

Construction of Narratives around "Dizel" Sub-culture:

From Social Stigma to Emancipatory Practice

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Abstract: The thesis takes the nineties Serbian Dizel sub-culture as an entry point in understanding the social change and the patterns of reproduction of cultural values within different ideological settings. In spite of its mass popularity among nineties youth and the massive comeback since 2010, Dizel has been a surprisingly neglected topic in social sciences and studies of culture, especially when compared to similarly popular styles such as turbo-folk—a subject that has attracted scores of analyzes and commentary. The primary goal of this thesis will be to describe and theorize the Dizel phenomenon in a way that answers the simple but important and mostly unaddressed question: what was Dizel? Furthermore, the thesis looks for a socio-historical interpretation that eschews the judgmental approach that still dominates public discourse on Dizel in Serbia. Particular attention will be given to the meaning of its association with criminality in a way that eludes both relativism and denunciation, two frequent attitudes toward the sub-culture. The Dizel sub-culture is in that sense positioned as a site of symbolic struggle (Bourdieu 1991) in post-Yugoslav Serbia and observed as a result of “advanced marginality” (Wacquant 1996). The main argument of this thesis is that Dizel was constructed within middle-class discourses as a threat for social order through the insistence on its criminal and violent dimension. Following the argumentation of Jock Young (1999:74) that the fear of crime often represents a “metaphor for other types of urban unease (e.g. urban development), or a displacement of other fears (e.g. racism, psychological difficulties),” this thesis engages into an exploration of what is Dizel a metaphor of; What types of *other* social fears does Dizel represent for middle class and cultural elite? Thesis is based on a research conducted in Belgrade, in April 2016, consisted of 76 questionnaires, 7 additional interviews and 5 interviews with members of “Dizel-left” political initiative.

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This thesis owes too much to many of you to be signed solely by my name.

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Chapter one: Introduction

The disintegration of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia and the 1991-95 war(s) that followed represent the final stage of the collapse of state socialism in Europe. The *post-socialist transition*¹ or *transformation* (Lazić and Cvejić 2007) had already started in the ex-Soviet countries when the atrocious civil war escalated in Bosnia and Hercegovina and Croatia. *The transition* in the region of former Yugoslavia fully begun only after the Dayton agreement, which put an end to the War in November 1995. In Serbia, structural and institutional changes were not introduced before the democratic revolution that occurred on October 5th 2000. In those terms, Serbia represents a somewhat unique case as it is the only country (together with Montenegro) that stayed under the government of a socialist party led by Slobodan Milošević until the end of the 1990s. In the atmosphere that fanned the flames of nationalisms in the region, Slobodan Milošević advertised himself and the Socialist Party of Serbia as the saviors of the falling federation (see: Baker 2015, Lazić 1994, Ramet 1999).

The complexity of the post-Yugoslavian *condition* (Buden 2007) and the re-invention of post-Yugoslavian identities are particularly clearly articulated through the debates on culture. Cultural practices have often assumed an important role in both public and everyday debates,

¹ Both concepts - "post-socialism" and "transition" are highly debated. Regarding that the social transformation after 1991 is not a central topic of the paper, *post-socialist transition* will be used in italics to emphasize the ambiguity of the term. It is presupposed in this paper that the *post-socialist transition* is a denominator for structural and institutional changes that occurred (after the disintegration of firstly soviet Bloc and then SFRY), having in mind that the changes were local specific and induced by different conditions. For further debates see: Rupnik, Jacques. 1999. "The Postcommunist Divide." *Journal of Democracy* 10(1):57. Burawoy, Michael and Katherine Verdery. 1999. *Uncertain Transition : Ethnographies of Change in the Postsocialist World*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, Chari, Sharad and Katherine Verdery. 2009. "Thinking between the Posts: Postcolonialism, Postsocialism, And. Ethnography after the Cold War." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 51(1):6-34.; Horvat, Srećko and Igor Štiks, eds. 2014. *Welcome to the Desert of Post-Socialism: Radical Politics after Yugoslavia*. London: Verso.

with consumption of popular music as probably the most conspicuous example². Questions about who listens to what music genre were explicitly social and political ones in former Yugoslavia, and denote much more than taste, lifestyles, and preferences. Liberal intellectual discourses in Serbia that strongly opposed Slobodan Milošević's regime often connected listening to "domestic folk" genres with nationalism.

Stigmatization through taste stems from an older classification based in "rural-urban" dichotomy, established during Yugoslavian period. This dichotomy, created by socialist "urban" cultural elites, produced "urban peasants" (Spasić 2013, Vučetić 2012) - an imagined stratum of people who were forced to migrate to the city due to the wider socialist project of industrialization and nationalization of rural areas. The *urban peasants* had never managed to assimilate to the city way of life as they were always in a lack of cultural capital because they listened to the *wrong* music, watched the *wrong* movies, read the *wrong* magazines and dressed *wrongly*. This social dichotomy is a product of the classification based on the consumption of (popular) culture.

This thesis aims to capture a particular group of *urban peasants* - the Dizels (Dizelaši). The Dizels were members of a nineties sub-culture called Dizel, made distinctive by specific fashion features such as nylon tracksuits, Nike air-max sneakers, high waist jeans, tops tucked in the bottoms and strengthened by metal belts and unavoidably jeweled by thick golden chains. Dizels listened to domestic music genres such as turbo-folk and Serbian dance music. They were accused of violence and criminal activities. Dizel went through two phases in the nineties: it started as a particular style of clothing among criminals in gangs that overtook the destroyed

² Catharine Baker (2015) gives a detailed overview of literature on the topic in historiography *The Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s* in the chapter "Culture and Language During and After the Wars", Pp. 112-120.

Serbian economy during the war years (1991-1995); and it morphed, in the second half of the nineties, into a mass youth culture, although not anymore necessarily a violent one. Association with criminality was originally an important element of Dizel which faded in the second phase. Although Dizel became primarily a fashion and music style, criminality however remained one of the style's meaning together with violence and lack of taste, education and moral—connotations readily mobilized by detractors and critics.

In spite its mass popularity among nineties youth and the massive comeback since 2010, Dizel has been surprisingly neglected topic in social sciences and studies of culture, especially when compared to similarly popular styles such as turbo-folk—a subject that has attracted scores of analyzes and commentary. The primary goal of this thesis will be to describe and theorize the Dizel phenomenon in a way that answers the simple but important and mostly unaddressed question: What was Dizel? Within the analysis, I look for a socio-historical interpretation that eschews the judgmental approach that still dominates public discourse on Dizel in Serbia. I will pay particular attention to the meaning of its association with criminality in a way that eludes both relativism and denunciation, two frequent attitudes toward the sub-culture. In that sense, I position Dizel as a site of symbolic struggle (Bourdieu 1991) in post-Yugoslav Serbia and observe it as a result of “advanced marginality” (Wacquant 1996). The main argument of this thesis is that Dizel was constructed within middle-class discourses as a threat for social order through the insistence on its criminal and violent dimension. Cultural criminologist Jock Young (1999:74) argues that the fear of crime often represents a “metaphor for other types of urban unease (e.g. urban development), or a displacement of other fears (e.g. racism, psychological difficulties)”. This thesis engages into an exploration of what is Dizel metaphor of? One of the

working hypotheses of this study is that Dizel is a metaphor of certain middle-class uncertainties that they tried to mask through stigmatization of this sub-culture. The thesis seeks after an answer to the question: What types of *other* social fears does Dizel represent for middle class and cultural elite?

According to Catherine Baker, “evaluating what happened to culture, and even language, during Yugoslav wars is thus a necessarily part of evaluating the impact of ethno-political violence” (Baker 2015:112). The thesis contributes to this agenda through a study of narratives produced about Dizel by 76 individuals who were teenagers in the 1990s and now belong to the Serbian middle class - specifically, to the stratum that Serbian sociologists Mladen Lazić and Slobodan Cvejić call *class of professionals*. Lazić and Cvejić define class as:

“the role of a group in the reproduction of a given system of social relations. Classes form a social hierarchy based on structural differences in the possession of economic, organizational, and cultural capital, which make their relations potentially conflicting. At the same time, classes are internally complex, divided into subgroups of individuals who share similar life conditions. In this way, we consider class structure to be simultaneously relational and hierarchical”. (Lazić and Cvejić 2007).

