds.

The fact is that in those years, they really can't...I understand that they can't comprehend me. Between us there is maybe 20 years difference...16, 15 years at least. It means that they can't understand that I am now 35 years old, I have a family, a child, I have bills, that I have gray hairs. I simply have to keep going.<sup>5</sup>

Here Phillie argues that younger audiences lack of awareness regarding interwoven familial and financial obligations can lead to miscomprehension. However, Phillie's need to attract expanded audiences was never exclusively a burden. Not only does expansion provide the means to support a family, it also affords DJs enjoyment and musical growth:

Considering the fact that I professionally work as a DJ, I started getting offers to work at different corporate events, for different corporations, different sports happenings, where the public wasn't only a one-dimensional rap audience, but an audience of every type. That is, there were old folks, younger folks, from the city, from the country, from abroad; and then I saw that I had to find a niche for all of them. And I discovered that I can, and it works well, and I really love to do it. Those are exceptional gigs, you know. Of course, my specialty still remains *real hip hop* and *hardcore rap* (orig. English) and that's what I live every day in my head.<sup>6</sup>

Phillie makes a nuanced argument here about "corporate events" that suggests that expanding an audience across local social boundaries of age, geography, and nationality need not be exclusively a burden to a DJ. Despite living an ethos of "real hip hop and hardcore rap," Phillie expressed the need to expand beyond this singular dimension. This offered a creative challenge that might offend some narrow audiences in its coziness with corporate business imperatives. Yet

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<sup>5</sup> "...radi se o tome da oni u tim godinama ne mogu ni...ja ih razumijem da oni ne mogu mene razumijet između nas sjede možda 20 godina razlike...16, 15 godina najmanje. Znači oni ne mogu razumijeti da ja imam 35 godina sada, da imam familiju, dijete, da ja imam račune, da imam...sijedi, sijedi kosu...da jednostavno moram ići dalje."

<sup>6</sup> "...s obzirom da profesionalno radim kao DJ, kad sam počeo dobivati ponude da radim na različitim korporativnim eventima, za različite korporacije, različita sportska dešavanja, gdje publika više nije bila jednodimenzionalna rap publika, nego je publika bila od svakakve, znači od starih, mlađih, iz grada, sa sela, iz inostranstva, i onda sam video moram naći neki niche za sve njih i tu sam ono otkrio da to mogu i to dobro leži i to volim radit jako. To su ti neki specijalni gigovi, naravno da je moja specijalnost i dalje real hip hop i hardcore rap i to je ono što živim svaki dan u svojoj glavi."

as opposed to being constricting, working with firms could also simultaneously enable a creative career, while spurring mixes that might appeal to different crowds.

In my experience, clubs that cater only to hip hop audiences are next to non-existent in ex-YU. As is evidenced by the lineups at Fresh Island, clubs more frequently have what one could call a hip hop friendly orientation and feature DJs who actively incorporate categories such as r+b, dancehall, house, electro, grime, dubstep, and UK garage into their live playlists and mixes. This mutual imbrication with both electronic and other music genres was obvious in the early naming conventions of radio programming. For example, the 1980s precursor to Blackout on Zagreb's Radio 101 was called *Electro Funk Premiere*. During the 1990s, "dance," also known "Cro-Dance" given its popularity in Croatia in particular, attracted a number of artists who rapped lyrics, used synthesizers, and sampled melodic phrasing, including Zagreb's Electro Team (ET). In 1995, ET's Fresh Jay appeared at the prestigious Disco Music Club (DMC) competition which I discuss further below, becoming the first domestic DJ ever to participate in the competition. Thus, the dramatic appearance of dubstep in the club scene and hip hop beat production during my fieldwork in 2011-12, with its low frequency bass "wobble" and heavily processed digital distortion, was in many ways a continuation of electronic dance music's ongoing presence and connection to homemade hip hop.

Homemade hip hop's expansion over the past two decades has occurred within a context of the glorification and arguably fossilization of older musical categories, especially rock. A whole series of Yugorockumentaries such as *Lucky Child (Sretno dijete)* and *Orchestra (Orkestar)* both remind and introduce viewers to the artists who inspired generations of audiences with punk, new wave, and rock oriented pop. I regularly observed how CD sets, popular history books, award shows, and even museums commemorated rock performers and

their sounds as the stuff of, to borrow journalist Petar Luković's (1989) phrase, "a better past." In 2012, I attended an exhibit called "The Last of Youth of Yugoslavia" (*Poslednja mladost Jugoslavije*) curated by the Museum of Yugoslav History, which maintains the House of Flowers Mausoleum (*Kuća cveća*), the site of Tito's grave in the Dedinje neighborhood of Belgrade. The exhibit analyzed and displayed examples of the "youth alternative pop culture" known as the aforementioned "New Wave," including flyers, posters, audio cassettes, comics, photography, fanzines, and journals that were featured on museum walls.

Soon after this exhibit, the Museum housed another entitled, "Technology for the People" (*Tehnika narodu*), which in a centrally located display case offered a thesis part Benedict Anderson, part STS, that Yugoslav manufacturing, technology, and the popular culture they often delivered to homes were critical means through which the multinational state imagined its productivity, thereby producing its viability. Radios, televisions, kitchen appliances, and turntables that consumers bought during the 1950s-70s were devices with practical purposes. However, as the exhibitors argued, they were also the means through which Yugoslav supranationalism sustained its beliefs in socialist self-management, guaranteed employment, and the promises of a brighter future.

Zagreb's Elemental and Split's tbf are among the most widely distributed of all Croatian popular bands across the region. Notably, audiences often note that their earlier creative production was more aesthetically hip hop and bore more resemblance to rock as their popularity increased. After innovating in the area of domestic rap lyricism and sample-based beatmaking, each group regularly now features backup vocalists and harmonized choruses, drummers, and guitarists. Each group remained popular in hip hop circles during my fieldwork, but one could

signal one's stylistic preferences through an evaluation of Elemental and tbf's musical transformations.

While rock's creative genealogy in ex-YU has a taken-for-granted domestic history, the performers of some popular musics, like hip hop, more expressly trace Afrodiasporic creative lineages. Even though their popularity was confined to smaller numbers, domestic interest in soul, funk, reggae, dancehall, and especially jazz is longstanding. The racialized and essentializing category, "black music" (*crna muzika/glazba*), appears in ex-YU as it does elsewhere in Europe. The category necessarily dovetails with other domestic racialized musics, including that field that listeners often label as "Gypsy" (*ciganska*). Many audiences, hip hop artists included, often exoticize and romanticize the qualities of these sounds and their imagined origins. The interrelation of these musical categories with cultural capital is complicated, because their celebration often reinforces an imagined division of social labor that suggests that "the blacker the person, the more suited he or she is to (certain forms of) musical production." Here, domestic audiences equate "blackness" not only to an imagined Africa and African diaspora, but also to domestic racial ideologies and hierarchies that see Romani and Muslim populations as darker than Christian, Slavic speakers. Nonetheless, jazz is in many ways a celebrated prestige, if still marginal genre, as can be seen through its presence in well-regarded clubs and through different forms of state and private sponsorship.

One of my workshop instructors, DJ Raid, had long moved away from practicing turntablist technique and instead studied piano, music theory, and jazz. When Raid told me of his decision, he voiced what he felt was domestic rappers' stereotypical reaction to his newer pursuits:

You know, very often people involved in hip hop look at (studying music theory) like some sort of “science fiction” (orig. English), like “why would you need to know which notes are which?” Well, man, you need to (know) because that with which you are fooling around is just that: it’s music. Someone played that. Now, when you can understand a sample, then you can understand how it works, so that you can begin to work with it much better. That is really important. And of course, through my playing, my eyes opened to other musical genres. I tell you, from jazz, which I am beginning to understand, you know? You begin to understand the brilliance of those tracks of some old jazzmen and newer ones. But not only jazz, anything that is music. I listen to jazz, and honestly, I listen to metal. You know? I listen to Tool, which is a totally avant-garde metal story. At one moment it was. It opens your eyes, it broadens you, and truthfully you begin to listen to more music. Automatically that is something that allows you more creativity.<sup>7</sup>

To Raid, “avant-garde metal,” jazz, and music theory all allow one to “open one’s eyes” and understand how to use collected samples. For those who are “just” rappers and not particularly interested in becoming real musicians, music theory is “science fiction.” Raid described how he came to his pedagogical technique for turntablist instruction by way of metaphor from another field of hip hop production. As a young beatmaker, he found a single sample that he liked and thus looped it over the course of the entire three-minute song. He argued that if one listens to a wider range of music and learns more about the basic components of composition, then one’s reaction to such easy loops is one of disgust. By sharpening his musical skills, Raid believed that his beats and scratch routines were far more complex than those of his younger self, and by implication, those of peers less interested in a wide range of musics. Like other DJs, “music” was equated with maturity in contrast to “turbo,” which was equated with “youth” and non-music.

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<sup>7</sup> “Znaš, vrlo često ljudi koji se bave hopom to gledaju kao neki ono science fiction, kao zašto bi sad ti moraš da znaš koje su note, koje su šta. Pa, ba, moraš zato što čime ti barataš jeste to, to je muzika. Neko je to odsvirao. Sad kad ti možeš da shvataš sempl, ti onda na kraju ono, shvataš kako on funkcioniše, pa možeš mnogo bolje da radiš sa tim. To je jako bitno. I naravno kroz moje sviranje, mi je otvorilo i oči za neke nove muzičke žanrove. Kažem, od đeza, koji krećem da shvaćam i znaš ono, krećeš da shvataš zapravo genijalnost tih stvari, ono, kažem ti nekih starih đezera i novih. Ali ne samo đez, bilo čega, bilo šta što je muzika. Ja slušam ono, ono slušam đez u suštini, i slušam ono metal. Znaš? Slušam Tool koji je potpuno neka avangardna metal priča u suštini u nekom trenutku bila. Otvori ti oči, mnogo se širi, i s tim što slušaš u suštini više muzike, automatski je to stvar koji tebe omogućava veća kreativnost.”

Both domestic and foreign sounds could qualify as a moral positive, but any category was susceptible to technospectacular danger.

In comparison to France or Germany, DJing in a hip hop idiom, turntablism, and controllerism remain extremely marginal in ex-YU. During my fieldwork, my instructors were regularly looking for proper, sponsored spaces to hold their workshops, places whose owners hopefully did not expect expensive rent. At the DJ workshops that I attended in Zagreb and Belgrade, my instructors and handful of peers articulated the idea that rap and DJing was under “attack” from detrimental “turbo” tendencies at a range of levels, from decisions concerning repertory to the micro-precision of basic scratch technique. “Real DJs” did not quickly sling together .mp3 playlists for a house party; nor ideally should they build live setlists with “cheap” hits. By slowly practicing each awkward scratch technique, beat juggle, and drumming pattern, we slowly refined our skills.

The bulk of those who attended the DJ workshops sought to improve their beat- and key matching along with other mixing skills. However, a few of us went a step further, pursuing other techniques necessary to perhaps one day earn the lofty title of “turntablist.” Of the terms, “DJ” and “turntablist,” the latter pointed to a musical movement largely foreign to homemade hip hop. Turntablism had prestige since it emphasized musical techniques our instructors saw as cultivated and connected to virtuosic performance that grew in the late 1990s, grew in notoriety primarily in the US, Western Europe, and Japan. Becoming a proficient turntablist, thereby emerging as someone who does more than “just” play the records of others, was a transnationally shared ideal that was by no means unique to ex-YU, but nonetheless had particular local resonances.

In Belgrade, our mixers, each featuring two headphone jacks, allowed our instructor DJ Raid to closely supervise our practice while our nascent patterns were inaudible to the rest of the room. He would circle around multiple times to each of us, plug in his own headphones, and direct and re-direct our evolving routines. His dedicated practice method involved a series of careful steps meant to further develop our skills, so that we could eventually DJ with a “jazzman’s approach” (*džezerski pristup*) to improvisation. An amalgam of his most frequently reiterated instructions as I remember them follow:

With the pitch slider on the turntable, slow the tempo of an instrumental beat down to make sure that you perform each of the scratch patterns cleanly and in time. Do not increase the tempo of the instrumental prematurely until you can perform any given technique in double-time at 100+ bpm. Get yourself a whiteboard and diagram patterns, so that you can conceptualize how your hands should look and the abstract technique should sound. Devote 20 minutes apiece to individual scratches like the chirp, orbit, crab, prison, autobahn, boomerang, and delayed two-click flare. After 40 minutes devoted to reps of these skills, “relax” with 20 minutes of freestyle during which you combine multiple scratches that you are learning, switching after each measure. If you forget how an individual sonic snippet should sound when a sample is scratched, then review the well-regarded tutorials on YouTube, especially those made by the Scratch Academy or Alex Sonnenfeld (a.k.a. DJ Tonspielzeug).<sup>8</sup>

Time and again, Raid reinforced the longterm benefits of this regimen, even though impatience, frustration, and boredom would invariably creep into our routines. All of these techniques established a clear distinction between the “serious musicianship” of aspiring turntablists as opposed to their neophyte DJ peers, both within the workshop and beyond in the local club scene.

Raid’s obvious dedication and mastery of turntablist techniques had taken him light years beyond the chirp+one-click-flare scratch combination that many intermediates and even

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<sup>8</sup> Students in the Belgrade workshop were aware of The Berklee College of Music’s Turntablist Transcription Method, but for the sake of efficiency, Raid often offered his own hand-drawn version of a scratch combination.

professionals use to aesthetically ornament their mixes. His personal commitment to achieving virtuosity brought him a national DMC award in Switzerland where his family emigrated. The DMC began as an organization and international competition in London in 1986. Soon thereafter, the DMC evolved into the premier global showcase for scratching, a set of techniques that became later subsumed under the broader category of “turntablism.” Raid moved back to Serbia and reintegrated himself in Belgrade through a series of song and album collaborations with many of Serbia’s most well-known hip hop acts, including Marčelo’s Filter Crew of which he is a member. As is the case with many homemade hip hop artists, Raid succeeded in adding an internationally recognizable “featuring” to his professional résumé. He jointly composed “Raided R,” a track that appears on DJ Revolution’s 2008 *King of the Decks* album. Revolution is a prominent figure in Los Angeles hip hop and turntablist circles. His appearance on nationally-syndicated “The Wake Up Show” radio program with Sway and King Tech brought him international acclaim. Here we can see how both a “real” musician’s technical prowess can allow him to garner renown within hip hop’s circuits of symbolic exchange, thereby expanding the time and space in which one might otherwise encounter a name (Munn 1992).

Raid often used the word “*šljakati*,” a verb that in slang means to work hard, labor, and toil, when he described what a day must be spent doing if one was to improve. As an example, he dedicated countless hours to expanding awareness of turntables in Serbia through pedagogy. Raid’s bi-weekly workshops in Belgrade and one-off conference events in front of audiences in Kruševac, Niš, Zagreb, and Skopje were laborious efforts to expand publics and legitimize largely unknown skills to others, such that they might consider turntablism as a musical art form. One fellow student began to professionalize his practice regimen by extending his time in front

of the turntables to a full 7 hours a day, thereby taking advantage of free time that would disappear when his studies in law school progressed.

Just off of Ilica, Zagreb's tram and shopping thoroughfare downtown, and tucked away in a small, unremarkable building also occupied by the August Cesarac Center for Culture and Film, was a cleanly dance studio painted bright white. Twice a week, Venom would morph the studio into a resolutely informal practice space lined with turntables, cables, and mixers. Piles of records that spanned both genre and political era were strewn about for participants' use. Old Jugoton and PGP-RTB releases were shuffled together with battle records from Paris or the Bay Area. Some were stuffed into crates, some had lost their sleeves, others were chipped or marked with stickers that Venom had used to drop his needle right at the beginning of a drum break. His workshop was a place where pedagogy, practice, and informal conversation also mixed. Information sharing and reunion with artists from around Croatia and beyond was constant.

Distinguishing yourself as a DJ required not only developing an array of musical skills, but also accumulating detailed knowledge about instruments, equipment, and prices. This awareness situated in a unique ex-YU politics of gear consumption. Venom's road-worn, but functional DJ gear bore the signs of heavy use, regular transport to and from gigs, and tinkering by an owner who clearly possessed remarkable talents in what the now global stars of the craft, the Invizibl Skratch Picklz (ISP), once called "turntable mechanics." Venom honed these skills as a former student at the Electrotechnical Department at the University of Zagreb. For example, one evening Venom quickly re-wired my Vestax PMC-06A, a line to known to the tiny circle of local intimates as the diminutive "little 6" (*šestica*), so that my battle mixer could emit a master audio signal out of the quarter-inch headphone jack thus helping me to overcome a manufacturer's design flaw long embedded in my old gear.

Both Venom and Raid sought to domesticate a global emergence of DJ pedagogy. By the time I arrived in the field, my instructors were also creating domestic YouTube videos for their younger peers. In many ways this followed other pioneers, including the former team champions of the DMC, the ISP who not only were turntablist innovators, but they also proliferated instruction of their craft. The ISP released a series of early instructional VHS tapes and later DVDs. The *Turntable Mechanics Workshop* distributed by Vestax was the first of their many instructional videos. Venom's Zagreb-based DJ collective, *Džabaton*, had tried to organize a regional DMC competition, but too few aspiring turntablists signed up for the event.<sup>9</sup> Their videos were thus yet another means to tap audiences who might one day join the next attempt at organizing an ex-YU DMC battle that would be as successful as that which Red Bull had started for domestic rappers.

Often lurking behind our discussions was the specter of 1990s wars and sanctions, which among other deleterious effects, also encumbered the mobility of foreign musics until the advent of more widely distributed Internet access in the 2000s. Venom insisted that the difficulties that he encountered growing up in the 1980s and 1990s were “unfathomable” (*nepojmljivo*) by the standards of peers in Western markets and today's would-be domestic DJs. Having grown up in some cases as refugees, many who came of age during the 1990s could narrate arduous tales of both record and gear acquisition. Older artists across the scene(s) sometimes argued that younger peers took music's broad availability for granted. Katz (2012) cleverly deploys Ralph Ellison's metaphor of the “thinker-tinker” to describe the work and practices of DJs that go beyond their

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<sup>9</sup> “*Džabaton*” played on local record label names like Jugoton or Diskoton by combining the suffix *-ton* and the word “*džaba*” meaning “free” or “costing nothing.” The name spoke to a particular event series through which the collective tried to bring in largely student crowds who struggled to afford festival tickets.

cultivation of musical talents. Venom did a lot of thinking alongside his tinkering that offered a studied, peripheral vantage point on the politics of gear circulation.

Venom expressed annoyance with the DJ industry's constant emphasis on product innovation and gadget marketing, which implied to younger practitioners that they could gain expertise by purchasing expensive new toys, rather than by devoting years of dedicated and unglamorous practice in one's bedroom. Such practice required maintaining functional gear, not just the purchase of the latest device. Domestic DJs achieved status by laboring to find ways to track down and preserve once hard-to-find, now still expensive equipment. Meeting the right people, learning the catalog of gear prices, and navigating the transregional variants of Craigslist all were steps necessary to acquire a proper home practice space for one's decks. When workshop attendees chatted, many strategized as to how to buy technologies cheaply. Doing so often meant crossing borders to find better deals. Model numbers of equipment for sale in Split, Rijeka, or Novi Sad bandied about during our breaks. These discussions were often for the benefit of new workshop attendees who sought advice as to how to inexpensively create a practice space at home. In a new era of ongoing crisis, equipment acquisition remained a sign of devotion to one's craft, but it could also be a somewhat stigmatized indicator of class privilege. Thus, earning, researching, and finessing a means to purchasing gear like a Technics 1210 turntable was a Janus-faced sign of an DJ's artistic progression with which one was encouraged to be careful. In addition to sharpening turntablist technique and mixing styles, younger participants could earn respect by laboring to cultivate proper material relations.

Based on interviews conducted in the US, Katz (2012:214-248) describes the spectrum of opinion that existed in the mid-2000s among what he calls "performative DJs" toward the emergence of a technomusical innovation collectively known as Digital Vinyl-Emulation

Systems (DVS). This portion of Katz's valuable discussion represents a new chapter in an oft-told story of how DJs in New York, Philadelphia, and elsewhere improbably used consumer technologies in ways that re-defined what it meant to play someone else's records. Once using audio system detritus in the 1970s to build massive mobile sound systems, pioneering early hip hop DJs encountered a market that had shifted by the 1990s. Responding in large part to hip hop's mass mediation in television, consumer demand for DJ gear in the US, Europe, and Japan facilitated an industrial shift toward the development of an ever more diverse range of products, including mixers, specialized record cartridges and styli, and other equipment. While ambivalent about some of these products, Katz argues that many American DJs consider DVS an overwhelmingly positive new product. When used with turntables, the system is comprised of a hardware interface, software on a laptop, and two normal looking records, pressed with a track that emits a digital signal, that in turn maps onto the timecode of any audio file on a hard drive. Since DJ performance and turntablist routines often generate pleasure among audiences through the creative juxtaposition and scratching of different verbal and musical samples, many equated the creative design with "magic." In my fieldsites, "Serato," as DVS are often collectively known after one of the market-leading brands, invited similar DJ discussion of amazing new possibilities, but also drawbacks that were in many ways particular.

Since the mid-2000s, Serato and competitor DVS like Traktor have enabled DJs across the world to manipulate music files on a laptop hard drive with nearly the same comfort and technical range as one could a vinyl record. One can beat juggle, perform body tricks, and nearly every scratch technique with files instantaneously downloaded from any computer. Based on an average estimate for popular length, .mp3 compression, and thus a file size of 4 megabytes per track, a one terabyte hard drive can now hold 250,000 songs. Serato Audio Research, a New

Zealand-based company, thus vastly expanded a performer's potential repertory at a greatly reduced price. DVS also preserved the utility of expensive turntables and CDJ players, which is critical to understanding the transnational success of these products. Gone are the days when DJs need to lug heavy crates or bags full of vinyl to clubs. Now, rather than having a far deeper familiarity with mixable portions of a song including the drum breaks on a record, one can simply look at a new hit's audio waveform in Serato's software in advance of a heading out to perform. By setting a few so-called cue points, or digital markers in the waveform where with a click of a button, a DJ could advance a virtual needle without lifting the actual one. DJs could feel confident in their preparation to use the latest hits to entertain crowds. They thus needed less preparation, knowledge, and practice in order to fashion mixes that young club-goers would tolerate.

Global major labels now clog the email inboxes of domestic "tastemakers" with attached files featuring new singles replete with instrumentals, remixes, and vocal-only song versions. This is a stark contrast to the older practice some remember when labels sent vinyl 12 inch singles only a few times a year to cities like Zagreb. On the plus side, Serato infinitely expanded one's deployable repertory at a performance event. However, some of my informants felt that technologies with affordances such as these had constraints: they enabled immature, unsophisticated, and less musical approaches to DJing as a craft. Keeping up with new releases became such a burden to some that one DJ reported now simply ignoring label emails as many downwardly mobile Americans would credit card promotions. Free, illegal Internet file distribution coupled with these technological advancements obviated the need for hip hop DJs to visit record stores, dig through crates, or engage in more traditional forms of audio archaeology.

These tangible practices figure very large in oral, lyrical, and filmic histories of hip hop's initial expansion as a genre.

Despite many pros, some argued that such technologies also facilitated laziness. With amusing self-deprecation mixed with an implicit critique of those with less experience, DJ Chill claimed, "Serato makes you stupid." Some older DJs felt that the physicality of in-person encounters with vinyl was something missing from the experiences of younger artists, who appeared to download tons, but seemed to "really listen" to very little. In ex-YU, the relative absence of specialized DJ gear and records was long artificially maintained, and I therefore naïvely expected that domestic DJs would be thrilled with Serato's possibilities. After all, despite its diversity as a musical movement, turntablism was subtly dominated historically by those with geographic access to markets and disposable income necessary to invest in the necessary, expensive gear. However, materiality and passionate research was critical to older DJs musical educations and brought them into personal contact with other aficionados and discographies. As I argue elsewhere and above, .mp3s (*empetrice*), Serato, and digital distribution generally emerged as signs of a "murky," ambivalent, uncertain present among many informants. In particular, DJs with whom I spoke often felt their pathways to knowledge and community were changing, in some ways for the worse.

In an era of "*Jutube*" (which might translate to "YUtube"), videos have great currency in homemade hip hop. In early 2011, I became involved in the pre-production of a music documentary with two seasoned, Zagreb-based DJs. In a short, we each hoped to thematize shifts in repertory, conditions of performance, and the local effects of Serato. While I moved to Sarajevo long before the film was completed, I and others were convinced that DJs Chill and Dirty Hairy had the makings of a terrific documentary that I still hope they one day realize to its

end. The paths that each artist followed to Zagreb from the Croatian diaspora contrasted, but each were well-positioned commentators on the changes that Serato had wrought. Each had informed vantage points on the product's value as seen from peripheries of major music markets.

Brighton-born Hairy's artistic career, like that of his domestic colleagues, was notable in its navigation of creative relationships across diverse social lines. As another Anglophone developing his Croatian language skills, Hairy struggled initially to develop creative contacts within Zagreb's hip hop scene after moving to the capital from the UK. Finding gigs proved challenging despite his lengthy experience in DJing, drumming, and music retail. Even with notable beatmaking talents, familial ties, and his expansive discographic knowledge, identifying collaborators was not easy as Hairy initially found the scene somewhat hermetic. He began developing what I would call an ethnomusicological understanding of his surroundings, spending more time in Zagreb's handful of remaining second-hand record stores than many locals. He also started sampling from the catalogs of the old Yugoslav labels, thus "domesticating" his beat production in a way that only the most successful local beatmakers had done so thoroughly. By 2011, some of Croatia's most prominent artists, mainly from the eastern, rural region of Slavonia, began taking notice of Hairy's live routines, remixes, and original beats. Other musicians often frame Slavonia's hinterland as the romanticized home of tamburica orchestras, which makes "urban" hip hop a particularly awkward "fit" within the symbolic logics of the musical geography. Since rap acts like the aforementioned General Woo, Kandžija, and Krankšvester (whose work I discuss at length in chapter 5) often discuss this outsider-insider status in their lyrics, Hairy's own felt distance from the Zagreb scene was not strange to his Slavonian peers.

In planning the documentary, Hairy recruited the expertise of DJ Chill, a Sarajevo-born veteran of Zagreb hip hop, whom he met also scouring the crates for Yugoslav-era classics. Chill's family fled B&H during the 1990s war and faced more profound difficulties, including finding employment, upon arrival in Croatia. Chill first developed his passion for hip hop in Sarajevo, and growing up in Zagreb, he spent the bulk of his very limited allowance and eventual earnings on new cassettes, CDs, and records. In our interview, he recalled the occasion that he had in 1994 to see Public Enemy at the arena Dom sportova as forever inspiring, in large part thanks to DJ Terminator X's showcase on the turntables. When I first met Chill in 2003, he worked tirelessly to improve as a DJ, hoping to turn practice into a sustainable profession. At the time, after his delivery job ended for the day, he would use contacts to receive after-hours access to clubs and their house turntables. In hopes of acquiring his own gear, he began working multiple jobs and carried records to friends' apartments to continue practicing. In overcoming these barriers, Chill had a kindred sense of affinity for both other hip hop artists' stories of hardship and their dedicated research, practice, and maintenance of communities.

By 2011, Chill could professionally sustain his passion. This was no small feat, particularly because in the Croatian club and festival scene, paid opportunities for hip hop performance had never been expansive and appeared to be waning on the eve of European accession. Attaining such success meant keeping a busy weekly schedule full of long nights, regularly working on online promotion, and organizing regular parties in clubs where crowds wanted to hear "pop-pier" playlists than Chill otherwise preferred. That spring, Chill hosted me multiple times at Radio Student's weekly *Mixtape Sessions* show, where the studio was also a meeting space for the DJs who ran the program and a slew of invited guests from the domestic scene(s). Chill felt that the lack of corporate sponsorship, advertising, and format expectations

was an affective release, or “something for the soul” he said with a smile. Broadcasts such as *Mixtape Sessions* were moments (often felt to be too infrequent) when Zagreb’s scene in particular would coalesce to freestyle on the air, listen to the latest domestic and foreign releases, or just relax on the roof terrace.

Hairy wanted to focus the documentary on crate-digging, beatmaking, and the vinyl record-mediated genesis of his friendship with Chill and others. We hoped to also cast DJ crews like Rijeka’s Kopaj ovo! (Dig This!) and Ljubljana’s Tetkine radosti (Auntie’s Delights), whose influential mixtapes I discuss further below. Among their promotional plans, Chill and Hairy wanted to re-invest money earned while gigging in pressing a limited edition of 7-inch vinyl singles featuring homemade hip hop for fans. Unlike digital files, limited edition records was a more personal commodity that they could actually hope to sell, given the novelty, small quantity, and potential appeal to collectors. Before performing together, Chill and Hairy often distributed burned mixtape CDs for free at the door of venues. They hoped their simple gesture would give young crowds incentive to both come out to shows and hopefully buy drinks, which was one important priority of supportive club owners. Hairy argued that the ease-of-use and personal touch embedded in the act of giving and receiving CDs was qualitatively better than digital download, which hopefully meant that listeners would build a more meaningful relationship to the DJs through the gift. Instead of only offering mixes through SoundCloud or similar websites, their gift’s very materiality could build a more devoted audience.

