



# **The Potential of Popular Culture for the Creation of Left Populism in Serbia: The Case of the Hip-Hop Collective “The Bombs of the Nineties”**

Research Article

Jovana Papović

MA Candidate, EHESS-Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris

[jovana.papovic@ehess.fr](mailto:jovana.papovic@ehess.fr)

Astrea Pejović

PhD Candidate, Central European University, Budapest

[astrea.pejovic@gmail.com](mailto:astrea.pejovic@gmail.com)

[http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/cse/en/pejovic\\_papovic](http://www.suedosteuropa.uni-graz.at/cse/en/pejovic_papovic)

*Contemporary Southeastern Europe*, 2015, 3(2), 107-126

# The Potential of Popular Culture for the Creation of Left Populism in Serbia: The Case of the Hip-Hop Collective “The Bombs of the Nineties”

Jovana Papović and Astrea Pejović \*

The focus of this article is to highlight the potential of popular culture to become an agent of leftist populist politics in contemporary Serbia. The authors observe the hip-hop collective “The Bombs of the Nineties”, whose music tackles topics from recent history, and who subvert the fashion style of the 1990s “Dizel” subculture, which is often connected to Serbian nationalism and war profiteering. The paper analyses the relationships “The Bombs of the Nineties” create between their practices, class warfare and leftist discourses, aiming to show the potentials and threats those relationships introduce. Following Ernesto Laclau’s understanding of populism as a “hegemonic political articulation of demands”, we assume that “The Bombs of the Nineties” could represent a solid populist political agent in that they attempt to reveal and draw attention to the “unfulfilled demands” of disempowered Serbian youth. On the other hand, the counter-intuitive merge of ideologies they operate, and the limited impact of their strategies on the official politics could be an obstacle to the expansion of their message.

**Keywords:** Left populism, Youth, Transitional Serbia, Popular culture, “Dizel” Movement.

## Introduction

The term “populism” is often used in political discourse as an attribute for political strategies that aim to mobilise the general population around a common issue. Used as a derogatory term or a devaluating tool, populism tends to cast away political opponents outside the scope of the honourable political practice. Observing the resurgence in the usage of this term since the nineties, Margaret Canovan notices that “the populist movements that have in the past decade burst into mainstream politics in Western democracies are usually treated as pathological symptoms requiring sociological explanation.”<sup>1</sup>

- Still, post-Marxist political theorist Ernesto Laclau did not perceive populism as a social pathology, but rather introduced a perspective on

---

\* Jovana Papović and Astrea Pejović are social anthropologists and documentary filmmakers. The focus of their research is the post-socialist transitional state in the Balkans. The crossing points of their research include the intersection of political and cultural practices in the Balkans, specifically youth cultures and activism, popular music and the transgenerational cultural capital of Serbian citizens.

<sup>1</sup> Canovan, Margaret. 1999. Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy. *Political Studies* 47(1), 2-16.

populism as an inherent instrument of modern politics.<sup>2</sup> Laclau considered populism to be an inevitable discursive form for constructing the pluralist political landscape. Given that the leftist populist endeavours often gathered around informal civic movements, this paper tries to locate left politics in Serbia outside of the traditional political sphere. Under “left”, we consider political parties and movements that are engaged in defending equality, criticism of the social order and the desire for greater social justice. Following Ernesto Laclau’s definition of populism as a form of the articulation of “unfulfilled demands”<sup>3</sup> and drawing on ethnographic research on the Serbian leftist hip-hop collective “The Bombs of the Nineties”, this paper argues that left populist speech in Serbia could be traced outside the traditional political practice, in the field of popular culture. By analysing the practices and discourses of the hip-hop collective “The Bombs of the Nineties” and the audience’s reception, the paper discusses the potential and limitations of popular culture as a field for the articulation of left populism.

### **Politics-as-populism, populism-as-politics**

Since the recent global economic crises and the reinforcement of nationalism across the Western world, an overall populist tilt in the landscape of legitimate politics has emerged. This was accompanied by an increase in the vote share of so-called “populist” parties. Although the phenomenon seems to be growing and is of interest to more and more academics, there is still no truly coherent and consistent theory that would help us to define “populism” unanimously. One dominant understanding of populism even thought that the term should be used as a plural, as Jean-Pierre Rioux suggests - a political movement led by a charismatic leader and characterised by a systematic critique of the elites and a constant reference to the people.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars, such as Cas Mudde, argue that populism is an integral part of representative democracy and that we live in a “populist zeitgeist.”<sup>5</sup> Others, such as Benjamin Arditì, assert that we have to accept “that populism is a recurrent feature of modern politics, one that appears both in democratic and undemocratic variants, and that this recurrence refers to key themes of the populist discourse.”<sup>6</sup>

We could divide research in populism into three groups: one which views it as a strategy, another which defines it as a style or a discourse, and finally a third which takes it as a “thin-centred ideology.”<sup>7</sup> The third option seems to be the most useful for analysis as it, unlike the others, allows for observation of the phenomenon in any ideological framework, and permits cross interpretation in different political contexts.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, as Cas Mudde says:

*“Though populism is a distinct ideology, it does not possess ‘the same level of intellectual refinement and consistency’ as, for example, socialism or*

---

<sup>2</sup> Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. London: Verso.

<sup>3</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

<sup>4</sup> Rioux, Jean-Pierre. 1997. Présentation: Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire. *Les populismes* (56), 3-3.

<sup>5</sup> Mudde, Cas. 2004. The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government & Opposition* 39(3), 541-63.

<sup>6</sup> Arditì, Benjamin. 2007. *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism*. Edinburgh: University Press, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*.

<sup>8</sup> Ivaldi, Gilles and Andrej Zaslove. 2015. L'Europe des populismes: confluences et diversité. *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* 53(1), 121-55.

*liberalism. Populism is only a 'thin-centred ideology', exhibiting 'a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts' [...] as a thin-centred ideology, populism can be easily combined with very different (thin and full) other ideologies, including communism, ecologism, nationalism or socialism.*"<sup>9</sup>

Understood as a thin-centred ideology, populism imposes itself as a "practical-political ideology", both a "technical-idiomatic tool" that accompanies the rise to power and a method of speech that helps to keep it.<sup>10</sup> In this context one might ask what the common denominator to such a heterogeneous set of phenomena would be. Following Mudde, we could point out that: "the core concept of populism is obviously 'the people'; in a sense, even the concept of 'the elite' takes its identity from it (being its opposite, its nemesis)."<sup>11</sup> Hence populism would appear within the context of the people's discontent directed towards elites, which are perceived to be holding a monopoly of power, wealth and culture. Populism is therefore "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupted elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."<sup>12</sup>

In the book *On Populist Reason*, Ernesto Laclau attempts to find an ontological foundation for all of the phenomenons interpreted as populist. Unlike the majority of theorists of populism, Laclau offers a challenging angle, in which populism becomes one of the preconditions of "thinking politics"; the rejection of populism becomes a rejection of the political "*tout court*".<sup>13</sup>

Laclau's first ascertainment is the ambiguity of populist referents. If populism does not have a stable referent, Laclau argues, it is precisely because it articulates a large number of "unfulfilled demands" in the context of "an increasing inability of the institutional system to absorb them in a differential way (each in isolation from the others)" which creates an "equivalential relation" between them.<sup>14</sup> For Laclau the unity of the concept resides in the hegemonic political articulation of demands.