In his earlier work, Mladen Lazić (1987) defined socialist middle class as a stratum of *mediators* whose role was based on organization of social reproduction. Lazić singles out two types of socialist middle class: one that mediated instructions from the economic and the political nomenclature which had the monopoly over decision making processes to the working class, and the other one, the class of professionals. The first one obtained larger “organizational capital” (or *organizational assets*), the term he borrows from Erik Olin Wright in order to “signify the position of a group inside the process of decision making, in political as well as in economic hierarchical structures” (Lazić and Cvejić 2007). The class of professionals obtained larger cultural capital crystalized in the form of university education. The professionals mediated

technical knowledge, but more importantly, “socially-integrative consciousness that shaped basic value patterns and ideological orientations in Yugoslavia” (Lazić 2011:234-35). Contemporary class of professionals, therefore, will be understood as a social stratum reproduced on the cultural values mediated by the socialist class of professionals, assuming that it plays the same integrative social role as a mediator of “socially-integrative consciousness” and creators of cultural values.

1.1.Methodology

This thesis represents a result of my longtime interest in the nineties Serbian Dizel sub-culture. I started researching Dizel in 2011 at the music festival “I Love the Nineties” in Belgrade. “I Love the Nineties” was a reunion concert of 25 nineties Dance music performers and bands. Since then, I have been following the revival of the Dizel sub-culture, which inevitably made me scrutinize the original sub-culture from the nineties.

For this research, I asked the witnesses of the nineties about their opinion of Dizel sub-culture. I was not particularly interested in personal experiences with Dizel but rather how the nineties teenagers who today belong to the class of professionals form opinions on Dizel and do they see it as an active agent of post-socialist Serbia or as a passé trend. Through the set of four question I aimed to detect patterns and values that qualify Dizel. I formulated general questions trying to avoid implications to criminal and violence. Furthermore, I did not ask about Dizel as sub-culture as I attempted to avoid qualifying it in advance, having in mind that Dizel as a qualifier has a history before it was articulated as a sub-culture. I wandered if the answers would lead to the criminal part of Dizel or to the youth sub-culture. I also believed that asking about Dizel would be too abstract and would lead my correspondents to theorize this phenomenon, while I aimed to gather opinions based on the first-hand experiences, assuming that nineties

teenagers were exposed to Dizels in their everyday lives. The questionnaire asked were the following:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1 – How would you define Dizels? | 3 – Are there any Dizels today? |
| 2 – When did Dizels first appear? | 4 – Name five things that you would associate with Dizels. |

I targeted people born between 1975 and 1985, teenagers and young adults during the nineties. My targeted respondents belong to what has already been named as the *class of professionals*. The construction of Dizel sub-culture as a negative and threatening social agent in the nineties mostly came from this social stratum. My main goal is to find out how the contemporary class of professionals reproduces the attitudes towards this sub-culture. My initial respondents were people around me who were helpful during my previous research and who were fruitful interlocutors within informal interviews. Using the snowball technique, I gathered 76 answered questionnaires from my targeted population. For the answers that were particularly interesting or at some points ambiguous I held additional short interviews. There were 7 such cases. In this thesis, I am going to undertake a qualitative analysis of the answers that expose the attitudes towards the nineties Dizel youth sub-culture.

My respondents belong to *Generation W*, where W stands for War (Jarić 2003). Generation W represents an encompassing denominator for the people from Serbia born between 1984 and 1971 coined by Serbian sociologist Isidora Jarić, with the remark that the generation W itself is not monolithic. Researching everyday life in post-Milošević Serbia, Jarić postulated Generation W in order to try to classify the answers of the generation that was born in socialism and bred in isolation, fully conscious of the socio-political circumstances, yet without a possibility for the independent decision making or, for the good part of her sample, without possibility to influence

the situation. Jarić asserts that nineties were “the period when their expected transition to adulthood was interrupted by the war, embargo, poverty and overall isolation” (Jarić 2003). Generation W therefore represents a passive subject of the nineties, without structural prerequisites for an active participation in the political reality of the Serbian nineties. Anti-war, anti-nationalist, nationalist, pro-war, apolitical and other narratives were a compendium of ideologies that Generation W was passively exposed to. “Their chaotic growing up in an unstable and often hostile environment”, Jarić asserts, “was marked by wars, destruction, lack of parents’ attention, shortened school classes and prolonged summer and winter vacations because of numerous strikes, electricity and heating restrictions, bombing” (Jarić 2003:276).

My intervention to Jarić’s determination of the group is that my sample encompasses also people born in 1985 for two reason. As a member of the Generation W, I believe that people born in 1985 share the same social experience as Jarić’s group and also, it is common practice in Serbia for children to go to school a year earlier; therefore, a number of people born in 1985 actually has an experience of generation 1984. Furthermore, I take into consideration a significant sociological debate on the validity of the concept of generation (Foster 2013, Kertzer 1983). Bourdieu (1993) asserted that, due to different social backgrounds, young people cannot be reduced to a social group based only on biological age. My research therefore focuses on a specific social stratum with a premise that the value orientation of this social group was formed triangularly, as a product of age, socio political context and personal backgrounds (family, education, neighborhood). The thesis aims to grasp how the narratives are constructed among those who were Dizel’s contemporaries and for that reason I employ Spasić’s generational category.

The Dizel sub-culture is here taken as an entry point in understanding the social change and the patterns of reproduction of cultural values within different ideological settings. The analysis aims to show how the attitudes towards the Dizel sub-culture nest the “negative” social values within this particular sub-culture in order to maintain the social hierarchy in which one group aims to establish itself as the carrier of the “true” social and cultural values.

I start with a contextual analysis in which Dizel emerged. Through the analysis of existing literature, I locate the Dizel phenomenon within the disintegration of Yugoslavia, breakup of Yugoslav cultural field and proliferation of marginal cultural models. Regarding that Dizel was not thematized in academic discourses and that my aim was not to seize the construction of public opinion through journalism or popular culture, I do not operate with a significant amount of data for the macro-analytic perspective to position my analysis in. Therefore, macro perspective will be acquired from existing literature on development of class relations in post-Yugoslavia and ethnographic researches of culture as a distinctive category in Serbia.

The second part of the thesis will present the textual analysis of 76 questionnaires. My main goal was to grasp the micro level of a very specific group of people – members of the class of professionals who were teenagers during the nineties; therefore, the analysis of the questionnaires’ will take a microanalytic perspective (analysis of conversational narratives) (Souto-Manninga 2014). My microanalytic perspective aims to grasp my respondents’ opinions on everyday life experiences. The analysis will occasionally compare the answers with the existing literature from the contextual analysis. Furthermore, I hold 5 interviews with a group of young left activists who do not belong to Generation W, but who articulate Dizel subculture in their political practices. They aim to construct their focal point and their political program from the proletarian point of

view, and in this agenda, they position Dizels as heirs of working class. They dress like Dizels taking it as an emancipatory practice on the left political bloc. The interviews will be summarized at the end of the second part of the thesis in order to encompass the spectrum of narratives around Dizel.

In the concluding part, I will summarize my interpretative analysis and point out to certain political capacities that Dizel sub-culture potentially carries in the contemporary context.

1.2. Possible theoretical approaches to Dizel

This thesis frames Dizel sub-culture as a site of symbolic struggle in the nineties Serbia. Through the analysis of narratives constructed around Dizel sub-culture in the contemporary context the thesis aims to show how the symbolic struggle from the nineties was reproduced and continued in the contemporary post-Yugoslavian context. The framework immediately points out to two important theoretical concepts: symbolic power and sub-culture.