Romantic articulations of vinyl record nostalgia ran parallel to many discourses and associated practices in Western music markets, including audiophile critiques of digital compression and the supposedly reduced fidelity of .mp3s. When I first heard these DJs talk about record collecting, the “Yugonostalgia” that other scholars describe often came to mind.

However, once I began helping with the film's pre-production, Hairy and Chill made clear that they hoped to first emphasize the personal growth of DJs through record collecting, and second to offer a critique of technological change that left the club and festival circuit more competitive and perhaps less musical after the introduction of Serato and similar technologies.

Amateur DJs with massive .mp3 libraries but little training were not always welcome among their seasoned peers who often faced a dearth of gigs outside of the summer season, the bankruptcy of once influential radio stations, and even licensing fees from musicians' unions that claimed to protect the marketplace. Overnight these often younger DJs would download gigabytes of classic songs that sometimes took older DJs years to acquire and prepare to use with attention to the snares, kicks, and drum breaks on any given record. Chill and Hairy dismissed my notion that Serato allowed one to mix smoothly faster, arguing with nuance instead that such devices helped novices blend unfamiliar songs more cleanly, helping the majors deliver usable, new material in record time.

Comparing the "transition" from an era of mix production when vinyl records dominated to the subsequent period of Serato is interesting to consider when juxtaposed with what optimists have often described teleologically as a "transition" from socialist to clientelistic neoliberal political economy. While recognizing some of the present's benefits, I often found older DJs celebrating elements of earlier eras of musical mass mediation and consumption. Vinyl records, cassettes, and even CDs had benefits as did older television programming and radio. Nostalgia for records in ex-YU must be distinguished both from the emotional and materialist feelings Western record enthusiasts might have and from general Yugonostalgia. The dismembered state was not the primary concern. Chill and Hairy felt a longing perhaps, but theirs was geared toward an era in which DJing felt more materially-ground, interpersonal, and less dependent on

keyboard strokes. Crate digging for so-called Yugobreaks emerged as an important medium through which dedicated DJs established connections with their peers and local music histories.

Beatmaking, radio programming, equipment acquisition, documentary production, and the steady, measured cultivation of turntablist and mixing technique were only a few of the avenues through which domestic DJs sought to transcend the negative connotations of categories in an otherwise “youthy” genre. There were others. Since the 1990s, beatmakers had long utilized samples from Yugoslav-era discographies, especially from the catalogs of PGP-RTB and Jugoton. Beatmaking thus had long domesticated hip hop production in a way that utilized iconic rhythms and riffs of the past. During my fieldwork, DJs were also increasingly (re-)discovering the danceable breaks in domestic jazz, soul, funk, and progressive rock.

In domestic beatmaking, artists had long used a wide range of melodic sampled loops from records as diverse as those including Ivica and Marica fairytales (a Southwest South Slavic version of Hans and Gretel) to famous songs like “War Profiteers” (*Ratni profiteri*) or “I’ll Be Good, I’ll Never Do It Again” (*Biću dobar, neću nikad više*) by the celebrated, late composer and singer, Arsen Dedić. Loops from recordings like these can explicitly cite different foreign and domestic musical styles, or bury the references in entirely new collage. Audience evaluations are based largely on the success of the final beat, but in some instances, we should be careful to ignore the resonances of domestic musical citation. A beatmaker’s selection of a horn stab from a trumpet occurs within a vast realm of possible instrumental choices. Local semiotic ideologies that see instrument, place, and identity symbolically intertwined may make brass instrumentation “sound cool,” or aesthetically uninspiring. In homemade beatmaking, artists referenced domestic discographic histories of particular sorts in building their audiences.

One afternoon during a visit to Rijeka, I had fortunate occasion to interview DJ Smeđi šećer (Brown Sugar) whose show on Radio Trsat and blog, *The Kitchen of Organic Sounds (Kuhinje organskog zvuka)*, are go-to destinations for those interested in Yugobreaks and antiquarian record finds. When we spoke, Šećer felt strongly that the time had come to re-emphasize danceable “black music” in Rijeka’s clubs, where audiences had forgotten the value of DJs. His radio program and blog posts sought to present a “deep” history of domestic black music in a way that insisted upon celebrating specific creative genealogies.

Šećer felt that crowds expected DJs too often to be little more than human CD players, cueing instrumentals so that a domestic rapper could perform. DJs were often left itching for better treatment, showcasing, and a bigger portion of audience attentions. Šećer argued as we spoke that this “human jukebox” expectation flew in the face of what he believed made for a good DJ.

A good DJ is a DJ who feels the vibe in a club and knows how to build up his set that night. A good DJ doesn’t just show up with a prepared set in order to rock without attention to anything else. Instead, he needs to be ready to adjust to people in that specific moment. People aren’t always ready and crazy to dance, nor is the situation the same that night. So they look at what they are doing, how they are behaving, what the vibe is in the club, and then work in relation to that. Also a good DJ is one without compromises. That means that he won’t adapt to people who came to hear hits. Okay, play a hit here and there, but in between, you have to play those tracks that are going to build suspense for that hit. And then people will begin to follow what’s happening when the DJ is building a story. Because when you build a story for a two hour set and at the end it’s crazy, then you have done your work well. If you try to make things crazy from the beginning...I think that can also happen, but most of the time, in my opinion, a good DJ has to be organized, communicate with the crowd, and be without compromise in his choice of music.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “Dobar DJ je DJ koji osjeti vibru u klubu i zna kako će izgraditi svoj set te večeri. Dobar DJ ne dolazi samo s pripremljenim setom da bi izrokao bez obzira na sve, nego mora biti spreman se prilagoditi ljudima u tom trenutku. Ljudi nisu uvijek spremni i ludi za ples, ni uvijek tako te situacije te večeri, pa ono, pa gledaju što ljudi rade, kako se ponašaju, koja vibra u klubu i onda radi u skladu sa time. Isto tako dobar DJ je DJ koji je bez kompromisa. To znači da se neće lako prikloniti ljudima koji su došli slušati hitove. Okej, pusti hit tu i tamo, ali između toga moraš pustiti one stvari da bi izgradio suspense za taj hit, i onda će ljudi početi kužiti šta se događa kad dobar DJ gradi priču, jer ako gradiš priču dva sata u setu i na kraju ludnica, onda si napravio dobar posao. Ako pokušaš napraviti ludnicu od

DJs familiar with countless YouTube instructional videos, explanatory Wikis, trade magazines, famous turntablist compositions, and books like *How to DJ Right: The Art and Science of Playing Records* will no doubt recognize elements of Šečer's definition from those that have long circulated internationally among the world's most storied performers. Nonetheless, Šečer's unrehearsed, thoughtful definition given on-the-spot bears close consideration. Good DJs walk a complicated line between being prepared, yet adaptable to the demands of specific crowds, venues, and cities, all while avoiding reliance on technospectacular musical solutions in the form of hits. The temporal and cultural specificity of building the right "story" on any given night for different gathered crowds is notable, as is Šečer's criticism of the value of "hits." Hits were problematic in part because they did not build any narrative tension in the unfolding of a good story. They might be useful to release crowd suspense, but they were the most superficial finds in DJ digs.

Thus, the drive to domesticate, creatively and "without compromise," spilled over into mix-making, too. In different ways, beatmakers and DJs celebrated the syncopated drum breaks, Hammond organ solos, rhythm guitar riffs from elder performers who brought jazz, soul, and funk to ex-YU. When I was in the field, many artists including Šečer were particularly excited by the work of a Slovenian DJ collective known by a pan-national name, "*Tetkine radosti*" meaning "Auntie's Delights" across ex-YU's Slavic standard languages. *Tetkine radosti* drew tour dates far-and-wide and the respect of their BCS peers by creatively mobilizing 1960-70s Yugofunk, -

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*početka, mislim i to se može dogoditi, ali većinu vremena, po meni dobar DJ mora bit slojevit, komunicirat s publikom, i bit bez kompromisan u izbor glazbe."*

soul, and progressive rock in their eminently domestic mixtapes and live performances. In evaluating the success of their idiosyncratic mixtape style, Chill commented as follows:

That idea is really genius. Actually, it isn't so much genius as it is simple. We have it, too. It's right here. It's not only in America. We have breaks in Croatia and in the entire region of former Yugoslavia. I collected those records, and I always had the basic idea to one day use the samples, and I don't know what. But the idea never occurred to me to spin those breaks. They really went all the way with it. And that's, wow, a brilliant idea.<sup>11</sup>

Tetkine radosti's particular aesthetics of juxtaposition drew multiple lines of contrast: against their folk playing counterparts (i.e., the aforementioned folkies), the "old rockers" (*stari rockeri*), US American DJs, and "cold," digitally mediated, hit-driven, hard drive mixing of today's younger domestic DJs.

Like audio archaeologists, DJs across genres see record crate "digging" (*kopanje*) as a key practice that differentiates "shallow" listening from forms of musical attentiveness that go much "deeper." The importance of crate digging has been romantically portrayed in a series of lyrical, film, and cover art treatments that span national hip hop scenes and classic canons. Films like *Wildstyle* (1983), the documentary *Scratch* (2002), and even scholarly works like Schloss' *Making Beats* (2004) all point to the centrality of digging to DJing and hip hop beat production in the US.

When domestic DJs "dig" through homemade records, liner notes, and other aspects of the musical past, the cultural production of the SFRY is unavoidable. The ongoing research, collection, and use of "Yugobreaks" points to an earlier age of domestic "play" with "Yugofunk" and other genres for which artists often trace Afrodiasporic creative genealogies. For many

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<sup>11</sup> "Ta ideja je stvarno genijalna. U biti, nije toliko genijalna nego jednostavna. Imamo i mi, to je tu. Nema samo u Americi. Imamo mi brejkove u Hrvatskoj i u cijelom prostoru bivše Jugoslavije. Ja sam skupljao te ploče i uvijek mi je bila primarna ideja jednog dana ću iskoristiti sample i ne znam što, ali nikada nije pala ideja na pamet kao da bih te brejkove mogao vrtiti. To je oni isfurali do kraja. I to je, 'wow', genijalna ideja."

audiences, these sounds also can point to a bigger, more diverse, and more influential music market in Europe, once 23 million citizens strong. As Schloss (2004) argues, there is an ethics to sample-based beat production that is more intricate than hackneyed outsider accusations of musical theft or copying acknowledge. Likewise, the notion that DJs “just play someone else’s music” when spinning songs ignores their systems of value, internal debates, and ideals. Mixing, sampling, and trading recommendations about groups like Smak, Drugi način, Tihomir “Pop” Asanović, Kornji grupa, and Josipa Lisac, beatmakers and DJs symbolically connected their creativity to older peers who were forerunners in domesticating sounds that pointed westward, but in ways that foregrounded blackness, the West’s diversity, and unconventional, peripheral, symbolic connections.

When I interviewed Tetkine radosti in Sarajevo during the popular Film Festival in summer 2011, they had just performed a show that coincided with Rambo Amadeus’ concert at Dom mladih down the street. I found myself running between venues, during one of the few times every year, as I heard from local artists, when Sarajevo’s nightlife is full of non-stop performances. DJs Bakhto and Borka did not take my missing some of their show as slight, referring to Rambo as a legend.

Tetkine radosti traced their musical lineage in different familial, neighborhood, and cosmopolitan directions. In our interview, Bakhto described how his father was interested in US rock and *etno* from Spanish-speaking countries. He claimed that in his house a distinction was made between “cultured” (*kulturna*) and “beefy” musics. “*Goveđenska muzika*” might better translate as “music for meatheads,” and the agrarian connection is probably not incidental. Bakhto also cited a friend’s father, who bore a likeness to Professor Baltazar of Zagreb Film’s internationally known eponymous cartoon series, who traveled to the Bronx where he bought 20

rap records for his son during the 1990s when their acquisition in Slovenia was not straightforward.

In contrast, Borka spoke a little critically of his father's musical interests, who as a sociologist, treated music as a social practice capable of illustrating social theory, in a vein perhaps similar to this study. During our interview, Borka claimed to feel a closer musical kinship with his brother and sister, whose interest included punk, new wave rock, and early internationally distributed rap records. He felt that these were influential in spurring his later enthusiasm for DJing. Borka had the chance through his family to travel to Berkeley, California where he bought new CDs in the US. Their cable television connection in Ljubljana gave him access to American music videos. He became increasingly familiar with hip hop through the show "Yo! MTV Raps" and a high school radio broadcast that played sometimes during recess. Later, Slovenian television began more regularly broadcasting music, and shocked both Borka and Bakhto when they broadcast Wu-Tang Clan's "C.R.E.A.M." in the mid-1990s.

Tetkine radosti's mixtape craftsmanship reveals extensive digging into the "vaults" of Yugoslavia's discographic past. They coupled a repertory saturated in classic and obscure drum breaks from soul, funk, and progressive rock with obvious technical prowess. In the CD insert to their third mixtape, which their cover artist adorned with the Jugoton logo, Tetkine radosti describe their musical bricolage with the following English language commentary:

a three part collage mix of music dug from the Yugo vaults...cool tunes, hooks and breaks taken strictly from music produced by Yugoslav artists, mostly from the 60's and 70's. Auntie is happy to serve you with a plate of short funk/prog/rock, schllager (sic), beat, jazz and disco bits all crammed into one hour of oldschool delights.

When I first heard their work, Tetkine radosti reminded me of California DJs Shadow and Cut Chemist, whose internationally famous mixtapes, *Brainfreeze* (1999) and *Product Placement* (2001), bucked the era's trends with (some might contest highfalutin) underground distinction. The American duo's technical virtuosity was matched by their discographic expertise in classic and more rare US soul and funk records.

Pulled largely from the catalogs of the socialist era Jugoton, PGP-RTB, and RTL-PGP (Radiotelevizija Ljubljana) record labels, Tetkine radosti's tapes were mixed with a similar classic break mix aesthetic. They smoothly transitioned from songs with disparate tempos; through well-timed scratches of beats, they reorganized the rhythms of snares, high hats, and bass drums; and they ornamented vocal samples with fade outs. Their beat juggles creatively altered time signatures, added syncopation to the established rhythms of recordings, and enabled blends that pointed subtly to their turntablist prowess. Lengthy scratch solos are however absent. They argued that turntablist flair could thrill some audiences, but also threatened to alienate those who did not know what was happening or who thought scratching was just noise, thus losing interest in the performance. As Borka jokingly noted, Tetkine radosti are "politically correct" in relation to technique, recognizing different preferences. Their mixtapes were distinguished by their unabashed celebration of a musical past and repertory that required "digging deep."

Borka and Bakhto expressed some skepticism about their ability to keep crowds entertained with their concept throughout an entire night, because Yugoslav dance numbers that sounded like break beats were a relatively limited. However, Bakhto felt their mixtapes could also bridge generational gaps during mundane activities. Borka then recreated a frequent club encounter that he often has with fans of the DJ collective.

Those people who come to our parties, they have the mixtape. And often they come and tell us that they were with their mother and father and they threw on the CD just to see. “Hey, look I have music from when you were young, Mom.” And people really come up to us, “Hey, I had a moment with my father and mom that we haven’t had for a while. While in the car, we listened to these songs, and the stories began.” You know? Then they started to talk about what it was like back then. Where they went out. How the parties were. In fact, *Tetkine radosti* is fun for the whole family.<sup>12</sup>

Through the modern configuration of an old repertory, *Tetkine radosti*’s mixtapes narrow the symbolic gap between songs and techniques marked as “old” and “young.” Borka argued, that after all, every music listener digs, whether they mark their practice as such or not.

During our interview, Borka and Bakhto were careful not to cast their fans’ excitement over their clever splicing of sonic fragments from the past in terms of “Yugonostalgia.” Theirs was instead first and foremost an appreciation of aesthetics and musical talents of performers who happened to record during an earlier era. Their small, but diverse audiences appreciated the challenging effort to mix stylistically disparate tracks. They drew a line between themselves and more technospectacular Yugorock bands that “made a ton of money” on nostalgia:

All these bands, you know, Prljavo kazalište (Dirty Theater), Plavi orkestar (Blue Orchestra), and those from the ‘80s... That “Yugonostalgia”... It’s a bit of a stupid concept in the sense that everything is put in that category (lit. glued to it). But I want to say that our project does have some small connection to that, but it’s more like, okay, Yugonostalgia is something that has become an everyday thing, not something that can be a “scene,” or I don’t know what. It doesn’t have any meaning anymore. And a lot of people have made money on that. For us, it’s more about finding fragments, let’s say, not that we discover them, but that we put them together... things that have the possibility to reference Yugonostalgia and many different things. Both musical things, historical things, and covers of American tracks. So it references Western pop culture. And we put that together

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<sup>12</sup> “Oni ljudi koji idu na naše partije, imaju mixtejp, često nam dolaze da su bili u kolima s majkom i sa ocem i da su ubacili ovaj CD samo zbog fore, ‘e, vidi imam neku muziku kad si bila mlada. I kao, baš nam dođu, e imali smo momenat s ocem i majkom koji već dugo nismo imali u kolima, ono, slušali smo ove pjesme i krenuli su priče, znaš. Onda su počeli pričati kako je bilo tada, gdje ste otišli, kako su žurijalo... Zapravo, *Tetkine radosti* su zabava za čitavu obitelj.”

in a way that freshens it for people somehow (*da im se to nekako osviježe*). And I think that's the point why it's successful.<sup>13</sup>

Iconic sounds of a past era do more than only point to former political economy and a no longer existing state under which they were made. They can point also to “musical things,” “historical things,” and domestic reinterpretations of “Western pop culture.” They “freshened” sonic “fragments” from the musical past in a collage for which they also utilized new techniques.

In the end, I am unexpectedly returning to a nasty, old question that, given its elitism and implied racism, has rightly frustrated hip hop artists, audiences, and scholars to no end: “Is hip hop music?” The question is, of course, much better stated in far less conservative terms than the directness of the largely asinine one above. Thanks to the work of countless commentators, in my life, I have never doubted that hip hop is music. However, given the preceding discussion of domestic DJing, there are other philosophically circuitous questions that bother me: Why does the symbolic relationship between hip hop and “music” regularly recur as a matter of international debate? What are the locally specific contours of that debate? If hip hop has always been a “culture” with 4-5 “elements,” some not expressly musical, then have hip hop artists been lead indicators out of necessity in a “flexible musicianship” in the West? If “musicianship” itself increasingly means (self-) promotion, video (pre-/post-) production, booking, negotiating contracts, among countless other tasks, then is the category of “music” itself less stable, its practices more diverse than regularly imagined? What motivates performers to continue to

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<sup>13</sup> “*I svi ovi bendovi, ne. Prljavo kazalište, Plavi orkestar, i ovi u osam desetima. Tako da ta Jugonostalgija, malo je glup koncept u smislu svega toga što se na to lijepi. Ali, ja hoću reć da naš projekat ima malo veze sa time, ali više ima veze sa tim da okej, Jugonostalgija je nešto što je već ono everyday thing i to nije više nešto što bi bila scena ili ne znam šta. Nema više nekog značaja. Puno ljudi je zaradilo novac na tome. Više je to da nađemo neke fragmente, recimo, ne da mi ih otkrijemo, nego ih složimo, koji imaju neke reference na to i na mnogo drugih stvari i na muzičke stvari i na istorijske stvari i na, recimo, coveri američkih stvari, dakle, ima reference sa Zapadnom pop kulturom. I to nekako složimo da ljudi da im se to nekako osviježe. Ja mislim da je to taj point, zašto je to uspješno.*”

privilege the category as an ideal toward which one advances, matures, and brings successively closer to home?

Homemade hip hop, which was first performed in socialist Yugoslavia, reappeared with gusto at the turn of the millennium, after being interrupted by conscription, war, sanctions, and the ongoing multinational restructuring of the music industry. Hip hop is one of the last genres that labels promoted in domestic music industry that was once able to sell sustainable amounts of physical musical media during the Yugoslav era. Significant portions of the regional industry have transformed and downsized after the expanded availability of high-speed Internet and download.

Hip hop thus spans generations of multi-modal music consumption within an unstable, uneven, and “murkily” dynamic music economy that struggles to support alternative artistic impulses. Artists could compare an era of vinyl with the era of Serato, wherein ambivalent shifts in technology could mirror broader political changes. For an aging generation who often identified as alternative, broad legitimacy remained elusive. Domestic DJs from a range of backgrounds in their late 20s and 30s hoped to see audiences expand to older generations and have their crafts more firmly understood as “music” and within other elevated terms (Gelbart 2007). In DJ workshops, for example, students entered small worlds that took technical skills, musical discipline, and the cultivation of transnational connections in order to maintain.

I contend above therefore that homemade hip hop artists regularly situate themselves in an ongoing debate of what “music” as a category means locally. This has implications for which formal definitions become important as do symbolic interpersonal, intergroup, and cross-genre relations. We should consider countless other descriptive categories of social practice when considering what hip hop is, means, and continues to

do. We can observe ways in which DJs actively push their talk and crafts in symbolic directions that justify and legitimize their work to skeptical domestic audiences.

## Chapter 4

### The Unconventional Voices of the Domestic Rapbund

#### Homemade Hip Hop and Heteroglossia Beyond Standards

In contrast to nineteenth century pan-Slavic and more recent nationalist practice, the wordsmiths of domestic rap's homemade early 21<sup>st</sup> century expansion often prioritize related, but ultimately distinct forms of linguistic value. In a 2006 interview with the Serbian news daily, *Novosti*, MC Sky Wikluh from the Belgrade-based group Bad Copy explains that his initial interest in rap lay in the musicality of lyrics and non-conformity to standard rules:

I immediately like the fact that a single rap could on special rhythmic forms when speaking the text in this way or that. I am not attracted by the point of the text. I don't care to preach (*da nekome solim pamet*) as to how society is deeply ill or fucked up. Instead, I am interested by the very form of a verse in which words are bombed with numerous accents. By breaking a traditional linguistic form, a new meaning is gained (Pavlović 2006).<sup>1</sup>

Reacting to both “preachy” trends in domestic rap that insist on delivering a social message, Wikluh emphasizes the rhythms of rap lyricism and the range of “accents” with which one can “bomb” a single verse. As Arsenijević argues (2009), Bad Copy was celebrated by fans as playful, innovative, and an extension of the success of Yugoslav rock scene's capacity to cleverly domesticate global genres. Audiences came to see rap as more and more domestic. This occurred not through rappers' attention to new standard rules that emerged in the 1990s, but thanks to their capacity to play in a recognizably domestic way with linguistic registers both intimately familiar and broadly global. In this chapter, I consider further what Wikluh might

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<sup>1</sup> “Odmah mi se dopalo što jedan rep može da formira posebne ritmičke figure izgovarajući tekst ovako ili onako. Ne privlači me poenta teksta, nije mi stalo da nekome solim pamet kako je društvo teško obolelo i zajebano, nego mi je interesantna sama forma stiha u kojem su reči bombardovane mnogobrojnim akcentima. Lomljenjem ustaljene jezičke forme dobija se novi smisao.”

mean by the domestic “accents” of rap. While their lyrics sometimes reference, occasionally support, or otherwise play with the fraught politics language standardization that marked the 1990s, prominent domestic rappers often direct their linguistic attentions to much broader realms of practice.

Following well-trodden paths of my colleagues in linguistic anthropology, two theoretical concepts have helped me better understand rappers’ linguistic innovations in homemade hip hop. First, Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia is indispensable to considering value in domestic rap lyricism, because MC dexterity relies to a large degree on a capacity for convincingly stylizing different voices across the social landscape. Second, I argue that irregardless of the “sources” of these domestic voices, rappers and their audiences attribute value and meaning to them. Through domestic language ideologies, voices or ways of speaking that rappers perform point to specific social groups. Dominant linguistic discourses have implications for how speakers come to see ways of speaking associated with person-types, but they are not determinative. In a field of debate about language, rappers emphasize values that are simultaneously distinct yet interrelated to those that dominated the politics of the 1990s.

In domestic rap, not only do the new Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin standards emerge, but also the sometimes related pronunciations of štokavian: ijekavian, ekavian, and ikavian; and the other regional dialects, kajkavian and čakavian. The successor standards to Serbo-Croatian are also laden, albeit unevenly, in what speakers may or may not recognize as Germanisms, Italianisms, Turkisms, and the now ubiquitous Anglicisms. As Wikluh implies, flow/prosody and the rhythm of rap are no less important to domestic lyrics. Likewise, the “languages” of different social groups, including professional classes and genders, also regularly appear. I thus analyze rappers’ linguistic self-presentations that draw upon geographically and

temporally broad sets of symbolic tools that extend across and beyond domestic spaces. After quickly summarizing some of the debates without which the anti-nationalist rhetoric of prominent domestic rappers would be largely illegible, I must quickly go in a different direction. Following Friedman's (2010) lead and commentary on Aleko Konstantinov's 1895 comic classic, *Bai Ganyo*, I show that the messages, humor, and verbal art of domestic MCs lies in their ability to creatively draw from a symbolically diverse homemade linguistic field. I consult an array of primary sources including domestic rap lyrics, portions of interview during which I solicited commentary on linguistic messages, and journalists' publications that evaluate domestic rap.

### **Standard Strategies**

Since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, different South Slavic linguists have embraced what Bauman and Briggs (2003) refer to as “hybridizing” and “purifying” language planning projects. Through “hybridizing” language planning, linguists consciously combine multiple codes to attempt to satisfy multiple communities of speakers. On the other hand, “purifying strategies” seek to erase the language practices of another community in the standardized form. Both Friedman (1999) and Greenberg (2008:17) consider the Balkan *Sprachbund* in terms of complex, coterminous, and often contradictory centripetal (monoglossic) and centrifugal (heteroglossic) tendencies. Nonetheless, Friedman (2012:308) is also clear when he defines the *Sprachbund* as a region where, due to centuries of multilingualism, speakers share lexical, morphosyntactic, and phraseological features across Balkan Slavic and Romance; Greek, Albanian; and local dialects of Romani, Turkish, and Judezmo. Different early ethnographers, philologists, and other intellectuals ascribed politicized “sources” with linguistic value, because of their imagined capacities to point to certain desirable qualities for their present-day objectives. Whether these

writers were geared toward traversing social categories or merely reinforcing difference depended largely on their politics.

In his writings, the definitive South Slavic language planner of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, famously once stressed the importance of constructing speech communities on the basis of the vernacular. Vuk argued that the liturgical Slaveno-Serbian that dominated the Orthodox Church literary practice was too archaic and removed from the actually existing speech of the South Slavs (Greenberg 2008:25). Thus, Vuk's populist dictum regarding the standard that he began to codify under the direction of his mentor in Vienna, Jernej Kopitar, was directed to fellow speakers outside of formal institutions like the Orthodox Church: "Write as you speak, read as it's written" (*Piši kao govoriš, čitaj kao što je napisano*; cited in Greenberg 2008:45). Vuk's passions for the language and songs of the people were consonant with broader 19<sup>th</sup> century European philological efforts to distinguish national ways of speaking from those of churches and the occupying forces of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires. Thus, the contradictory spectrum of hybridizing and purifying impulses that Bauman and Briggs identify were embedded in the single famous character of Vuk. In the Vienna Literary Agreement of 1850, the political ideologies of Vuk, Ljudevit Gaj, and other leading figures of the pan-South Slavic movement sufficiently overlapped, and they agreed: "Illyrian" was a single language (Greenberg 2008). They promoted Illyrian as a linguistic justification for South Slav political coalescence in a single state. Modern nationalists still imagine states as territories that should conform to unique linguistic practices untainted by foreign presences. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such language ideology inspired revolutionary South Slav writers and politicians who often saw common language as a key cultural basis for autonomy from competing Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, and other imperial interests.

The politics of language in South Slavic lands have long both drawn international attentions while being influenced by productively awkward philosophical entanglements. For example, the Illyrians ascribed to Johann Gottfried von Herder's (1744-1803) advocacy for a one nation=one language=one territory equation still popular among nationalists the world over. Vuk's collection of epic songs and folk tales drew the excitement of German Romantics who recognized his glorification of the "real sources" of folk expression that he labeled "Serbian." These oppressed voices of rural Christians under Ottoman rule became one of many anti-Islamic moral justifications that favored European ascendancy and support for 19<sup>th</sup> century Serbian rebellion. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, American scholars Milman Perry and Albert Lord were fired by their allochronic belief that they heard vestiges of the Homeric past in South Slavic and Albanian epic song that the former recorded on research trips to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and northern Albania in the early 1930s. The singers with whom they worked were Yugoslav or Albanian citizens of various backgrounds born at least two millennia later after Homer. Nonetheless, Perry and Lord believed that by observing epic singers and compositional technique in the present they could derive certain basic principles diagnostic of oral performance in the classical period. Such language ideologies, research fascination with Europe's Balkan periphery, and charismatic cosmopolitan philosophies are important to bear in mind as post-WWII domestic multiculturalism in the SFRY gave way to constitutional nationalism (Hayden 2012) at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The hybridizing strategy of the Novi Sad Agreement of 1954, which sought to set norms for the expressly multiculturalist policy of the SFRY, traced its precedents back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Alexander 2006:385). Croatian and Serbian linguists struck this linguistic compromise, representing the two dominant pronunciations of the South Slavic dialect štokavian. Despite the

Agreement, linguists debated the status of the hyphenated language, Serbo-Croatian or Croato-Serbian, throughout the following decades until its nominal “death” in 1991. During the protests of the Croatian Spring in the late 1960s, the ideology of linguistic unity faced particular challenge, which resumed during the mid-1980s in Serbia. Language politics were a fraught field of debate through the very end of the socialist period.