*"There is in any society a reservoir of raw anti-status-quo feelings which crystallize in some symbols quite independently of the forms of their political articulation, and it is their presence we intuitively perceive when we call a discourse or a mobilization 'populistic'."*<sup>15</sup>

It's only when the system is not able or refuses to incorporate the "unfulfilled demands", that a "chain of equivalence" is created between them. The "chain of equivalence" creates the second *sine qua non* dimension of populism: "the need for an internal frontier", and an antagonistic frontier between the State, (the

---

<sup>9</sup> Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*.

<sup>10</sup> Bakić, Jovo. 2013. *Populizam ili demagogija u političkom životu Srbije?*, in *Promene osnovnih struktura društva Srbije u periodu ubrzane transformacije*, edited by Lazić, Mladen and Slobodan Cvejić. Belgrade: Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta. Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 219-39.

<sup>11</sup> Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*.

<sup>12</sup> Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*.

<sup>13</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 24.

<sup>14</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 73.

<sup>15</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 123.

common denominator of the dominant, the oligarchy, and the corrupted elite) on one side, and the "people" on the other.

Furthermore, Laclau develops the figure of "the precipitator of the equivalential link: popular identity as such." The particular antagonistic figure of "the people" has a duty to crystallize the demands as an "empty signifier, which becomes *intentionally* poorer, for it has to dispossess itself of particularistic contents in order to embrace social demands which are quite heterogeneous."<sup>16</sup> For Laclau, the task of the left is to constitute "a people" in the same way that far-right parties do - to symbolically build a popular unity and to assemble a certain number of social demands around specific symbols.

### Populism in the Serbian context

- Populism is not alien to the contemporary Serbian political context. Many historians believe populism has been present and exploited as a mechanism of power in Serbian politics since the formation of the modern state in the 19th century, and they use the term pejoratively. Vladimir Pavićević argues that "populism represents, from Karađorđe to Slobodan Milošević, a recurrent technique of governance, which in practice has not been successfully replaced by instruments that provide the development of liberal democracy model."<sup>17</sup> Dubravka Stojanović, a historian known for her criticism of the Serbian relationship to other Yugoslav nations, follows this interpretation by emphasising the populist nature of Serbian politics: "Serbia wanted to impose its populist model on other Yugoslav nations which led to a conflict with other nations and the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991."<sup>18</sup>

- However, the literature on populism in Serbia rarely analysed the democratic successors of Slobodan Milošević's regime as populist. This only changed once the Radical Party split, when a number of members left to found the Serbian Progressive Party (Srpska Napredna Stranka SNS), which came to power in 2012. The party's leader, Aleksandar Vučić, used the overall discontent in Serbia to gain power. Having been openly nationalist in 1990s and early 2000s, Vučić now moderated his rhetoric, alleging to speak on behalf of "the people".

- Commenting on Serbian populism, Pavićević argues that it should be considered the main obstacle to the democratization of the society. Again, populism is in this sense understood as a social peril connected to far-right ideology: conservatism and antimodernism. Harkening back to Laclau, where could we trace left-wing populist practices in contemporary Serbian politics?

Serbian public discourse is generally hostile towards left ideologies, and activists are often diminished and sometimes demonized in the media. One of the reasons for this could partly be rooted in Slobodan Milošević's left

---

<sup>16</sup> Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 96.

<sup>17</sup> Pavićević, Vladimir. 2008. *Reprodukcija populističkog obrasca u srpskoj političkoj kulturi*, in *Savremena država*, edited by Pavlović, Vukašin and Zoran Stojiljković. Belgrade: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Fakultet političkih nauka Univerziteta u Beogradu, Centar za demokratiju, 221-30.

<sup>18</sup> Stojanović, Dubravka. 2010. *Ulje na vodi. Oglеди iz istorije sadašnjosti Srbije*. Belgrade: Pešćanik, 27 [translated by the authors].

positioning in the nineties. Milošević's regime legitimised itself through nationalism, while maintaining, at the same time, continuity with the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia through the new state's name (Federal Republic Yugoslavia, consisting of Serbia and Montenegro). As anthropologist Stef Jansen noticed, Milošević remained in power "due to heterogeneous discourse consisting of vague allusions to some aspects of Serbian nationalism parallel to some aspects of Yugoslav socialism which were until then considered as incompatible."<sup>19</sup> After the October 5 revolution, the Socialist Party of Serbia, SPS, kept its socialist rhetoric but never openly distanced itself from Milošević. Furthermore, the SPS supported liberal economic policies in various governments that it helped form.

- Another reason for the marginality of the left ideology in Serbia can be found in the relationship between the democratically elected governments and the working class issues. In his study on left social movements in the post-2000 Serbia, historian Petar Atanacković disappointedly remarks that the working class (which should be a traditional nurturer of left ideas) is atomized and disoriented as a result of the systematic redirection of the workers' dissatisfaction from social to various national issues carried out by the authorities.<sup>20</sup> Arguing that the working class is confused, seduced by nationalism and the perks of individualising capitalist forces, the sociologist Mladen Lazić also does not see a potential for the mobilization of this group, finding it too heterogeneous.<sup>21</sup>
- The sporadic initiatives that address social issues from a left perspective are mainly gathered around marginal or informal groups and non-governmental organizations, mostly active within student organizations, feminist organisations, and LGBT and cultural activism. Some of those left-wing organizations formed the Left Summit of Serbia,<sup>22</sup> "a wide radical left network that strives to interconnect them around a set of political principles focused on worker and democratic control, reindustrialisation, anti-fascism, and the struggle for equality."<sup>23</sup> Miloš Baković Jadžić, co-founder of the leftist organization Centre for Politics of Emancipation and a member of the Left Summit estimates that the current political climate is still not suitable for the creation of a solid left-wing party.<sup>24</sup> Croatian left-wing theoreticians and activists Srećko Horvat and Igor Štiks argue that there has been a recent

<sup>19</sup>Jansen, Stef. 2005. *Antinacionalizam. Etnografija otpora u Beogradu i Zagrebu*. Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek, 22 [translated by the authors].

<sup>20</sup>Atanacković, Petar. 2009. *Novi socijalni pokreti u Srbiji između apatije i protesta*, in *Društvo u pokretu. Novi društveni pokreti u Jugoslaviji od 1968. do danas*, edited by Tomić, Đorđe and Petar Atanacković. Novi Sad: Cenzura, 232-43, 248.

<sup>21</sup>Lazić, Mladen. 2009. *Društveni subjekt savremene levice i radnička klasa u Srbiji*, in *Probuditi san, Razgovori o levici u Srbiji*, edited by Mladenović, Ivica and Milena Timotijević. Belgrade: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 43-47.

<sup>22</sup>The following organizations are Levi Samit Srbije: PARISS, Udruženje akcionara Vršackih, Vinograda, Građansko sindikalni front, Solidarnost, ROZA - Udruženje za radna prava žena, Centar za politike emancipacije, Marks 21, Gerasija, Kontekst kolektiv, Obruč, Forum Roma Srbije, STRIKE, Društveni centar "Oktobar", Zrenjaninski socijalni Forum, Zelena omladina Srbije, Žindok, Centar za kvir studije.

<sup>23</sup>Ilić, Pavle. 2014. *Neoliberal Assault on Working Class Rights in Serbia: Can the Trade Unions Lead the Struggle?*. *Lefteast*, 21. July 2014 (accessed: 14. May 2016).