Bourdieu (1991:166) defines symbolic power as

a power of constructing reality, and one which tends to establish a gnoseological order: the immediate meaning of the world (and in particular of the social world) depends on what Durkheim calls logical conformism, that is, ‘a homogeneous conception of time, space, number and cause, one which makes it possible for different intellects to reach agreement’.

Drawing back on Durkheim and Radcliffe-Brown, Bourdieu (1991:166) further asserted that the shared symbolic system within the society is inherently political and “cannot be reduced to the structuralists’ function of communication”. The political nature of symbols lays in its role of “social integration: as instruments of knowledge and communication, they make it possible for there to be a consensus on the meaning of the social world, a consensus which contributes fundamentally to the reproduction of the social order”. This consensus is always a product of a

“symbolic struggle for the production of common sense” (Bourdieu 1991:239). To transform one symbolic system into *common sense* “agents bring into play the symbolic capital that they have acquired in previous struggles, in particular all the power that they possess over the instituted taxonomies, those inscribed in people's minds or in the objective world, such as qualifications” (Bourdieu 1991:239). This struggle represents the struggle over classifications “struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and believe, to get them to know and recognize to impose the legitimate definition of the division of the social world and, thereby, to *make and unmake groups*” (Bourdieu 1991:221).

Looking at class and taste in post-socialist societies require to depart from theories elaborated in the West in several ways. Bourdieu's theory is based on his research in France, a country with greater social and political stability than post-socialist Serbia. In periods of transformation such as the one Serbia went through in the 1990s, symbolic struggles are greatly intensified and often radicalized. The war in Yugoslavia clearly exemplifies this. Through four years of social turmoil, new political systems were established, and struggle for symbolic domination was constant. However, process of adopting new symbolic systems and production of new forms of *common sense* occur in a slower pace than institutional ones, especially when it comes to the building of civil society (Dahrendorf 1990). Furthermore, Serbian sociologist Ivana Spasić (2013:16) singles out two important characteristic of contemporary Serbian society. At the first place its post-socialist character, highlighting on Yugoslavian particularities; secondly, its semi-peripheral position which leans to Immanuel Wallerstein's conceptualization of the World-system theory. Spasić (2003:17) points to the cultural dimension of the semi-peripheral societies that is marked by “symbolic, cultural and cognitive aspects of the global stratification: intellectual hegemony,

non-intentional imperialism built in scientific literature, collective stigmatization and unequally distributed power of (self)identification”. In this sense, semi-periphery is characterized by the cultural influence of the Core, due to its geographical and historical closeness, yet the semi-periphery is in the constant *lack*. Nevertheless, the lack is not the one of the colonial subject, therefore semi-periphery is trapped in between two worlds, being able to identify with both, albeit not belonging to any. Intensification of symbolic struggles in this context brings in question full application of Bourdieu’s theory. In the context as post-Yugoslav Serbia legitimate culture is not interpleaded in the tissue of the society but is often (re)shaped by political regimes in power.

The concept of sub-culture, crafted in Great Britain, in the tradition of Marxist humanism in the Birmingham school³ also cannot be directly transposed into the local Serbian context without paying attention to the named contextual specificities. Sub-culture, defined by Birmingham school, are “sub-sets – smaller, more localized and differentiated structures, within one or other of the larger cultural networks” (Clarke, Hall, Jefferson et al. 1976:13). According to this theory, sub-cultures appeared as a collective answer of youth to structural changes that occurred after the Second World War (in Great Britain). The authors asserted that sub-cultures have “ideological dimension” as they address and attempt a solution to “class problematic” (Clarke et al. 1976:47). Sub-cultures are also rooted in “generational consciousness” that is an inherent part of the class consciousness (Clarke et al. 1976:51), yet specific, regarding that class belonging shapes youth’s

³Having in mind post-Birmingham critique of sub-culture only Birmingham school concept will be discussed here for two reasons. At the first place, post-Birmingham critique was articulated after Dizel sub-culture, while on the second place, the critique addresses the connection of music and fashion to youth cultures rather than observing it as a class issue, which is assumed to be the case in the further analysis of Dizel. (see: Hesmondhalgh, David. 2005. "Subcultures, Scenes or Tribes? None of the Above." *Journal of Youth Studies* 8(1):21-40. doi: 0.1080/13676260500063652, Maffesoli, Michel. 1996. *The Time of the Tribes : The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*. London: Sage Publications, Thornton, Sarah. 1996. *Club Cultures : Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital*. Hanover: University Press of New England.)

experiences as a consequence of “a formative stage of their development” (Clarke et al. 1976:48). Dick Hebdige (1979:80) draws attention to the usage of style “as a coded respond to changes affecting community”. Analyzing the emergence of Punk as a consequence of “Britain’s decline”, Hebdige (1979:87) shows how punk subculture created an understandable language that articulated “gloomy apocalyptic ambience of the late 1970s”. Dizel in this sense could be understood as articulation of gloomy and apocalyptic late eighties and early nineties in Yugoslavia, marked at the same time by the growing nationalism, war that was waiting to burst, and capitalism progressing towards this former socialist region.

Dizel could be also observed in the continuity within alike European sub-cultures; it could be put in the perspective of de-industrialization processes and crisis of welfare system in *late modernity* (Dawson 2010). In those terms, Dizel can be analyzed as a sub-cultural product of the systematic exclusion of the working-class youth under the pressure of de-industrialization and liberalization of economy with the local specific socio-political context.

The emergence of Dizel may be considered as an outcome of *advanced marginality* (Wacquant 1996) of the working-class in European post-industrialized urban settings. Wacquant argues, following Sassen, Mingione, and Thrift that advanced marginality is the exclusionary social process that occurs in the “post-Fordist metropolis as a result (...) of the uneven, disarticulating, mutations of the *most advanced sectors* of Western societies and economies”, which dominantly influences working class and ethnic minorities, as well as the urban areas they populate. The marginality is a consequence of “polarized economic growth and the fragmentation of the labor market, the casualization of employment and automatization of the street economy in the degraded urban areas, mass joblessness amounting to outright deproletarianization for large

segments of the working class (especially youths), and state policies of urban retrenchment if not outright abandonment”(Wacquant 1996). It is rooted in the spatial determination of the urban areas. Wacquant asserts that advanced marginality is symptomatic for the “bounded and increasingly isolated territories viewed by both outsiders and insiders as social purgatories, urban hellholes where only the refuse of society would accept to dwell”(Wacquant 1996).

Dizel sub-culture, however, was not exclusive for the working class suburbs but mushroomed all around Serbia, although the suburbs are the spaces where it mostly prevailed until now days. This phenomenon could be traced in the territorial prerequisite for *advanced marginality* that Wacquant singles out. Serbia in the early nineties became isolated both politically and territorially. War and the international sanctions physically prohibited the vast majority of Serbian citizens to move outside of Yugoslavian (Serbia and Montenegro) borders. Symbolically, Serbia could be perceived as a “bounded and increasingly isolated territory” hence Dizel flourished not exclusively in the working-class suburbs but throughout whole country as destitution occurred in the majority of population. Another reason could be find in the historical perspective, within the Yugoslavian housing policies. Due to the specific program of urban planning in Yugoslavia that aimed to widen class character of housing, working class families were not necessarily segregated to the suburbs but scattered around cities equally with the middle and higher classes (Damjanović and Gligorijević 2010, Stojanović and Martinović 1978, Vujović 2002).