In the early 1990s, language planners turned separate standardization, literary canons, and orthographies into tools that further justified political separation during the Yugoslav Wars. This period is often portrayed as a centrifugal shift away from the SFRY’s official tolerance of both an Eastern and Western variant of štokavian at the federal level in the name of one of the dominant post-WWII platforms of Yugoslav socialism, “brotherhood and unity” (*bratstvo i jedinstvo*). This (gendered) multiculturalism saw Croatian and Serbian nationalisms as threats to a functioning federal government and supranational Yugoslav community. As Greenberg (2008) has outlined in considerable detail, nationalist linguists in each of the successor states sought to emphasize distinction from the speech practices of their neighbors, despite the fact that even the now officially separate standards of the former Serbo-Croatian are mutually intelligible. Those who today insist on the separation of the language into Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, and Montenegrin often also deny the historical legitimacy of a centrally planned linguistic unity.

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, advocates of a separate Croatian language standard have emphasized various forms of creative Ausbau, including linguistic purism and the introduction of archaic, obsolete, or “newly coined” Croatian words. Depending on what they regard as the latest (neo-)imperial hegemon, Croatian planners have often identified foreign languages as “threats” to local practices. After 1991, Croatian purism became more pronounced in linguistic circles when planners sought to maximally distinguish Croatian from Serbian, especially during the war.

In the press, journalists and government officials in particular noticeably adopted so-called “Tuđman-isms” (*tudmanice*). Tuđman-isms received their name after independent Croatia’s first president, Franjo Tuđman, whose anti-Serbian rhetoric also manifested itself in linguistic terms.

Greenberg (2008:65) argues that standard language ideologies in Serbia can be organized along a spectrum, ranging from the status quo linguists who claim modern Serbian is an outgrowth of the eastern variant of Serbo-Croatian; the neo-Vukovite linguists who advocate for linguistic purity; and the Orthodox linguists who support extremely nationalist Orthodox language and orthography. Officially, the Serbian standard is based on two pronunciations of štokavian, ijekavian and ekavian, and thus supports the status quo, in Greenberg’s terms. Since Vuk’s codification efforts, Serbian language planning has traditionally shown a preference for elevating the vernacular, thereby differentiating the liturgical from secular language (Ibid.:47). However, the neo-Vukovites wanted to purge Serbian of what they regarded as Serbo-Croatian “corruptions” born of Yugoslav compromise (74-76). Ranko Bugarski among others has also been critical of nationalist efforts in Republika Srpska to ekavianize, that is, to further emphasize B&H’s linguistic differences, even though the entity has historically been a site where the western variant, ijekavian, was more prevalent (79-83).

In contrast, Bosniac linguists emphasized Turkisms and Arabisms and what they perceive as Arabic phonology, as particularly represented by the frequent use of the phoneme /h/ (146, 157, 162-63). Given the insistence on translation during the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995, Croatian and Serbian linguists have argued that Bosnian gained greater international legitimacy that the standard would not otherwise have (136). The subsequent work of linguists to differentiate Bosnian adds a complicated dynamic to standard language ideologies that often appeared as a debate first and foremost between Croatian and Serbian linguists. The latter

undermine the status of a separate Bosnian language, which some see as simply accented or “bad” Croatian or Serbian. While advocates of a separate Bosnian are less established, in part because many reject linguistic nationalism that fuels divisions, the Serbian and Croatian dismissal of Bosnian has echoes of an ideology that saw Muslims as simply converted Catholics or Orthodox Christians.

In 2006, one camp Montenegrin language planners released three new consonants that linguistically justified their political separation from Serbia. Throughout ex-YU, linguists’ building out separate standards accompanied the process of developing separate literary canons, and standard Montenegrin emphasized phonology and morphology from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In making their claims to a separation from Serbian, supporters of a separate Montenegrin turned to the period of Montenegro’s celebrated epic poetry, particularly the poetic language used by Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813-51).

Silverstein (1996) has usefully discussed how standard language ideologies often imagine possession of the standard as a sort of orienting point or node to which speakers are supposed to direct their practice. In part through what Silverstein calls explicit or implicit metapragmatic comments (1993), advocates of the standard will direct speakers to conform their practices in the classroom, at a job, or other oftentimes formal settings toward this glorified ideal. Linguistic practice is thus metricized. Standard ideology can hierarchically organize speakers in relation to the ideal, from which “bad” practice can lead one to fall away.

Regardless of the work of domestic nationalists, traces of the pan-Slavic and socialist hybridizing strategies remain prominent throughout ex-YU. Many are critical of new standard ideologies and openly reject the politics of linguistic separation, which often runs parallel to critiques of neoliberal clientelistic democracy. For many, both are difficult to separate from the

nationalisms that accompanied capitalism's ascendancy. For example, on the anti-Croatian nationalist left and later in the broader populace, what speakers sometimes regard as the inauthentic novelty of Tuđman-isms also emerged as the subject of derision. Today, speakers' use of the term "our language" (*naš jezik*) refuses to identify speech with an ethnonational label, instead employing the first person plural possessive pronoun, a shifter. Thus, Silverstein's discussion of metapragmatic commentary that directs speakers to an ideal can help us to see how non-standard language ideologies can also coax speakers' practice in other directions.

Since the 1990s, scholars' justified attentions to the nationalist standardization projects of Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin that I describe above have sometimes inadvertently occluded their focus on other themes. Ex-YU has emerged as a sort of poster child of the dangers of competing standard language ideologies. In an Andersonian vein, scholars have consistently illuminated how nationalists have imagined communities that reversed a civic multiculturalism to a new period of state-sanctioned ethnonationalism. Much of this scholarship has called into question the re-standardization of the language once commonly known as "Serbo-Croatian." Ex-YU has become the prototypical landscape dotted with linguistic "flags" that supposedly map evenly onto ethnonational identities or with limited internal division (Greenberg 2008:8).

As I discuss in Chapter 1, rappers have also spilled much ink, often critical, on domestic nationalisms. In a vein similar to the one embraced by General Woo a few years later, Edo Maajka's 2008 track "Nod Your Head" (*Klimaj glavom*) also offers a visually evocative lyrical image that critiques the nationalisms, associated flags, and related semiotic resources that cover the ex-YU landscape:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 Wherever I have been in the Balkans            | <i>Dže god sam bio na Balkanu</i>            |
| 2 the same problems                              | <i>isti problemi</i>                         |
| 3 the same flags, scarves, but different designs | <i>iste zastove, šalovi ali drugi dezeni</i> |

4 some are for Thompson, some are for Ceca,     *neki na Thompsonu, neki na Ceci,*  
5 some are for Merlin                             *neki na Merlinu*  
6 but we are stuck in a rut                     *a mi smo ostali u kreci*

With his song title, Edo resignifies the head nod, typically an international marker of positive reception among hip hop audiences, as a sign of political complacency. Years after the release, Zagrebian producer Koolade’s synth heavy, frenetic beat still seems to explode throughout the recording. In the opening lines, Edo references Marko Perković Thompson, Svetlana Ražnatović Ceca, and Dino Merlin — each respectively a Croatian, Serbian, and Bosniac popular artist who have each commanded large followings with nationalist rhetoric. Particularly the former two are known for their longtime associations with radical rightwing politics in Croatia and Serbia respectively. Merlin will continue to raise heckles despite more recent transnational success given nationalist recordings he made during the war and continued flirtations with exclusivist Islam. Thus, even in this snippet, Edo goes beyond flags to also illuminate how musics and “scarves” (likely a reference to those emblazoned sort worn by soccer hooligans) also serve as semiotic resources for performing divisive domestic selves.

Here, using domestic rap as an illustrative example, I also ask what sort of other “flags” do speakers fly besides the new BCS+M language standards? Or perhaps better, akin to customers in an old-timey millinery shop or, more fittingly, a brightly-lit LIDS retail headwear store stuffed with flat brim NBA and MLB caps, what sorts of linguistic “hats” do MCs take on and off to compose their lyrics? I draw insights from linguistic anthropology, sociolinguistics, and hip hop studies in order to consider how domestic rappers call out to audiences who share knowledge of and oftentimes present-day semiotic associations about the manners of speaking and writing of social groups imagined to inhabit and influence ex-YU.

## **Hip Hop Linguistics**

In domestic rap, strict adherence to standard rules are often of little importance to lyric composition. Rappers embrace lexical innovation, syntactic flexibility, and codeswitching to (Black or African American Vernacular) English, German, Italian and Turkish among other languages. Domestic MCs also embrace what Alim (2006:97) calls “hip hop’s cultural modes of discourse,” which he enumerates to include call and response, multilayered totalizing expression, signifyin, bustin, tonal semantics, poetics, narrative sequencing, flow, metaphoric and hyperbolic language use, image-making, freestylin, battling, word-explosions, word-creations, word-pictures, kinesics, and dialoguing other voices. While all of these are present in domestic rap, the last of these is of particular interest to me here given the pertinence of analyzing “other voices” in acknowledging but also moving beyond the politics of standard ideologies. In ex-YU, language standardization projects are very much incomplete and challenged, and homemade hip hop artists identify different linguistic values and threats that can both support, or alternatively, nationalist language planning. One of domestic rap’s defining qualities is its ever-unfolding range of symbolic connections that MCs make to linguistic codes that prove influential on the (semi-)periphery of Europe. The unfolding process of signification, semiosis, can be seen in how domestic rappers assume different voices in their lyrics. Domestic rappers see some of these ways of speaking and rhyming as American, where I now turn my attentions.

American rappers often both explicitly comment on the value of their language and implicitly signal to audiences that certain linguistic practices are more authentic, valued, or otherwise appropriate in hip hop. As is the case in many global hip hop scenes, domestic rappers who began playfully writing lyrics in the 1980s often did so first in English and only subsequently in their L1 or “native tongue” (see also Cvetanović 2016). Thus, Yugoslav-era rap

followed the pattern of many scenes elsewhere in Europe. Many prominent American hip hop acts visited Croatia in particular during the 1990s and 2000s, including the late Big L. His celebrated 1998 song “Ebonics” remains an interesting comment on the specific ideals often celebrated by hip hop artists that are resolutely grounded in a vernacular outside of the confines of an unevenly shared Standard American English. The chorus, which features a verbal sample from Nas, runs: “I know you like the way I’m freakin’ it/I talk with slang and I’m never stop speakin’ it/“Speak with criminal slang’/That’s just the way that I talk, yo/“Vocabulary spills, I’m ill”” Discourses of linguistic authenticity regularly celebrate dialects, localisms, “slangs,” and elements of the markedly black vernacular, which can contrast with the priorities of Standard American English. Not only Big L, but countless MCs including Talib Kweli, Big K.R.I.T. (see “Cool 2 Be Southern,” 2012), and others have written famous treatises about rap’s proper codes as they see them. Artists such as these traveled well in the domestic scene(s). Today, sympathetic music journalists celebrate hip hop albums and other performances as exciting sites of domestic language innovation.

By the late 1990s when Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian rappers began to increasingly write in domestic language(s), many songs continued to remain laden with the extensive presence of lexemes observers describe as Anglicisms. This linguistic connection to various forms of English, including AAVE and scene-specific jargon, was consistently reinforced through various means. Not only in their names like “Blackout,” the pseudonym choices of countless domestic artists that appeared on air, but also in their “drops,” “shoutouts,” and repertoires, radio programs constantly reinforced these linguistic connections. “Anglicism” (*anglicizam*) is in many ways an insufficient concept to understanding the diverse pathways of the ways of speaking in global hip hop(s). First and foremost, the term is insufficient because

many artists trace an African-American genealogy both for the genre and the English vocabulary that they employ, which means that “Anglicism” can erase the linguistic diversity of its derivation from the array of registers associated with AAVE. Practice-specific jargons include terms for rap, DJing and turntablism, graffiti, and more. Occasionally, such jargons also include a lexicon that draws heavily from so-called business English. Performers whose creative practices take them into hip hop’s business crafts regularly use terms like “promotion,” “marketing,” and even “consulting.”

While American MCs are by no means their only linguistic influence, I sometimes heard the thoughts of prominent American artists on language subsequently reiterated, replayed, or otherwise regimented as authoritative discourse in different settings. Given their entanglements in homemade hip hop, it is important to note that American rappers often critique and otherwise mark hegemonic whiteness and high-standard forms of speaking English. Alim (2006) and Cutler (2009, 2010) have observed how the grammar, morphology, and lexicon of AAVE often emerges as a dominant ideal in written lyrics and freestyle performance. On the basis of her research in a Bay Area high school in the 1990s, Bucholtz (2011) argues that white hip hop fans would often adopt the speech of their black peers, but often did so inaccurately, given their imperfect facility with the patterns of AAVE. “White kids” inaccurate appropriations emerged as subjects of derision, and thus the linguistic norms that teachers applied in the classroom did not carry over to other spaces in the school. The scripted meaning of propriety thus is often flipped in American hip hop’s defining lyrics, films, and other performances. And yet, the vernaculars of American rappers are “spectacular” in that they reveal countless instances in which politicians, police, journalists, teachers, and other forms of “official talk” are voiced, sampled, and otherwise parodically used. Alim, Lee, and Carris’ (2010) analysis of Los Angeles

rap battles convincingly demonstrates how hip hop's linguistic stylizations of American social relations work to both undermine *and* reinforce historical social hierarchies. Even though AAVE may emerge as the prestige linguistic code in hip hop, thereby supplanting otherwise naturalized white ways of speaking, other ways of being a rapper, whether as an Asian-American, a woman, queer, or otherwise, can be grounds for insult in rap battles. Such biases also emerge in domestic rap, where the movement of misogynistic or homophobic slurs are not subject to frequent moral evaluation among MCs.

When domestic rappers claim to be some combination of first, authentically “domestic;” and second, a mass media “alternative” or “underground” within the newly transnational music industry, this stance often implicates a position on language. The diversity of codes to which domestic rappers switch demonstrates the wide range of European, American, and Middle Eastern symbolic resources at their disposal. Perhaps somewhat counterintuitively, domestic rappers sometimes also celebrate the value of their domestic standard language. They do not see this purifying tendency as necessarily at odds with an otherwise anti-establishment stance, given the fact that in school curricula, the popular press, and government publications, the hegemonic dominance of any one successor to Serbo-Croatian may be tenuous. Being “alternative” can thus mean assuming any combination of centrifugal and centripetal, hybridizing and purifying linguistic tendencies.

In homemade hip hop, pseudonym-clad rappers see the voices, accents, and stylized characters that populate their lyrics symbolically connected to different social groups. “Extreme local” emphasis on kajkavian-isms, ikavian-isms, and ekavian-isms co-exists alongside (word)play with globally circulated linguistic registers. Sometimes multiple registers are put into conversation within the verses of a single song in a storytelling fashion similar to globally

circulated rappers from Slick Rick to Kendrick Lamar. Rappers ventriloquize and stylize wide ranges of social figures, including “technospectacular” folk singers, tough guys, politicians, wannabes, women, sexists, and drug dealers through shifting accents, tonality, and lexicon. Producers also sometimes sample the speech of recognizable individuals, i.e., they use an original voice recording. Rappers’ linguistic play can also point to a whole host of Others, within the domestic hip hop scene(s), from across ex-YU, and beyond.

As I have argued, domestic rappers compose in language(s) known by shifting names, comparable to the changing state and national identities of an often painfully contested political geography. Systems of value for the rapped use of dialect, slang, and flow are often distinct from the aforementioned priorities of language standardizers. Rappers’ deliberate selection, highlighting, or willingness to use non-standard lexicons (including *šatrovački*), morphology, and grammar means that rap’s compositional practices are not narrowly confined to the standards that emerged in the wake of Serbo-Croatian’s active dismemberment. Many rappers’ linguistic self-presentation regularly celebrates symbolic gaps between their manners of speaking and standard Bosnian, Croatian, and Serbian. However, the clear hegemony of any one way of speaking is not as clear as in places like the United States. Thus, domestic rappers sometimes both identify as “alternative” *and* also celebrate conservative language practice.

### **Rhyming Signs that Point**

On a 2014 EP called *Bilingual Sign (Dvojezična ploča)*, Belgrade’s Bvana (a name in *šatrovački* that when flipped, becomes the English “wannabe”) and Osijek’s Kandžija added to the now lengthy discography of cross-border collaborative recordings. In the Serbian-Croatian rap co-production, the MCs deliberately played with the polarizing linguistic nationalism over orthography and signage in the Slavonian city of Vukovar. In 2013, supporters of Croatian

linguistic purism vehemently protested the SDP-led government's insistence on re-establishing official bilingual, bi-scriptal signage in Croatian and Serbian in Vukovar. The BCS+M word "ploča" refers both to a vinyl record and an antiquated tablet, such as the 12<sup>th</sup> century *Bašćanska ploča* found on Krk which Kandžija shouts out at one point in the record, along with other important sign artifacts that intellectuals have used to construct of Croatian ethnolinguistic identity.<sup>2</sup> On the eponymous lead single, the rappers trade verses in Croatian and Serbian respectively, speaking as if they cannot understand one another despite the mutual intelligibility of their language(s). Kandžija and Bvana harvest linguistic nationalism in their EP as material for further parodic critiques. The EP operates as a critique of the ongoing destruction of and debate over bilingual signage in Vukovar, the politicization of minority presence, and the exclusive definition of ethnonational identity. Bvana and Kandžija subtly draw a distinction between themselves and more explicitly "patriotic" rappers in the domestic hip hop scene(s).

After the record's release, Kandžija continued the parody through a complex multi-voiced discussion on the EP project that he offered in an interview with the newspaper, *Glas Slavonije*:

We will perform only in arenas at full spectator capacity, because people long for the love and message that we are sending. I hope that we will succeed in our goal, which of course as always is peace on earth. Only understanding, but by this I don't mean foreign languages and alphabets – of course, I am thinking of English – which we do not understand and therefore confuse us (*zbunjuju nas*). Greetings to all. Let's bring back Glagolitic and live like kings!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Itself not entirely dissimilar from the braggadocio and local claimsmaking of battle rap, the *Bašćanska ploča*'s inscription in Glagolitic reads: "In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, I, abbot Držiha, wrote this concerning the lawn which Zvonimir, the Croatian king, gave in his days to St. Lucia. And the witnesses [were] župan Desimira in Krbava, Martin in Lika, Piribineg in Vinodol, and Yakov in Otok. Whoever denies this, let him be cursed by God and the twelve apostles and the four evangelists and Saint Lucia. Amen. May he who lives here pray for them to God. I, abbot Dobrovit, built this church with nine of my brethren in the days of Prince Cosmas who ruled over the entire province. And in those days [the parish of St.] Nicholas in Otočac was joined with [the parish of] St. Lucia."

<sup>3</sup> "Nastupat ćemo samo u arenama kapaciteta gledatelja, jer ljudi su željni ljubavi i poruka mira koje šaljemo. Nadam se da ćemo uspjeti u namjeri, a to je, naravno - mir u svijetu, kao i uvijek. Samo razumijevanje, ali ne

Kandžija's comment above features multiple layers of self-deprecation and parodic hyperbole regarding the band's influence to "spread a message of love and peace on earth" to arenas filled to capacity. Kandžija often performed to small crowds with his live band, Naked Women (*Gole žene*), a name that he joked was the only way he could ever draw any concert attendees. Second, more importantly, despite focusing on English rather than Serbian, he nonetheless voices typical nationalist discourse regarding the threat of foreign ways of speaking. Kandžija claims that cross-cultural understanding can and should be achieved, but ridiculously, without foreign alphabets and languages. To further underscore his ironic distance after his short anti-English rant, he encourages the paper's readership to instead return to the 9<sup>th</sup> century Glagolitic alphabet in order to "live like kings" in the present. Thus, he argues that instead of Latin or Cyrillic characters, a medieval script framed in modern nation-building discourse as critically important to Catholic Croatia's tracing a historically "deep" lineage for independence should be adopted for today's signage. Here the MC parodies nationalistic glorifications of the past, assuming a political position on orthography further to the right of anyone on the spectrum while simultaneously recording with a Serbian MC, who in the same interview he claims to have initially mistaken for a Hungarian given the imagined/feigned distance between their mutually intelligible languages.

As Greenberg (2008:5) writes, language planners after the dismemberment of socialist Yugoslavia in the 1990s were also very concerned with orthography. A separate alphabet and spelling conventions could "naturalize" distinctions between ostensibly separate languages.

Scholars trace the histories of local alphabets including Glagolitic, *arabica*, Old Church

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*stranih jezika i pisama – mislim, naravno, na engleski mislim - koje ne razumijemo i zbunjuju nas. Pozdrav svima i vratimo glagolicu i živimo ko kraljevi (Mitić 2014)!"*

Slavonic, Latin, and Cyrillic in a variety of geographic directions, and for those who can read them as signs, ways of writing “point” to places and the groups imagined to inhabit them through language ideology. Writing systems can serve to underscore connections of fledgling independent states to a temporally “deep” history, while simultaneously distinguishing one language from those of the neighbors. Language ideologies often implicate orthographic equivalents, which become particularly salient in states with contested official bi-scriptalism, as was the case in socialist Yugoslavia and remains true of B&H and Serbia.

Artists, managers, and labels often place a great deal of creative consideration into selecting the dominant visual signs under which they distribute and market their musical commodity. A visual representation of the artistic self includes a presentation of an orthographic self. As Jackson (2000) argues, scholars often pay insufficient attention to album packaging as a potential site of ethnomusicological inquiry. Today, album and single packaging may include physical CD liner notes or, more often, digital image and text presentations in .pdfs, .jpgs, and other files that accompany album, mixtape, and single individual song id3 tags. Latin, Cyrillic, and non-standardized orthographies presented in digital and physical packaging also imagine and seek to construct particular intended audiences. Domestic rappers creatively utilize the gender, class, racial, and ethnonational significations of repertoires, orthographies, and linguistic registers to symbolically differentiate themselves from, or alternatively, align themselves with their peers and imagined audiences. Domestic rap’s orthography is by no means narrowly confined to the new standards, nor are the writing practices of audiences and artists confined to album artwork. Users select orthography for YouTube and Facebook comments and posts, other online forums, albums, singles, and flyers. Ways of writing can draw connections across ethnonational lines, or alternatively, establish symbolic distance oneself from those connections,

or even further entangle an artist in far broader aesthetic economy. Spelling, typeface, and alphabet selection all intersect with homemade hip hop's broader (re-)significations of places and social groups.

Performers play with the indexical value of bi-scriptalism in B&H, which can explicitly complicate the country's divided divided. In fall 2013, in direct contrast to the Croatian advocates of language purity who protested Cyrillic signage in Vukovar earlier the same year, Bosnian reggae-crossover act Dubioza kolektiv publicly used both Latin and Cyrillic scripts in promoting their album's release on Tkalčićeva Street in Zagreb. Tkalčićeva is a popular pedestrian thoroughfare with a series of bars, clubs, and cafés. On Croatian National Television's weekly political talk show "Sundays at 2" (*Nedeljom u 2*), the band argued that the public marketing of their CD using Cyrillic was an opportunity to criticize Croatian linguistic purism. Dubioza kolektiv has long been affiliated with "Enough!" (*Dosta!*), a B&H NGO that has sought to unite youth across the entities behind certain social programs of joint interest. The album cover uses the official bi-scriptalism of the B&H government, but the band's approach is different. Through music, they seek to reach a broad coalition of Serbian, Croatian, and Bosniac audiences in order to move beyond the political gridlock along ethnonational lines. Enough! also worked with Frenkie and Tuzlan beatmaker King Mire in 2006 to release a CD with the organization's name that used both Cyrillic and Latin alongside a logo that employs a full handprint reminiscent of a widely recognized hand signal for "stop."

BC have incorporated increased use of Cyrillic in their online self-presentation, flyers, and clothing merchandise, insisting in recent years on the employment of Cyrillic as the "more Serbian" variant of both official scripts. Officially, the Serbian government sanctions the public use of both Latin and Cyrillic, although favors the latter in government publications. For their

2010 album, *Discrete Heroes* (*Дискретни херои*), БС decided to represent themselves online almost exclusively by way of the Cyrillic alphabet. Broader practice among Serbian artists varies dramatically, often oscillating creatively between the two scripts in visual self-representations. In a 2011 song, “Rap and the City” (*Rep i grad*), with Fantastična četvorka (Fantastic Four or Ф4), МС Марлон Брутал, a regular БС collaborator, argued that his likeminded peers are not fascists, just because they insist on Cyrillic:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 If you write in Cyrillic, that means that you are a fascist | Ако пишеш ћирилицом значи да си фашиста         |
| 2 I am not a fascist or a Nazi                                | Нисам ни фашиста ни нациста                     |
| 3 Just a Serb, brother, a patriot, a nationalist              | Само Србин брате, родољуб, националиста         |
| 4 But, I am not the type of patriot who breaks shop windows,  | Али, нисам тип патриоте што разбија излоге      |
| 5 Rather I protect my alphabet, brother, I kiss my icons      | Него чувам своје писмо брате, љубим своје иконе |

Throughout the song, the MCs are critical of pro-European politicians who have “sold out” their city and country for personal advantage. Here, in the first line, Брутал caricatures a center leftist, who as the stereotype runs is ever eager to please Western Europe, we can assume also thinks more highly of Latin script. Cyrillic, Orthodox Christianity in the form of religious icons, and heteronormative relations become signs of Serbian pride and difference from globalized foods, television, and efforts to enter the European Union. Such nationalist celebrations of orthography differ dramatically from the aforementioned performances that make light of the politics of standardization and linguistic purity.

### **Rhyming Ways of Speaking**

Domestic rappers stylize selves and Others that point to a range of social figures, including different genders, classes, and professions. Regional, urban, and generational registers also exist throughout domestic rap. While some positive evaluations of homemade hip hop lyrics may

hinge on authentic performances of ethnolinguistic identity, such is by no means the only salient rubric that emerges in rappers' commentary on language. Quite often, audiences, journalists, and artists celebrate lyrics according to criteria beyond the standard and linguistic nationalism.

### *Place-Based Registers*

Not only is there a long-standing practice of domestic rappers referencing and re-signifying microtoponyms (Ćurković 2013), but MCs also substitute local place names for ones that refer to iconic global sites of hip hop production. The neighborhood Špansko in Zagreb becomes “*Špaolin*,” a playful reference to the Wu-Tang Clan and their nickname for Staten Island, Shaolin. In Bad Copy's opus, the rappers rename one of Belgrade's *proche banlieues* “South Central Kotež,” even though Kotež's location is near Pančevo, to the northeast of the Serbian capital's historic center.

Rap lyrics in Zagreb, Sarajevo, and Belgrade also indelibly feature local linguistic elements that MCs often foreground. In Belgrade, rappers compose primarily in ekavian, while ijekavian is the primary štokavian dialect for Sarajevan and Zagrebian MCs. To my knowledge, rappers largely do not comment on their own use of these dialects, as they have long each been the basis for the standards, including the Eastern and Western variants of Serbo-Croatian during the socialist period. In contrast, rappers outside capital cities often foreground the use of less widely spoken dialects and subdialects. Škokić (2007) describes tbf's use of ikavian, which points to their identity as rappers from the coastal city of Split and Dalmatia more generally (although ikavian can also be found in parts of Slavonia and elsewhere), while simultaneously establishing an audible contrast with their artist colleagues from Zagreb. Published versions of tbf's lyrics, whether online or in print, almost always also insist on ikavian renderings of words that include a distinctive reflex of *jat*, a vowel from a presumed Common Slavic language that split in the 10<sup>th</sup>

century, pronounced as *i*, as opposed to *e* in the case of ekavian, or *ije* in the case of ijekavian (Greenberg 2008:33-34).