<sup>24</sup>Papović, Jovana. 2015. *Nouvelle gauche en Serbie: Levi samit, Levain*. *Le Courrier des Balkans*, 6. April 2015 (accessed: 14. May 2016).

rebirth of left politics in the region, especially amongst the youth (students and activists), but that these movements still have difficulties communicating with “the people.”<sup>25</sup>

- Furthermore, these left initiatives are cautious in using the word “people”, but rather opt for “workers” when talking about “the people”. The authors question if this attempt to avoid the term serves the purpose of not being discredited by their political opponents as populist. The signifier “the people” is thus left *empty* by the left initiatives, which gives the current regime an opportunity to manipulate and choreograph it at their will. Regarding the historical background and current political context, it seems that in the near future left-wing ideologies have rather slim chances of penetrating the mainstream Serbian politics.

### “People’s popular culture”

Taken that left-wing ideologies fail to address “the people” within political discourses in Serbia, the potential for its articulation could be traced in popular culture. Popular culture has been perceived as a tool for the deception of the people since the first critiques emerged, most prominently from the early Frankfurt school of thought. Nevertheless, since the establishment of Cultural Studies as a discipline in the 1960s, popular culture has been acknowledged as a fruitful field for the articulation of politics.

Cultural Studies focuses on finding modes of resistance inside popular culture, which are perceived as a hegemonic field of the dominant classes. Stuart Hall stated that “[i]n the study of popular culture, we should always start here: with the double stake in popular culture, the double movement of containment and resistance, which is always inevitably inside it”.<sup>26</sup> Hall considered that containment and resistance are always in a dialectical relationship. On the one hand, he perceived popular culture as a marker for the people’s practices that creates the culture from the bottom, while on the other hand, he recognizes a “commercial” definition of popular culture as a cultural content created by cultural industry and consumed by a large number of people. Hall believed that “just as there is no fixed content to the category of ‘popular culture’, so there is no fixed subject attached to it - ‘the people.’”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, he asserted that “*other* forces” have certain interests in defining “the people and [calls] for a construction of a culture that is “genuinely popular” as a counterpoint to the power’s construction of people as “an effective populist force, saying ‘Yes’ to power.”<sup>28</sup>

Cultural Studies has always perceived popular culture as a field that is inherently embedded in politics, especially when it comes to youth cultures and youth political practices. Even though the persistence on the interpellation of popular culture and politics produced an amount of criticism regarding the

---

<sup>25</sup> Horvat, Srećko and Igor Štiks. 2014. *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism: Radical Politics After Yugoslavia*. London: Verso.

<sup>26</sup> Hall, Stuart. 1981. *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular*, in *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Samuel, Raphael. London: Routledge, 228.

<sup>27</sup> Hall, *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular*, 239.

<sup>28</sup> Hall, *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular*, 239.

discipline's cultural reductionism, popular cultural practice proved the right of the scholars of Cultural Studies on numerous occasions. Although literature, film and television were mainly analysed for their political potential, music has always been present as the articulator of political meanings. Music was already recognised as a politically sensitive social practice by Plato, who wrote in the *Republic* to "beware of change to a strange form of music as endangering the whole. For never are the tropes of music changed without the greatest political laws being changed, as Damon says, and I am persuaded" (424c).<sup>29</sup> Today, with the growing debates around youth's *apoliticity* (to understand in Ranciere's sense) and the search for new political practices, music has been increasingly recognized as an alternative field in which youth claims politics. Drawing on Colin Hay's definition of politics as "a combination of identifiable alternatives, over which actors can have an effect and upon which they can reflect within a social setting", Street et al. believe that this definition introduces the idea that "politics occurs in realms outside of the formally designated political domain, but is distinguished from those activities that are private or devoid of social interaction, or are attributable to 'fate' and/or beyond human agency."<sup>30</sup>

Simon Frith argues that popular music is an important element in the creation of cultural and political identities. He believes that unlike the general understanding of music as a reflection of the people or the audience, the issue is:

*"how it [music] produces them [people, audience], how it creates and constructs an experience - a musical experience, an aesthetic experience - the way can only make sense of by taking on both a subjective and collective identity. [...] Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind [...]."*<sup>31</sup>

Firth asserts that identity is *mobile*, that it is a *process* and that "[m]usic seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective."<sup>32</sup> He believes that social groups only get to know themselves "as groups (as a particular organization of individual and social interests, of sameness and difference) through cultural activity, through aesthetic judgement. Making music isn't a way of expressing ideas; it is a way of living them."<sup>33</sup> On a similar account, Peter Wicke argues that "music evolved into an extraordinary medium of cultural communication, one of the fundamentals of societal production of individuality and subjectivity [...] 'youth' [read young people] began to define itself peculiarly through music."<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Plato and Allan David Bloom. 1968 [1991]. *The Republic of Plato*. New York: Basic Books, 102.

<sup>30</sup> Street, John / Inthorn, Sanna and Martin Scott. 2012. Playing at Politics? Popular Culture as Political Engagement. *Parliamentary Affairs* 65(2), 338-58, 344.

<sup>31</sup> Frith, Simon. 1996. *Music and Identity*, in *Question of Cultural Identity*, edited by Hall, Stuart and Paul du Gay. London: Sage, 108-27, 109.

<sup>32</sup> Frith, *Music and Identity*, 110.

<sup>33</sup> Firth, *Music and Identity*, 111.

<sup>34</sup> Wicke, Peter. 2005. *Music, Dissidence, Revolution, and Commerce: Youth Culture Between Mainstream and Subculture*, in *Between Marx and Coca-Cola. Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980*, edited by Schildt, Axel and Detlef Siegfried. New York: Berghahn Books, 109-26, 115.

Finally, John Street observes that “music has been a site of political expression for centuries, whether as a part of the folk tradition or of the classical canon.”<sup>35</sup> He also adds that music that articulates politics is not exclusive for subgenres and marginal music but is present in the mainstream as well. By analysing different acts and performances, Street also depicts the importance of musicians as agents of social and political struggles. Wicke also notices that “until today, pop music has been the least censored branch within the cultural realm”<sup>36</sup> which makes it a suitable and relatively “emptied space” for the shift of political struggle. Street emphasizes that music is a more affordable medium than film or television, which means that “music is well adapted to reflecting or responding to reality, and that certain styles of music-making are disposed to take advantage of this potential.”<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, it is far from true that all produced music is political, even though it is always a product of a certain socio-political context. A question remains as to why certain socio-political contexts trigger more political music than the others.

#### “The Bombs of the Nineties” - Case Study

While researching the articulation of politics in popular culture, one hip-hop collective with a highly provocative name in a Serbian context, “The Bombs of the Nineties” (*Bombe devedesetih*), especially attracted our attention. The group is highly heterogeneous in terms of age, as the members’ age stretches from 17 to 30 years. Also, the collective consists of both women and men with different family and education backgrounds. Some of them come from a middle class milieu and live in the centre of Belgrade; others come from Belgrade working class suburbs such as Borča, while some of them are originally from outside of Belgrade and grew up in peasant families. The group revolves around three charismatic figures, but has twenty additional members - rappers, producers, friends and supporters - who make up “The Bombs of the Nineties”. The members initially met via social networks where they shared their musical taste, ideas and ideology. Social networks are also their key channel of promotion and communication with the audience. Although new on Serbian hip-hop scene (they have been active since 2014), “The Bombs of the Nineties” are well connected with other underground hip-hop artists and they represent an important actor, promoting a new hip-hop subgenre - “trap”. We followed the group during one year in a participant observation fieldwork, from September 2014 to May 2015. We assisted at some of their gatherings, concerts, song recordings, and video shootings, and followed some of them during their student activism undertakings. We also used film as part of our methodology as visual representation is very important in their expression and practices. We also conducted five semi-structured interviews with the three founding members of “The Bombs of the Nineties”: Daki BD, Mimi Mercedes and Gudroslav, as well as many more informal interviews with the other group members. We first encountered Daki BD as he was the author of two blogs, one about hip-hop and urban culture, “Vraćanje na pravo” (A return to the right

---

<sup>35</sup> Street, John. 2012. *Music and Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 42.