Finally, to understand and analyses how the criminal aspect of Dizel subculture is articulated in the narratives, critical lens will be borrowed from an emerging social discipline called cultural criminology and its conceptualization of sub-cultures. This discipline overlaps criminology,

cultural studies and sociology, comprehensively relating to the Chicago and Birmingham school, in order to place crime as a product of cultural contexts and power relations within a society; “seeks both to understand crime as an expressive human activity, and to critique the perceived wisdom surrounding the contemporary politics of crime and criminal justice” (Ferrell, Hayward and Young 2008). Cultural criminologists take the *underclass* as one of the starting points of the analysis of crime. Hayward and Yar (2006) argue that in theory of underclass dominant position claims productive work as an integrative function of society: “to be ‘of society’ is to produce; lacking such a role, one falls out of society proper all together, becoming part of its non-assimilable desiderata”. Similar to Wacquant, the underclass is product of the “society increasingly polarized by the crisis of Keynesian economics and state welfarism, and the subsequent neoliberal reordering of public policy under the aegis of Thatcherism, Reaganism and the ascendance of the New Right” (Hayward and Yar 2006).

Young (1999:80) criticizes both cultural and structural theories of exclusion asserting that the first one overemphasizes cultural exclusion while the latter favors the economic one. Subcultures in Young’s (1999:89) view come as a “key concept of diversity in a plural society”. He considers that subcultures are a product of the “moral springboard of already existing cultures and are the solutions to problems perceived within the framework of these initial cultures”(Young 1999:89). Methodology wise, Young (1999:74) reminded that “what is necessary is to enter into the subculture in order to discover the significance of crime within it”. Therefore, the next chapter (Chapter 2) will contextualize Dixel subculture within the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and analyze the development form an exclusive group of criminals to a mass youth subculture. Chapter two will present a macro perspective developed from existing literature. Furthermore, it

will show how the class of professionals engaged symbolic struggle and reproduced within the same context. Chapter three will present the qualitative analysis of the construction of narratives within contemporary class of professionals based on 76 questionnaires and additional interviews. In the concluding, fourth part of the thesis, different positions and possible answers to the proposed questions will be argued.

Chapter two: Locating Dizel

The escalation of the ethnic conflict that accompanied the disintegration of Yugoslavia significantly intensified symbolic struggles within cultural field. Debates around culture, both its transformation and the transformative role it had within the disintegration of Yugoslavia were mainly oriented around question of nationalism and re-invention of national identities (Baker 2009, Čolović 2007). However, culture was not in any way excluded from the forcible economic transformation that occurred. On the contrary, the role economic transformation had in Serbian culture was crucial. One sector of the economy had special symbolic importance from the early nineties on: organized crime.

2.1.The role of Organized Crime in the Development of Dizel Subculture

The 1991-95 Wars introduced an overall criminalization of the former Yugoslav societies. Strazzari (2007:186) argues that “[a] critical aspect for understanding the nexus between war and the economy in a (former) Yugoslav context is the role played by the pre-existing, ‘self-management’ based economy. (...) the Yugoslav system encouraged the consolidation of local economic elites and a clientelistic system that usually followed ethnic demarcations.” Even though the state economy had already been severely shaken by a few crisis during the eighties (Baker 2015:24-9), Strazzari (2007:187) depicts the downfall of the economic system within the shift from “production to predation,” which, he believes, happened when “the new regimes abolished all intermediate political bodies, banned trade unions, and used the black market to plunder and reallocate wealth”. Similarly, Morrison (2010:164) states that the “socio-economic impact of these tectonic shifts created a context within which organized crime could not only flourish but enjoy the protection of the state as they did so”.

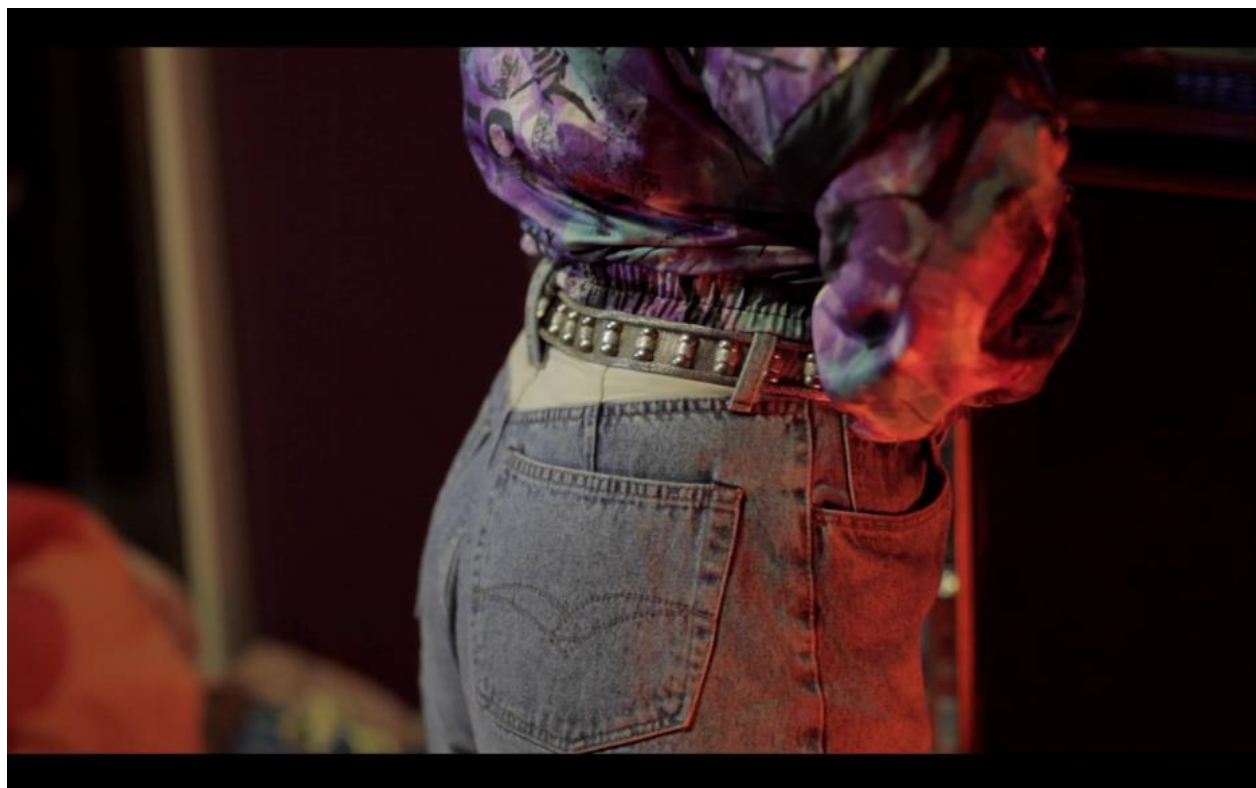
For Morrison, the development of the organized crime also lays in the socialist period. He states that:

The contemporary problems with organized crime in Serbia, Montenegro, Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina stem from the symbiosis which developed between Yugoslav state security (UDBa) and the criminal fraternity during the Cold War era. Both would play a key role in the Wars which followed the social, economic and political crisis that swept Yugoslavia in the 1980s” (Morrison 2010:184).

He argues that the criminals who operated in the West on behalf of Yugoslavian State Security – UDBA came back in the nineties with both social and economic capital and were in the position to act in the local mafia structures. The warfare turned to be, as Morrison calls, “a gift for organized crime groups throughout Balkans” (Morrison 2010:180), which induced a massive comeback of Yugoslav criminals in the region.

The homecoming criminals brought along a significant amount of the foreign luxurious garments - clothes, vehicles, jewelry - that singled them out from the rest of the society that started descending into poverty. They also brought hard currency, which allowed them an extravagant and ostentatious lifestyle in impoverished Serbia. A 1995 Serbian documentary film titled “See You in the Obituary” portrayed a dozen of the main players of this criminal scene. Their striking visual representation was consisted of silk shirts tucked in the high waist jeans or sweatpants, fastened with a metal belt. The total look was accompanied with Nike Air-max sneakers and completed with thick golden chains around necks. This look became the essential visual representation of what became known as Dizel. Crime became the main denominator. The subjects of the documentary film spoke openly to the journalists Aleksandar Knežević and Vojislav Tufegdžić about their criminal activities abroad and their credo “to have everything and now” (Baljak 1995). The film was in production from 1993 until 1995 and portrayed 19

criminals. Some of the characters were assassinated already during the shooting of the film, so the film included both their stories and funerals. By the release of the film half of them were already dead.