Spelling conventions can also call out to audiences along urban and generational lines. The influential Zagrebian rap “boom” of the late 1990s featured songs that were diacritically marked in various ways. A celebrated freestyle rapper from Zagreb, Target, is particularly proficient and playful with *šatrovački* or *šatro*. The famous rap duo, Tram 11, once made up of Target and the aforementioned General Woo, offered a number of lyrical interpretations of politics in post-war Croatia, which manifested sometimes as “bad” math, “One and one doesn’t make two, but 11 (*Jedan i jedan nisu dva, već jedanaest*).” Tram 11 turned their bad math into a sort of ego-tripping unofficial slogan that simultaneously pointed to an ongoing “transitional” era in which the standard meaning of words appeared dislodged through the activities of a new elite. As one can see in their 1999 track “What’s Up, Shorty?” (*Kaj ima lima?*), Tram 11’s lyrics were full of ANGLICISMS, informal registers, šatrovački, vulgarity, and elements of the **kajkavian** dialect, particularly in Target’s rhymes. An illustrative rhyme of Target’s from “What’s Up, Shorty?” follows:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 Hi, how’s it goin’? What’s up, shorty? Huh,<br>you good?      | <i>Bok, <u>kak</u> si, <b>kaj</b> ima <u>lima</u>? ha, si <u>brodo</u>?</i> |
| 2 I strolled (the streets) of Zagreb, before you<br>even walked | <i>ja sam <u>šet</u>o Zagrebom dok ti još nisi ni <u>hodo</u></i>           |

In the song “Only Here (or, chez nous)” (*Samo kod nas*) that they recorded in 2000, Target and General Woo repeat these elements while describing Croatia in terms of a series negative social phenomena. Each song features complex forms of wordplay that touches upon each of the aforementioned categories.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 I give you the legendary turns/events of the day                     | <i>Dajem ti legendarne ulete dana</i>                                    |
| 2 of the land of Croatian greats, the western-most hood of the Balkans | <i>zemlje hrvatskih velikana, najzapadnijeg kvarta Balkana</i>           |
| 3 alongside <i>čevapi</i> and onion, which is our national dish        | <i>uz čevape i luk kaj su nacionalna hrana</i>                           |
| 4 because only here can you call shit banana                           | <i>jer sami se kod nas za <del>stranje</del> može reć <u>banana</u>,</i> |
| 5 Only we talk that kind of slang                                      | <i><u>Mosa mi čamopri kvuta šatru</u></i>                                |
| 6 We roll the good stuff in blunts while chilling on Blackout (Radio)  | <i>ROLAMO <u>gotivu</u> u BLANTU kad CHILAMO na BLACKOUTU</i>            |

According to Target, only in Croatia (and it's unclear whether their reference to *chez nous* here might apply to the whole Balkans) can one say "banana" and mean "shit." Within the song, this is a bitterly amusing further comment on the destabilization of words and meaning in post-socialist space. In the work of Zagreb's rappers, signs of kajkavian dialect also regularly emerge, including those songs by the well-known act, Elemental. Beyond the marker, *kaj* in the position of what would otherwise be *što* in standard Croatian, kajkavian is also marked by the presence of a number of Germanisms, including the sometimes derogatory, "Purger" (from the German "Bürger" for citizen, townsman, or member of the bourgeoisie) which Zagrebians often positively claim.

#### *Non-Domestic Foreign Registers*

Beyond the self, rappers also use language to stylize Others beyond ex-YU. Such lyrical work often reveals more double-voiced connections. While some languages of the Balkan *Sprachbund*, including German, Hungarian, Albanian, and Turkish have a less overt presence in homemade hip hop, loanwords, calqued words and phrases are nonetheless present. For example, on the 2011 track "Hungary" (*Mađarska*), MC Toxara describes a regular shopping trip that he makes across the border from Croatia's easternmost Slavonia. When rapping about his experiences, Toxara makes specific references to inexpensive foods that can be found ("vajkrem")

or buttercream, “*čajna kobasica*” or dry-cured pork sausage), standard forms of greeting (“visont latašro” for “*Viszontlátásra*” or the formal of “goodbye”), and currency (“*forinti*”). In

celebrating Hungarian hospitality, he has choice words for the domestic “we” and other political players in ex-YU:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 We are consumers, we are assholes   | <i>kupci smo šupci smo,</i>                            |
| 2 We follow advertisements that the Krauts ( <i>švabe</i> ) and Greeks throw us   | <i>slijedimo reklame kojim trpaju nas švabe i grci</i> |
| 3 All sorts of foreigners, Yankees ( <i>ameri</i> ) or Russians,  | <i>koekaki stranci, ameri il rusi,</i>                 |
| 4 they hold us in their fist and don't want to let go   | <i>drže nas u šaci i ne žele pustit</i>                |
| 5 You must be crazy if you allow that to continue   | <i>ti mora da lud si ak puštaš to da traje</i>         |
| 6 Find me in Hungary ( <i>Mađa</i> , short for <i>Mađarska</i> ) with a basket full of buttercream and dry-cured pork sausage | <i>nađi me u mađi s punom korpom vajkrema i čajne</i>  |

During my fieldwork, I remember multiple occasions when I heard about the experiences of Hungarian relatives, friends, and acquaintances already within the EU as Croatians prepared for an accession that seemed inevitable. Here, Toxara playfully raps about a cross-border shopping trip less politicized than others that he finds inspirational. He offers a critical take on a domestic “we,” which he finds overly subject to the interests of “all sorts of foreigners,” contrasting such with “*Mađa*,” which has yet to join the Eurozone.

As I describe further in Chapter 5, rappers who perform songs in which they screw around (*zajebavaju*) such as Bolesna braća, Bad Copy, Prti Bee Gee, Krankšvester and others often parody different forms of “talk.” They give voice to stereotyped superficial women, politicians, and hyper-masculine tough guys, linguistically composing these Others in ways that are locally laughable. These performers also frequently stylize foreign Others as Toxara does above. One such song includes Bad Copy’s 2003 smash hit “*Uno, due, tre*” that features nearly 5 minutes of

“junk” Italianisms, which reference everything from traditional cuisine, luxury automobiles, fashion designers, and the transnational circulation of names and expressions from gangster films like *The Godfather* trilogy. Here, Bad Copy expands the stylizations of Italian and Italian-American mobsters also explored in the works of Zagreb MCs Nered i Stoka, who often stylize the “tough guy” with less irony and critical distance, thereby creating a domestic variant of gangsta rap. In a related discussion, Hill (1995:198, 205) describes how Anglos in the United States use “junk Spanish,” a form of light talk and joking in public discourse that maintains the subordination of Spanish and Spanish speakers, while avoiding direct racism. In contrast, Bad Copy directly insult Italian and do so flamboyantly. Despite arguably unclear footing, Bad Copy nonetheless also give voice to gross sexism and homophobia. Here the hierarchy of linguistic power between Serbian and Italian in Europe is far less clear than it is between English and Spanish in the United States. The power hierarchy is even partially reversed, or at least, unevenly favors Italian, as a member of the EU. MC Ajs Nigrutin’s first verse, replete with his flat melodic intro and Serbian renderings of Italian, follows:

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Good evening, young lady, good evening<br>Good evening, young lady of Naples | <i>Bona sera, senjorina, bona sera<br/>bona sera, senjorina Napoli</i> |
| 1 An Italian bum, mafia spaghetti  | <i>Italiano dasa, mafija špageti</i>                                   |
| 2 Audi 4, pizza, Don Fileto sausage  | <i>Audi kvatro, pica don fileti</i>                                    |
| 3 confetti, stoves, spaghetti, ice cream cones                               | <i>Konfeti, šporeti, špageti, korneti</i>                              |
| 4 good evening, faggots, now you are the target                              | <i>Bondorno, fegeti, eto vas na meti</i>                               |
| 5 Alfa Romeo, Milan, Turin   | <i>Alfa Romeo, Milano, Turino</i>                                      |
| 6 Your rhymes are zero, one baby   | <i>Rime su ti nulo, uno bambino</i>                                    |
| 7 Totti, Ferarri, Đogani, Armani   | <i>Toti, Ferari, Đogani, Armani</i>                                    |
| 8 Ajzak, you little barbarian, stop with that rhyme                          | <i>Ajzače, barabčino, sa tom rimom stani</i>                           |
| 9 We don’t eat anything without parmesan                                     | <i>Ne hasamo ništa ako nema parmažani</i>                              |
| 10 We smell like sweat like members of the Taliban                           | <i>Smrđimo na znoj kao talibani</i>                                    |

|    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 11 | Giugiaro, smoke, my love, my cock           | <i>Duđaro, fumare amore mio kako</i>      |
| 12 | Panzerotti, lasagna, licking, hey kitty     | <i>Pancerote, lazanje i lizanje maco</i>  |
| 13 | Gelato, the supreme crime boss              | <i>Gelati, kapo di tuti kapi</i>          |
| 14 | Godfather Cicciolina, I enjoy fanta         | <i>Padrino Ćicolina, uživam u fanti</i>   |
| 15 | Pininfarina, Cavalli, Pedrini               | <i>Pininfarina, Kavali, Pedrini</i>       |
| 16 | Laura Biagiotti, Fabio Giannini             | <i>Lora Bjađoti, Fabio Đanini</i>         |
| 17 | Felce Azzurra, black grapes of the bathroom | <i>Felce Azuro, paljeri di banjo</i>      |
| 18 | The whole body, my perfumed life            | <i>Tuto il korpo mon vida parfumato</i>   |
| 19 | Liquid soap, a secret moment                | <i>Likvido sapone, sekreto momento</i>    |
| 20 | Two three, four three, five hundred         | <i>Due tre, kvatro tre, cinkvenĉento</i>  |
| 21 | Let me, let me, sing                        | <i>La sate, la sate, lire mi kantare</i>  |
| 22 | The Corleone boys, Sicily Capone            | <i>Ragaci Korleone, Sicilja Kapone</i>    |
| 23 | One passport, Sportissimo, Soffici          | <i>Uno paseporte, sportisimo, soffici</i> |
| 24 | Eros Ramazzotti, I fart alone around Ibiza  | <i>Eros Ramacoti, solo prdim po Ibizi</i> |
| 25 | I fart alone around Ibiza                   | <i>Solo prdim po Ibizi</i>                |

Before dropping one of the more memorably offensive lines, arguably insulting himself, Italians, and the Taliban all at once — “We don’t eat anything without Parmesan/We smell like sweat like members of the Taliban” (*Ne hasamo ništa ako nema parmežani/smrđimo na znoj kao talibani*) — Ajs Nigrutin briefly verbalizes an attempt to stop himself. “Ajzak (one of countless pseudonyms), you little barbarian (*barabĉino*), stop with that rhyme” (*Ajzaĉe, barabĉino, sa tom rimom stani*) reveals his awareness of offending certain mores. As is often the case, the voicing of Nigrutin’s lyrics are difficult to pin down. In the mid-2000s, Nigrutin made quite a name for himself through a combination of a growling, powerful voice and stage presence, unrelenting self-deprecation; misogynistic, homophobic, and racialized slurs; and an incredible capacity for idiosyncratic, clever, and proudly vulgar lyrics. While obsessively talking about his sexual exploits, favorite folk pop stars, and drug-induced escapades, Nigrutin will rap extensively about his own hangovers, bodily discomfort, and unsuccessful trips to the bathroom. Traditional homemade foods, including of the greasy and fast variety, play a key role in Nigrutin’s opus, which is reiterated here in his multiple references to spaghetti, pizza, gelato, Don Fileto sausage

(a Mexican brand), Bosnian-made ice cream cones (*korneti*), panzerotti, and lasagna among others. In his extensive wordplay with Italian names and Italianisms above (some false), Nigrutin couples designer perfumes and clothes with reference to Hungarian pornography and folk pop stars with Italian pseudonyms (Čikolina, Đogani). Nigrutin’s (in)famous verse above is similar to many other songs throughout homemade hip hop that likewise “screw around” by voicing Others beyond ex-YU and playfully, if problematically, stylize the sexually dominant, heteronormative male tough guy or gangster.

In a similar vein, on the 2013 *Rain of Bullets* album, MCs from Split stylize German-speaking gangsters by way of similar “junk” Germanisms. Here, again, the lyrics are double-voiced, parodying European gangster rappers, Croatian rural life, the diaspora, and German speakers all at once. Again, the footing and the relationship of the authors to the homophobic slurs and tales of heterosexual conquest is unclear. The track is made up of a dizzying array of code-switching and German calques, and in the chorus, the artists amusingly brag of their prowess in accumulating one of the key metrics for calculating success in today’s music industry: “*Ein Millionen, zwei Millionen, YouTube Clicks...drei Millionen!*” The German-speaking gangsters in the song identify themselves as both “Croatians” and “Balkanites,” and the imagined toughness they claim echoes Todorova’s (1997) discussion of Central European historical and literary imaginations that see the Balkans as an exotic liminal space in-between West and Orient. MC Kid Rađa’s least controversial, but nonetheless illustrative verse follows:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 We come from Split, we are Croatians     | wir kommen aus Split wir sind Kroaten   |
| 2 very good with soccer and with neck ties | sehr gut mit Fussball und mit Krawatten |
| 3 me, I go sailing for three months        | mich, ich gehe segeln für drei Monaten  |
| 4 and my grandmother sells tomatoes        | und meine Grossmutter verkauft Tomaten  |
| 5 making lots of money, that’s my motto    | viele Geld machen das ist meine Motto   |
| 6 I know man, he won the Lotto             | ich weiss Mann der hat gewonne Lotto    |

7 Brother, I hate your pigs in blue  
8 and I love mine, the best woman

9 from ganja young Rađa, intellect broken  
10 but everything is good if I have a flood  
11 every day I make bread from machines  
12 my eyes red, I pack Visine  
13 if I have dranken lots of Alcohol  
14 for breakfast I eat a fat omlette with ham

15 I am 27 years old  
16 and I love to drive my Volkswagen  
17 a small lager beer in my right hand

18 and in my left hand, grass from my country  
19 I have a room free, Germans welcome  
20 to the Adriatic Sea, and sunshine the whole  
summer

Bruder, ich hasse deine Schweine in blau  
und ich liebe meine das beste Frau

von Ganja jung Rađa Intellekt kaput  
aber alles gut wenn ich habe eine Flut  
jeden Tag ich mache Brot aus Maschine  
meinen Augen rot ich packe Visine  
wenn ich habe viel Alkohol getrunken  
zum Frühstück ich esse fett Omlett mit  
Schinken

ich bin sieben und zwanzig Jahren

und ich liebe fahren meine Volkswagen  
kleine Bier lager im meine rechte Hand

und im linke Hand Gras aus meine Land  
ich habe Zimmer frei deutsche willkommen  
zu Adriatisch See und Sonnenschein ganz  
Sommer

In this German verse, riddled with studied inattention to grammar, yet nonetheless indicative of a high degree of fluency, Rađa plays on numerous interlinked stereotyped voices: the wannabe gangster, the tourism-friendly Dalmatian, the stoner-alcoholic, and the German-speaking visitor who comes to Croatia with limited interest in anything other than “Room Available” signs (*Zimmer frei*) and a sunny coastal vacation. Here, the domestic self imagined in the lyrics is a German-speaking Croat who embodies numerous clichés, including driving a Volkswagen, having a grandmother who sells tomatoes, and sailing on the Adriatic for multiple months out of the year. Below, by way of an illustrative related example, I will elaborate on themes that I develop above by focusing on how domestic MCs play extensively with Americanisms, perhaps the most important markedly “foreign” linguistic register in homemade hip hop. Further emphasizing the playful “craziness” of the verse, one of Kiša metaka’s other MCs ends his verse

with the final rhyme: “Are we crazy? Most definitely, my boy/there are no normal (people) in the Yugo Jungle.”<sup>4</sup>

*Calquing, Dječaci’s Blejzoniks, and the Shifting Status of Americanisms*

In July 2014, American rap luminary, Rick Ross, performed at the Fresh Island Festival at Zrće Beach, but his local signification went far beyond the international distribution of his music. Split’s Dječaci, many of whom are also involved in the Rain of Bullets project, have not only expanded regional audiences for markedly ikavian rap. They have also developed a “hybridizing” style that some have called “*blejzoniks*” that emphasizes Anglicisms, codeswitching, calquing words and phrases, and borrowing loanwords from what Alim (2006, 2009) calls “Hip Hop Nation Language” (HHNL) to levels not that many domestic rappers do not deliberately flag (Ćurković 2011; see also Škokić 2007). Like Omoniyi (2009), I am dubious about the value of imagining global hip hop scene(s) as a coherent “nation” with a single “language,” especially in ex-YU where nationalism has done so much violence. However, Alim’s term is useful insofar as MCs do share common discographies, lexicons, and styles that they recognize as “hip hop” that they also often see as grounded in particular, largely African-American traditions. Dječaci’s most-celebrated wordsmith, Vojko Vručina (a pseudonym that might translate to the curious coupling of an archaic name like “Hank” with the word for “heat”), has established his reputation for deft verbal ability in this style, including on the 2010 EP “Bitches and Lasers” (*Kuje i laseri*).

Dječaci’s track “Hustlin’/Pimpin’” (*Svodnočin*) is typical of their play with calques from HHNL and AAVE. For example, on Dječaci’s “Crack House” (*Krek kuća*) from their 2008 debut album, *Drama*, alongside a batch of featured artists, Some Hard Characters (*Neki tvrđi likovi*),

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<sup>4</sup> “Sind wir verrückt? Ganz genau meine junge/es gibt nicht normalen in die Yugo Dschungel”

Dječaci simultaneously inhabit the role of gangsters and lampoon them when describing illicit practices of the pan-Balkan unregulated economy that are deadly serious. The refrain of “Crack House,” pitched down and rapped in a register of English that resembles both the “twang” of a Texan accent and a slowed, chopped+screwed vocal, is looped to repeat eight times so that the references to globally distributed hip hop personages and a cinema star, “Lil’ Jon, Lil’ Wayne, Lil’ John Wayne” drone like a church incantation.

“Hustlin’/Pimpin’” utilizes the broadly recognizable instrumental from Rick Ross’ platinum-selling single “Hustlin’” from the 2006 *Port of Miami* album, which debuted at number one on Billboard’s Top 200. By softening the final *k* of the Croatian noun for “pimp” (*svodnik*) to a *č* and then adding an *in’* characteristic of the dropped *g* present tense verbs of AAVE, the song’s title immediately emphasizes a heretofore non-existent Croatian-HHNL hybrid. The song is consistent with a long tradition of covering/remixing (*obrada*) of American hits both within hip hop and dating back to the Yugoslav era. The forms of double-voiced global connection-making above are complex. Among their other characteristics, Dječaci’s lyrics bespeak a typical form of domestic rap “screwing around” (*zajebancija*) and a localized version of the “blaxploitational” hip hop subgenre, coke rap. The “Southern-ness” of Ross’s original is thematically and linguistically doubled in Dječaci’s cover. First, Ross’ original vocals point to the “Dirty South” and the new geography of commercial American hip hop over the last fifteen years. Second, Vojko Vručina’s lyrics are in a pronounced Dalmatian ikavian as opposed to standard ijekavian. A further “**southern**” layer below is added through the “screwed up” vocal in the chorus that points initiates to Houston’s late DJ Screw who is widely-credited for beginning an aesthetic trend of “pitching down” sampled vocals in his beat production.

In “Hustlin,’” Ross engages in classic battle rap braggadocio, comparing himself to luminaries of a pan-American drug trade that runs from Columbia and Panama to Miami’s ports. Manuel Noriega and Pablo “The King of Cocaine” Escobar become subjects of positive comparison as Ross simultaneously explains the economic limitations placed on minority youth in the “real Miami.” Ross also symbolically aligns himself with Kenneth “Black/Boobie” Williams, a Florida drug dealer arrested in the 1990s, now serving “a hundred lifes” in a federal penitentiary for operating outside of the law.

Ross’ Original Chorus:

Every day I’m hustlin’  
 Every day I’m hustlin’  
 Every day I’m, everyday I’m  
 Every day I’m hustlin’

Ross’ Original First Verse:

1 Who you suckers think you trippin' with? Yes, I'm the boss  
 2 Seven forty-five, white on white, that's Rick Ross  
 3 I cut 'em wide, I cut 'em long, I cut 'em fat  
 4 I keep 'em comin' back, we keep 'em comin' back  
 5 I’m in the distribution, I’m like Atlantic  
 6 I got them pretty thangs flyin’ ‘cross the Atlantic  
 7 I know Pablo, Noriega, the real Noriega  
 8 He owe me a hundred favors  
 9 I ain’t petty, playa, we buy the whole thang  
 10 See most of my homies hustle, they still do they thang  
 11 My roof back, my money rides  
 12 I’m on the pedal, show you what I’m runnin’ like  
 13 When they snatch Black, I cry for a hundred nights  
 14 He got a hundred bodies, servin’ a hundred lifes

Chorus from Dječaci’s “Hustlin’/Pimpin’”  
 (Svodničim’):

Every day, I’m pimpin’  
 Every day, I’m pimpin’  
 Every day, Every day  
 Every day, I’m pimpin’

*Svaki dan ja svodničim*  
*Svaki dan ja svodničim*  
*Svaki dan, svaki dan*  
*Svaki dan ja svodničim*

Vojko Vručina's First Verse:

1 Who do you think you are fuckin' with, I'm the boss

2 Give me money for slippers, or I'll break your nose

3 I'm like Rick Ross, I have a frozen neck

4 I have frozen teeth, and a frozen watch

5 I have deep rhymes, deeper than the Čikola River

6 I force motherfuckers to fly past the Čikola River

7 I know —

8 The real —, he owes me ten drinks

*s kim ti misliš da se **zajebaješ** ja sam **bos***

*daj mi pare za šlape il ću ti slomit **nos***

*ja sam ka rick **ross**, imam smrznuti vrat*

*imam smrznute zube, imam smrznuti sat*

*imam duboke rime, dublje od čikolee*

*tiram mamojebače da lete priko čikolee*

*poznajem —*

*pravoga —, duguje mi deset pića*

9 Because I always remember, I count every lipa

10 I count my earnings while leaning up against my Jeep

11 I always cheat the system, because I'm old school

12 Everyday I talk shit like Zarathustra

13 Everyday I commit serious crimes

14 Every night I write rhymes, everyday I'm pimpin'

*jer sve se sićam, svaku lipu **brojim***

*brojim zaradu dok naslonjen na jeepu **stojim***

*uvik varam sustav, jer sam stara mustra*

*cili dan pričam sranja kao zarathustra*

*teški zločini, svaki dan ih počinim*

*svake noći pišem rime svaki dan ja svodničim*

In Ross' original and Dječaci's version, the chorus, flow (prosody), thematization of sexual prowess, gangsterism, and success in the unregulated economy runs parallel. By describing unregulated trades run by gangsters in Southeastern Europe and making much more pedestrian claims to fame and toughness, Dječaci both positively invoke and make light of Ross' lyrics.

The humor of Dječaci's cover rests on multiple factors, including the imagined cultural inconsistency of performing coke rap in Split. However, given the epidemic in narcotics use that artists like tbf has long described in songs like their 1997 "Grief Trilogy" ("3-logija jada"), coke rap is only a partially awkward domestic "fit" in Split. Dječaci's claims are also far more pedestrian than those of Ross: in Lines 1-2, already distinctions between the original and the cover become obvious. Vručina's character does not run a multimillion-dollar drug cartel, but he

will break your nose if you do not give him money for house slippers. Others should also beware if they plan on shortchanging him: Vručina is known to count every *lipa*. As of the cover's release, a single Croatian *lipa* (the smaller denomination of the official currency, *kuna*) was worth approximately one-fifth of an American cent. In Line 3, Vručina plays on the American slang term for gaudy jewelry, "ice." *Mamojebači* (lit. "motherfuckers") is one of many calqued neologisms, a noticeably atypical pejorative used in domestic slang. Dječaci's use of a variety of Americanisms here underscores the linguistic mixing at work on the part of the rappers.

Dječaci's characters are often made through extensive, intertextual, and often parodic reference to discographies that span either side of the Atlantic.<sup>5</sup> In their dub version, Dječaci creatively conjure the social figure of the local gangsta rap wannabe and small-time criminals. In 2008, Ross' short professional career as a corrections officer manifested as a media scandal, which also raised questions as to the authenticity of his narratives in the eyes of some American critics. Vručina also alludes to rightwing discourse, when he discusses forcing his enemies out of Croatia. Similar themes were addressed in the nationalist rock musician Thompson's in/famous 1992 song "Čavoglave Battalion" (*Bojna čavoglave*) in which he explicitly discusses forcing Serbs and "Chetnik bandits" past the Čikola River in the Dalmatian region of Zagora. Through a discographic reference, Dječaci stylize the Croatian nationalist tough guy, in which a Thompson listener is conflated with a braggart and misogynist. Such moves have the capacity to simultaneously critique American mainstream hip hop, its domestic adherents, and a range of Croatian tough guys. At once, the MCs align themselves with Ross' original, but this alignment

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<sup>5</sup> Compare this discussion with that of Žanić (2010), who has written about the domestic sociolinguistics of animated films in which he describes translators' efforts to replicate the heteroglossia of Disney and DreamWorks productions in a form that appeals to Croatian audiences. Accents that point to US American, white, black, Latinx, and southern speakers are rendered in standard Croatian ijekavian, Dalmatian ikavian, dialects kajkavian and čakavian, and even Bosnian pronunciations.

is double-voiced, insofar as many of the claims of Vručina's stylized tough guy are notably humble (e.g., Lines 2, 9). Further illumination of the dangers of the pan-American underground economy and the painful differential between white and black economic possibilities for success in the US are less important to the cover than the humor pointing to the awkward juxtaposition of lyrically imagined American and Croatian social types.

### *Class and Professional Voices*

As we can see above, double-voiced “gangster/mafioso/thug/hustler/or otherwise tough guy talk” appears regularly in the lyrics of domestic rappers, who don the voices and associated linguistic signs of assorted criminals in songs. These include Edo Maajka's 2003 hit “Minimal Risk” (*Minimalni rizik*), which portrays a criminal within an unregulated economy for which the Balkans has developed unfortunate international renown (Glenny 2008). Edo's stylization of New Former Yugoslavs is done through a variety of semiotic means which include language, especially a particular lexicon and tonal semantics. However, gangsters domestic and otherwise, are by no means the only professional voices that emerge in homemade hip hop.

MCs also litter “politicians' talk” throughout domestic rap lyrics. In songs such as the Tuzlan rapper HZA's paeon “Dear Tito” (*Dragi Tiito*), samples of speeches of the region's most well-known 20<sup>th</sup> century politician emerge. Before HZA's first verse, three iconic scratchy snippets of Josip Broz's voice appear in succession that set up a contrast pair between the explicitly multicultural policies of the SFRY and the nationalist emphasis on monoethnic states that succeeded the wars of the 1990s and continue to divide B&H internally:

Sample 1: “So that from the beginning man is most important and that the opinion never dominates that his interests subordinate greater interests...”

Sample 2: “Brotherhood and unity can only exist between those who are truly equal...”

Sample 3: “In Yugoslavia, we must show through example that there can be no minorities and majorities. Socialism rejects minorities and majorities...”<sup>6</sup>

Not only does HZA sample, but in lyrics in the form of a letter to the late politician, he also adopts the lexicon of the SFRY in drawing a distinction between past and an incomplete present: “There’s no work, no money, no brotherhood and unity/these children will deal with shit (*imat’ sarong*) from childhood” (*Nema posla, nema para, nema bratstva i jedinstvo/ova će djeca imat’ sarong od djetinjstva*).

|  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 First they separated Yugo into republics                         | <i>Prvo na republike podijelili Jugu,</i>                |
| 2 Then they brought sadness into the hearts of mothers of the dead | <i>pa u scra majki poginulih unijeli tugu</i>            |
| 3 And pain, they destroyed each other’s churches and mosques       | <i>i bol, rušili jedni drugima crkve i dzamije,</i>      |
| 4 Just as if they didn’t once together help one another build them | <i>isto k’o da ih nisu zajedno gradili ranije.</i>       |
| 5 Media poisoned us, us and them over there                        | <i>Mediji nas trovali, i nas i one tamo,</i>             |
| 6 Former guests of Goli otok came to power with a plan             | <i>bivši gosti golog otoka došli na vlast sa planom,</i> |
| 7 Everyone wanted their own  | <i>svako je htjeo svoje</i>                              |
| 8 National colors  | <i>nacionalne boje,</i>                                  |
| 9 and we got fucked, bro   | <i>a dobili smo svi po pički bolan</i>                   |

Here, again, we see play on the domestic “we,” which the media “poisoned” by turning a first person plural into both a “we” and “them over there.” A multiethnic set of “thieves,” “priests,” “hodjas,” and “villagers from the hills (hillbillies)” joined with “America,” “the CIA,” “the Russians,” and “the Vatican” to “fuck [Tito’s] plan.” By adding reference to Goli otok, the

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<sup>6</sup> Sample 1: “*Da je od početka čovjek bio u prvom planu i da kod nas nikad nije prevladao stav da njegove interese treba podređivati nekim višim interesima*”...Sample 2: “*Bratstvo i jedinstvo može postojati samo među onima koji su zbilja ravnopravni*” Sample 3: “*Mi moramo u Jugoslaviji na primer pokazati da ne može biti manjine i većine. Socijalizam manjinu i većinu odbacuje.*”

SFRY's primary prison for political dissidents from 1949-1989, HZA does not entirely divert attention from the crimes of the former regime, which included limiting certain forms of speech. In "Dear Tito," HZA embraces a form of solidarity poetics that spans ethnonational distinction in its interpretation of the past, and the MC does so by ventriloquating politicians' speech.

In resignifying markedly socialist lexicon and politicians' recordings, HZA has continued in a domestic rap tradition that extends through well-known acts including Zagreb's El Bahattee who also referenced "brotherhood and unity" and sampled Tito in his eponymous 2001 song, which also criticizes nationalism from the Croatian perspective. While the aforementioned Priki from Bihać does not sample Tito or directly reference markedly socialist slogans in "Yustalgija" that he recorded a decade later, the video recontextualizes a great deal of socialist era speech. Classic postcard greetings, political scientific and economic analysis of imports, exports and federalism, and imagined titles for prominent Anglophone and financial magazines including *Time* ("Prosperous Country Yugoslavia Just Said a Big NO to the European Union") and *Forbes* ("Yugoslavia among the Richest Nations in Europe.") all adorn the video in which Priki imagines "Yugoslavia — How would it be if during the 1990s the war had not happened." While quotes by famous international and Yugoslav writers appear throughout the video behind the glass of ubiquitous newsstands that could be in any city across ex-YU, jump cuts transport the viewer to street scenes of famous locations. These are re-adorned through special effects with their socialist-era names, including the "Yugoslav" (as opposed to "Croatian") National Theater and the Square of the Republic of Yugoslavia (instead of Ban Jelačić Square), and recognizable landscapes are also filled with wind turbines and other signs of alternative energy.