<sup>36</sup> Wicke, *Music, Dissidence, Revolution*, 116.

<sup>37</sup> Street, *Music and Politics*, 48.

thing)<sup>38</sup>, and another one, “Teorija iz teretane” (Theory from the gym), subtitled “Necessary theoretical reading for the liberation of the working class in the XXI century.”<sup>39</sup> At the point when we met Daki BD, we were co-writing a paper on the revival of a nineties Serbian subculture, “Dizel”. Daki BD appeared as an interesting interlocutor as he was one of the few actors of the “Dizel” revival to articulate the subculture through a theoretical axis: he was at the time a philosophy student, and one of the few to publish on the subject. Belonging both to the world of academia and hip-hop, Daki BD represented a kind of bridge between two worlds for us as researchers. Our shared interest in urban culture and the development of “Dizel” subculture allowed us to build trust with him, and he introduced us to the rest of the group. By following “The Bombs of the Nineties”, we were concentrating on the synchronization of their political discourse with their practices. Our research concentrated on the political dimension of their public activities.

What was striking for us, as researchers of the revival of the “Dizel” subculture, was the unique appropriation of the “Dizel” symbols within “The Bombs of the Nineties” collective. Their appropriation of “Dizel”, which is colloquially considered as a negative heritage of the nineties in Serbia, assigned emancipatory potential to this subculture. Observing this as a counter-hegemonic practice, we were intrigued that this reinterpretation did not come from the intellectual or academic discourses but from a youth group. Such an initiative led us to presume that the contemporary youth generation born and bred after the disintegration of Yugoslavia holds a potential to deconstruct cultural dichotomies constructed around popular music and “Dizel” subculture.<sup>40</sup>

### Practices

“The Bombs of the Nineties” is a hip-hop collective consisting of solo acts. It serves as a sort of a mutual label for the performers, which encircles them in a politically and ideologically cohesive group with enough space to showcase their artistic individuality.

Each member is characterized by a personal rap-style and plays a clear role in the collective. Daki BD is the oldest member - born in 1985, he is considered by the group as its ideological mentor. Mimi Mercedez (1992) is the only female rapper of the group and the most popular member. She sometimes works as a stripper, and the performance of her identity could be positioned inside the lipstick feminism or “Raunch culture” that advocates the empowerment of women by deliberate body practices, ostentatious dressing and behaviour, assuming provocative sexual attitudes in order to fight established gender roles.<sup>41</sup> Concerning the highly patriarchal Serbian context, the rhymes of Mimi

---

<sup>38</sup> Daki BD. 2015. [Vraćanje na pravo](#). *Dizel Gorivo*, 02. April 2015 (accessed: 17. May 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Daki BD. 2015. [Teorija iz teretane](#) (accessed: 20. March 2016).

<sup>40</sup> Papović, Jovana and Astrea Pejović. 2015. *Revival without Nostalgia. The Dizel' Movement, Serbian Nineties Cultural Trauma and Globalized Youth Cultures*, in *Eastern European Youth Cultures in a Global Context*, edited by Winkel, Heike and Matthiass Schwarts. London: Palgrave McMillan, 81-93.

<sup>41</sup> Levy, Ariel. 2006. *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. New York: Free Press.

Mercedez include: “Everybody wonders whether our nation is decaying because of the likes of me; or is it the decaying nation which creates the likes of me” (*Da li zemlja propada zbog ovakvih kao ja, ili zemlja propala stvara ovakve kao ja*),<sup>42</sup> could be understood as an empowering message, as she underlines the ambiguity between the subject and the object of the domination. This play with ambiguity could be linked to the process of self-empowerment. Empowerment here should be seen as a process that seeks social transformation based on “the construction of critical awareness and on a consideration of the structural conditions of domination. The main challenge is therefore to facilitate awareness to develop ‘subjectivities of resistance’, ‘radical subjectivity’ and to work on both the identities of the subjects and social positions of all kinds.”<sup>43</sup> Gudroslav (1993) is the youngest founding member whose name is a play on words with traditional Serbian names, which end with a suffix - *slav* that could mean both celebration and of Slavic origin. Gudroslav (*gudro* - from *gudra*, colloquial for drugs) could both mean the “one who celebrates drugs” or a “Slav on drugs”. Gudroslav is the most dedicated and the most recognized rapper by both fans and the members of “The Bombs of the Nineties”. The other members often seek Gudroslav for advice during the recording sessions and the data from our participant observation period marked him off as a sort of a music catalyst of the group. It was he who organized the first solo concert in the Belgrade club “Drugstore” on 20 February 2015. The other members of the collective performed on this concert as supporting acts, which introduced the collective to the wider audience in Belgrade for the first time.

“The Bombs of the Nineties” record their songs in improvised studios; their videos are made with limited or no funding and are directed and filmed by their friends. Their promotion is exclusively made through social networks and we can measure the increase of their visibility in correlation with the number of their fans on Facebook<sup>44</sup> and YouTube views.<sup>45</sup> At the beginning of our research the collective did not have an independent page but at the time of writing in March 2016 they have 4120 followers. The less popular individual members of the collective have between 2000 to the 25 000 followers gathered by Mimi Mercedez. At the very beginning of our research, Mimi Mercedez had around 8 000 followers on Facebook, meaning that she has almost tripled her fan base in the last two years.

## Discourse

Hip-hop is a music genre that has always had a social and political dimension, as is also the case in Serbia. On one hand, one of the most popular hip hop collectives, “Beogradski Sindikat” (Belgrade Syndicate), uses hip-hop to promote conservative values,<sup>46</sup> while on the other hand the rapper Marcelo

---

<sup>42</sup> Mimi Mercedez feat. Salier Del Flores. *MMM*. *Youtube* (accessed: 15. May 2016).

<sup>43</sup> Bacqué, Marie-Hélène and Carole Biewener. 2015. *L'Empowerment, une pratique émancipatrice?*. Paris: La Découverte, 146 [translated by the authors].

<sup>44</sup> Bombs of the nineties [Facebook page](#) (accessed: 20. March 2016).

<sup>45</sup> Bombs of the nineties [YouTube channel](#) (accessed: 20. March 2016).

