Yugospotting through Rhyme-Dropping: Social Engagement of the Rap Scene in the Cultural Yugosphere

Balkan rappers have been among the first cultural activists who, now over a decade ago, started breaking the, at the time still fresh, ex-Yugoslav borders, organizing concerts and musical projects throughout the region. The initiators of this cultural collaboration were Marčelo from Serbia, Edo Maajka from Bosnia and the Croatian rap band Elemental. Their activity launched a movement of socially critical rap scene in the region. Treating the post-war thematic as well as observing, telling, and sharing experiences through the medium of rap music also brought some other common Yugospheric themes into focus in their lyrics, especially the cultural disorientation and feelings of social betrayal common to all post-Yugoslav youth.

My analysis focuses on the politically and socially engaged rap lyrics in the Balkan transnational rap scene from 2003 to 2013. I am using the term Yugospotting to indicate a mode in rap discourses that defines the social conditions of post-Yugoslav societies. In analyzing Yugospotting, I aim to define the capacity of rap music to get socially and politically engaged in the public sphere (Street 2012),especially considering that rappers as social observers are no longer keeping their lyrical attention on strictly post-war political issues; but have, rather, developed an understanding of the more current problems in their underdeveloped societies, as well as many acute problems common to democratic societies worldwide, e.g., the rise of the extreme right, homophobia, and xenophobia.