Despite the popularity of Elemental's engaged 2008 hit "Why Do I Have You?" (*Zašto te imam?*) Croatian National Television censored the video from broadcast. Through the careful

*bricolage* of footage shot largely at both HDZ and SDP political party functions, Elemental's video reinforces a negative portrayal of present-day political speech that they describe in their song. The viewers of the video see alcohol and food consumption, politicians' bodily hexis full of smiles and photo-op poses, and the laughter of suit- and gown-wearing, high-ranking, supposedly antagonistic, rival party members. These images contrast directly with shots of farmers, fishermen, and welders working in Croatian shipyards. MCs Shot and Remi address their lyrics and questions from the chorus to a corrupt government official who they frame as having forgotten the reason as to why he sought election to the Croatian Parliament (*Sabor*) in the first place — “Why do I have you when you give nothing to me/Why do I have you when you don't hear my voice/Do I ever come to your mind/Do you ever stop to think about us a little (*Zašto te imam kad ne daješ mi ništa/Zašto te imam kada ne čuješ moj glas/Da li ti padnem koji put ja na pamet/Dal' ikad staneš malo pomisliš na nas*). Here, the MCs describe “politician's talk” as insincere and thus distinct from the voices of voters. The MCs make the disconnect between statements, public presentation, and reality clear when they sing in the call-and-response bridge: “[Voice 1] He's a wonderful person and a hardworking idealist/[Voice 2] a couple of years ago he was the toughest communist/[Voice 1] He fights for the people and says that he's a humanist/[Voice 2] he's a hedonist on our tab” (*On je prekrasan čovjek i radišan idealist/je, prije par godina najžešći komunist/On se bori za narod i kaže da je humanist/je, na naš trošak je hedonist*). Here, Elemental's rhymes echo sociolinguistic research. Salamurović (2012) has argued that, despite the differences in rhetoric, today's political speech in Croatia and Serbia relies on many populist conventions that were deployed during the wars of the 1990s and earlier. Campaign placards of the “idealist” politician, who they address in the second person, “have some smart phrase” (*plakate sa nekom pametnom frazom*), but “in the parliament you don't say

anything” (*u saboru nisi rek’o ništa*). The “people” must thus “raise [their] voice” in order to be heard. What is clear is that particular forms of inauthentic speech are critical to portraying a corrupt politician.

### *Prosodies that Point*

Hip hop artists and those from related genres often emphasize different hierarchies of linguistic value that stress tonal semantics and prosody (flow) over “politically-conscious” lyrics. Grgić (2007) says as much in his Afterword to the lyrics compendium, *Croatian Hip Hop*:

#### *Rocked Rhymes:*

Hip hop is not a type of poetry that one can value, analyze, and read like another type of the literary form, including haiku and narrative epics. These words are first written for the voice, for its color, for technical skill, for style. They are written for a beat, for rhythm, flow, groove, a melody, breaks...<sup>7</sup>

While Lord and Perry (1960) would take issue with the notion that epic performance is devoid of voice, skill, and style, Grgić’s valuable point demands my attention here as I have been largely unpacking lyrics with limited attention to their actual performance. Arguing that hip hop as a poetic form cannot be understood on the basis of its direct semantic content alone, Grgić does not seek a translation for the Englishisms he deploys alongside “rhythm” and “melody,” including beat, flow, groove, breaks. And in the afterword, he argues that hip hop should be evaluated according to other criteria. Fox (2004) has similarly argued that, all-too-frequently, anthropologists and ethnomusicologists draw analytic distinction between language and music. This is misleading, insofar as the divide erases the obvious mutual imbrication of each field of practice, which when removed from its context of performance, loses an important aspect of

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<sup>7</sup> “Hip hop nije ona vrsta poezije koja se može vrednovati, analizirati i čitati kao bilo koja druga vrsta ove književne forme, uključujući haiku i narativne epove. Ove riječi pisane prvenstveno za glas, za njegovu boju, za tehniku, stil. Pisane su za beat, za ritam, flow, groove, melodiju, breakove... (Ibid: 213).”

meaning. Before I address live performance (incompletely, tentatively) in the final section, I intend to better analyze the musicality of domestic rap by way of examples.

As a linguistic-musical register of performance, beatboxing is often forgotten. Nonetheless, beatboxing is an important element of hip hop style, which artists have also domesticated. Beatboxing involves the vocal creation of a range of hi-hat, snare, and kick drum combinations that performers more readily compare with drum sets, the programming options available on beatmaking software kits, or electronic drum machines than they do with elements of language *in sensu stricto*. They articulate “more musical” linguistic registers that focus on establishing orally-produced rhythms through the vocal apparatus. Domestic beatboxers like Lil’ Bear from Slavonski brod are few and far between. However, more prominent homemade hip hop artists occasionally reinforce beatboxers’ symbolic connection to the genre by adding them to concert billings and featurings on albums. In light of his ability to masterfully recreate a wide range of musical styles including hip hop, dubstep, and other forms of edm, Lil’ Bear toured with General Woo and recorded with Kandžija. Lil’ Bear’s vocal stylings accompanied Woo’s 2011 “*Repchuga*,” a classic battle, ego-trip track that calls out younger artists for their embrace of trends as opposed to authentic rap. Lil’ Bear also released a video in which he beatboxed alongside a *gajda* player in Ljubljana. The *gajda*, which resembles a Scottish bagpipe, is more commonly played in Macedonia and Bulgaria, and its marking as a “traditional” instrument makes Lil’ Bear’s pairing with his beatboxing notable.

While aficionado audiences often recognize reggae, dancehall, ragga, reggaeton, and grime as to varying degrees separate genres in ex-YU, their artists, primary distributors, and audiences frequently overlap. The melodic contours, lexicon, and rhythm of patwa-inflected BCS+M registers such as those employed by Popaj, Dubioza kolektiv, Who See, and Eyesburn among

many others point to Caribbean creative genealogies that do not overlap entirely with those of homemade hip hop artists. Dubioza kolektiv has garnered a massive transnational following built upon their particular variant of so-called Balkan beat or funk that highlights a blend of reggae's linguistic and musical styles with so-called Balkan brass. The patwa quality of their lyrical compositions rendered in Bosnian adopts stereotypical patterns and a lexicon that points to Caribbean reggae, dancehall, and ragga.

Less-widely circulated performance styles are also celebrated as notable for their linguistic innovations, including the nigh untranslatable 2011 release "*Srbija dans lajk dis*" by Zvezde Grajma (Stars of Grime). The song was one of many remixes of UK artist P Money's "Slang Like This." Like the original, the lyrics of the remix foregrounded Belgrade's domestic "slang" lexicon, thus localizing the original theme of the track. The band name clearly references the "Stars of Grand" (*Zvezde Granda*), a popular Serbian program on Pink Television. Since "Stars of Grand" is dedicated to showcasing the folk pop performer lineup signed to Lepa Brena's Grand Productions label, the young artists' use of such a similar name is likely ironic, in light of their devoted to "urban" styles such as grime which fans associate with the "alternative" scene(s). There is a double-voiced re-signification of the label that draws the most ire among so-called alternative musicians with Belgrade and beyond. The percussion-effusive flow (see Krims 2000:51) often in double-time that the performers adopt sounds different from many homemade hip hop compositions, insofar as it foregrounds ragga-infused vocal tonality, polyrhythms, and fast-paced tempo that they define, referring to two of the most prominent Jamaican performers, "not as much rap, as it is that Sizzla and Capleton style (Tomić 2012:50)."

## Standardizing a “Spectacular Vernacular” and a “Unified” Domestic Scene

When voices are enregistered, they have the capacity to point to specific social groups through ideologies that see peoples and ways of speaking as semiotically linked. This is also the case with styles of verbal performance. As I described briefly in Chapter 2 as elsewhere (Kohl 2016; see also Kovač 2013), many homemade hip hop artists saw the Red Bull MC Battle in fall 2011 as a massive success in terms of stagecraft and branding. The event organizers also used YouTube, Red Bull’s web pages, and all of the paraphernalia they generated including brackets and rules to imagine the domestic scene(s) in unified competition across Croatian, B&H, and Serbia. In many ways, the process of unification had long already happening, but the Battle undoubtedly constituted one of the biggest cross-border events in the history of a *regional*, homemade hip hop. Notably, the Austrian-Thai corporation helped promote domestic artists’ understandings of verbal performance that pointed to African-American progenitors, their famous successes, and storied skills in wowing crowds. The Red Bull Battle thus was also a rare occasion for longtime domestic artist-experts to unpack what they understood as the history of rap battling for a domestic public. Without diminishing the improvisational talents of MCs, freestyle rap battling is never truly “free” of the cultural context in which competition occurs. One must, obviously, be highly attuned to the desires of a local crowd. As artists domesticated a global art form in this particular instance, specificities of homemade hip hop emerged.

The four rounds of the Battle took place over four consecutive Saturday nights in Sarajevo, Zagreb, and Belgrade, with the final back in B&H’s *de jure* capital. Through the Red Bull websites in each participating country, organizers fielded pools of 16 rappers to compete in the first three national rounds. The venues — Sarajevo’s House of the Young, Belgrade’s House

of Youth, and Zagreb's Factory of Culture —each had better than average resources at their disposal.

At the time, I often saw how homemade hip hop concerts, festivals, and club events across ex-YU made do with far worse lighting, sound systems, and promotion. Informants with whom I spoke after the Battle insisted that promoters would struggle to retain such a level of audience interest for an annual event. They just doubted that there were enough MCs and crowds with money enough to sustain the Battle as anything other than a semi-annual novelty.

Nonetheless, the professionalism of the concert organizing of the Red Bull Battle placed the event on par with that of enormous multi-genre festivals like Novi Sad's EXIT or Zagreb's T-Mobile IN-Music. Transnational companies such as MTV, Tuborg, and New Yorker build their brands by sponsoring spectacular verbal performances like freestyle rap battles, rap laden music festivals on the Adriatic coast, and a range of concerts. Freestyle battling has experienced a sort of renaissance internationally, and like domestic MC battles, often occurs with corporate support.<sup>8</sup> For example, promoters timed a multi-round Croatian rap battle at Zagreb's Club Aquarius with the 2003 Croatian release of Universal Studios' film *8 Mile*, Eminem's Hollywood vehicle, that came out at the apex of the white rapper's global popularity. Domestic corporate advertisements often hitch brands to ethnationally diverse performer lineups, sharing their music with vacationing audiences of various backgrounds. The "good business" of supporting supranational festivals (even if they are not particularly profitable, but nonetheless

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<sup>8</sup> In the wake of HBO's *Blaze Battle*, MTV's *Wild 'n Out*, the Rap Olympics, and the Scribble Jam Festival, a series of new battle rap competitions have emerged in recent years, partly within the framework of YouTube Channels, which include Ultimate Rap League (US), King of the Dot (Canada), and Flip Top (Philippines). A YouTube Channel based in Germany, Beatbox Battle TV, has been hugely influential in the distribution and promotion of beatbox performances and competitions. A handful of these battles have been taken up in the secondary literature (see, for example, Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook 2009).

build a brand) relates distantly to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century state efforts to cultivate support for a unified, planned language.

Red Bull's recent forays in homemade hip hop constitute one of many forms of entertaining "Eurocompetition" that have grown since the 1990s (Borneman and Fowler 1997). In many ways reminiscent of the Eurovision Song Contest and Champions League Soccer, Red Bull organized competitors in this case from soon-to-be full members of the EU and candidate countries exclusively. In each venue, a faux boxing ring replete with company logo underscored the sports metaphor. The competitive spirit was stoked by a large screen backdrop behind the ring that quickly cut to graphics featuring the names of the MCs and their pictures. At the right moment, the screen would cut to a ticking 30-second countdown clock that showed the audiences how much time the rappers had to launch their rhymed barbs. The aesthetic of the backdrop screen contents reminded me of the introductory graphics to CAPCOM's Streetfighter or Midway's Mortal Kombat video games that I played on Nintendo before developing my mild addiction to Netflix's streaming dramas as an adult. Red Bull has long supported cultural manifestations with which they sought to symbolically tie their brand, ranging from "cutting edge" music production, dance (including domestic b-boying), and "x-treme" sports. The DJing workshops that I attended in Zagreb and Belgrade were in many ways domestic variations not only on the American Scratch Academies, but also the Red Bull Music Academy which first organized a workshop for DJs in Berlin in 1998. The company has thus long supported artists across Europe who remain uncomfortable fits in traditional university music programs. MTV Adria, the national Red Bull web portals, and a handful of domestic news sites followed the 2011 Battle. Prior to heading out to Dom Mladih I met with DJs in Sarajevo to screen domestic hip hop's "classic" freestyle performance that were available on YouTube. Videos of old-timer MCs

and young competitors as well as published journalistic reports stoked the excitement. Camera crews ensured highlights from each city could be spun into thousands of private and semi-private views once the rounds ended. In the case of the Red Bull MC Battle, the company's desired capital accumulation was intertwined with non-standard linguistic value organized under the sign of unity despite diversity and competition.

Both the Red Bull websites and participating rappers compared the MC Battle in 2011 to events held by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), not as far as I know, to Eurovision. I can only speculate that the gender politics and deliberate kitsch so frequently pronounced at Eurovision offended or otherwise annoyed the largely heteronormative, male-dominated, "alternative" spaces (and here, once again, we see the meaning shift to something none-too-distinct from conservative positions) usually created by domestic rappers. These were reinforced by countless homophobic and sexist slurs that MCs hurled at one another during the Battle. Very little was said about the rappers' use of disses that insulted competitors' physical appearance, fashion taste, and/or supposed sexual orientation. Alongside critiques of rap skills, the overwhelmingly white, Slavic-speaking competitors regularly accused each other of femininity or homosexuality.

Given the deliberate aim of cultivating a multinational crowd through mass media, organizers were, however, clearly worried that insults based on racial, religious, or national categories of belonging could derail the event (and injure the brand). The official rules thus anticipated controversy, imagining the young, exclusively male performers (48 of 48) and their volatile lexicon and sartorial habits in particular ways. They barred potentially inflammatory clothing, perhaps aware of previous debates sparked by Belgrade's popular "Chetniks" (Четникс) streetwear brand. The official rules of the 2011 Battle stated as follows:

Insults that utilize national, religious, or racial differences will be punished in the most severe fashion: with disqualification. In addition, wearing clothes that can incite an opponent or the public will not be tolerated (e.g., uniforms with national or hooligan logos).

Thus, insults that highlighted race, religion, and/or nationality as well as clothing that bore signs of potentially antagonistic rival hooligan groups were grounds for immediate disqualification. These rules stand in striking contrast to the official, explicit, no-disses-barred official policies that Alim, Lee, and Carris (2010) productively describe in their ethnography of battles in Los Angeles. The authors contend that verbal attacks based on racial and/or ethnic difference often re-inscribe hierarchies in broader American society, despite the fact that white MCs often avoid race-based disses of their black peers.

Historically, audiences and artists have discussed success in freestyle rap through a range of informal measures that are grounded in live performance in front of cheering (or jeering) crowds, expert judges, and competing rappers. Online fan portals, DVDs, recorded lyrics, YouTube videos and their associated comment feeds are also arbiters of live linguistic success. In the videos that advertised the 2011 Red Bull Battle, a quick montage of interviews with the deliberately multinational cadre of expert judges created the sense that they would evaluate competing MCs on how they succeeded in entertaining crowds. The videos brought into being what Holt (2007) would call a transnational “center collectivity,” which he defines as “clusters of specialized subjects that have given direction (21)” to the network of people and institutions surrounding a genre. Holt continues, “they include influential fan communities, critics, record producers, and above all artists whose iconic status marks them as ‘leading’ figures (Ibid.).” Through the juxtaposition of interview snippets, the viewer comes to learn that “entertainment” in the context of the rap battle has different metrics. One MC, who had seen success in the first

B&H-only Battle in 2010, argued that the judges would evaluate on crowd laughter: “I think that tacitly, (the judges will be looking for) the MC who makes the audience laugh the most.”

Another MC from Belgrade reiterated this point, stressing the importance of punchlines, humor, and added that self-confidence would be critical. Another rapper said that he personally would be looking for the competitors’ stage presence and personality. An MC from Zagreb stressed her desire to hear competitors’ “flow.” Being “homophobic,” “sexist,” or otherwise offensive to certain constituencies was not a concern that judges voiced. The promotional videos that MTV produced (and were subsequently posted to YouTube and Red Bull’s domestic websites) thus crafted a domestic ideal, authoritative positions, and even a standard for verbal performance. Of course, audiences beyond the judges also emphasized different aspects of verbal dexterity, wit, and improvised creativity. The videos gave future commentators — expert, participant, or audience — a means to ground their own positions in reference to these guideposts that illuminated a path to successfully besting an opponent while demonstrating prowess for verbal spontaneity in domestic terms.

In 2011, these ideals concerning freestyle rap also mediated a continued symbolic relationship to imagined hip hop homeland, namely specific urban spaces in the United States. While scholars may trace an African-American historical genealogy for rap battling through “playing the dozens” and to various rhyming insult games that span borders, domestic artists did other sorts of historical work through interviews and conversation. School children in ex-YU have long “flipped” or otherwise re-composed decasyllables (*deseterac*) reminiscent of epic poetry with their own “dirtier” innovations. However, two DJs offered brief explanations of the place of battling in the American hip hop tradition. As a prelude to the round in Zagreb, promoters even organized a short performance by Craig G of the Juice Crew from Queensbridge

in Long Island City, Queens. Craig G had notable success in battling Supernatural, one of the legends of freestyle rap who made his name in New York City. Homemade hip hop artists paid deference to largely African-American progenitors, but also domesticated their understandings of what was important from that history.

As was the case in the Red Bull Battle in 2011, audiences and judges often place greatest value on lyrical improvisation when they evaluate freestyle rap. During the unfolding of rap battles, competitors often criticize one another when they are suspected of bringing “writtens” to a battle. The rules reiterated this concern and established their hierarchy of value for verbal performance:

Insofar as the judges notice that a participant performs with a text that has been pre-prepared, the participant will not be suspended, but this will affect his score. More points will be accorded to true freestyles, i.e., lyrics conceived on the spot. The judges will rate the thought behind the lyrics, the humor, flow, the style of the rap, and the composure of the competitors on stage.

However, rappers often admit that freestyle takes concerted practice and repetition of memorized couplets and words that rhyme. Battle organizers worldwide are increasingly acknowledging the fact that “pure” improvisation is both impossible and likely undesirable. Freestyle rap has also, perhaps paradoxically, become its own institutionalized and commodified form of authentic creativity (see also Wilf 2014).

Through their linguistic self-presentations, including in recorded lyrics and live freestyles, rappers draw a geographically and temporally broad set of symbolic connections both within and beyond ex-YU. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, ethnographers, prolific collectors like Vuk, language planners, and conservative cultural commentators often favored different authenticated “sources” (*izvori*) for their songs and standards than does homemade hip hop — they glorify the

isolated village as opposed to Tram 11's favored *Heat of the Streets* (*Vrućina gradskog asfalta*) for which they named their 2000 album. However, historiographically imagined sources are less important than the social categories to which certain voices, including ones that embrace the new standards, point. From live performance to music videos to forms of dress, homemade hip hop stylizes these voices of politicians, tough guys, and foreigners through a variety of means. Language is only one of the most obvious and perhaps most complicated semiotic media that imagines a range of figures. The domestic selves and others imagined through language remain awkwardly entangled with American creative lineages, often resolutely heterosexual and male, and embedded in a heteroglossic world that I continue to explore through one duo's work in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Nasty Notes, Cunninlynguistics, and Shady Sincerity: Voicing, Footing, and Monikers

#### “Remember That Name...KRANKŠVESTER”

*Krankšvester is terribly open to criticism. You can very quickly criticize (the project) by saying that it is chauvinism with some concealed pseudo-message. But I will be as honest as I can be. It's not that it isn't that way, but I don't think like that. If I really thought that way, I would feel terrible about myself. No. This is the way that I caricature. This is the way that I make texts, that is, serious texts. Serious...(laughter)...well, they are never serious... This is the way that I deliver a specific message with humor, satire, and an absurd caricature of everything.*  
– MC Sett speaking about his concept album and band, Krankšvester<sup>1</sup>

Back in 2011, when an interviewer from an online music portal asked the Osijek-based, self-proclaimed pornorap duo, Krankšvester, whether or not they supported Croatia's accession to the EU, the band's response began first in-character.<sup>2</sup> The Slavonian trigger-warning tandem played sarcastically with the multiple meanings of the BCS+M word for “entry” or “accession.” They thereby addressed *the* political question of the day. Here, I quote from their exchange:

**Interviewer:** General Woo's position on Croatian accession (*ulaz*) to the Union is known. Is Krankšvester going to the referendum?

**Sett:** Krankšvester supports entering into just about anything. We need to penetrate that European Union and fuck it royally (laughter; orig. “*izjebat' ju kraljevski*”). We'll have one political text on the new album.

**3ki stil** (“Tricky” English org. Style): We're for accession (*ulazak*) through the anus!

**Sett:** Yes, we have to enter through Europe's ass (Hadrović 2012).

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<sup>1</sup> “Krankšvester je užasno otvoren za kritiku. Ti možeš to jako brzo kritizirat i reći to je šovanizam, prekriven nečim, nekom šatrom porukom, ali ja ću ti bit najiskreniji, ne nije, ja to ne mislim, ja kad bi to stvarno mislio onako, osjećao bi se jako loše zbog sebe. To nije sad neki, neka maska uz koju ja govorim nešto što duboko u sebi mislim. Ne. To je način na koji ja karikiram to. Tako radim tekstove, znači ozbiljne tekstove. Ozbiljne (smijeh)...nikad nisu ozbiljni...to je način na koji ja prenosim određenu poruku kroz humor, satiru, apsurdno karikiranje svega.”

<sup>2</sup> As a category/subgenre/style, “pornorap” often emerges in interviews with the group, but rarely does among other MCs.

This analytical response to the question came from one of the most explicit bands in post-Yugoslav spaces and immediately forced the interviewer back into the hyper-sexualized thematic territory that Krankšvester obsessively inhabits. Following others in the male-dominated domestic hip hop scene(s), I will refer to the duo's insistence on parody and role play as "screwing around" (*zajebancija*; see Kožul 2012). Such screwing around has implications for the complex, shifting ways in which the rappers describe their moral relation to the lyrics and beats that they compose.

Sett went on to provide a lengthier, more principled response to the aforementioned interviewer, saying that he tentatively supported Croatian accession, because it represented the "the better of two evils."<sup>3</sup> Glossing Sett's words that are reproduced in full in the footnote below, Krankšvester says "EU? why not?": after all, the Croatian populous was *already* "unsatisfied" at constantly being "robbed," and subject to "non-stop" crisis before it finally acceded in July 2013. While Sett understood complaints that the pro-EU center of the political spectrum received too much mass media attention, he felt he had yet to hear of a better alternative proposed by critics.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In Goffmanian terms, as I discuss below, one could also argue that his latter response was more principled.

<sup>4</sup> Interviewer: "Woo-ov stav o ulasku u Uniju je poznat. Da li Krankšvester izlazi na referendum? Sett: Krankšvester je za ulaz u bilo što. Mi moramo penetrirati u tu Europsku uniju i izjebati ju kraljevski (smijeh). Imati ćemo jedan politički tekst na novom albumu...3ki: Mi smo za ulazak kroz analni otvor! Sett: Da, mi kroz dupe Europe moramo uć." Sett goes on to say "I am definitely for accession (to the Union, and not the butt), because I hear too few meaningful arguments coming from the other side. They tell you that you're going somewhere where you will be robbed, where people are unsatisfied and a financial crisis reigns...Okay, but where are you now? In El Dorado? We have a non-stop crisis, they constantly rob us, and we're unsatisfied. On the other hand, I completely understand those who say that the pro-European segment receives too much space in the media. However, the biggest problem is that the dialogue in the mainstream revolves around idiocy, and it seems to me that we began too late to address the accession in a normal way. I am for accession and I know that it has its negative sides, but I have yet to hear of a better alternative, or that alternative strikes me as even scarier. To me, it seems like the better of two evils. On the other hand, maybe I am wrong. I was wrong regarding tons of things...("Ja sam definitivno za ulazak (u Uniju, a ne dupeta; op. a.) jer s druge strane čujem premalo smislenih argumenata. Kažu ti da ćeš doć negdje gdje će te pokrast', gdje su ljudi nezadovoljni i vlada financijska kriza...Oke, ali gdje si trenutno? U El Doradu? Mi smo non-stop u krizi, neprestano nas kradu i nezadovoljni smo. S druge strane, apsolutno razumijem one koji govore da proeuropska struja dobiva previše medijskog prostora. Međutim, najveći je problem to što se dijalog u mainstreamu sveo na budalaštine i čini mi se da smo prekasno ulasku počeli pristupati na normalan način. Ja sam za ulazak i znam da to ima svoje negativne strane, ali za bolju alternativu još nisam čuo ili mi ta alternativa djeluje strašnije. Čini mi se kao manje zlo. S druge strane, možda sam u krivu. Bio sam u krivu oko mase stvari...")

Implicit in the response was memories of Croatia's relatively arduous path to accession, wherein war, the prosecution of war criminals, and post-socialist corrupt accumulation have remained constant news stories since the 1990s and 2000s. His playful initial answers to "serious" questions are consistent with their music: commenting soberly on the experiences of Croatia's body politic is rarely Krankšvester's exclusive lyrical impulse. Instead, their albums foreground a performed decadent machismo. They avoid the stigma of pretension by embracing the vulgar. And through various musical, linguistic, and thematic techniques, they voice and otherwise animate resolutely crass characters.

This simultaneous use of multiple linguistic and musical registers is key to Krankšvester's performances. Their lyrics are shot through with double-voicing, that like other forms of parody, "introduces into [the] discourse a semantic intention that is directly opposed to the original one (Bakhtin 1984:193)." Much like actresses or actors, the rappers regularly animate and/or author "opinions, beliefs, and sentiments (they) do not hold (Goffman 1981:145)." They do so despite widespread music ideologies, both domestic and international, that insist music, including hip hop, should be an authentic reflection of an artist's soul or background. Bakhtin has described dialogism and heteroglossia as fundamental to achieving understanding of a novelist's stylistic tools, and likewise this chapter considers them critical to Krankšvester's compositional strategies. Like many rappers before them, Krankšvester makes rampant use of words and sounds that are saturated with the intentions of other people and places, foregrounding an aesthetics of "one point of view opposed to another, one evaluation opposed to another, one accent opposed to another (Bakhtin 1981 [1935]:314)." Here, I ask: What visions of the self does the hip hop MC (see also Jackson 2005) spark within a context of

post-socialist dismemberment? I argue that audiovisual techniques of authorial self-distancing both reflect and contribute to shifting senses of domestic belonging and its evaluation.

Krankšvester, self-deprecatingly adopts and amplifies culturally intimate, unstable images of Balkan masculinities. Throughout their increasingly popular discography dating back to 2010, Krankšvester caricatures the lives of two male rappers whose primary desires in life include consuming: alcohol, illegal narcotics, high-end fashion, markedly nationalistic and “kitschy” folk pop, and especially carefree sex.<sup>5</sup> The pugnacious and outrageous characters that they conjure and exaggerate in their recordings feel uncomfortably enamored with multiple controversial ideological projects, including those of Croatia’s Catholic Church, mainstream parties, and other hegemonic institutions like the EU. While Croatia has ostensibly met “benchmarks” toward incorporation in European modernity, various forms of post-industrial “crisis” persist. Everyday matters of the kitchen table, bed and bathroom thus leak not only into the spectacles of clubs, beaches, and politics, but also into Krankšvester’s stylizations of sell-out rappers, frustrated misogynists, and nationalist oligarchs. In their parodies, high stakes, deadly topics are turned into an entertainment-laden carnivalesque.

“Screwing around” is one among other domestic hip hop registers such as “street” (*ulični* and “gangsta”), “commercial” (*komercijalni*), or “engaged” that frame expectations for artists’ moral, aesthetic, and pragmatic relationship to texts. One can trace the genealogy of South Slavic masking, satire, irony, and parody in deep historical and broad geographical directions. Longstanding annual carnivals like that of Croatia’s largest in Rijeka regularly feature an “ever-mocking, oppositionist and critical stance towards ruling institutions (Lozica 2007:73).” Since Yugoslav dismemberment in the 1990s, journalists and artists have regularly lampooned

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<sup>5</sup> See the 2010 songs “*Krankšvester*,” “*Krankaveli*.”

nationalist rhetoric and elite accumulation in multimedia performances. For example, musicians like Rambo Amadeus, Laibach, and Let3 have drawn considerable attention by cleverly and ambivalently appropriating folk pop (“turbofolk”) and other entertaining genres often regarded as “complicit” within the new political economy. In contrast, the socially engaged domestic rappers who dominated the 2000s directly lambasted the consumer culture of the transitional post-socialist “meantime” (see Jansen 2015; Jašarević 2017) and the nationalisms of what Brubaker (2004) has called “ethnopolitical entrepreneurs.”<sup>6</sup>

Krankšvester fits somewhere between these political and aesthetic traditions, but does so in satirical, overtly sexual and consumerist fashion. Their albums critique a hegemonic brand of post-war, post-socialist, consumer culture straddling a period of EU accession.<sup>7</sup> They lampoon mediatized figures of personhood through deliberately exaggerated embodied, gendered, racialized, linguistic, and nationalistic behaviors (see Agha 2011).<sup>8</sup> The cover art of the first album displays Krankšvester masquerading in sadomasochistic gimp masks brandishing decapitated mannequins and inflatable dolls, an appropriately sexualized visual accompaniment to the lyrics. In their songs that I discuss in more detail below, drug addicts appear who are completely reliant on their mothers to call the local dealer when they defecate in their pants.<sup>9</sup> The romantic relationships of chronic pornography consumers suffer because their partners are unwilling to perform the same acts as the “Whores from the Internet,” for which a track is

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<sup>6</sup> Brubaker’s analytic that I have now mentioned multiple times is invaluable in both the post-Yugoslav and, I dare say, American context. Populist, engaged rappers often argue that such entrepreneurs strategically promoted vacuous entertainments.