<sup>46</sup> This collective is prominent because of their open critique of corruption in Serbian politics and politicians. Their critique mostly addresses the Democratic Party, perceived as corrupt and nepotistic. Nevertheless, Belgrade Syndicate is also known by its ambiguous political engagement with the far right movement Srpske Dveri, which has recently become a party. After the party was

openly supports pro-European politics and the values advocated by liberal democratic parties. “The Bombs of the Nineties” also openly speak about their political agendas through their music, arguing that entertainment is a good way to share thoughts with the audience. Therefore, Gudroslav stated: “We want to transmit a political message to our public through entertainment,”<sup>47</sup> and Mimi Mercedes jumped in by saying: “My most entertaining song is also my most political one. (...) The goal of this collective, especially Daki’s and mine, is to reassess the relationship people have towards politics.”<sup>48</sup>

The main issue around which “The Bombs of the Nineties” articulate their politics is class warfare. As heirs of the working class, they consider themselves the biggest losers of the democratic transition in Serbia - “the non-working class”.<sup>49</sup> Using hip-hop, they promote the idea that the unemployed and disempowered youth from Serbia and the region can and should create a critical mass together. Aiming to position themselves as the leaders of the (sub)urban youth, they claim that their music is a tool that could oppose the right-wing discourse that prevails in the hip-hop scene and the media, but also among Serbian youth in general.

Furthermore, they refuse to enter the labour market since they identify labour in “neoliberal capitalist” conditions as exploitation. They promote hedonism and leisure as “the best tool for fighting the neoliberal capitalism”. In another interview Daki BD stated: “Having fun is the only thing we can do to oppose this system in which we don’t have any opportunities.”<sup>50</sup> Daki BD describes the social cleavages of the Serbian society in a rather Manichean way; for him there is the elite on one side and the “people” on the other. The three leaders of the group insist on the political implications of their practice: “We want to talk to youth from the lower classes, to those *guys from the blocks* that are just fighting every day, and we want to talk about their life, and to use their words and sounds to do so.”<sup>51</sup> The group also insists on a commitment: “We reject the politics of victimization, we want to empower the youth of the working class and to do so we have to insist on the weapons we have. We want to have fun, to party and to listen to the music of the youth, hip-hop, techno and turbo-folk - the music of the *lower* classes. This is a committed political act, this is our way to defy capitalism.”<sup>52</sup>

---

formed, one of the Belgrade Syndicate’s leaders, Boško Ćirković-Škabo stated that now he “finally has someone to vote for”, which became the party’s slogan during the parliamentary elections in 2012, during the Talk show on *Prva* television, “Veče sa Ivanom Ivanovićem” (available [here](#)). Nevertheless Boško Ćirković, denied publicly being involved in any manner with the party Dveri. Members of the Belgrade Syndicate also took part in the “Family walk” (Porodična šetnja) organised by Dveri in October 2010, as a counter protest against the organisation of the Gay pride in Belgrade.

<sup>47</sup> Gudroslav, personal communication, 04. February 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Mimi Mercedes, personal communication, 04. February 2015.

<sup>49</sup> Daki DB often makes references to the youth that live in Belgrade suburbs as the “Neo-Dizels” or the “Babies of the nineties”, and he calls them the successors of the working class, considering himself, a child of two factory workers who lost their jobs living in (sub)urban neighbourhood Borča, to be a perfect representative of the generation (even if he is older than the group he is refereeing to). Daki DB, personal communication, 28. February 2015. See also, Teorija iz Teretane. 2012. [Nasilni subjekt: nepoželjni višak radničke klase](#) (assessed: 16. May 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Daki DB, personal communication, 04. February 2015.

<sup>51</sup> Mimi Mercedes, personal communication, 11. September 2014.

<sup>52</sup> Daki DB, personal communication, 04. February 2015.

### The construction of collective identity

Following Laclau’s concept of the “equivalency chain” and “unfulfilled demands”, we should see how the demands of “The Bombs of the Nineties” participate in the construction of a collective identity from a populist perspective. In this sense we could spot two main constitutive agents of “the people”: the disempowered working class on the one side, and youth as the “biggest transitional losers” on the other.

In order to position their practices and discourse in a global context, “The Bombs of the Nineties” use the figure of the subjugated, disempowered post-colonial subject, immigrants and ghetto citizens who are socially marginalized and relegated to poverty as their main referents<sup>53</sup>; to articulate their position, they use hip-hop as an empowering voice. They perceive popular culture as a more open and fruitful field for transmission of political ideologies than engagement in a political movement or protesting, and at the same time, far more inclusive than party politics.<sup>54</sup> They see hip-hop, its political origins and its popularity among various social groups as the natural method for the articulation of their “unfulfilled demands”. For them, the potential of hip-hop for social mobilization is endorsed by the fact that it manages to hold the “voices of the oppressed” despite its commercial success and global expansion.

“The Bombs of the Nineties” aim to reach Serbian youth by invoking local references as well. For this reason, they also listen to and promote Turbo-folk music and make covers and mash-ups of this genre with their own music. By listening and perpetuating this genre, which often polarizes Serbian society, “The Bombs of the Nineties” on the one hand intend to provoke the Serbian cultural elite, and, on the other, want to get closer to the taste and everyday practices of the working class.<sup>55</sup> Polo Čare stated in an interview: “I never harboured resentment towards this genre. Some turbo folk songs are stronger than any rap tracks. When you hear lyrics such as ‘Winter in the Balkans, I’m in my apartment, money up to the roof, where should I go, where should I go’, it

---

<sup>53</sup> We noticed a lot of references to African football players and Black power members in the songs of the collective. They refer to these historical characters or sportsmen as “heroes” and “brothers”. Mimi Mercedez’s song, (feat Daki BD) named by the Senegalese football player *Diafra Sakho*, is the most unequivocal example of this statement. “They like my dark side - Mimi Ghana/They say you’re cute as Daki’s speech impediment/Bombs of the nineties, a diamond mine /The tradition of workers and crazy immigrants /They didn’t know enough, did they - Mali, Sierra Leone/.../ The ambition is not small on the way to Senegal/The global problem, the Balkans and West Africa/.../ A chain around my neck, I’m looking for a plot in Dedinje/I’m shining to give solar energy to my brothers in Africa/West Africa, there we were born/Senegalese coast, Patrick Vieira/Diafra Sakho, Mamadou Sakho/My name is Diafra, my name isn’t Darko/My biggest brother, Diafra Sakho.” Available [here](#).

<sup>54</sup> Besides hip-hop, Daki BD was involved in student revolts during the blockade of the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, in 2010. The students’ demands remain unfulfilled, and, referring to this experience, Daki BD stated, “I think that hip-hop is a much better way to send a message to people and communicate with a wider audience”, Daki BD, personal communication, 28. February 2015; see also Teorija iz teretane. 2013. [Hip-hop kao lokalno glasilo srpske radničke klase](#) (in collaboration with Goran Musić and Predrag Vukčević) (accessed: 16. May 2016).