Picture 1: Popular nineties Replay jeans model, with nylon sweatshirt tucked in with metal belt (source: private collection)

One of the survivors, Kristijan Golubović, several times prosecuted for different crimes and nowadays frequent participant in reality television, stated in an interview that he was the one who imported Dizel fashion to Serbia after he returned from the United Kingdom in 1987. He explained how in one London gym he borrowed golden chains from the actor and professional wrestler Mr. T and how his friend admired the dangerous look. Later, he robbed a jewelry shop and gave stolen gold to another jeweler to make custom thick chains for him. In a combination with silk sweatshirts and high waist jeans that were popular among working class youth and

football hooligans in the United Kingdom, Golubović proclaimed that once he appeared looking like this in Serbia, “everybody else endorsed it” (Drašković 2009).

In the early nineties, Dizel as a signifier was reserved for this group of criminals and their clan members. In terms of the etymology of the word itself, consensus does not exist. One story says that the name came from the Diesel fuel, as fuel smuggling was a common gray market activity, and another finds the explanation in the Diesel fashion brand that became popular and unaffordable to anyone else but the Dizels in the nineties. The actual origin of the name is probably somewhere in between these two narratives, maybe in one of the answers from the questionnaires which says that the name comes from the jeans that were smuggled from Bulgaria and smelled of gasoline.

2.2.Dizel – a youth sub-culture

Socio-political circumstances around the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the 1991-95 Wars strengthened the criminal structures in the region. Alongside gain of economic power, Serbian criminals advanced their social positions as well. Beside the already mentioned documentary film “See You in the Obituary” which could be argued as a critical insight in the developing social stratum of criminals, crime became extremely visible and promoted in media. Newspapers were overwhelmed by the interviews and stories that portrayed the criminals’ everyday lives. Criminals started dating and marrying famous folk singers and one of the most powerful ones, Željko Ražnatović - Arkan, *businessman* and a leader of a notorious paramilitary unit “Tigers” (later a politician who was assassinated in 2000), married the most famous Serbian folk singer Svetlana Veličković – Ceca. The media proclaimed their wedding the wedding of the century, and it was published on VHS for the major record label PGP RTS, owned by the state.

The atmosphere of a complete social decadence and the overturn of public discourses turned the criminal personas into some sort of icons of the war-torn Serbia. Alexander and Bartmański (2012:2) argue that icons “allow members of societies (1) to experience a sense of participation in something fundamental whose fuller meaning eludes their comprehension and (2) to enjoy the possibility for control despite being unable to access directly the script that lies beneath.” In this sense, the criminals could be understood as a sort of facilitators, or translators, of the suddenly changed social dynamics to the common people. Throughout their presence in media, by exposing their everyday stories and biographies to the audience, the criminals served, in Alexander and Bartmański’s sense, as “transmitters of experience”. It could be argued that the experiences transmitted by the criminals in an absurd way made sense of the destroyed everyday life in Serbia.

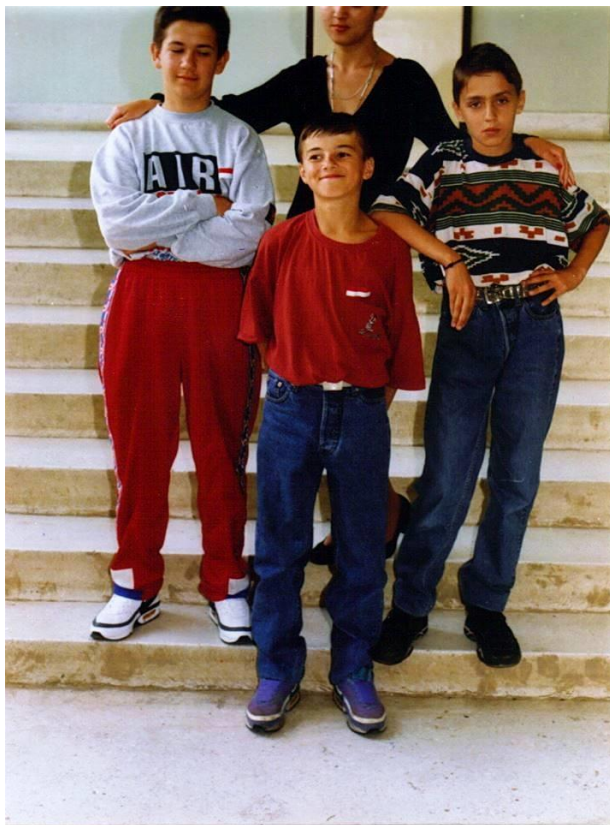
Their extravagant lifestyles and the striking aesthetics influenced the emergence of the Dizel youth sub-culture in the mid-nineties. The crucial factor for the development of Dizel as a youth sub-culture was the popularity of dance music. This genre that came to Serbia on the wave of its global uproar and made a natural alliance with the criminal aesthetics. The visual component of the dance music genre promoted on MTV and VIVA TV already had numerous similarities with the prominent style of the criminals. Furthermore, the iconic social status of the criminals in the society exposed them as the only successful individuals in Serbia. After the wars and economic embargo, the state economy was devastated and the black and gray markets turned out to be the only lucrative markets. Ordinary people, left alone on the verge of existence, turned to smuggling of different goods. Serbian economy was moved to streets which became flea markets turning great number of citizens into petty criminals. The state turned a blind eye for

these criminal practices as the ruined economic system did not have the needed mechanisms to normalize neither the economy nor everyday life. Therefore, the relationship between (organized) crime and the state structures in the case of Yugoslav wars and their aftermaths was not conflictual, but rather “symbiotic” (Hodžić 2006:244)⁴.

The normalization of criminal activities in Serbian society allowed the Dizel youth sub-culture to expand. Alexander and Bartmański argue that the materiality of the icons “points beyond itself to the elusive but very real domains of feeling and thought” (Alexander and Bartmański 2012:2). In this sense, the particular fashion style could be seen as a representation of a longing for an unachievable success in such a context as nineties Serbia was. With the smuggling activities and the relative opening of Serbia to western goods, the necessary elements of style became accessible. Furthermore, Čolović (2007) argues that the over-exposing of criminals, familiarity with their everyday activities, their achievements in the warfare and their treatment in public discourses turned them into heroes. Čolović (2007:14) presents the “surplus of meaning” within the stories about criminals that do not expose them only as brutal villains but also as protectors of the weak. He asserts that their pompous and early deaths made them immortal, as death stopped them in the middle of their actions, which created sort of an ambiguity

⁴Similarly, Sampson (2003:325) argues that “criminalization of the state” is an “overinclusive” concept. He believes that the criminalization occurs due to a weakening of state control but the weakening could be constituted in different ways meaning that the criminalization could occurred both as a top down or bottom up process but also as a triangular process beyond the obvious corruption of the state apparatus. Sampson argues that criminalization of the state “is about state functionaries, warlords and mafia networks who make choices on the basis of strategies and allegiances” (2003:335). Finally, Sampson emphasizes that observing state as a target of the criminal structures who aim to corrupt it in order to impose their law is misleading as it proposes the “order versus chaos” perspective where the state would represent order and criminal chaos. Sampson reminds “that states may be extraordinary chaotic and that mafias may impose order” (2003:331). Sampson, Steven. 2003. “Trouble Spots: Projects, Bandits and State Fragmentation.” Pp. 309-42 in *Globalization, the State and Violence*, edited by J. Friedman. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.

- they were not a threat anymore as they could not do any more physical harm, still their aura was threatening.