<sup>7</sup> Krankšvester make light of the frustrated aspirations of an increasingly narrow middle class with left and rightwing political leanings every bit as much as they do those of a decadent oligarchy. For the latter, see the 2014 track, “Danijel Popović (*Džuli Novac*).”

<sup>8</sup> For a relevant discussion on the portrayals of *playboys* in Brazilian rap, see Roth-Gordon (2007).

<sup>9</sup> See “Raid” (*Racija*).

eponymously named.<sup>10</sup> Krankšvester's MCs narrate the fun they have as adulterers who fornicate with the wives of *Gastarbeiter* while they are working abroad; and younger women whose rightwing, homophobic boyfriends seek to cover up their sexual confusion by throwing stones at local Gay Pride parades.<sup>11</sup> Their albums feature smarmy odes (each with heavy erotic undertones) to fast automobiles, Croatian seaside vacations, leftist film festivals, and the late Californian hip hop icon, 2Pac Amaru Shakur.<sup>12</sup> In these rapped tales, the MCs voice brand-obsessed consumers, sex-crazed tourists, loose-cannon drinkers, and a particularly domestic variant of "wannabe" gangsta rappers.<sup>13</sup> Their growing videography, for example, shows them sartorially styling pill-popping ravers, mustachioed horny Yugoslav-era crooners, and trap rappers in front of Slavonian cornfields and horse-drawn carriages. Each category is relevant in a social world that Krankšvester portrays (deliberately, problematically, politically incorrectly) as the second-class "ass of the EU." Many artists described this periphery as one of increased economic imbalance and insecurity, musical conformism, political apathy and hypocrisy. However, Krankšvester inhabits the perspectives of those stereotyped social actors whom other rappers routinely denounce, foregrounding links between sexism, nationalisms, and materialisms. While 3ki and Sett rarely break their own morally deplorable characters, listeners are regularly presented with opportunities to consider the group's sincerity by way of their lyrics, album artwork, live performance, over-the-top exaggeration, and self-reflective interviews.

In their recordings, Krankšvester masterfully adopts a broad range of transnational entertainment signs, not only from present-day post-Yugoslav spaces, but also from time-spaces

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<sup>10</sup> See "*Kurve sa neta*."

<sup>11</sup> See "So, You Work Abroad" (*Pa ti radi vani*), the title of which is played on in the follow-up, "There's A Parade For You Outside" (2012; "*Parada ti vani*")

<sup>12</sup> See the 2010 tracks "*Vrum vrum*," "A Summer Scheme/Thing" (*Ljetna shema*), "*Motovun*," "*Krankaveli*."

<sup>13</sup> Intimate and pornographic descriptions of sexual experiences speak to the MCs "perversions" and possible confusion about their sexuality. See the eponymous "*Krankšvester*" and "*Krankaveli*" (2010).

more far flung. Krankšvester's musical compositions feature a diverse range of instrumental sounds, sampled citations, and electronic music styles which serve as creative resources that often underscore their parodic intents. This unspecific range ventures far from classic rap beats into even the aesthetically opposed realms of "hard" gabber and "soft" synth pop, thereby producing an amusing fit to deliberately vulgar texts. Production signifiers of early 1980s New York, 1990s West Coast, and Southern rap of the 2000s all appear, as do reggae, dancehall, dubstep, and various other trendy forms of global edm, pop, and what rappers often view as gauchely consumerist Eurodance tracks. Domestic rock ballads and accordion loops give some songs an occasional Balkan vibe. The instrumentation ranges dramatically to include pianos, synthesizers, cowbells, steel drums, even the *über*-traditional *gusle* and turntable scratches. "Boom bap" DJ Premier-style drum kits used on one track will quickly shift into "old school" electro or *au courant* trap-style by the next. Samples both deliberately index and utilize the aesthetic properties of a similarly wide range of globally and locally distributed artists including pop icon Madonna, Sarajevo's rock legends Indexi, and one of *the* American rappers most often labeled as "conscious," KRS-One.

The language of Krankšvester's albums gains its Southwest South Slavic flair through the duo's use of a wide, yet nonetheless specific range of linguistic codes that point to Croatia's position as a historical borderland between competing empires and today's national and largely privatized mass media conglomerates. Artists who screw around like Krankšvester often distance themselves from standards of "proper" linguistic comportment. Their language play involves a heavy dose of *šatrovački*, "bad" grammar, and calquing creatively from a globalized hip hop lexicon.<sup>14</sup> Vulgar words (nearly every one imaginable for women, sex, and genitalia) and even

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<sup>14</sup> Please see Chapter 4 for a further description of *šatro*.

linguistic registers deemed inappropriate for domestic rap are regularly deployed. Stereotyped Others emerge, not only through music, but with Krankšvester's use of vocal samples, foreign languages and jargons, flow (lyrical prosody), or changes in pitch, timbre, and vocabulary. In-studio or software-based vocal adjustments, autotuning, and other voice-masking techniques add another layer to their dense compositions.<sup>15</sup> Narratives therefore feature the sonic illusion of including many voices beyond those of the MCs. Their pseudonym-clad, ambivalent characters dare listeners to consider what hedonistic celebrity, pornography, politicking, and religiosity might share.

In earlier chapters of this dissertation, I ethnographically explore the implications that a series of domestic hip hop compositional idioms reminiscent of American ones such as “engaged” and “commercial” (*komercijala*) have for artists' moral and pragmatic relationships to lyrics, brands, and music. Despite some similarity to the typological categories that artists, journalists, and scholars often use to describe American hip hop, these BCS+M terms have distinct implications when domesticated. During my fieldwork, these categories were among the more dominant ones that emerged in music reviews, interviews, and lyrics emanating from the domestic hip hop scene(s). These transnational terms hold particular explanatory value when they are treated *not* as pure, hermetically sealed structural categories, but when flexibly used to describe rap's shifting meaning across space, time, and a post-Yugoslav field of social distinctions.

What may seem like humorous “screwing around” to one listener or artist at any given time, may appear deeply serious to another — or both simultaneously. Screwing around is thus

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<sup>15</sup> In the 2010 song “That Money” (*Taj novac*) the pitched down vocals of the chorus were inspired by Memphis' Three 6 Mafia: “Ever since I first became aware of my self, I needed that money, so you better put it in my pocket” (*Otkad znam za sebe/ja sam treb'o taj novac/treb'o taj novac/zato bolje stavi novac u moj džep*).

an entertainingly and dangerously double-voiced dialectic. Sometimes it parodies, other times it recalls the revealing recent exposures of American entertainers, including those of politicians and comedians (see also Hall, Goldstein, and Ingram 2016). It is at once “only” screwing around, as the duo regularly insists, but it is also deeply political.<sup>16</sup> The selves domestic hip hop mediates thus are subject to an ongoing unfolding determinacy, frozen only temporarily in description.

Since hip hop’s emergence as a recognizable genre with mass distribution and a confluence of styles that artists adopted, appropriated, adapted, and otherwise took up far beyond the South Bronx, modernist ideologies of property rights, unique individual ownership, and monoglossic conceptualizations of artists’ biographies have stood at odds with the scene’s creative practices. From sampling to naming conventions, many of hip hop’s performative practices muddle the clarity of a “life history [that] draws closer to the official presentation of the official model of the self (identity card, civil record, curriculum vitae, official biography) and to the philosophy of identity which underlies it (Bourdieu 1987:4).” In the US, this philosophy of identity narrowly conceived also has seen “soul,” a “culture of poverty,” and hypermasculinity mapped onto blackness, as if these were all journalists and ethnographers might find in their writerly forays into American urban “fields” (see Kelley [1997] 2012). In homemade hip hop as elsewhere, naming conventions involved in selecting a pseudonym or *noms de plume* and *guerre* can sometimes signal an important pragmatic frame that stylizes a particular performed voice or figure of personhood (Agha 2005:39; Androutsopoulos and Scholz 2003). Artists’ names can function both as a genre cue and, particularly with secondary pseudonyms that are further removed from primary MC names (like Struka’s “Siggy Stroo,” Magellano’s “Panoptik,” or Ajs

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<sup>16</sup> The recent #metoo movement has once again laid bare a thin ethical line between self-aware satire and tolerance for abusive symbolic if not physical violence.

Nigrutin's "Ajzaklija Stomaklija") monikers often imply a unique moral alignment to the lyrics being rapped or the playlist being mixed.

In rap, isomorphic, one-to-one relations between text and artist may emerge, but that relationship is always subject to a potential re-working suggesting that hip hop performances, like other (in)animate things, do indeed have a social life. When MCs foreground screwing around, linguistic play, musical masking, and the ambivalent use of different characters often in storytelling becomes paramount. In discussing one of his approaches to writing lyrics, Sett argued:

Being burdened with money is bad. But I won't tell you that. I will tell you that I am crazy about money, and money is all that I want. I want money. Which means that I will make fun (*isprdatću se*) of that materialism, but generally it seems stupid to me to say, "Shun materialism! Embrace the spiritual!" Be honest, and tell me, have you ever really listened to those people? It bothers me when somebody acts like they are better, and starts to tell me something as if I don't already know it. You know what I mean?<sup>17</sup>

Like many rappers before them, Krankšvester offers a chance for their listeners to move away from thinking of the musical self "as a structured, fixed, and (as is often hoped in the psychological literature) consistent and harmonious 'thing' (Basso 1988:68)," and thus think of identity more in terms of an ongoing unfolding (in)determinacy (see also Brubaker 2004). Many regional performers claim that one of the strengths of rap as a genre is that it allows them to "throw something out from themselves (*izbacit' nešto iz sebe*)." That "something" is often a subject who speaks in multiple voices wearing different masks.

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<sup>17</sup> "Opterećenost novcem je loše. Ali ti neću to reći, ja ću ti reći da sam lud za novcem da bih samo novce hoću. Hoću novce. Znači, isprdatću se sa tim materijalizmom, a opće, ali glupo mi je govorit o tom sad, 'kloni se materijalizma! Okreni se duhovnom!' Budi iskren i reci mi da li stvarno ikad slušaš takve ljude, ono? Smeta me to kad mi neko, jel, može da se ponašat kao da je bolji, kao da on meni govori nešto ja već ne znam. Znaš?"

Some studies of hip hop consider the genre's messages in either/or terms. Rap lyrics are "revolutionary," romantically "resistant" to some hegemonic status quo, or alternatively, merely indicative of misogyny, pathology, nihilism, or none-too-latent homophobia. Performances are rendered self-evident through the magic of critical meta-commentary.<sup>18</sup> However, as Alim, Lee, and Carris (2010) argue with regard to Los Angeles rap battles, hip hop's stylized performances of social Others often reflect dominant hierarchies at the same time as they undermine them. Newman (2009:199) has also shown that teenage MCs with whom he worked were often quick to render their adherence to rapped sexist and homophobic utterances opaque, deploying verbal signals that implied their boasts were "all concept, and nothing real." And Rodman (2012:184 [2006]) has added: "Taken as an abstract question of form and style, it's relatively easy to recognize that the lines between the autobiographical and the fictional 'I' are often hopelessly blurred." As a corollary to these arguments, I suggest that screwing around is best considered as a double-voiced, alternatively both parodic and sincere, processual category that appears with high frequency, disappears as quickly as it came, and reemerges as a salient descriptor of the works of many homemade hip hop artists.

One can easily get carried away with hip hop's postmodern impulses without acknowledgment of the fact that many performers and audiences adhere to a modern ideology that sees author, animator, and principal as closely aligned, i.e., a "you are what you say (sample, compose, wear, etc.)" model.<sup>19</sup> Artists' attribution of clear semantic meaning to rap lyrics, whether in formal journalistic interviews or informal conversation, might be described along a

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<sup>18</sup> This "all-or-nothing" approach to analysis is replicated in the debate about whether or not the genre remains global, was always-already local, or perhaps even "glocal" (see Pennycook and Mitchell 2009).

<sup>19</sup> This parallels Newman's findings: "In sum, we find the MCs navigating, mostly but not always successfully, a complex system relating verbal and real violence and conflict generally. Potential violence could be shifted to the virtual form of battles, but verbal insults, in or out of battles, could be subject to transparent or opaque interpretations, although the choice between them was not always clear (2009:202)."

spectrum with opacity at one end (“the lyrics are open to interpretation”), and transparency at the other (“this is what I meant”). For example, line after line on Krankšvester’s albums poke fun at rappers who take themselves too seriously by peddling “that social” (*ta sozijala*; message) or an explicitly earnest “social engagement” (*angažman*). They thus use the interview setting to set their recordings apart from ultra-sincere engaged or street rap that I describe in earlier chapters. As Sett himself implies in the epigraph above, their performance is also open to all sorts of substantive critique from social groups bearing “the mark of the plural (Rivera 2012:426 [2003]).” Sensitive social differences once again become interchangeable in the discourses of two heterosexual men.

3ki and Sett’s discography, interviews, and other performances raise many of the ethical questions that are central to parody. Is an artist responsible for an audience’s (mis)interpretation of misogynistic, homophobic, and nationalistic chauvinisms? What forms of exclusionary self-Other distinction-making are articulated in domestic rap and who are its targets? What are the ethical stakes reinforcing the problematic American and domestic performances that have been canonized as key texts in hip hop as a genre? Is drawing a distinction between author, animator, and principal justified, or does such distancing merely serve as yet another means of absolving performers of responsibility? I do not seek to answer these questions in this chapter. I instead examine how performers who situate themselves directly within the terms of hip hop’s “most notorious problems (Newman 2009)” think about their responsibility vis-à-vis audiences.

Krankšvester’s work is also in many ways consistent with a long transnational genealogy of hip hop parody, and thus regularly articulates alignments to, or alternatively, symbolic distance from what Kitwana (2002) has called the “Hip Hop Generation” and Alim (2006) has referred to as the “Global Hip Hop Nation.” Poking fun at some audience frustrations with not being able to pin

down Krankšvester's "real" voices, 3ki offered an Austro-American technometaphor: "it's as if you walk up to Schwarzenegger and ask, 'hey, why aren't you *The Terminator*?'"

### **Play with Domestic Rap Performance Frameworks**

Tonči Kožul (2012), a prominent Zagreb-based music journalist, wrote a rave review of one of Krankšvester's early live performances at the Factory of Culture (*Tvornica Kulture*) club and claimed he was particularly impressed by the rappers' ability to tack between what he argues are two dominant categories of homemade hip hop. "Screwing around" and "engaged" rap could flatten performances when they masquerade as "pure" typological categories, but the point of Kožul's review was precisely that Krankšvester straddled the two admirably. In my haphazard, choppy, but multiple field experiences with artists, there are also other frameworks within which artists describe homemade hip hop that are central to understanding Krankšvester's commentary.

In one of the earliest published scholarly studies on Croatian hip hop, Bosanac (2003) argues that the presence of American performers in club and festival venues during the late 1990s were often of great symbolic importance to local artists, performers, and fans. The presence of African-American performers like Afrika Bambaataa, Ice T, Public Enemy, Big L and others served as the concrete manifestation of a connection to a globally significant music genre at a time when ex-YU's newly transnational music industries were more isolated than they had been from global markets at any point since the 1960s. As festival lineups along the Adriatic attest, the US continues to be an influential point of reference for homemade hip hop audiences. Given the historiographically constructed emphasis on the urban US as a key geographic point of hip hop's origin and continued innovation, American categories that have been employed by artists, journalists, documentarians, the global music industry and its Big Three "music groups" such as "conscious," "underground," "commercial," or "gangsta" often develop locally specific

significations, canons, and associated performers in each of so-called global hip hops' diverse scenes.<sup>20</sup>

As a subgeneric style, language ideology, and thematic imperative, screwing around is a performance framework for ex-YU hip hop composition that prioritizes self-deprecating humor, pleasure seeking, parodic social critique and building solidarity (primarily among men) along largely politically incorrect lines. Female performers like Bitches on Grass (Bičarke na travi), Sajsi MC, and more recently Mimi Mercedez have also composed in this register, but as is the case in homemade hip hop generally, they are not as prominent as their male counterparts. While it has American analogs, screwing around while appropriating the stylistic signifiers of hip hop is very visible across ex-YU spaces. In beat production, lyric composition, album packaging, live performance, interviews, and a range of other communicative forms, the priority is to entertain potential audiences by way of humor, breaking taboo, and deliberately violating many of the dominant standards that typically orient practice, both within hip hop and elsewhere. Instead of grand considerations of national, regional, or global politics, screwing around rap often thematizes what on the surface appears to be more mundane and everyday, like trips to the market, dealing with parking attendants, and partying in the club.<sup>21</sup> Sometimes tales of the otherworldly fantastical also emerge. Artists who screw around revel in providing explicit description of traditionally “private” spheres of sociality, including sexual intercourse, foreplay, hetero- and homosexual relations. As we see in Chapter 4, stereotyped performances of Italian, Hungarian, German, “gypsy,” and a range of other ethnonational, social, and professional

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<sup>20</sup> In September 2012, after the US Federal Trade Commission approved the merger of Universal and EMI, it was estimated that their combined market share meant that they controlled a whopping 40% of *all* recorded global music sales, making the post-merger company the largest of the remaining Big Three (including Sony and Warner Music Group). Combined, Sony, Warner, and Universal-EMI are purported to control 90% of all international music sales (Carter and Cherkis 2012).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Ajs Nigrutin's 2008 “Henpecked Househusband” (*Papučar*) and Bad Copy's “Žoor.”

identities are mobilized in screwing around composition. On the other hand, artists generally avoid essentializing rapped descriptions of Croats, Serbs, and Bosniacs unless critiques are self-directed. Wald's enumeration of the terms in which the "dozens" or "playing the dozens" has been described in the US American context: "tricky, aggressive, offensive, clever, brutal, funny, inventive, stupid, violent, misogynistic, psychologically intricate, deliberately misleading—or all of that at once, wrapped in a single rhyming couplet (2012:3)," echoes how screwing around rap sounds in ex-YU. However, journalistic and artistic discourses that frame a dichotomous division between "engaged" vs. "screwing around" rap can erase how elements of each regularly exist within the other.<sup>22</sup>

Given the fact both Sett and 3ki have different forms of employment, one as a postal worker in Osijek and the other as an op-ed columnist, neither is "burdened" with the next-to-impossible professional task of subsisting from hip hop music in Croatia. 3ki argued that the fact that Krankšvester, like many of their peers, treat hip hop as a "hobby" offered some distinct compositional advantages. After seeing nearly nothing in the form of financial recompense for the release of their individual solo albums with Aquarius Records, 3ki and Sett decided to embrace the "opportunity" to avoid the dictates of being "radio-friendly." In contrast, writing particular "hit" texts or accepting a gig at a "trendy" club filled with "make-up-ers" (*šminkeri*), "urban villagerdom" (*urbana seljačina*), "posers" (*pozeri*), or latter-day "*Dizelaši*" can involve aesthetic compromise and a temporary distancing from one's "true" sense of morality and "real"

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<sup>22</sup> Rap performance frameworks also emerge in discourse as axes of differentiation, a cultural dichotomy seen to exist between two social groups and their registers, the values of which are understood to contrast according to a perspectival mapping of their respective essentialized traits (Gal 2012). Since these dichotomous axes of differentiation essentialize, they also involve the semiotic process of erasure (Irvine and Gal 2000), and thus internal variation is obscured behind a veil of supposed homogeneity on each side of an axis.

aesthetic interests.<sup>23</sup> Krankšvester parodies local musical discourse that insists upon glorifying the “engaged” and “street” tradition, or alternatively, abandoning both entirely in order to garner recompense through “commercial” self-interest. To the voices that they animate in their songs, composing any sort of music is often first and foremost a means to sexual gratification.

Underscoring through humor the imagined symbolic distance of ex-YU from the urban US thus becomes a one key strategy of performers who screwing around and frequently target their street-centric peers. One classic example lies in the aforementioned group Bad Copy’s opus, when they celebrate “South Central Kotež.” This imagined geographic identification and the name, “Bad Copy” play on awkward symbolic connections to American hip hop. The peripheral settlement from where two of the group members hail is to the north and east of Belgrade’s historic center, and in the description of some observers, is far more mundane than the globally circulated images of South Central Los Angeles (Arsenijević 2009). Rappers in ex-YU are thus often attacked as not sufficiently indigenous, not only by music ideologies outside of homemade hip hop scenes, but from within its community of practitioners. Most domestic performers acknowledge and often celebrate their American counterparts’ lyrics, beats, and most memorable performances. However, mimicry of the global canon is also critiqued as “superstandardized (Bucholtz 2001; 2011):” that is, too reminiscent of musical, linguistic, or performative behaviors that iconically index American artists and the inverted prestige hierarchy globally distributed performers have created through the re-signification of whiteness as hip hop’s racial Other (Alim 2006; Alim, Lee, Carris 2010; and Culter 2009).

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<sup>23</sup> “Urban villagerdom” is a term that frequent Krankšvester collaborator, Kandžija, used on an eponymous 2009 track. He plays with the negative domestic significations of the “villager” (*seljak*), and argues that supposedly urbane club goers are often equally retrograde. Wearers of the Diesel-brand once figured as a primary sign of 1990s cheap social climbing and crassly accumulated new wealth.

“Commercial,” “engaged,” and “street” are, of course, just a handful of the frames in which homemade hip hop is described. The relationship of each to the artist’s imagined “true” self is important to make Krankšvester’s multimodal performances more legible. “Battling,” the domestic iterations of which I discuss further in Chapter 4, is one other important frame to take into account when considering screwing around’s style and compositional ethics. “Battle rap” also signals how audiences should interpret performance through countless implicit and explicit signs that the identity of a performer and his text should not be necessarily considered in one-to-one relation. Culpability can always be sidestepped by appealing to the mode of lyrical production: texts were composed during a battle, thus they should have been improvised, and should not be taken *necessarily* as indicative of a performer’s true beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

In my following consideration of techniques employed in Krankšvester’s opus, I am particularly interested in how artists’ who describe their work within the “screwing around” frame engage in musical and linguistic role-play that is supposedly “not serious.” I will necessarily devote less time to other elements of their multifaceted performance. For example, their video compositions (some of which appear to have been created under the pseudonym, “VJ Dario Yebote”) could also be the subject of a lengthy analysis.<sup>25</sup> Krankšvester’s live performance also incorporates extravagant costumed attempts to highlight the shadiness of their sincerity: dressed in monastic habits, they opened a Vukovar show that I attended with their backs to the crowd. When DJ Dirty Hairy let the first bass beat drop, Krankšvester turned around, began rapping, and slowly shed their frocks to reveal cheap pastel suits. These, along with sunglasses, could be read as a multivalent attempt to index the detectives from the “Miami Vice” TV Series,

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<sup>24</sup> Krankšvester’s variety of lyrical battles can be considered as a braggadocio/bragging content form, a lyrical method American rappers use to examine certain themes (Edwards 2009:23-39).

<sup>25</sup> This name might best translate to “VJ Danny Phucku.”

pimps, and the Miami (Booty) Bass lyrical themes made (in)famous by the ever-scandalous, ever-explicit 2 Live Crew, one of 3ki's primary pornorap influences. The Slavonians' performance at the Blackout Festival was a rather dramatic turn from the sort of affective musical event that might typically be broadcast from Vukovar. The city was one of the most tragic sites of fighting during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and has been consistently presented as such in the post-war Croatian historiography, often to the exclusion of other themes (see Kardov 2007). The show thus operated dialogically and conflicted with my expectations for the prerequisite solemn expression of solidarity with the victims and their families that are frequently broadcast on HRT. Krankšvester's playful use of markedly Catholic garb also coincided with a statement about current events, occurring rather close in the calendar to Pope Benedict's divisive last papal visit to Croatia, during which the state spent millions on security and television stagecraft in order to bring the Holy See's message to the largely underemployed masses.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Themes of Krankšvester-ian Screwing Around**

When "screwing around" is foregrounded, linguistic play, musical masking, and the ambivalent use of different roles and codes in heteroglossic storytelling becomes paramount. Performer identities, songs, and even the shortest of single rhymed couplets might draw inspiration from US American "naughty by nature" acts like 2 Live Crew, Too Short, Kool Keith, or "rap clowns" like Biz Markie. His voice laden in autotune filters and heavily Slavicized pronunciations of Anglicisms, Sett greedily argues to the audience on the final song on Krankšvester's 2010 self-titled album: "If you love *keš*, *mani*/cram it in your bum, *hani* ("Keš-Mani/Our Father Gabber Master Mix;" *Oče Naš*)." However, "screwing around" as a style-*cum-*

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<sup>26</sup> Indeed, the Catholic Church emerges at a variety of points as a site of critique on the albums. See, for example, the song "Disco Cancer" (*Disko rak*), which I discuss further below.

subgenre-*cum*-ideology also stands in intimate relation to what artists often frame as Balkan contexts of production, distribution, and reception. Screwing around often offends social protocols quite deliberately by giving exaggerated voice to the consumerism, sexism, and nationalism rappers portray as indicative of their audiences in ex-YU. Zagreb's Bolesna braća (Sick Brothers, or "Sick Rhyme Sayazz" as they render their own name in English), Split's Dječaci, (Boys), Belgrade's Prti Bee Gee, and perhaps the most (in)famous, Bad Copy, are among the most active and prolific performers whose lyrics, beats, and performances are regularly framed as screwing around when they compose. The work of many more rock-oriented domestic performers such as Hladno pivo (Cold Beer), Let3, Rambo Amadeus, and the late Slavonian punk performer, Satan panonski (Pannonian Satan) also share considerable parodic elements, such that audiences also see them as sometimes screwing around.

Rappers who screw around often appear to revel in satirizing and poking fun at their peers whose artistic output is framed as "too street," "too engaged," "too commercial," "too American," "too nationalistic," "too black," or otherwise distanced from a shifting essentialized image of what it means to be "authentically" local. Rappers who "screw around" argue implicitly and explicitly that "engaged" and "street" rap can be frustratingly hegemonic.

Rappers who take themselves and their messages too seriously are lampooned regularly in lyrics that appear on Sett and 3ki's early solo albums. In different ways, each record features lyrical articulations of perspectives that I heard many times during my fieldwork: 1) explicit political engagement in rap was considered by those who preferred to "screw around" as pretentious, thus engaged rappers' celebration in the press was tempered by their peers; 2) domestic rap could easily be policed as inauthentic if it too closely ran thematically parallel to its more globally distributed recordings from the US; 3) to those who screw around, rapping with

the hope of inspiring concrete political change was not only pompous, but also potentially futile, because “no one was listening” to hip hop given its marginalization in the domestic mass media.

On the 2009 track “*Zeitgeist*” that appears on his solo album “A Guide through Life for the Carefree” (*Vodić kroz život za bezbrižne*), Sett describes the life of an “urban artist” who channel surfs on the couch, spends the bulk of his salary on clothes, all while warning everyone he meets of the world’s imminent collapse. The chorus of this self-described “fuck rap” song “for pessimists” runs “There’s no social engagement/This is for lazy people (*Nema socijalnog angžmana (2x)/Ovo je za lijene ljude, za lijene ljude*).” In the third verse, Sett calls out to an intended audience in the voice of a rapper who is described in markedly negative terms:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 The world is in disarray, I am watching<br>“Sponge Bob”               | <i>Svijet je u rasulu, ja gledam Spužva Boba</i>  |
| 2 I pose like an urban artist because I am a<br>shepherd                | <i>Poziram ko urbani izvođač jer sam čoban</i>    |
| 3 My rhymes are terrible, I say what I see                              | <i>Rime su mi grozne, pričam to što vidim</i>     |
| 4 Everyone looks at me dully as if I am<br>speaking Yiddish             | <i>Svi me tupo gledaju ko da pričam jidiš</i>     |
| 5 The crew is looking for music that they can<br>fuck to                | <i>Ekipa traži glazbu uz koju mogu jebat</i>      |
| 6 Only critics speak of that which we need                              | <i>Samo kritičari govore o tome što nam treba</i> |
| 7 Fuck rap because this is pop for pessimists                           | <i>Jebo rap jer ovo je pop za pesimiste</i>       |
| 8 who are looking for three clean people<br>among four and half million | <i>Što u 4 i po milijuna traže tri čiste</i>      |

In the first five bars, Sett describes himself as a rapper who watches cartoons while the world is in disarray (Line 1). This imagined MC “poses” as an urban artist, but is in reality a “shepherd,” a term which refers to the imagined rural backwardness of the speaker (Line 2). Bored with his “terrible” lyrics as if they were hearing a markedly foreign language (Yiddish), the rapper admits that his audience is ultimately more interested in music to which they can have sex than that which has a message (Lines 3-5). By lines 6-8, Sett already shifts his voice away from that of an

imagined MC, and suggests that critics are the “only” ones who say what the country needs, and offers a conclusion about his own compositional genre: “fuck rap, because this is pop for pessimists/who are looking for three clean people among four and half million (*Jebo rap jer ovo je pop za pesimiste/Što u 4 i po milijuna traže tri čiste*),” that is, within the entire population of Croatia.