<sup>55</sup> Delić, Darko. 2012. [Kritika kritike turbo-folka: smrtonosni sjaj Koka-kole, Marlboro i Suzukija u doživljaju domaće liberalne elite](#). *Teorija iz Teretane*, 02. February 2012 (assessed: 16. May 2016); see also Polo Care. [Turbo Folk me je naterao](#). *Youtube*, 21. September 2015 (assessed: 16. May 2016).

explains the essence of life. It's how we combine two worlds that are parts of our culture and we support maximally the unification of these genres."<sup>56</sup>

The second constitutive agent of "the people" in "The Bombs of the Nineties" practices, central to their engagement, is the concept of the "Youth", which is prominently "crystallized", in Laclau's term, through the collective's defiant name. The name could, on one hand, be understood as a provocation as it is a direct reference to the warfare of the 1990s. Nevertheless, the name is much more complex than the first association may reveal. Beyond the war symbolism, the reference to the nineties is also generational. Using this name, they refer to their peers who have known nothing but war, economic sanctions, poverty and failed economic transition. They use this generational reference to build the new identity of the Serbian youngster [the bombs] and create a version of a mythology of the "subject that is empowered by a hostile environment."<sup>57</sup> In this sense, "The Bombs of the Nineties" subvert historic references and purposely intimidate the public, reminding them of the wars in the nineties, by drawing attention to its living consequences.<sup>58</sup> They intend to remind the public of the constant reproduction of social outcasts among the youth population, which is a product of the official political neglect of the youth.<sup>59</sup>

Accordingly, one of the most prominent responses of the collective to the neglected social position of the youth is their insistence on the revival of the nineties "Dizel" subculture.<sup>60</sup> In the beginning of the nineties, "Dizel" was a movement centred on a group of criminals connected to the informal economy during the war in Yugoslavia. "Dizels" (*Dizelaši*) used the social disorder caused by the wars to gain capital and promote violence. Their fashion style involved sports garments by luxurious high-end fashion brands, thick golden chains and most prominently, Nike "Air-Max" sneakers. "Dizel" style represented a degradation of *good taste* for the Serbian cultural elite, while

<sup>56</sup> Strugar, Stefan. 2015. *Beogradska rep senzacija: "Bombe" raznose domaću scenu*. *Vjesti online*, 24. April 2014 (assessed: 16. May 2016).

<sup>57</sup> Dizel Gorivo. 2011. *Vraćanje na pravo. DIZEL za XXI vek - pitanje od presudnog značaja*. (accessed: 16. May 2016); see also: Strugar, *Beogradska rep senzacija*.

<sup>58</sup> "Using Dizel dress code is an intentional provocation" Mimi Mercedes, personal communication, 11. September 2014; "When someone declares himself as a Dizel, that means that he is on his way to becoming politically conscious." Daki BD, personal communication, 11. September 2014.

<sup>59</sup> The increasing youth unemployment forced the young population to turn to precarious labour and the grey market. At the very beginning of the World Economic Crisis, in June 2008, the International Labour Organization presented the following facts: "Over 40% of young workers [in the Western Balkans] are in temporary jobs, while approximately 44% are estimated as engaged in informal employment with no employment contract or social security coverage. Furthermore, the number of young workers who have become discouraged in their search for a job, but who are available and willing to work, amounts to 5.6 per cent of the total youth population, which could add an estimated 10 per cent to the ILO youth unemployment rate for the sub-region" in International Labour Office Geneva. 2008. Background paper for the Informal Meeting of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs during the International Labour Conference Geneva, 12. June 2008. (accessed: 10. October 2014).

<sup>60</sup> From 2009, a revival of nineties music and fashion occurred in Serbia. This revival was part of a global phenomenon, yet it evoked many repressed memories and was highly criticized in the media and public discourses. The peak of the revival took place in October 2011 with a music festival called "I love the Nineties". This particular event triggered a public debate marking the youth that participated in the revival as nationalist, hooligans, with bad taste etc. See Papović, Jovana and Astrea Pejović. 2013. „Dizel“-Revival in Serbien. *Wiederkehr einer Subkultur der 1990er Jahre*. *Osteuropa* 11-12, 97-104; Papović and Pejović, *Revival Without Nostalgia*.

their attitudes intimidated citizens. The collapse of the state economy established “Dizels” as the most successful and powerful individuals, who became role models for the youth that were growing up in an impoverished society. After the end of the economic embargo in 1995, fashion elements from the “Dizel” movement became available on the Serbian market and the youth started to imitate their “heroes” in numbers. The small-scale movement, exclusive for a warfare elite, from this point on became a youth subculture. Through the appropriation of the “Dizel”, “The Bombs of the Nineties” embody the identity of the contemporary Serbian youth, whose social position is at the same time *the consequence of the bombs from the nineties* and a *ticking bomb*.

Serbian Cultural Studies lack a thorough analysis of the condemnation of “Dizel” in dominant and popular discourses. Furthermore, the hooligan football supporters, whose fashion statement is close to the “Dizel’s”, additionally enhance the perpetuation of the negative imagery associated with “Dizel”. From the position that interprets “Dizel” as a negative heritage of the nineties, “The Bombs of the Nineties” could be easily portrayed as the promoters of Serbian nationalism and as hooligans.

In contrast to popular opinion, “The Bombs of the Nineties” embrace “Dizel” as a stigmatized youth movement and build their counter-hegemonic practices from there. We could understand their use of “Dizel” as a “grounded aesthetic” ,in Paul Willis’s terms. For Willis, popular culture allows for an immense number of meanings and reinterpretations depending on the context in which a particular popular culture is produced and consumed. Willis comes up with the “grounded aesthetic” as a notion in order to “identify the particular dynamic of symbolic activity and transformation in concrete named situations.”<sup>61</sup> “The Bombs of the Nineties” identify “Dizel” as the embodiment of cultural hegemony, and from there they construct a neo-“Dizel” persona. In Willis’ terms, their practices could be defined as a “process whereby meanings are attributed to symbols and practices and where symbols and practices are selected, reselected, highlighted and recomposed to resonate further appropriated and particularized meanings.”<sup>62</sup> In this way, “The Bombs of the Nineties” glorify the African anti-colonial struggle and the fact that there are certain academic initiatives reading post-socialist transformation in parallel to the post-colonial one.<sup>63</sup> Although the prefix “post” is debatable, we could perceive the appropriation of “Dizel” in the practices of “The Bombs of the Nineties” as the “ways in which post-colonial societies take over those aspects of the imperial culture - language, forms of writing, film, theatre, even modes of thought and argument such as rationalism, logic and analysis - that may be of use to them in articulating their own social and cultural identities.”<sup>64</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup> Willis, Paul. 2005 (1990). *Symbolic Creativity*, in *Popular Culture. A Reader*, edited by Guins, Raiford and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz. London: Sage, 241-248, 244.

<sup>62</sup> Willis, “*Symbolic Creativity*”, 244.

<sup>63</sup> Chari, Sharad and Catherine Verdery. 2009. Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51(1), 6-34.

<sup>64</sup> Ashcroft, Bill / Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin Helen. 2007. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge.

Reading the “The Bombs of the Nineties” in this sense, we may easily understand their music and politics as populist, as they attempt to reveal and draw attention to the “unfulfilled” demands, in Laclau’s terms, of the contemporary Serbian youth. Unlike the new left organizations, as stated above, this hip-hop collective openly refers to the category of “the people” in order to unite and guide the agency of the audience and the followers. But we could also say that the manner in which they combine Marxist and leftist references with references to the ethnic wars of the nineties can be confusing or misleading, and as such the ideological nature of their commitment could be criticized or (mis)interpreted differently.

### **And now what? Limits of music as an articulator of left populism**

Taking into account music’s potential to convey politically sensitive meanings and the potential of popular culture to articulate left wing populism or to create new political identities, we have to consider what happens once the audience receives the message: how is it understood and reinterpreted? The main problem in thinking about the transmission of political knowledge and meanings through popular culture or music lies, as Anneke Meyer argues, in the analytical potential of the terminology “audiences”, “consumers”, “messages” and “effects”. She draws attention to this issue following Ann Gray’s analysis of debates regarding audience research that states that this terminology “implies a one-way model of communication in which texts are active producers of messages and consumers are passive recipients.”<sup>65</sup> “Texts and consumers, as well as their inter-relationships, are more complex”, Meyer continues, as they “both reflect and generate certain representations; they create and reproduce culture.”<sup>66</sup> This position stems from Cultural Studies’ body of knowledge, which has been arguing for cultural consumption as the production of meanings. Street, Inthorn and Scott assert: “popular culture serves not only as a source of political knowledge, but also as a source of political morality.”<sup>67</sup> Accordingly, we should ask how the consumption of the “The Bombs of the Nineties” music participates in the construction of the political identities of their audience and how it influences the understanding of Serbian recent history. Even though we would need to undertake ethnographic research of the audience in order to answer these questions precisely, we may theoretically reflect on the limitations and the potential threats carried by “The Bombs of the Nineties”, their music, style and subversion of the nineties symbols.