Pictures 2 and 3: Nineties children dressed as Dizels (source: private collection)



Picture 4: Technical high school students in Belgrade suburb Rakovica, generation 1994/95 (source: private collection)

2.3. Class of professionals and the “rural-urban” dichotomy

The main critique and the stigmatization of Dizel sub-culture in the nineties came from the part of the class of professionals who followed the cultural patterns from the Yugoslav period. For them, the proliferation of Dizel sub-culture represented the final capitulation of urban cultural model under the invasion of the rural one. Furthermore, the presence of the criminal dimension inside the sub-culture opened the space for even deeper stigmatization.

On the “rural-urban” axis of cultural practices in nineties Serbia, Dizel was positioned on the rural part. The middle class discourse produced Dizel as the inner Other and the main otherness came from the cultural practices of Dizels, music and the ostentatious fashion at the

first place. Spasić (2013:64) shows how the middle class sees itself as the carriers of social norms of *human excellence* such as morals, anti-materialism, urbanity, culture, decency, pacifism. Dizel practices represented antipodal points to every value that middle class claimed. Milena Dragičević Šešić, Serbian expert on cultural policy and university professor pointed out in an informative interview I held with her, that Dizel could not fit into any of the dominant models from the nineties. “For the ‘cosmopolitan middle class’”, she argues, “it represented bad taste mixed with nationalism and glorification of the War and crime, while for the nationalist elites it was too vulgar and represented a polluting threat and a degradation of the re-emerging Serbian identity”.

Therefore, two lines of stigmatization functioned in the direction of Dizel – cultural practices and nationalism. Both were also important distinctive categories within the *cosmopolitan middle class*. Culture, as a distinctive practice, is rooted in Yugoslavian cultural politics that promoted western culture as a desirable model. After Yugoslavia left Communist Information Bureau in 1948, foreign politics were oriented towards the West, yet staying in the continuity with communist ideology as the political doctrine. Within this turn, Yugoslavia embraced cosmopolitan cultural policies in order to step from the repressive Soviet regime (Vučetić 2012). This *western turn* was embedded in promotion of Western (popular) culture while national culture(s) were kept and nurtured in a hermetic domain of folklore (Đukić-Dojčinović 2005). However, the cultural capital that constituted Yugoslav cosmopolitanism was not equally distributed, but belonged to the social strata in the urban areas with higher education

and greater economic power (Spasić 2011)⁵. With the dissolution of Yugoslavia, the cosmopolitan cultural project easily became exposed as an ideological construct; in a few months “rural culture” followed by the sounds of folk music proliferated in the cities. Cosmopolitanism at this point was not anymore the tissue of the social being. Moreover, in Croatia for example it became undesirable as it was connected to the socialism that represented a threat of the Croatian future in Europe (Spasić 2011). In Serbia, it was invested as a capital for the anti-nationalist, anti-Milošević struggle; those in the possession of cosmopolitan capital gathered around different anti-nationalist NGOs (Jansen 2005). In the ethnographic research among the anti-nationalist NGOs Jansen concludes that: “[i]n post socialist situation, in what was understood as a wave of primitivism that flooded state, city and everyday life, continuity of culture became a place of resistance (...) “Culture” was articulated as the most important factor in the anti-nationalist discourse” (Jansen 2005:166-7). Jansen’s informants, the anti-nationalism NGOs activists articulated the “rural-culture” as the crucial factor of the collapse of the previous system. They nested the nationalism into the “rural-culture” and used music as one of the main distinguishing markers between “rural” and “urban”. Jansen’s (2005:125) informants argued that the folk music is a “metaphor of the current situation”, under which they meant war and nationalism. “Culture” and the Western music at the first place represented the symbolic capital for the Jansen’s informants which located them into the continuity with the West, and discontinuity with the nationalist present in Serbia. Spasić (2013:61-3) also shows how the anti-Milošević politics

⁵Spasić (2011) characterizes cosmopolitanism as an “unintended celebration of what is routinely available to only some parts of the globe and some social strata, and a concomitant devaluation of other humans and their less fortunate lifeworlds”. As cosmopolitanism in Yugoslavia was located in particular commodities (Western goods) and practices (listening to Western popular music, traveling) which were seemingly accessible to everyone but required specific cultural and economic capital in order to maintain it. Spasić uses Bourdieu’s concept of “social condition of possibility” in order to show “unequal distribution of access to, certain outlooks and practice”.

became overlapped with the evaluation of cultural tastes; cosmopolitan middle class used culture both to position against Milošević politics and against “urban peasants”.

How this sentiment is gradually reproduced in the first years of the *democratic transition* is shown in the research of Serbian Anthropologist Marina Simić. Simić (2010:325) traced the “discursive practices that people use to constitute themselves as cosmopolitan ‘European’ subjects and the tactics they employ in comparing themselves to concepts, ideals and stereotypes of how, and who, they would like to be”. Although almost a decade later than Jansen, Simić yields similar results from her field among the youth in Novi Sad, second largest city in Serbia. Simić (2010:332) argues that the cosmopolitanism is located in the consumption of the Western popular music:

Employing the previously specific political and economic position of socialist Yugoslavia – somewhere between communism and capitalism – my subjects were able to claim Western popular music as their own and to connect it with ‘high’ art. ‘Adequate’ aesthetic appreciation was a way to ascertain a certain ‘cultural level’ that also implied certain moral values.

Simić’s analysis does not trace the learning processes of her informants in order to locate where the reproduction of the “rural-urban” dichotomy stems from in the present day Serbia. Nevertheless, it could be assumed that the perpetuation of the dichotomy comes from the family, older peers and the part of the anti-nationalist activists who managed to re-gain public positions during the *democratic transition*.

Finally, Lazić (2011) gives a special attention to the reproduction of the class of professionals, similarly perceiving cultural capital as one of the driving forces of their struggle against Milošević. He believes that the class of professionals who mediated “socially-integrative consciousness that shaped basic value patterns and ideological orientations in Yugoslavia” (Lazić

2011:234-35) did not have interest in the preservation of the socialist order as it kept them restricted, especially in terms of possible gain of economic capital due to socialist limitations (Lazić 2011:239). Lazić asserts that the class of professionals needed new social order, capitalism, so that this stratum could convert their cultural capital in other forms of capital. The class of professionals needed “relative autonomy of social sub-systems that includes autonomy of cultural field; the market that enables conversion of different resources into economic capital” (Lazić 2011:91).

However, the proliferation of “rural culture” jeopardized this agenda. The inversion of cultural models threatened the value of the middle class cultural capital that the class of professionals aimed to capitalize on in post-socialism. Therefore, the emergence of Dizel subculture could be taken as the beginning of escalation of symbolic struggle in Serbian cultural field. Class of professionals promoted urban cultural model based on the socialist cosmopolitan cultural values by Dizel through insistence on the criminal aspect of the subculture. Reminding how Spasić (2013:64) shows the self-perception of middle class as the carriers of “human excellence” such are moral, anti-materialism, urbanity, culture, decency, pacifism the criminal aspect of Dizel was not an actual physical threat to any of those norms, as the Dizel criminals only threatened and by 1995 mostly exterminated each-others. The criminal served to construct a threat for cultural order, for the value of potentially lucrative cultural capital.

Chapter three: Construction of narratives around Dizels inside contemporary class of professionals

After locating Dizel in the historical perspective of the “rural-urban” dichotomy and the influence this cultural category had on the new class relations in nineties Serbia, the following chapter will shift 15-20 years forward, in April 2016. The interpretative analysis of the 76 questionnaires aim to show how the discourses on Dizel developed and how the criminal aspect of the subculture is articulated today. Furthermore, it will show how the contemporary class of professionals understands the revival of Dizel and how does it draw the lines between nineties sub-culture and the comeback today. Finally, significant part of the respondents made assumptions about the connection of contemporary Serbian politics and Dizel sub-culture; therefore, the final part of the analysis will evaluate these opinions, as well as an emerging political practice among students of Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy called the “Dizel left.”