When they formed Krankšvester and recorded in their first album in 2010, Sett found a responsive interlocutor and future collaborator in 3ki. The latter’s 2006 track “Brawl/Chaos” (*Tarapana*) from the album “Circus” (*Cirkus*) features a cross-border collaboration with Ajs Nigrutin, Brka, and Kandžija. The chorus runs:

|   |                                |
|---|--------------------------------|
| 1 Raise the glasses, bottles                                      | Dignite čaše, flaše            |
| 2 Let the neighbors be scared                                     | Nek’ se susjedi plaše          |
| 3 Let the whole club jump   | Nek’ cijeli club da skače      |
| 4 (Girl, pull down your panties!)                                 | (Curo, skidajte gače!)         |
| 5 Break the bottles, glasses                                      | Razbijajte flaše, čaše         |
| 6 Put your hands in the air for Balkanites, for all of our people | za Balkance, za sve druge naše |

In contrast to recorded transnational appeals for peace that problematize political-economic “transition,” nationalist historiography of the post-war era, and lingering interethnic animosity, i.e., themes of the utmost gravity, songs like “Brawl/Chaos” situate rappers in the transnational *kafana* chronotope. Serbian writer Vladimir Arsenijević (2009) opines as he describes the evolution and present-day signification Belgradian and regional *kafana* as a one-time Ottoman-turned-classic-Balkan site of a tragic-comic party, also regularly invoked in Emir Kusturica’s films:

Today, in kafanas we get drunk and eat to our hearts’ content. In the meantime, *kafana* gastronomy became an entirely separate culinary branch. Here, live music regularly plays. *Kafanas* lost that meditative function that they once had, but in

them, we still find the same spirit of inertness that once made up the very essence of the Ottoman Empire (37)<sup>27</sup>

Here, the rappers inhabit a regional stereotype of drunken misbehavior (Lines 1 and 5) that manifests itself as gendered heteronormative sexism (Line 4). This song also interpellates a transnational, domestic audience, but incites the audience it invokes to party (Lines 6-7). Even during its 1990s nadir, the symbolic geographic value the West associated with the “Balkans” was never entirely negative (see Brubaker 2004), but instead facilitated longstanding “positive stereotypes” indicative of a “savage slot” (Trouillot 2003). This Western representation exoticized ex-YU as inhabited by peoples who possessed “super-musicality,” “warm” hospitality, and a propensity for “wild” partying. 3ki, his collaborators on “Brawl/Chaos,” and his future work with Sett in Krankšvester “self-Balkanize” by framing their actions as that of “out-of-control” proverbial meatheads. Through ambivalent voices, 3ki and Sett perform roles that they do not necessarily condone and what emerges is an image of a social landscape in which most men (and quite a few women, too) are motivated by relatively amoral decadence.

Krankšvester serves as a frame for a particular type of performance akin to American hip hop characters such as Nas’ alter-alter-ego “Nasty Nas,” RZA’s “Bobby Digital,” or Little Brother’s *Minstrel Show* concept album. The self-titled track on the Krankšvester’s first self-titled record from 2010 serves as a memorable moment of self-introduction, Sett’s first verse exclaims:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 Take off those shirts, bras, and vests         | <i>Skidajte te majice, grudnjake i veste</i>    |
| 2 rub your pussies, Krankšvester is on the stage | <i>Trljajte pičoke, na bini je Krankšvester</i> |
| 3 Boys who love sex and rap about the same       | <i>Momci koji vole seks i repaju o istom</i>    |

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<sup>27</sup> “U kafanama se danas napijamo, jedemo do mile volje, kafansko kulinarnstvo u međuvremenu postalo je čitava jedna odvojena kulinarska grana, tu često svira živa muzika, kafane su izgubile onu meditativnu funkciju koju su nekada imale, ali u njima još uvek nalazimo isti onaj duh inertnosti koji je nekad činio samu suštinu Otomanske imperije.”

|   |  |
|---|--|
| 4 Who hang out with tits and hang out with cunts        | <i>Druže se sa sisama i druže se sa pizdom</i>   |
| 5 I talk about that fucking, my rhymes are vulgar       | <i>Pričam o tom jebanju, rime su mi vulgarne</i> |
| 6 I want to fuck Serbian, Croatian, and Bulgarian girls | <i>Želim jebat Srпкиnje, Hrvatice, i Bugarke</i> |
| 7 It's enough that you are alive and drink water        | <i>Dovoljno je ako si živa i piješ vodu</i>      |
| 8 Greetings to my people, Fabio and Škoda               | <i>Pozdravljam svoje ljude Fabia i Škodu</i>     |

Throughout the first verse, Sett frames himself as a hypersexualized character whose vocabulary is as “vulgar” as his desires. Unlike an imagined group of rightwing peers, who are the subjects of countless disses in other songs, Sett claims to be far less concerned with a woman’s national identity than he his with her basic anatomy (Lines 5-6). While the performance as Sett says is eminently “open to criticism,” accusations of male chauvinism, and misogynistic objectification, the claim can also be made that a social type is being lampooned as a sleaze, one obsessed with the “cheap” thrill of easy sexual gratification often to his own embarrassing detriment. 3ki elaborates on the group’s identity with a variety of local, negatively imbued similes that continue the performance of a social type:

|  |   |
|--|---|
| 1 A shepherd like Milan Bandić, with rhymes, I defend like Ladić with all of my powers | <i>Čoban poput Bandića Milana, branim poput Ladića, svim silama</i> |
| 2 a real peasant like Radić  | <i>Prava seljaka poput Radića, rimama</i>                           |
| 3 I behave so stupidly that I am even bluntly smart                                    | <i>Tolko glupim da i pametnog zatupim</i>                           |
| 4 I bust big ballsy raps, you cannot buy this shit <sup>28</sup>                       | <i>Lupim repčugom do jaja, ovo sranje nemoš kupit</i>               |
| 5 And don't be mad about what's being prepared, only dick, cunt, and cum               | <i>Ni ne slutiš što se sprema, samo kurac, pička, sperma</i>        |
| 6 There is no doubt that we have thoroughly fucked with such a large sum of women      | <i>Sumnje nema da smo izjebali tolku sumu žena</i>                  |
| 7 As we say, there will be problems, I don't think we are lying                        | <i>Ko što kažemo, problema bit će, ne mislim da lažemo</i>          |
| 8 Fuck that rap of yours, it's mercilessly flattened                                   | <i>Zajebi taj tvoj rep, bez milosti je zgaženo</i>                  |

<sup>28</sup> In BCS+M rap, the term “shit” is multivalent and often connotes something positive as it does in other hip hop traditions.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 9 This is what you've been looking for,<br>something that you can kick up dust to | <i>Ovo je što si tražio, nešto uz čeg bi prašio</i> |
| 10 Let this shit play while you receive fellatio                                  | <i>Nek ovo sranje svira dok dobivaš fellatio</i>    |
| 11 Better than Viagra, you are listening to two<br>old hooligans                  | <i>Bolje od Viagre, slušaš stare dvije mange</i>    |
| 12 Put your hands in the air, if you like to lick<br>bearded clams                | <i>Digni ruke u zrak, ako voliš lizat dagnje</i>    |

From the very beginning, Krankšvester situate their performance in a wide array of lyrical references to domestic celebrities, the past and present Croatian political establishment (Lines 1-3), and most obviously, to sexual acts ranging from oral foreplay to intercourse. Since 2000, Social Democrat Milan Bandić has essentially served a Daley-esque uninterrupted term as Zagreb's mayor, despite a demotion to the office of deputy mayor between 2004-05. Bandić has also been implicated in drunk driving incidents (one during which he threatened the job of a police officer who reported the crash), politically motivated firings, the public use of sexist obscenity, and shady land acquisition dealings. Among Bandić's other none-too-forgettable moments, he drew particular negative attention when the press caught wind of his positive citation of the Nazi motto "Work Makes (One) Free" (*Arbeit macht frei*), which once adorned the entrances to Europe's most notorious concentration camps during World War II. Dražen Ladić was a famous Croatian goalkeeper turned soccer manager, who was fired for seriously injuring passengers of a Renault in his Mercedes at a Zagreb intersection. By rhyming "Bandić" with "Ladić," 3ki deliberately situates his own biography by way of analogy within the scandalous personal histories of two public figures of negative notoriety. When 3ki claims to be "defending the rights of peasants" a double-entendre (Line 2) is invoked, which could also mean "defending real hillbillies." When describing a masculine noun, the adjective for "real" (*prava*) is also the word for "rights." The early 20<sup>th</sup> century Croatian politician, Stjepan Radić agitated not only for

the rights of agricultural workers, but also for increased Croatian independence during the reign of the Belgrade-based Karađorđević dynasty which ruled over the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes and later became the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Given his biography and untimely assassination, Radić has been increasingly commemorated and celebrated since the 1990s as one of the leading intellectual figures of 20<sup>th</sup> century initiatives for Croatian independence. “*Prava seljaka*” should translate to the “rights of agriculturalists,” but if one allows for incorrect grammar and slang, this could also mean “a real boor” or “the rights of boors.” In BCS+M, the term “villager” (*seljak*) is often used beyond its literal meaning as an insult for someone who is unrefined or uneducated, which the use of incorrect grammar underscores. By situating his lyrics in the idiom of “defending the rights of hillbillies,” the self-titled track of the first self-titled album serves as a warning: a celebration of dick, cum, fellatio, bearded clams, in short, the Viagra-induced party hosted by “two old hooligans” is “all” that follows (Lines 5-12).

Despite their careful maintenance of resolutely unpretentious personas, Krankšvester and their domestic counterparts who screw around often propagate alternative codes of conduct and hierarchies of meaning than their explicit self-ascription to “anti-message,” “un-conscious” hip hop implies. In our interview in 2011, Sett argued that in his opinion, satirical messages were sometimes far more effective at influencing audiences, despite being far less “preachy” than ones that are “crystal clear” to everyone:

I think that it is sometimes the best way, you know? I think that enough people have said that you shouldn't beat your wife. Hey, that's clear to everyone. It's a terribly crystal clear situation, and that's not the message that you want to give. But we just chose, let's say, a satirical way in order to discuss it without preaching to someone, but through entertainment you can grasp how absurd the situation is. So, I will put myself in the role of the aggressor, be stupid, be disgusting, and push it to some bizarre extent and at the very end let you know

that such behavior is wrong. But at the same time, I never said: “Hey, you shouldn’t beat your wife!” I mean, if one has to say that to you, fuck it.<sup>29</sup>

At a later point in the interview, Sett claims that there are enough rappers trying to propagate some morality, and gives brief voice to the moral tone of their lyrics: ““this is bad, this is evil, this is negative, bla, bla, bla.””<sup>30</sup> All of the techniques that *Krankšvester* employ suggest a symbolic distance between the MCs and their creative works, which was further underscored at various points in my interviews with 3ki and Sett.

In the following section, I will closely read “Motovun” and “A Summer Scheme/Thing” (2010; *Ljetna shema*), two *Krankšvester*-ian recorded interpretations of summer lifestyle consumer culture in Croatia about which I elicited explicit commentary from Sett and 3ki. Despite a downturn due to the global recession in 2008, tourism has been one of the few industries in ex-YU that has continued to expand since the war. The Croatian National Tourist Board’s slogan: “The Mediterranean as it Once Was” interpellates an English-speaking subject whose geographic knowledge is limited and assumes he can travel backward in time through a trip to Central-South-Eastern Europe. The fantastical proposition and deliberately anachronistic campaign is rendered more ridiculous through *Krankšvester*’s description of political imbalances, hedonism, and sexual exhibitionism that they map onto both domestic and foreign tourists’ experiences of summer months along the sunny Adriatic.

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<sup>29</sup> “*Mislim da je ponekad najbolji način, jel. Mislim da je dosta ljudi je reklo da ne bi trebao tući svoju ženu. Hej, to je svima jasno. To je užasno, to je kristalno jasno situacija, i da to je poruka koju ne želiš dati. Ali mi smo samo izabrali taj, hajde, satiričan način može da o tom pričamo da u isto vrijeme ne propovijedamo nekom, nego kroz zabavu shvatiš koliko je to apsurdna situacija. Dakle, ja ću se staviti u ulogu nasilnika, bit glup, bit odvratna, to dovući do bizarnih nekih razmera i na kraju ti dat doznanje da to ponašanje je pogrešno, a da ti u isto vrijeme nisam nikad rekao, ‘E, nemoj tući svoju ženu!’ Mislim, znaš, ako ti to treba reći, jebi ga.”*

<sup>30</sup> “*To je loše. To je zlo. To je negativno. Bla, bla, bla.’ To su ti svi rekli. Takvih repera imaš dovoljno.”*

## Screwing Around Musically

Krankšvester's musical performance utilizes a broad swath of globalized genres, their concomitant signifiers, and discographic references in order to inspire laughter given their incongruous "fits" imagined as locally awkward. The smooth, melodic near-whispers of the opening studio patter kick off "A Summer Scheme/Thing" as follows: "Sweetheart, I am taking you to the seaside/bring a towel and make three sandwiches for the trip/we'll go through Bosnia/shorty, you know what's waiting for you..."<sup>31</sup> This curious, potentially romantic frame stands in contrast to the remainder of the parodic love song, which quickly evolves into a "thick description" of the sexual proclivities of the protagonists once the narrative reaches the coast. Heading through divided Bosnia reminds the listener that Krankšvester's decadent party with foreign tourists occurs in a context of still-unresolved political tensions and economic imbalance. This imbalance is reiterated toward the end of the song in the ambivalently both welcoming and threatening couplet: "please come back to us, we will all wait for you/the waiters will steal, and we will fuck you."<sup>32</sup> The song also represents a more "brutal" variant of performances by the massively-popular Split-based rap "crossover" group, tbf, and their critiques of the rapid privatization of the Dalmatian coast that occurred once the SFRY's borders had been flung open to the incursions of foreign capital (Škokić 2007).<sup>33</sup> Like tbf, Krankšvester's performance might be read as expressing some of the same skepticism about the merits of a national economy so wedded to the fleeting whims of cosmopolitan tourists.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Dragice, vodim te na more. Ponesi ručnik i napravi tri sendviča za put. Idemo preko Bosne. Malena, znaš šta te čeka..."

<sup>32</sup> "Dođite nam opet, svi ćemo vas čekati/konobari krast će, mi ćemo vas jebati"

<sup>33</sup> See also tbf's "Heroyix," "Intropathy" (*Intropatija*), "Don't Know What I Would Say" (*Ne znan šta bi reka*), and "Be Like Us" (*Budite kao mi*).

<sup>34</sup> The creative play with Adriatic vacation clichés in "A Summer Scheme/Thing" can also be read as a nationally-intimate register (Herzfeld 2004) of gendered joking such as that offered by President Ivo Josipović during a widely-panned February 2011 speech at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. Alongside a continued

When the light, pop-py musical track begins, a synth-laden melody that invokes an anachronistic hybrid between DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince's "Summertime" (1991) and a George Michael's "Freedom! '90," 3ki and Sett express their excitement about chasing bikini-clad "hangerijan," "đerman," and other women around the beach with the intent of publicly reciprocating oral sex, regardless of whether or not the "cool" Czechs criticize them.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the vulgarity, the language on the song features a series of heavily Slavicized English lexical items that is consistent with many other screwing around performances.<sup>36</sup> During the heavily autotune-corrected, falsetto melody of the bridge, Sett sings, "They come from all sides/from Spain and Iran/from Norway and even Greece/We will lick all of their pussies,"<sup>37</sup> a message which builds directly upon the song's Cunninlynguist-inspired chorus: "Everyone wants

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emphasis on regional economic cooperation and good diplomatic relations with Croatia's neighbors, Josipović expressed optimism that the students whom he addressed would enjoy consuming another product the tourist industry never fails to advertise, "because our sea is crystal clear, and as my wife hates to hear, I can say that our girls are quite beautiful (see Hrgović 2011)." In a critical commentary that playfully compared a Josipović quote to comedian Sasha Baron Cohen's *faux*-Kazakh journalist "Borat" on Croatia's *VoxFeminae* portal, Hrgović invokes the 2006 film's title when she writes: "Probably carried away with the atmosphere of American cultural learnings for make benefit glorious state of Croatia (sic), Josipović stopped nodding his head and expressed untempered optimism (about the future of Croatian tourism)...Real idyll. Just as at the beginning of *Borat* when the Kazakh journalist introduces his family in his native village of Kuzcek and, totally radiating with pride, cites his sister as the fourth best prostitute in Kazakhstan, Josipović's native Croatia has its touristic trump card: quite beautiful girls (*Ponesen, valjda, atmosferom učenja o američka kultura za boljitak veličanstveno država Hrvatska, Josipović je stao klimati glavom i izrazio nepokolebani optimizam 'jer je naše more kristalno čisto, a kako moja žena ne sluša, mogu reći i da imamo prelijepje djevojke.'* *Prava idila. Baš kao na početku 'Borata' kad kazahstanski novinar predstavlja svoju obitelj u rodnom selu Kuzceku i sav ozaren od ponosa navodi kako je njegova sestra četvrta najbolja prostitutka u Kazahstanu, tako i Josipovićeva rodna Hrvatska ima svoje turističke adute: prelijepje djevojke.*)" Here, the single-minded Krankšvester caricature of male chauvinism echoes the feminist critique of Josipović's Ivy League gaff. Hrgović elaborates on her metaphor of Cohen's *Borat-qua*-Josipović "He who isn't drawn to Kuzceka can hop over to the Adriatic coast, maybe it's a bit more expensive, but the sea is crystal clear and in the shallows lies (*ljeska se*) the wet, salty, suntanned, mythic tourist's ass (*Kome se ne da potegnuti do Kuzceka, može skoknuti do jadranske obale, možda je malo skuplje, ali more je kristalno čisto, a iz plićaka se ljeska mokra, slana, suncem osunčana mitska turistička guza.*)"

<sup>35</sup> "Cunt will be licked, to swallow sperm quickly/I really don't care if you are 'hangerijan' or 'đerman'" (*Lizat će se pizda, eksati sperma/baš me briga jesi li 'hangerijan' il' 'đerman'*) "I will lick you on the sand, let the foreigners watch/We will fuck like crazy while the Czechs insult us (*Ližem te na pijesku, stranci neka gledaju/Jebemo se luđački dok nas Česi vrijeđaju*)"

<sup>36</sup> See Bad Copy's collaboration with I Rock, "My English" from Timbe's 2004 album.

<sup>37</sup> "One dolaze sa svih strana/Iz Španjolske i Irana/Iz Norveške pa i Grčke/Svima ćemo polizati pičke"

to lick salty cunt/little sa-aaa-lty cunts.”<sup>38</sup> With its selectively-doubled vocals, synth solos, simple keyboard chord progressions, and markedly-programmed drums, the potential aesthetic mass appeal of “A Summer Scheme/Thing” contrasts dramatically with possibly the *most* radio-unfriendly lyrics on the album.

By 2011, when I interviewed Krankšvester, homemade hip hop beatmaking ideals had long glorified the “classic boom bap” New York or “G-funk” West Coast sounds as prestige registers. There were, however, some notable exceptions. While working with Bolesna braća on the 2000 song “Uncle Muncle” (*Čiča miča*) Koolade sampled and looped a soft flute and xylophone melody off a 1979 Jugoton “Hansel and Gretel” (*Ivica i Marica*) children’s record, and then added a heavy bass line and drums, which provided the desired musical scaffolding for the band’s “dirty” folktale.<sup>39</sup> In the mid-2000s, when Croatian beatmakers like Baby Dooks, Dash, and Koolade were building impressive resumés by collaborating with globally distributed artists such as Sean Paul and Evidence from Dilated Peoples, Wikluh Sky and his Bad Copy bandmates notably went in another aesthetic direction. They released albums with highly minimalistic production. These served as a “rough” iconic match to rapper Ajs Nigrutin’s radical facial contortions, his belching into the microphone, and the graphic description of trips to the bathroom, drug-induced highs, and sexual adventures that Bad Copy has traded on for years.<sup>40</sup> In

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<sup>38</sup> The hyper-sexualized sing-songy chorus, “*Svi žele lizat slanu pizdu/slaaana pizdurinaaa*,” recalls the Bakhtinian dictum: “All words have the ‘taste’ of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. Contextual overtones (generic, tendentious, individualistic) are inevitable in the word (1981 [1935]:293).”

<sup>39</sup> One of Bolesna braća’s more well-known songs, “Uncle Muncle” (*Čiča miča*), begins “*Čiča miča, počela je priča*,” which translates directly to “Uncle Miča, the story has begun.” This is a classic BCS+M beginning to a folktale that corresponds to the semantic weight of the English, “Once upon a time.” Bolesna braća foreshadow later efforts by Krankšvester when they describe a dystopian fairy tale forest (which bears some remote similarity to its tamer filmic variant released by Dreamworks Studios, *Shrek*). Characters like Little Red Riding Hood, Popeye, and Papa Smurf all engage in drunken sexual orgy resulting in the former’s unwanted pregnancy.

<sup>40</sup> Ajs Nigrutin and Sky Wikluh drew domestic notoriety not only for their music, but also for their appearance on the regionally syndicated version of the “Big Brother” reality television show. This created a notable moment of

Bad Copy's performance, bodily hexis, misbehavior during interviews, and an embrace of the *faux pas* are all foregrounded alongside beat production that is often deliberately composed to sound "unpolished." The post-2000 dominance of aesthetic trends associated with the "Dirty South" and American urban markets such as Atlanta, Miami, Houston, Memphis, and New Orleans had not received the same attention in most European scenes, including in former Yugoslavia. That said, by the time of my dissertation fieldwork, a younger group of performers including Dječaci, Sarajevo's Kontra, and Zagreb-based Sinestet had flirted with trap, chopped+screwed, and other aesthetics in their production. Thus, "screwing around" while beatmaking — whether by way of sample or the embrace of unexpected styles — always loomed in producers' repertoires.

Thus, Krankšvester's propensity both to screw around musically and to dabble in different hip hop aesthetics was nothing new, although Sett's beatmaking range is notable. This was readily apparent on the track named after the central Istrian town Motovun that annually plays host to one of ex-YU's most prominent film festivals. Alongside their musical equivalents, festivals such as Motovun represent not only a growing portion of the tourist economy, but are sites productive of discographic, fashion, and other indexicals with the capacity to point to the social type in attendance. Krankšvester's song "Motovun" similarly sets the listener in an iconically "warm" musical register by way of its downtempo, dub rhythm, and "relaxed" vocals. Here, in a melodic Croatian *patwa*, Krankšvester voice reggae-listening, *keffiyeh*-clad students

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footing vertigo insofar as famed parodic performers were asked to appear in programs purported to be "reality." Their appearance generated such high ratings that other regional reality television programs recruited rappers like THC la familia and Juice, who both later also appeared on "Farm" (*Farma*). Bad Copy's appearance on "Big Brother" led to a vast expansion in Bad Copy's name-recognition and concert bookings throughout ex-YU. I was in attendance at what was meant to be Bad Copy's "goodbye" concert in 2008 at Novi Sad's internationally renowned EXIT Music Festival, but in 2013, they appeared once more as the warm-up act to Snoop Dogg (aka Lion) before releasing their album, "*Krigle*." From listeners, I have heard a range of reactions vis-a-vis Bad Copy that included exaltations of their brilliance and insightful, implicit social commentary; or condemnations of their childish, misogynistic, and disgusting lyrics and behavior.

who also wear Che Guevara t-shirts in order to get their female peers from the Faculty of Philosophy to sleep with them.<sup>41</sup> In calling and responding to one another's lyrics, Krankšvester, while toasting in Croatian, describe their feigned interest in reggae, independent film, and anti-globalist activism in order to meet women: "I don't know anything about film and I don't care about reggae/No, no 4X/No, no, he doesn't care about reggae/I left for Motovun to drink, smoke, and fuck/He came to fuck."<sup>42</sup> By way of role-play and musical masking, Krankšvester shout, "bumbaclot, you monkey! (*majmune*)" and "rewind selector!" to an imagined DJ for whom their dreadlocked characters display absolutely no regard as they chase "little girls from the Faculty of Philosophy (*sa filozofskog klinke*)."

The "true" intentions of *keffiyeh*-wearing festival attendees are revealed already in the first verse: "I insist that I am an anti-globalist and that I listen to Manu Chao/just because so do the chicks whom I want to fuck."<sup>43</sup> Here, discography becomes a sign of a social type. Chao is a chart-topping French performer whose music ranges from punk to salsa. His brand and lyrics often bespeak left-wing political leanings born in part of his family experience fleeing from Franco's dictatorship in Spain. In "Motovun," Chao is figured as iconic of the playlists of a demographic of hypocritical leftist music consumers who are engaged primarily in order to convince women to fornicate. In the interview passage below, Sett explains the compositional logic behind the decadent satire of the song and the iconic indexes chosen to lyrically represent "hypocritical alternatives:"

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<sup>41</sup> On their album, *Krankšvester* frames the term "little Palestinian" (*palestinkica*) as a sign of domestic leftists and leftist musicians. The band regiments the accessory, otherwise associated with the Palestinian resistance since the 1960s, as an index of a hypocritical global activism that appropriates the symbology of movements from which it is safely distant.

<sup>42</sup> "Nemam pojma o filmu i ne zanima me rege/No, no 4X/Ne, ne, ne zanima ga rege/Otišao sam na Motovun da cugam, pljugam, jebem/Došo je da jebe"

<sup>43</sup> "Tvrdim da sam antiglobalist i slušam Manu Chao/Samo zato jer ih slušaju ribe koje bih jebao"

So I literally arrived at Motovun, which is a film festival to which people do not come to watch films, but instead it's cool right now for alternatives and girls from the Faculty of Philosophy to be at Motovun. They come there and fuck, do who knows what, and as for the screenings... I was at the screening of a Japanese film and I sat down. There were about ten people there. Thousands, tens of thousands are circulating around, you know. At the film there is no one. And I just connected this with the story that at those types of places, you see a lot of people dressed like Che Guevara. They have Che Guevara on t-shirts, bla, bla, bla, bla. Because they believe in something, and that's their kind of ideology. No, that's their pose. That way it's easier to get to women. To get to women, it's easier to come with dreads and with the notion that you love what she is listening to. That's Manu Chao, who is also the favorite of types with *keffiyehs*. To me, it's that kind of story.<sup>44</sup>

Krankšvester's satirical use of reggae and dancehall music occurs within a broader musical context in which the production aesthetics, themes, and vocal styles that trace their histories to communities of Afro-Caribbean diaspora are utilized by a series of domestic artists. Popay, Stillness!, Blaya Dub Playa, and perhaps most notably by the Bosnian act, Dubioza kolektiv all couple "conscious," engaged lyrics with many of the musical signifiers of reggae and dancehall.

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<sup>44</sup> "Dakle, ja sam doslovno došao na Motovun, što je filmski festival, gdje ljudi ne dolaze gledat filmove, nego je bit na Motovunu trenutno cool za alternativce i cure sa filozofskog, koja dolaze tamo pa se jebu, urade bilo što, i uopće na projekciji, ja sam ti bio na projekciji jednog japanskog filma i sjedim. Desetero ljudi je bilo. Tisuće, deseci tisuća ljudi onako circularaju okolo, jel. Na filmu nema nikog. Nije li to onak poražavajući za to? I to sam samo povezao sa tom pričom da dosta na takvim mjestima vidiš dosta ljudi koji su onako obučeni kao Che Guevara nose Che Guevaru na majci bla, bla, bla, bla, ne zato, jer oni vjeruju u nešto i da je to neka njihova ideologija, ne, to je njihova poza, tako je lakše doći do žena. Do žene je lakše doći dredovima i tim da kažeš da voliš ono što ona sluša. To je Manu Chao, ko je kao isto favorit likova sa palestinkama. To mi je taj, ta neka priča." Sett then continued in his discussion of the hypocrisy that he felt Motovun attendees represented: "In the same way, they talk about... very often you run into this... many people talk about how people ought to live, and they live with their parents. That is, they would change the world, but they cannot bring their own life situation in order. Look, I know that it is hard in Croatia, but these are young, capable people. Or, if it is really so tough that you cannot find something, please, just don't behave like you have the solution, because your solution is part of the problem. You know? You live with your parents, please don't talk about how other people should live, because that is terribly hypocritical. It's terribly so. Let's say, that was also known to happen to me. Before I talked... I found myself talking in older lyrics about people who have nothing to eat. Today, I would pull all of those tracks. You know why? Because I don't have any idea how it is to be a man who has nothing to eat. I have no idea how that man lives (*isto tako oni pričaju o tome vrlo često možeš naići na to, dosta ljudi priča o tome kako bi netko trebao živjet, a žive sa roditeljima. Znači, oni bi menjali svijet, a ne mogu svoju životnu situaciju dovesti u red. Gle, ja znam da je teško u Hrvatskoj, ali to su mladi sposobni ljudi. Ili, ako je već toliko teško da ne možeš naći nešto, pliz, samo se ne ponaša kao da imaš rešenje, zbog toga, jer je tvoja rešenja dio problema. Znaš ono. To je tako. Ti živiš sa roditeljima, nemoj pričat, pliz, kako bi neki drugi bi trebalo živjeti, zbog toga što je to užasno licemjerno, užasno je, to je recimo meni se isto tako znalo dogodit prije da pričam našao sam se u tekstovima prijašnjim da pričam o ljudima koji nemaju za jest. Danas bi svaku taku stvar povukao, znaš zašto? Zato jer ja ne znam kako je čovjeku koji nema za jest. Ja nemam pojma kako taj čovjek živi.*)"

There are also a series of institutions that support today's expansion of these genres eastward, including the Kingston CD/Vinyl Shop off of Ban Jelačić Square, the main square of Zagreb's historic downtown and the Seasplash Festival, which has runs annually in Pula for over a decade. The consumption and appropriation of genres that trace Caribbean lineages gets equated in Krankšvester's screwing around with a false "ideology" and "pose," geared more toward pursuing sexual gratification through the signs of revolutionary activism.