This collective introduced a rather provocative discourse to Serbian popular culture. They deliberately employ symbols from the nineties, singing about unemployment, poverty and late transition to adulthood in order to try to connect the youth’s current disadvantaged social position in Serbia with the unresolved social and cultural traumas of the nineties. Even more, by appropriating symbols that invoke painful memories, “The Bombs of the Nineties” accuse the Serbian cultural elites of constructing “Dizel” as an “inner

---

<sup>65</sup> Meyer, Anneke. 2008. *Investigating Cultural Consumers*, in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, edited by Pickering, Michael. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 68-88, 72.

<sup>66</sup> Mayer, *Investigating Cultural Consumers*, 72.

<sup>67</sup> Street / Sanna and Scott, *Playing at Politics?*, 339.

other”, the symbol of the downfall of civic values and growing nationalism. Also, the specific position that Mimi Mercedes holds in this rap collective challenges Serbian culture’s deeply rooted patriarchy by promoting female liberation, freedom to exploit her body as she pleases and women’s empowerment. Unlike turbo-folk singers, whose acting is perceived in academic discourse as contrary to patriarchal norms, even if is more inattentive than conscious, Mimi Mercedes’s act is completely intentional: she is openly talking about her aspirations to reach “young girls” in order to empower them.<sup>68</sup>

Nevertheless, we have to consider how contingent the understanding of the “The Bombs of the Nineties”, their name, music and style is on the audience’s knowledge of recent history and understanding of Serbian politics? A reading of historian Dubravka Stojanović’s study of Serbian history schoolbooks shows that the schooling system in Serbia provides confusion regarding the knowledge of recent history, Slobodan Milošević’s politics, the wars in the nineties and the role of Serbia in these events. Stojanović aims to prove that the biggest confusion in the schoolbooks comes from the ambiguous definitions of political ideologies and political events from the nineties, which misleads pupils.<sup>69</sup>

“The Bombs of the Nineties” tend to understand the “Dizel” subculture as a “people’s” culture and try to reinterpret it in a left perspective. Still, Dubravka Stojanović shows that the ambiguous historical knowledge of nineties politics provides a deep confusion regarding the left-right, socialism-nationalism political divisions in Serbia. Taking the historical school books published after 2000, she argues that 5<sup>th</sup> October, the day when Milošević was overthrown, is represented as the day “when communism fell, even though Slobodan Milošević did not go to war in the name of the working class and their rights, but in the name of the nation and the coveted borders.”<sup>70</sup> If young people are taught in school in such a confusing manner, “The Bombs of the Nineties” could produce even deeper confusion. Also, beyond their intentions, they could be (mis)understood and confused for glorifiers of Milošević’s politics and the wars.

It seems, however, that “The Bombs of the Nineties” has started to reach the intellectual elite in their political mediation. Again, it is Mimi Mercedes who has been gaining the most attention. The playwright and public intellectual Biljana Srbljanović has started to support Mimi on her social network profiles despite fitting into the group that the “Bombs” criticize. Similarly, an organization which works in the field of creative industry, *Rentakultura*,<sup>71</sup> invited Mimi Mercedes to their open talk about the position of young artists and the creative class in Serbia. Also, the Slovenian intellectual and leftist activist, Anita Tolić, recognized Mimi Mercedes as the voice of the generation, stating that Mimi’s music “brilliantly reflects the state of affairs in which her country has found itself. It is a state which creates “the likes of her” (especially

---

<sup>68</sup> 2015. [Bleja sa Bombama Devedesetih. Ekskluzivni intervju sa najuzbudljivijim rep kolektivom u zemlji.](#) *Before After*, 06. April 2015 (accessed: 18. May 2016); see also Mimi Mercedes. 2015. [Sex, Drugs and Class War. Feminist Trap in Serbia.](#) *I-D Magazine*, 11. June 2015 (accessed: 08. December 2015).

<sup>69</sup> Stojanović, *Ulje na vodi*, 132.

<sup>70</sup> Stojanović, *Ulje na vodi*, 131.

<sup>71</sup> Rentakultura: Available [here](#).

women in the re-patriarchal zed [sic] society), the lost generation, the underprivileged class, robbed of the legal, traditional ways of getting by and, ultimately, their future.”<sup>72</sup> From this intellectual feedback it seems that “The Bombs of the Nineties” subversion is recognized and encouraged by the educated audience, yet the conundrum for future research remains: how does the youth appropriate this hybrid ideology?

Furthermore, by dressing as “Dizel” from the nineties, “The Bombs of the Nineties” try to reach right-wing youth who sympathize with the original movement, attempting to awaken class consciousness within this marginalized group imbued with nationalist ideas. They use hip-hop as a popular speech in order to reach them, yet one could question how clear the message is. The advantage they have in this communicational process is that most of the members of the collective also come from working class neighbourhoods, as do the vast majority of the youth in question. In this perspective, we should emphasise that they share similar lived experiences, which enable them to reach this population more easily. Still, the question remains how effective a small hip-hop collective could be against an ideological machinery that has been thoroughly working on the dispersion of nationalism for decades.

A recent research project named “Myplace - Memory, Youth, Political Legacy and Civic Engagement”, conducted by sociologists Hilary Pilkington and Garry Pollock, shows that “young people feel remote from a perceived political elite and demonstrate high aggregate levels of populist beliefs that will make mainstream parties uncomfortable.”<sup>73</sup> Even though “The Bombs of the Nineties” populist strategies have an evidently limited impact on official politics, the collective is undeniably imposing as an innovative and subversive political group, and their practice introduces a new form of political speech and practices into the Serbian political spectrum.

### **Bibliography**

- Arditi, Benjamin. 2007. *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism*. Edinburgh: University Press.
- Ashcroft, Bill / Griffiths, Gareth and Tiffin Helen. 2007. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Atanacković, Petar. 2009. *Novi socijalni pokreti u Srbiji između apatije i protesta*, in *Društvo u pokretu. Novi društveni pokreti u Jugoslaviji od 1968. do danas*, edited by Tomić, Đorđe and Petar Atanacković. Novi Sad: Cenzura, 232-43.
- Bacqué, Marie-Hélène and Carole Biewener. 2015. *L'Empowerment, une pratique émancipatrice?*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Bakić, Jovo. 2013. *Populizam ili demagogija u političkom životu Srbije?*, in *Promene osnovnih struktura društva Srbije u periodu ubrzane transformacije*, edited by Lazić, Mladen and Slobodan Cvejić. Belgrade:

---

<sup>72</sup> Tolić, Anita. 2015. [International Women's Day in the Balkans](#). *Left East*, 13. March 2015 (accessed: 10. December 2015).

<sup>73</sup> Pilkington, Hilary and Gary Pollock. 2015. *Politics are Bollocks: Youth, Politics and Activism in Contemporary Europe*, in *Radical Futures? Youth, Politics and Activism in Contemporary Europe*. London: Wiley Blackwell / The Sociological Review, 1-35, 2.