The analysis of the answers will be divided in two parts. The answers to questions “How would you define Dizels?”, “When did Dizels first appear?” and “Name five things that you would associate with Dizels.” significantly overlap, therefore the data yielded from them will be analyzed at once. The answers to question Are there any Dizels today? will be treated separately.

Overall, respondents located Dizels in the context of the war-torn Serbia. Majority of answers situated the emergence of Dizel in the context of the disintegration of Yugoslavia - between the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.

- With the beginning of the War and the Sanctions in Yugoslavia.

- In the first half of the nineties, in the moment of the unfortunate war and the unforgettable crisis.
- I don't know when but they became visible in the public space in the early nineties.
- During the War and Milošević's government.

Some of the answers were ironic or marked the nineties descriptively:

- When we needed it the least.
- When it was the worst.

Some of the respondents perceive the emergence of Dizel as a consequence of the socio-economic crisis:

- The style was generating slowly, but it accelerated in the mid-nineties when the effects of economic embargo achieved its acute stage.
- It emerged during the nineties as a consequence of the poverty caused by the embargo which turned brands like Nike, Diesel, Levi's, Reebok etc. into status symbols.

A product of the nineties political elites, isolation and poverty.

Within the answers to the first question, the majority of respondents perceive Dizel as a youth subculture marked by specific clothing and music genres. More answers treated crime as an inspiration of the sub-culture than as a practice:

- Dizels were followers of a lifestyle and fashion from the nineties in Serbia, amongst young boys who wanted to look more aggressive and more independent on the streets already overwhelmed with crime.
- Mediocre part of youth who found their identity in criminals, turbo folk ...

- The group of young boys who listen to the nineties music and who have a specific fashion style. They generally have really short hair, wear tracksuits and sneakers, gold chain and act as if they belong to a criminal group.
- I do not exactly know how to define them as, on one hand, they were connected to crime, but on the other, for example, my classmate just liked to wear sneakers and tracksuits.

Several answers also connected Dizel to its global roots – suburban working class and immigrant culture:

- At the end of the eighties in the London and Paris suburbs. Those were guys who often had experience of jail, which was fruitfully seeded on the Balkans, but of course, adopted in harmony with local mentality.
- It is a counterpart of Italian Paninaro sub-culture.

The nineties, war, crisis, crime, and violence are the notions that are connected to Dizels in every single questionnaire within different questions. However, in the question - Name five things that you would associate with Dizels. - results show that socio-political context is not the main association for the respondents. Even though Dizel is in general located in the context of the crisis, the free associations are rather pop-cultural, based on fashion and music. Out of a total of 76 questionnaires, 45 answers depicted sneakers as one of five free associations. Out of those 45, only two said Reebok, while 43 claimed Nike. Furthermore, nineties music is the second most frequent association. By nineties music, respondents equally depicted the Turbo-folk and Dance genres. Some of the associations were very specific, naming famous Dance performer Ivan Gavrilović (four respondents) or some of his songs “200 Na sat” (200 km/h) which is often

considered a Dizel anthem (four answers), and the song “Oči boje duge” (Rainbow colored eyes), from the same performer (one answer). Other four most frequent responses were also connected to fashion – nylon tracksuits (38), thick golden chains (30), top – sweatshirt or a shirt tucked in bottom – jeans or sweatpants (22) and a specific hairdo (17). Only after this wholesome list of the elements of style, on the seventh place, with 15 answers, crime is included.



Picture 5: Some elements of Dizel style (source dizelgorivo.blogspot.com)

It is particularly interesting that the nineties came only six times as a standalone association, while war reminded only 3 of my respondents to Dizels. Milošević associates two of my respondents, while nationalism only one. Except for aggression, which stands out with twelve answers, other practices connected with Dizels like smuggling, robbery, stealing Nike shoes from people on the street (which was a common practice in the first half of the nineties), drug and

foreign currency dealing, came between four and one times as associations. Also, categories connected to education, that alludes to low vocabulary and lack of formal education is present within only several answers.

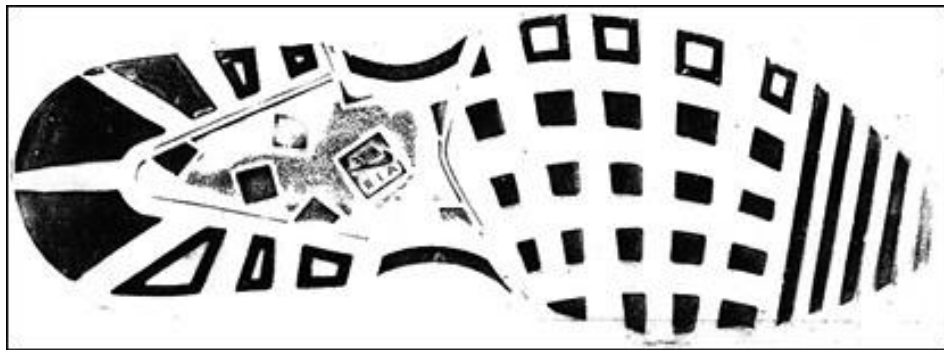
Looking at the answers, it could be assumed that the respondents connect Dizel rather to the nineties fashion and music than to the criminal and socio-economic circumstances. However, having in mind other answers within questionnaires, it could be assumed that the elements of Dizel style alone became signifiers of the threat that Dizel otherwise stands for. In that sense, when an association includes Nike air max or tracksuit– could it also be read as “aggression”, “violence”, “robbery”?

In order to understand how those signifiers became polysemic, Dizel has to be read, once again, in the global perspective. As one of the respondents pointed, Dizel could be perceived in the continuity with the emergence of the suburban working-class sub-cultures alongside de-industrialization processes in the suburbs of European capitals (Hayward and Yar 2006, Wacquant 2008): British Chav, French Racaille and Russian Gopnik. These sub-cultures represent global unemployed youth relegated to precarious living conditions and work opportunities. They represent the underclass that articulates their demands through ostentatious consumption:

labels and monograms valorized by young people as badges of identity serve also to function as overt signifiers of deviance. As such they become tools of classification and identification by which agencies of social control construct profiles of potential criminal protagonists (Hayward and Yar 2006).

In this sense, since the nineties, Nike Air Max training shoes became widely recognized as part of “ghetto” uniform. United Kingdom’s “National Footwear Intelligence and Reference

Database” reported that “Nike shoes are found most often at crime scenes there, with 60% of the shoeprints coming from this manufacturer. The most commonly encountered shoe was the Nike Air Max 95” (Murray 2003). Furthermore, tracksuit became an epitome of the unemployed youth. Unemployment turned the everyday life of the youth into the never-ending leisure time. With the lack of work social practices that were related to small number of social outcasts as petty crime, going to the gym, and hanging on corners of the streets without any activity became massive. Those activities were followed by the rise of popularity of sportswear and its appropriation from the unemployed youth in the everyday non-sporting activities. Turney (2012) believes that this fashion expression represents a “threat to the status quo” as it subverts dress codes, challenges the “formal modes of masculine behavior (such as sport and competition/rationality and business) (...) and is indicative of social instability, and possible social threat”. Tracksuit and running sneakers used for the leisure activities subvert the dominant ideology rooted in the binary opposition of the working dress code/sports dress code.



Picture 6: Forensic Science Service, UK, (Murray, 2003)



Picture 7. – Internet meme – a photography of Moscow riots with Nikes company’s “Just do it” slogan attached by an anonymous author. The photo of the violent act was taken most likely at the “nationalist ultras” rallies organized after the bailing of Rasul Mirzaev – Mixed Martial Arts Russian fighter from the Avar (North Caucasian) minority who injured a Russian 19-year-old boy Ivan Afganov in a fistfight in a night club. Afganov died of fatal injuries, yet the investigators showed that the fist fight was not the direct cause of the death. Mirzaev was released, which caused the riots (RT 2011).

When answering the question “Are there any Dizels today?”, apart from the yes/no answers, many of the elaborative respondents explained what is different regarding the style or the context from the 1990s. People who stated that there are no Dizels today are in a prominent minority:

- Not that much, thank God.