### **Screwing Around Linguistically**

Krankšvester's linguistic performance mobilizes a heteroglossic range of registers (sampled and vocally performed), flow, and lexical innovations to underscore their screwing around. As a name, "Krankšvester" might be best described as a false Germanism that could hypothetically fool some domestic listeners into thinking that the group named itself after the German word for nurse, "*Krankenschwester*." However, this uncodified, invented term is better translated into BCS+M as "*Bolesna sestra*" or "Sick sister" in English. The group's name has the capacity to point to a series of different ideas, including to the rappers' imagined moral depravity and a fetish for a quintessential pornographic social type, the "naughty nurse." "Krankšvester" could also be read as a playful reference to the aforementioned Bolesna braća who were innovators in what other commentators have referred to as "humoristic satiric" homemade hip hop (kronik 2007). Of course, the origin story of Krankšvester's name has more pedestrian beginnings: after a drunken conversation during which amusing Germanisms were considered, a friend of the group suggested "Krankšvester." The fact that the name was not an actual German word and sounded more like that of a punk group than a hip hop crew had immediate appeal after its felicitous utterance.

Krankšvester songs such as the relatively tame “Disco Cancer” (*Disko rak*) underscore the band’s tendency to offer gendered possibilities beyond the heteronormative masculinity otherwise more visible in regional rap. While Krankšvester’s characters reiterate a vast range of heterosexual desires multiple times throughout a single song, numerous allusions are made to their possible confusion over sexual orientation. “Disco Cancer” features an 8-bar chorus performed in a falsetto reminiscent of the Bee Gees’ 1977 hit “Stayin’ Alive,” a notably abnormal vocal stylization for often gruffly hyper-masculine regional rap.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 I won’t stop boogie-ing until I die from cancer                         | <i>Neću prestat čagat sve dok ne umrem od raka</i>                |
| 2 Disco cancer! <i>Madafaka</i> (orig.)!                                  | <i>Disko raka! Madafaka!</i>                                      |
| 3 I don’t care at all that I am this way, the disco floor will cry for me | <i>Baš me briga što sam takav, disko floor će za mnom plakati</i> |
| 4 Cry for me! <i>Madafaka!</i>  | <i>Za mnom plakati! Madafaka!</i>                                 |

Throughout the song, the group describes the monotony and difficulty of their characters’ work week, during which they dream of the release they gain on Saturday night as “as kings of the dancefloor.” In their 20-bar verses, an anachronistic singsongy flow is wedded to synth-heavy New Age melodic phrasing. Like the lyrical flow, the accentuated tinny clap drums and disco beat also seem of a different era. Sett’s first 20-bar verse follows:

|  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 We work the whole week                 | <i>Cijeli tjedan radimo</i>         |
| 2 and pray to Christ                     | <i>i molimo se Kristu</i>           |
| 3 On Saturday, you can find us           | <i>U subotu nas nađi</i>            |
| 4 dancing in the disco                   | <i>kako plešemo u disku</i>         |
| 5 The Homeland is where                  | <i>Domovina je tamo</i>             |
| 6 there is fun and dancing               | <i>gdje je zabava i ples</i>        |
| 7 Bury me on the dancefloor,             | <i>Pokopaj me na flooru</i>         |
| 8 let my coffin be there                 | <i>nek mi tamo bude lijes</i>       |
| 9 I put on my disco sneakers,            | <i>Obuko sam svoje disko patike</i> |
| 10 so I must                             | <i>pa moram</i>                     |
| 11 Bust that move                        | <i>Bustati taj move</i>             |
| 12 and become the king of the dancefloor | <i>i postati kralj floora</i>       |
| 13 I would not be able to live,          | <i>Ne bih mogo živjeti</i>          |

|  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 14 if someone took my disco              | <i>da mi netko uzme disko</i> |
| 15 I would kill myself immediately       | <i>Obmah bi se ubio</i>       |
| 16 and waste my money on drugs           | <i>na drogu novce spisko</i>  |
| 17 I would have to shoot myself,         | <i>Moro bi se upucat</i>      |
| 18 stab myself in the heart with a knife | <i>u srce nož si zabit</i>    |
| 19 Because clubbing is to me             | <i>Jer što je nekom kisik</i> |
| 20 as oxygen is to others                | <i>za mene je clubbing</i>    |

The humor of the lyrics trade on the semantic weight of religious and nationalistic terms more regularly used within more conservative discourse. Here we are introduced to an outmoded disco fan who appears as devoted to clubbing as he is to Christ, as dependent on dancing as he is oxygen. Sett's character is willing to die for his weekend release as he "busts a move" (*bustati taj move*) in his disco sneakers. His personal "homeland" (*domovina*) is not independent Croatia, but a place of "fun and dancing," where he hopes eventually to be permanently interred upon death. The musical aesthetic coupled with the English calques and exaggerated devotion to the dancefloor is amusingly paired with a high-pitched chorus that fails to register as "authentic" hip hop.

In the stories that Krankšvester narrate, the linguistic diversity of ex-YU is articulated through an array of lexical items that trace a range of domestic and global origins and thus have different indexical capacities. For example, in "Fashionable" (*Modna*), a track set to a slightly modified, yet still very recognizable sample from Madonna's chart-topping 1990 house/disco track "Vogue," a series of different linguistic codes are employed as 3ki and Sett's imagined characters accompany their female companions on shopping trips across clothing trend capitals in the US and EU. Italian brand names, global Anglicisms and references to American television shows, even accented German studio patter makes an appearance. When the markedly cosmopolitan and over-the-top chorus is repeated in the bridge: "Versace, Armani, Moschino,

Prada/You're most beautiful, shorty, when you swallow my load/Paris, Milano, New York, Stuttgart/You love fashion, but I love it when you swallow," the second and fourth lines that reference oral sex are dropped and replaced with regionally and globally recognizable German and English exclamations: "Yeah, baby, *špica, špica*" (a BCS+M rendition of the Germanism, "*Spitze!*" or "top-notch").<sup>45</sup> There are also a faint series of discussions that can be overheard in the background of the music toward the end of the track in which Sett asks some imagined interlocutor, "*Sprechen Sie Deutsch?*" Krankšvester's use of English and German frequently emerge as signs of their characters' utilitarian approach to linguistic cosmopolitanism and the clothing markers of bourgeois prestige, which they mobilize to woo their companions into the proverbial sack. In their cover art for the 2010 album, they feature a blackletter typeface that has historically been semiotically linked to both heavy metal consumption and "Germanness."<sup>46</sup>

Other than as objects of the group's performed largely heterosexual perversions, women's voices are primarily absent from Krankšvester's first two albums. Exceptions include: 1) the moans of an orgasm, presumably sampled from a pornographic film that opens the song, "Whores from the Internet;" 2) Madonna's imploring exclamation, "Groove to the music!" which concludes the aforementioned chorus to "Fashionable;" 3) and a newly-composed tribute to Viktorija Đonlić's 90's folk pop hit, "It Doesn't Matter" (*Nema veze*), that includes a scratchy sample of her original chorus: "We will love each other with our bodies/We can do it in front of everyone/It doesn't matter/We can do it in a park, on a bench, in a ditch/We can do it in front of

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<sup>45</sup> "*Versace, Armani, Moschino, Prada/Ali najlepša si mala kada gutaš mojeg gada/Pariz, Milano, New York, Stuttgart/Ti voliš modu, a ja volim kada gutaš*"

<sup>46</sup> As I discuss in Chapter 4, Kiša metaka but also Ajs Nigrutin and many others lyrically stylize imagined German identities.

everyone/it doesn't matter!"<sup>47</sup> Sometimes women are impersonated by 3ki or Sett by way of call-and-response, higher-pitched rhymes. For example, on the final verse "It Doesn't Matter," 3ki squeals: "Buy me a soda/buy me drinks!" and then provides his own deep, growling response: "I am not getting you anything until you give me your pussies!"<sup>48</sup> Exclamations such as these further underscore the highly stereotypical cross-gender performances littered throughout the album's geographic imaginary that foregrounds sites of Krankšvester's romps through clubs, "tacky" café-bars, and beachside resorts.

In the call-and-response chorus to the aforementioned "Raid" (*Racija*): "Throw, throw that shit away! (KRS: Whoop! Whoop!) 4X/I will never throw drugs away! (KRS: Whoop! Whoop!) 3X/I will shove them into my bottom first!" a sample re-signifies and re-contextualizes the sonic capacity of a broadly recognizable American song.<sup>49</sup> The scene is a Croatian police raid, which inspires desperate drug users to go to extreme depths to preserve their fix. KRS-One, whose frequent orthodox articulations of what hip hop compositional ethics should be, is somewhat cynically sampled. "Sound of Da Police," a canonical New York hip hop track, features the artist vocally reproducing an unmistakable siren sound to set American listeners in the chronotope of 1990s urban racial profiling and police brutality. The quick tempo, heavily processed bass lines, clap snare drums, air sirens, and repetition of the percussive phrase "buck, buck" resemble Major Lazer's 2009 dancehall hits given the fact that they index a riddim that accompanies the rappers' Croatian-ification of the lyrical musicality of Jamaican toasting. Beats, samples, and flows constitute additional levels of musical signification beyond the lyrics, which for those interpretants who regularly consume Zagreb's "Blackout Rap Show" now on Radio

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<sup>47</sup> "Volimo se tjelima/Možemo pred svima/Nema veze/Možemo u parku, na klupi, u jarku/Nema veze!" More recent collaborations with Belgrade's Sajsi MC have broken this trend

<sup>48</sup> "Plati mi sok, plati mi piće/Ne plaćam ništa dok ne daš mi pičke"

<sup>49</sup> "Bacaj, bacaj ta sranja 4X/Nikad neću bacit drogu 3X/Prije strpat ću u dupe!"

Student or Sarajevo's "Middle Finger" (*Srednji prst*) on B&H Federal Radio will legibly index different periods in globalized reggae, pop, and hip hop's American expansion.

While a good portion of the album's satire is directed toward lampooning gender relations according to an established trope of supposedly "primitive" Balkan men, songs like "*Krankaveli*" are intended as more specific parodies of other artists within the domestic hip hop scene(s). At various points on the 2010 record, the artists' flow or prosody changes dramatically to invoke Madonna or Memphis-based Oscar winners, Three 6 Mafia. The admiration domestic rappers sometimes express for the legacy of the late 2Pac Amaru Shakur is taken to its most hypocritical, illogical extent that implicates gender performance once more. What begins as admirably close, but nonetheless deliberately uncomfortable rendition of 2Pac's flow, lyrics, and themes in Croatian becomes more heavily satirical by the end of the second verse. Even the beat of "*Krankaveli*" is reminiscent of Daz Dillinger production of the mid-1990s. Sett makes the rapped claim at one point that due to his undying love for the California hip hop icon, he tattooed an MP40 automatic rifle used during WWII by the German Wehrmacht and later by the Croatian military during the Yugoslav Wars across his sternum. Then he claims to have even begun thinking about "Makaveli" (one of 2Pac's pseudonyms after which the song is named) while having sex with his girlfriend:

|   |   |
|---|---|
| 1 I nearly fell apart when I heard the news                   | <i>Skoro sam se srušio kad sam čuo vijest</i>             |
| 2 They killed Pac, he was 26                                  | <i>Ubili su Paca, im'o je 26</i>                          |
| 3 I listened to him all the time and every day                | <i>Sluš'o sam ga stalno i svaki dan</i>                   |
| 4 To me, he was the best, I am his fan                        | <i>Bio mi je najbolji, njegov ja sam fan</i>              |
| 5 He recommended that I hold my head high                     | <i>On mi je poručio da glavu držim gore</i>               |
| 6 That I don't trust what's fake and party until dawn         | <i>Da ne pušim fore i partijam do zore</i>                |
| 7 Oh God, why did you take Tupac from me?                     | <i>O bože, zašto si mi uzeo Tupaca</i>                    |
| 8 Now, because of him, I pour out a liter of cognac every day | <i>Sad zbog njega svaki dan prolijem po litru konjaka</i> |
| 9 Because I know that God is up there on the                  | <i>Jer znam da je Bogu gore s desne strane</i>            |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| right side  |  |
| 10 Brother, I can't wait to see you, I am counting the days | <i>Čekam da se vidimo brate, brojim dane</i>         |
| 11 I tattooed an MP40 to my chest                           | <i>Istetovirao sam šmajser na pleksus</i>            |
| 12 And I think about you when I am having sex               | <i>I mislim na tebe čak i kad sam u seksu</i>        |
| 13 Every time he's in the club, I request that the DJ       | <i>Svaki put kad dođe u klub DJ-a tražim</i>         |
| 14 Plays "California Love," because you are most dear to me | <i>Da pusti „California Love“ jer si mi najdraži</i> |
| 15 Brothers and sisters, black and white                    | <i>Braćo, sestre, crni i bijeli</i>                  |
| 16 Everyone loves to hear Makaveli                          | <i>Svi vole kada se sluša Makaveli</i>               |

This (necrophilic) homoeroticism deliberately undermines the remainder of Krankšvester's first album, on which the rappers-*qua*-ventriloquists constantly reiterate their heterosexual desires.

The heavily satirized love for 2Pac is consistent with the band's general cynicism about nostalgic hip hop narratives that glorify the 1990s.<sup>50</sup> These narratives are not only hegemonic within the domestic hip hop scene(s), but rather obviously map onto a deeply controversial period of history in ex-YU during when ethno-political entrepreneurs (Brubaker 2004) dismembered the SFRY and a series of violent conflicts ensued. Given the frequency with which the song is requested, asking some domestic DJs to play 2Pac's "California Love" is tantamount to asking for what Chicago bluesmen refer to as the "Set List From Hell," as the song, at least between 2011-12, remained so popular at clubs as to be hackneyed.<sup>51</sup> At other points on the record, Krankšvester express their frustration with romanticizations of canonical hip hop tracks and celebrations of the 1990s as the genre's only "golden era." This double-voiced celebration of hip hop icons and their awkward

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<sup>50</sup> "Napaljene mrcine, vrijeme je za prcanje/na kurcu imam pekmez i med koji vrcan je/da mogu barit žene koje vole žderat slatko/radim rep i ljubavi...š-š-šatro/ne radim iz ljubavi niti zbog kulture/radim rep da poslije gaže mogu jebat kurve/zato poslije nastupa nemoj mi upadat/s pričama o rapu nekada i sada/ne zanima me rap iz '95/želim samo jebati i ne napraviti dijete (Horny muscular men, it's time to copulate/On my cock, I have Turkish pekmez syrup and extracted honey/so that I can go after women who love to pig out on sweets/I write raps out of love...n-not!/I rap so that after a gig, I can fuck whores/So, don't attack me after a show/With stories about rap back then and now/I don't care about rap from '95/I just want to fuck without making a child)"

<sup>51</sup> See Grazian (2005).

coupling with domestic political projects and social differentiation is underscored by the uncomfortable use of Croatian to closely mimic 2Pac's iconic flow. Krankšvester's loose play with the domestic symbolism of 2Pac, reggae, and other globalized musical signs of blackness in many ways resembles similarly other awkward, cynical, and sarcastic appropriations. Signifiers tied to American history, violence, and radical inequalities along racial lines become domestically meaningful in what are locally seen as "playful" naming conventions in band names such as the "Monten\*ggers" and the domestic use of one-time pejoratives turned words of endearment in the domestic scene(s) like "blackie" (*crnjo*). In one sense, Krankšvester's humor polices "inauthentic" domestic appropriations and overidentifications with American blackness by highlighting the symbolic gaps between Motovun and Kingston, for example, or Los Angeles and Osijek. On the other hand, by policing these identifications, rappers who screw around often reinforce imagined difference and arguably exoticize blackness even further, insofar as they begin signaling the symbolic boundaries of "properly" domestic hip hop and other styles.

Through various linguistic techniques, Krankšvester's storytelling narratives feature the heteroglossic illusion of including the voices of many. 3ki and Sett borrow words, phrases, and flows that index AAVE and hiphopisms, but they do so in ways that often highlights the imagined symbolic distance between codes and social groups.

## **Conclusion**

In my poorly-prepped interview with 3ki at a busy café in Osijek, the MC was somewhat self-deprecating when asked to describe any social criticism that might be read into his group's lyrics. I had been talking with artists all day, and after being subjected to an exhausted deployment of my slightly-modified questionnaire inquiries, described many of Krankšvester's songs, rapped lines, and stylistic techniques in the seemingly uncomplicated terms of

“zajebancija.” Under the late afternoon sun, our interview (d)evolved into a discussion of my own desultory music interests, and sensing that I was hungry, we eventually left so that I could ravenously gobble down a thin-crust pizza at the city’s repurposed 18<sup>th</sup> century fortress (*Tvrđa*) built by waxing Austro-Hungarian imperial forces once intent on keeping the waning Ottomans out.

3ki’s evaluation of Krankšvester’s music contrasted somewhat with that of his partner, Sett. The latter appeared no stranger to controversy or riffing at length during an interview on his intentions with his writings. Nonetheless, screwing around reappeared in Sett’s discourse as an apt descriptor for Krankšvester:

I don’t have the capacity to be any clearer than I am, that is, I can’t caricature any more than I already do. The only next thing that I could do is to say: “This is all screwing around. And you need to take this as a critique of that form of behavior.” So, my responsibility lies in that. That detachment (*odmak*) of mine is my responsibility. That mask which is worn here is yet another detachment. We want to give you the awareness (*doznanje*) that here exists that certain detachment.<sup>52</sup>

When we met in Zagreb, Sett also kindly and introspectively spoke with me into the night about his intentions with specific lyrics, the motivations behind the album’s critiques, and if he felt Krankšvester’s parodic messages had been grasped by the band’s audiences. In the interview passage above, Sett argues that while he does feel a responsibility to demonstrate “detachment” to his audiences, he could not go any further short of explicitly saying that “this is all screwing around.” Admittedly, I was better prepared to probe Sett with inquires about the intentions behind Krankšvester’s songs, yet in passages like the one above, he too balked at ascribing too

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<sup>52</sup> “Nisam kapacitet da bi bio jasniji od onog što jesam, dakle ne mogu ništa više karikirati. Jedino sljedeća stvar što mogu napraviti je reći: “Ovo je sve zajebancija. I morate to shvatiti kao kritiku takvog ponašanja.” Dakle, to je moja odgovornost u tom. Taj moj odmak je neki vid moje odgovornosti. Ta maska koju je tu stavljena, to je još dodatni odmak neki. Hoćemo da ti dati doznanje da tu postoji taj određeni odmak.”

much semantic weight to a musical project that I had begun devouring with ever-greater ethnographic passions, slowly tacking away from my over-consumption of more overtly “political” texts.

Throughout this dissertation, I followed a now well-known observation Briggs and Bauman (1992) once made, that the symbolic gaps between genres and their concomitant linguistic and musical registers can be strategically widened or narrowed in order to emphasize and/or erase the imagined distance between performances.<sup>53</sup> However, Krankšvester’s articulations of *both* distance from and alignment to places, people, and things do not necessarily suggest a moral alignment, insofar as the rap performance framework that they adopt is particularly given to caricature, masking, and distanced animations. Indeed, it was given my own myriad biases that I unwittingly passed Krankšvester over in my periodic surfs through the homemade hip hop fan portals. To my naïve surprise, it was a female informant’s excitement about their first album’s “winks” that got me to pay attention to all of their talk about cocks and fighting (Geertz 1977).<sup>54</sup>

Depending on the listener’s sense of ethics regarding the limits of the satirical, Krankšvester’s album is in Sett’s words from the opening epigraph, “terribly open to criticism.” Krankšvester assume, exaggerate, and lampoon a variety of character traits that bandmembers 3ki and Sett map onto men and women across the Croatian social landscape. The group makes

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<sup>53</sup> See Briggs and Bauman (1992:149): “The process of linking particular utterances to generic models thus necessarily produces an intertextual gap. Although the creation of this hiatus is unavoidable, its relative suppression or foregrounding has important effects. On the one hand, texts framed in some genres attempt to achieve generic transparency by minimizing the distance between texts and genres, thus rendering the discourse maximally interpretable through the use of generic precedents. This approach sustains highly conservative, traditionalizing modes of creating textual authority. On the other hand, maximizing and highlighting these intertextual gaps underlies strategies for building authority through claims of individual creativity and innovation (such as are common in 20th-century Western literature), resistance to the hegemonic structures associated with established genres, and other motives for distancing oneself from textual precedents.”

<sup>54</sup> See Živković (2011) for an excellent discussion of the potential pitfalls of seeing irony and parody where none was intended. I would also contest that ignoring ironic and parodic potential is also an analytic pitfall.

light of violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and materialistic forms of conspicuous consumption; they objectify women and refer to their sexual organs using nearly every “slang” metaphor from the animal kingdom at their disposal; and they satirize domestic men in a manner reminiscent of Cvijić’s early anthropologies, Stoianovich’s exegeses on “Balkan civilization” (1967), and Kaplan’s influentially ethnocentric journalism (a Clintonian favorite) which each emphasized the “backwardness” of Europe’s “primitive” periphery (see also Živković 2011). Their satirical use of different linguistic codes implies an insurmountable symbolic distance between globalized black musics and naïve white performers, who are framed as forever romanticizing and capitalizing on genres historiographically linked to the Other. They strongly imply that a variety of conservative and progressive political stances in homemade hip hop and elsewhere are nothing but a means toward their characters’ never-ending desire for continued consumption and sexual gratification. Live costumed performance, cover artwork, studio patter, beatmaking, footing, ventriloquation, and role-play all adopt an array of signs to produce multichannel texts that build upon traditions in domestic rap more typically associated with more engaged performers like Edo Maajka, tbf’s Saša Antić, or Marčelo (see also Agha 2005:54).

As argued above, there are a number of moments during which the Krankšvester employ distancing strategies that bespeak a desire to separate their “true” selves as animators and authors of the rhymes from what the characters on the album are saying. On a song the title of which might best translate to “I Will Kill/You, Shorty” [*Poljubit ću te mala*], Krankšvester decides to retain the recording of their unintended studio laughter when the lyrics of the chorus reach a paranoid Rabelaisian plateau: “Shorty, I will you kill you if I learn that last night/someone else fucked you or took you to the movies/I will kill us both, there’s no dilemma here/Your mouth stinks, I smell someone else’s semen.” The giggles, which might have otherwise been cut from

the composition when 3ki could not complete his growling of the final repetition of the chorus, are left at the very end of the recording as a means of breaking frame and flagging questions as to how seriously Krankšvester identify with the “possessively stupid” characters that they describe in the song. The characters are so jealous and distrustful to the absurd point of screening their girlfriends’ Facebook accounts, calling five times over the course of 30 minutes, and following them to the bathroom to prevent a rendezvous with another suitor. Krankšvester’s concept albums beg the question as to how a performance can be simultaneously misogynist *and* (just maybe) progressive, crassly consumerist *and* “underground,” “engaged” *yet* nonetheless in Sett’s words, “never serious.” Croatia has long found itself in-between idealistic supranational political-economic projects like that of socialist Yugoslavia and the EU. Acts like Krankšvester revel in revealing the insincerity of supposedly well-behaved, masculine moderns.

**Krankoda: “Grab ‘Em By the...Pussyhats!?!”**

I first titled a draft of this paper, “Proxies,” because I saw the intimate, homemade strategies of Krankšvester’s double-voicings, battle rap, and symbolic distancing from imagined characters as somehow parallel to trends that states seemed to be increasingly using on a macropolitical level. Under clientelistic neoliberalism (and no doubt many prior systems), corporatized media, paramilitaries, and lobbies all seem to play incessantly on the symbolic gaps between themselves, elected representatives, and dominant firms whose operational beginnings and ends are very hard to distinguish.

Upon reflection, I am not sure if this structural, mimetic, or theoretical connection holds. Regardless, recent events in the US, particularly the “insane clown campaign of 2016 (Taibbi 2017),” would seem to suggest that we must sadly pay closer attention to the more personalized symbolic strategies used among the Apprentices of a technospectacular Twitter-shitter Reality.

Klein (2017) recently described the razor thin silver lining of Drumpf family ascendance as the “mask finally coming off” of a US political economy long addicted to shocking “disaster capitalism (2007).” I tend to agree. By donning homemade “pussyhats,” promising Women’s Marches have now creatively repurposed macho “lockerroom talk” in a fashion straight out of Krankšvester’s playbook. May it only continue, Inch’Allah. As the minute hand inches closer to both nuclear winter and two degrees Celsius, let’s also hope we can do better than another real “superpredator.” The vote for the 2002 Iraq War Resolution was just one of her most notorious, consistent efforts to toggle between a “public and a private face” sufficiently profitable for Government Sachs. To be fair, our nigh universal, but very unevenly distributed, addictions to fossils, fuels, narcissism, and imagined security make leftist symbolic self-distancing from these “dealmakers” a little hypocritical, still largely untenable, and ultimately dishonest.

What would radical divestment look like? “Motovun?”

## Conclusion

Politicians, historians, and journalists continue to describe the Balkans as a place of cyclical violence, particularly self-interested, genocidal leaders; moral and economic poverty; and supposedly imperfect, uneducated, not-yet-fully European inhabitants (see Friedman 2010; Konstantinov 2010 [1895]; Rasza and Lindstrom 2004; Todorova 1997). Similar professional “experts” now apply the logic of “ancient hatreds” so prevalent in the 1990s to explanations of violence in the Middle East (Stampnitzky 2014). This fairy tale, despite and particularly after the catastrophic US invasion of Iraq in 2003, continues remarkably to find some sympathetic audiences. Since the 1990s, however, many scholars and NGOs have fought to *deconstruct* so-called Balkanist discourses in Western Europe and North America. In today’s newly rebranded Western Balkans, related, teleologic concepts of “incomplete travel” on the “road to Europe” continue to dominate EU rhetoric (Horvat and Štiks 2015; Jansen 2015).

By highlighting certain aesthetics and imbalances tangibly experienced by those who have long been on the (semi-)periphery of Schengen Europe, artists often resignify, embrace, and even *reconstruct* the “Balkans” as a geographic signifier. Todorova also discusses ideologies of “auto-balkanism,” which she defines in terms of how local actors frame themselves as in-between modernity and tradition, but she does not much discuss how Balkanisms might be recast, how hegemonic symbolic-geographic ideologies may not last forever, nor how the Balkans as a place might be re-signified as a source of pride (see also Rasza and Lindstrom 2004) and a place of hopeful, yet risky interconnection. “Eastern Europe” is not disappearing as a cultural construct (cf. Todorova 2015), but the significations of the region are regularly reconfigured, including through homemade hip hop’s various forms of commentary.

Čvoro (2014) argues, for example, that this transnational, anti-nationalist “new Balkanism” is self-exoticizing and critical of “cold,” “rational,” neoliberal Europe. Čvoro’s “new Balkanism” analytic is useful, but I contend that artists’ resignifications of the Balkans once again attest to the longstanding complexity, playfulness, and fluidity of domestic self-state relations in historically contested borderland spaces. Thus, we should be careful to assert the novelty of partial, incomplete, and even fleeting alignments to state- and nation-building projects. In ex-YU, the ideological rhetorics and programs of neoliberal democracy, socialism, nationalism, and EU expansion have long frequently demanded that young people actively stake positions in relation to controversial political projects “at work.” When homemade hip hop artists narrate a variously experienced “incompleteness,” they do so to critique hegemonic tendencies in local political economy in ways consonant with populist, anti-establishment frustrations with the present.

While regional audiences, music critics, and even artists themselves often frame hip hop as an uncomfortable cultural “fit” in the Balkans, the genre’s up-take lay partly in the transnational charisma of crafts first developed in places conditioned to demonstrate certain historical similarities. Shared precarity on the margins of trans-Atlantic political and economic power resound in the aesthetics of homemade beats and lyrical messages. Many domestic hip hop discourses today suggest a politically heterodox anti-globalism that, in some ways, is a central irony of a genre that owes its international distribution in large part to monopolistic culture industries that often sought to project American power. The ethics of navigating precarity and a shifting sense of home are central to robust internal debates in the domestic scene(s) and beyond.

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