- Institut za sociološka istraživanja Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta.  
Beograd: Čigoja štampa, 219-39.
- Bombs of the nineties [Facebook page](#) (accessed: 20 March 2016).
- . [YouTube channel](#) (accessed: 20 March 2016).
- . 2015. [Bleja sa Bombama Devedesetih. Ekskluzivni intervju sa najuzbudljivijim rep kolektivom u zemlji.](#) *Before After*, 06. April 2015 (accessed: 18. May 2016).
- Canovan, Margaret. 1999. Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy. *Political Studies* 47(1), 2-16.
- Chari, Sharad and Catherine Verdery. 2009. Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, and Ethnography after the Cold War. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51(1), 6-34.
- Daki BD. 2015. [Vraćanje na pravo.](#) *Dizel Gorivo*, 02. April 2015 (accessed: 17. May 2016).
- Daki DB, personal communication, 04. February 2015.
- personal communication, 28. February 2015.
- Delić, Darko. 2012. [Kritika kritike turbo-folka: smrtonosni sjaj Koka-kole, Marlboro i Suzukija u doživljaju domaće liberalne elite.](#) *Teorija iz Teretane*, 02. February 2012 (assessed: 16. May 2016).
- Dizel Gorivo. 2011. [Vraćanje na pravo. DIZEL za XXI vek - pitanje od presudnog značaja.](#) (accessed: 16. May 2016).
- Frith, Simon. 1996. *Music and Identity*, in *Question of Cultural Identity*, edited by Hall, Stuart and Paul du Gay. London: Sage, 108-127.
- Gudroslav, personal communication, 04. February 2015.
- Hall, Stuart. 1981. *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular*, in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Samuel, Raphael. London: Routledge.
- Horvat, Srećko and Igor Štiks. 2014. *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism: Radical Politics After Yugoslavia*. London: Verso.
- Ilić, Pavle. 2014. [Neoliberal Assault on Working Class Rights in Serbia: Can the Trade Unions Lead the Struggle?.](#) *Lefteast*, 21. July 2014 (accessed: 14. May 2016).
- International Labour Office Geneva. 2008. Background paper for the Informal Meeting of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs during the International Labour Conference Geneva, 12. June 2008. (accessed: 10. October 2014).
- Ivaldi, Gilles and Andrej Zaslove. 2015. *L'Europe des populismes: confluences et diversité.* *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* 53(1), 121-55.
- Jansen, Stef. 2005. *Antinacionalizam. Etnografija otpora u Beogradu i Zagrebu.* Belgrade: Biblioteka XX vek.
- Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *On Populist Reason.* London: Verso.
- Lazić, Mladen. 2009. *Društveni subjekt savremene levice i radnička klasa u Srbiji*, in *Probuditi san, razgovori o levici u Srbiji*, edited by Mladenović, Ivica and Milena Timotijević. Belgrade: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 43-47.
- Levy, Ariel. 2006. *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture.* New York: Free Press.
- Meyer, Anneke. 2008. *Investigating Cultural Consumer*, in *Research Methods for Cultural Studies*, edited by Pickering, Michael. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 68-88.
- Mimi Mercedes's feat. Daki BD. [Diafra Sakho.](#) *Youtube* (accessed: 20. March 2016).
- Mimi Mercedes, personal communication, 04. February 2015.

- . 2015. Sex, Drugs and Class War. Feminist Trap in Serbia. *I-D Magazine*, 11. June 2015 (accessed: 08. December 2015).
- , personal communication, 11. September 2014.
- feat. Salier Del Flores. MMM. *Youtube* (accessed: 15. May 2016).
- Mudde, Cas. 2004. The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government & Opposition* 39(3), 541-63.
- Papović, Jovana and Astrea Pejović. 2013. „Dizel“-Revival in Serbien. Wiederkehr einer Subkultur der 1990er Jahre. *Osteuropa*, 97-104.
- . 2015. *Revival Without Nostalgia. The Dizel' Movement, Serbian Nineties Cultural Trauma and Globalized Youth Cultures*, in *Eastern European Youth Cultures in a Global Context*, edited by Winkel, Heike and Matthiass Schwarts. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 81-93.
- Papović, Jovana. 2015. Nouvelle gauche en Serbie: Levi samit, Levain. *Le Courrier des Balkans*, 6. April 2015 (accessed: 14. May 2016).
- Pavičević, Vladimir. 2008. *Reprodukcija populističkog obrasca u srpskoj političkoj kulturi*, in *Savremena država*, edited by Pavlović, Vukašin and Zoran Stojiljković. Belgrade: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Fakultet političkih nauka Univerziteta u Beogradu, Centar za demokratiju, 221-30.
- Pilkington, Hilary and Gary Pollock. 2015. *Politics are Bollocks?: Youth, Politics and Activism in Contemporary Europe*, in *Radical Futures? Youth, Politics and Activism in Contemporary Europe*. London: Wiley Blackwell / The Sociological Review, 1-35.
- Plato and Allan David Bloom. 1968 [1991]. *The Republic of Plato*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ramet, Sabrina P., and Gordana P. Crnković. 2002. *Kazaam! Splat! Ploof!: The American Impact on European Popular Culture since 1945*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Rioux, Jean-Pierre. 1997. Présentation. Vingtième Siècle, revue d'histoire. *Les populismes* (56), 3-3.
- Stojanović, Dubravka. 2010. *Ulje na vodi. Ogledi iz istorije sadašnjosti Srbije*. Belgrade: Pešćanik/Čigoja štampa.
- Street, John / Inthorn, Sanna and Martin Scott. 2012. Playing at Politics? Popular Culture as Political Engagement. *Parliamentary Affairs* 65(2), 338-58.
- Street, John. 2012. *Music and Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Strugar, Stefan. 2015. Beogradska rep senzacija: "Bombe" raznose domaću scenu. *Vjesti online*, 24. April 2014 (accessed: 16. May 2016).
- Teorija iz Teretane. 2012. Nasilni subjekt: nepoželjni višak radničke klase (accessed: 16. May 2016).
- . 2013. Hip-hop kao lokalno glasilo srpske radničke klase (in collaboration with Goran Musić and Predrag Vukčević) (accessed: 16. May 2016).
- Tolić, Anita. 2015. International Women's Day in the Balkans. *Left East*, 13. March 2015 (accessed: 10. December 2015).
- Polo Care. Turbo Folk me je naterao. *Youtube*, 21. September 2015 (accessed: 16. May 2016).
- Vučetić, Radina. 2012. *Koka-Kola socijalizam. Amerikanizacija jugoslovenske popularne kulture šezdesetih godina XX Veka*. Beograd: Službeni glasnik.
- Wicke, Peter. 2005. *Music, Dissidence, Revolution, and Commerce: Youth Culture Between Mainstream and Subculture*, in *Between Marx and Coca-Cola. Youth Cultures in Changing European Societies, 1960-1980*, edited by Schildt, Axel and Detlef Siegfried. New York: Berghahn Books, 109-26.

The Potential of Popular Culture for the Creation of Left Populism in Serbia:  
The Case of the Hip-Hop Collective “The Bombs of the Nineties”

Willis, Paul. 2005 (1990). “*Symbolic Creativity*”, in *Popular Culture. A Reader*, edited by Guins, Raiford and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz. London: Sage, 241-248.