Debating the Industrial Limits of Domestic Hip Hop

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ABSTRACT
The multicharacter biographies of hip hop artists, consumers, and distributors in post-Yugoslav spaces (ex-YU) straddle a period of seemingly never-ending, teleologic 'transitions.' The business models of regional music industries have also dramatically changed after the emergence of new forms of digital distribution. These transformations each occur within broader, often violent shifts from self-managed state socialism to clientelistic neoliberalism. 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. Artists often compare the precarious present of a marginal position within the record business in ex-YU using frames that reference foreign and past elsewheres, including an era of 'good life' socialism. A debate has emerged as to whose future a new present laden with brands and industry regulation best serves.

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-

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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 so-called domestic scene (*domaća szena*) were audiovisually brought together through diverse voiceover tracks and interspliced b-roll cutaway shots. For example, coppersmiths' handiwork from nearby Baščaršija 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 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 elsewheres as preferable to the current economic stagnations.[1]

1. In addition to *ex-YU*, one encounters a rich mix of other terms when traveling in Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia, including *bivša Juga* 'former Yugo', *ovi* (*naši*) *prostori* 'these spaces' ('of ours' is occasionally also added), *ovi* (*naši*) *krajevi* 'in these (our) parts', *Balkan* 'the Balkans', etc. In this essay, I henceforth refer to the aforementioned post-Yugoslav spaces in which I conducted research as "ex-YU," even though other successor states including Slovenia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo are beyond the scope of this study. Similarly dynamic is the word for 'domestic' or 'homemade,' which frequently shifts its referent depending on speaker and context. 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. I thus offer "domestic scene(s)" as a way of pointing to this dynamic and "ex-YU" as a term that at once both acknowledges but is also partially distanced from historical state mediations. Despite some lexical

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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 domestic 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).

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 his-

differences among Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian, and Montenegrin the basic grammar (and most of the lexicon) remains identical.

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torically racist industry (see, e.g., Rose 1994, 2008; Negus 1999; Forman 2002; Brackett 2003; Chang 2005). 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 domestic 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 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 pasoš*) of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (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 Bosnia-Herzegovina 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, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 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.

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In this essay, 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 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 domestic 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

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> 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 domestic 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 2011b) 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 advertise-

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ment 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, domestic 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

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term “front region” performances of nation-branded dramas are recast “backstage” in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian+Montenegrin 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 postwar politics of memory prone to nationalist historiographies that obscure other industrial pasts with broader employment (see also Manning 2012). While domestic 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

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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 domestic hip hop or the music industry more generally "should be" often assumes a story of imagined spatiotemporal elsewheres 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

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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." 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 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.

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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

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sort of value to record collectors, DJs, and beatmakers: they are proud emblems of a history of domestic discographic and industrial success.

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). Repertories, genres, individual artists, and even instruments were mobilized in Croatian, Serbian, and Bosniac nationalist discourses and nation-building projects during the Yugoslav Wars. 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.[2] 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 (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

2. 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.

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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 elsewheres. 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

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in the mass media, that is, to get paid and become, however fleetingly, a professional. Miszczynski 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. 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 2011a)? 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.

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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.[3] 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 "Dobrodošli u BG" (Welcome to Belgrade), 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 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 ʻoće 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.[4] In the song "Iron" (Pegla), outspoken antinationalist MC 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 Beogradski Sindikat's "Welcome to Srbija" is a battle rap, which identifies an amorphous

3. See also the discographies of Bolesna braća, Prti Bee Gee, Djecaci, Bad Copy, and Krankšvester.

4. 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.

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"they" (i.e., corrupt politicians) as coercing the characters of the song to the point of terrorism for a "better Serbia."[5] 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. 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 powerful 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.[6] 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 b, BG, b, BG jug*) in the scratches refer to the section of Belgrade (***B****eo****g****rad*) from which the MC hails.

5. See Arsenijević (2012) for a critical extended discussion of the "hip hop nationalism" of BS.

6. 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.

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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:

17 Don't miss walking around Belgrade's projects	17 Ne propustite da obiđete beogradske blokove
18 and the fine restaurants when you go down to the docks	18 i fine restorane kad se spustite na dokove,
19 It isn't recommended that you dick around in the city	19 nije preporučljivo po gradu da se kurčiš
20 There are Grobari, Delije, even Radovci, Zemunci here	20 tu su Grobari, Delije, pa Radovci, Zemunci
21 The gray color and social realism are making you depressed	21 Deprimirate sivilno i socirealizam,
22 here a new world is rising on the ruins of communism	22 ovde niće novi svet na ruševini komunizma
23 a wonderful country, a wonderful nation, and natural beauty	23 divna zemlja, divan narod, prirodna bogatstva,
24 the wars are long over, we're ready for new brotherhood	24 ratovi su davno prošli spremni smo za nova bratstva,
25 new unity and new gods and leaders for a new religion of Holy Writings	25 nova jedinstva i nove Bogove i vođe i za novu veru sveta pisma
26 we'll kiss their ass if they'll only end that visa	26 Ljubićemo dupe da se ukine ta viza
27 and for a new influx of that damned Western currency	27 i za novi priliv prokletih, zapadnjačkih deviza
28 buy a book about my city, you'll get a free DVD	28 kupi knjigu o mom gradu imaš gratis DVD
29 even BBC is broadcasting our video advertisement	29 naš reklamni spot vrti i BBC
30 time has run out unfortunately, we arrived at the end of the verse	30 vreme je isteklo na žalost stigli smo do kraja strofe
31 hopefully you had a good time here	31 valjda se ste lepo proveli
32 Come again	32 dođite nam opet

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

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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 International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (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

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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." Domestic hip hop production by artists such as Struka

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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, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 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 elsewheres, 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.[7] 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

7. 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.

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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, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 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 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

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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).[8] 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 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).

8. These are rough estimates based on local reporting.

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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 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

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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 postwar reconciliation—including public apologies for the Croatian government's ignominious role in the Bosnian War that had endeared him to the antinationalist 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 focued on his supposed communist leanings and insufficient patriotism, and now detractors had a story about potential corruption. This business relationship struck diverse

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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.[9] 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

9. In November 2012, to some observers' surprise (and in many corners, disgust), the initial rulings were overturned.

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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 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

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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 domestic 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 deindustrialization 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.

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