- I am not sure, even if they do exist, they are not in the sphere of my everyday life and work.
- If we speak about the nineties esthetics no, but the discourses that would pejoratively mark certain practices and tastes as non-civic⁶– would recognize some Dizels around, so in those terms they do exist.

One of the respondents says that there are no Dizels “but there are equivalents”, in terms of “low education and negative connotations of the nineties,” as he explained.

Another one stated:

- Not that many, yet, uncritical reception of the regressive social values that helped in building Dize sub-culture still exists.

This set of answers shows the Dize heritage – the “non-civic practices and tastes”, “low education”, “negative connotation to the nineties”, “uncritical reception of regressive social values”. This demarks the answers that express belief that Dizels exist today is the change of socio-political circumstances, as one respondent noticed “Dize exists today, but the context changed”. General opinion yield from the questionnaires is that Dize still exist, yet it went through a “cosmetic change”

- They absolutely exist, only the metal belts disappeared and they do not wear nylon sweatshirts with jeans. Everything else is absolutely the same. The richer ones changed the fashion brands and became metrosexuals.
- Yes, things did not change much, only that they modified their appearances.

⁶ The respondent here alludes to non-urban, civic is another colloquial denominator employed to express urban identity within “rural-urban” dichotomy

- They have always been around, just took the shirts out of the jeans and changed the brands they wear.
- I would say there are, in the cosmetically improved version.

Or on the similar account:

- Yes, in another form. With capitalism they put some make up on.
- Yes, in a new package. I think that Dizels today are mostly younger generations that imitate something that they did not experience, but saw in media and recognized as a representation of danger, fearlessness and desired.
- There are traces of the sub-culture in some other styles. It transformed. One can spot elements of Dizel on a random Yuppie or a clerk. When you see that you almost miss the autochthonous Dizels.
- Of course there are! Only in an upgraded version – more tattoos, more muscles, more sneakers, while the IQ stays at the level of the room temperature.

Several more answers point to Dizels' lack of intellect. Even though the number of such answers is marginal (five altogether) it is still important to have in mind that intellect exists as a measurement unit for Dizels. Richard Sennett (2003:338) argued against "measuring society in psychological terms" as it, he believes, masks the actual forces that produce inequality and at the same time, prevents challenging such processes.

In contrast, within the question about the presence of Dizels today, one of the respondents believes that the Dizels today should be distinguished within language and proposed to put the reviving sub-culture into the "neo-Dizel" category:

- Alongside few aesthetical and ideological interventions, yes, for sure. We need to have in mind that the sub-culture has been experiencing a significant revival within the last few years which inevitably changes the paradigm of the sub-culture and merges it with the other (sub)cultures – hipsters, LGBT, Queer, hip-hop. Therefore, I believe that we cannot use Dizel for both the nineties sub-culture and the revived one. I think that the most suitable term would be “neo-Dizel”.

Discussing the revival, one respondent also says:

- There are people who refer to Dizel, but mostly simulate it. The authentic Dizels only exist at the outskirts of Belgrade.

It is interesting to notice how this respondent connects Dizel to Belgrade. When I asked one potential respondent to fill in my questionnaire she said that she grew up in a provincial town in Serbia and that they did not have Dizels:

- Teenagers were mostly alternative in my city (metal, punk, grunge and so on) so I do not have firsthand experiences with Dizels except stories I heard and TV.

This answer was surprising, having in mind that another story, from another provincial town, tells a rather traumatic experience:

- They were waiting for us with pit bulls in front of the only alternative club in my city and were very aggressive.

On the similar account, one respondent says:

- I think that they are not present in urban places, at least not in the same shape, yet at the outskirts of the cities and in the small towns I think you can still find them.

Drawing back to Wacquant's notion of advanced marginality(1996), the answers that suppress Dizel to the outskirts of big cities or in provincial towns raise the question how is marginality produced today? It has been already said that in the nineties, due to embargo and international sanctions, the whole Serbia became sort of a "social purgatory and urban hellhole", therefore Dizel mushroomed equally throughout big and small cities, equally distributed throughout centers and peripheries. Socialist urban development policies were also perceived as one of the possible reasons for the spatial dissemination of Dizel. If today, in the period of transformation, Dizel is perceived to exist on the urban margins, could it be understood as a picture of capitalist progress of Serbia? As Wacquant shows, both in the United States and in Europe, although under different structural conditions, advanced marginality came as an outcome of both social and spatial exclusion of the lower classes. Absent from the city centers, Dizel today could be understood as an indicator of the systematic repression of the lower classes during the post-socialist transformation.

Some of the correspondents believe that, even if Dizel is not that visible anymore, the fact that society still refers to it must be an evidence that it still exists:

- We still use the term Dizel and we use it frequently, so that should lead us to conclude that there are Dizels today as well. Yet, they changed their appearances.
- If they are in the language, I am sure that they exist, although I think it is a restructured form now.

Also, one respondent notices a change in language, claiming that people around her call Dizels today "pig-heads". This leads to a conclusion that Dizel did not disappear, that the phenomenon is alive and triggers symbolic struggles.

However, within answers to the question “Are there Dizels today?”, three qualifiers stand out and are often repeated among the respondents: refined, evolved, cultivated. Some of them stated:

- Yes, they exist, only that today they are refined and they evolved.
- In a way, they cultivated.
- Yes, they are a bit different today. They evolved.
- Less, and they have also evolved so it is harder to spot them.
- There are their successors, but we do not call them Dizels anymore. In the nineties they were an exception, and today they are the rule and they refined a bit.
- Same values as the nineties just in better clothes.

The question that arises from these answers is: how does a cultivated Dizel look like? Who is that person? What does that person do? Part of the respondents connected the *evolution* of Dizels to official politics. One of the elaborative answers stated that Dizels “evolved to young leaders”:

- criminal activities are not based on the physical strength anymore but on economy, malfeasance and (corrupt) deals with politicians. Same goes for the contemporary Dizels they act as businessmen, with diplomas from private universities and membership cards from the parliamentary parties.

When I asked him to specify the term “young leaders,” the respondent stated “they are young ambitious students, more often from the private universities, and they push their ambitions through participation in political parties.”

This respondent is not alone in connecting Dizels with Serbian official politics. Several answers pointed to the evolution of Dizels into politics, some through change of fashion: “they

changed tracksuits for suits and went to the parliament,” while one of the respondents said that the “arrogant behavior, violence and lack of taste” that marked Dizel in the nineties is what marks Serbian politics today. This respondent concluded by stating that, in his opinion, Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić is a Dizel.

Spasić (2013:123-31) shows how politicians today, in a certain manner, overtook the role of the inner Other who is easily blamed for the socio-political instability. In the same way that stepping into criminal was perceived as a practice that enhanced social status in the nineties, party politics is today. Spasić concludes that her informants do not see politicians as social actors who are supposed to improve their lives, but as an independent class with personal interests, that is clearly separated from the people. The merge of Dizels with politics exposes the contemporary fear of politicians as similar to the nineties fear of Dizel. It was concluded in the previous chapter that Dizel was sort of a metaphor of the loss of social status and the embodiment of devaluation of the potentially lucrative socialist cultural capital. The class of professionals in the anti-Milošević (symbolic) struggle however managed to preserve its cultural capital. Nevertheless, due to overall crisis and frequent changes of regimes in Serbia, culture in general lost its value and is more and more dependent on state interventions through the Ministry of Culture and various funds. Therefore, the class of professionals is today in a situation of paradox: the value of their social capital is not threatened by another one, as it was in the nineties, but by the structure and the way money for culture is distributed. Therefore, the official politics and politicians are those who threaten the autonomy of cultural field, yet, Dizel apparently still represents part of this fear.

However, there is a small group of young leftists, mostly gathered around the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade, who see Dizels as potential revolutionary subjects. Unlike respondents who believe that Dizels are in official politics, this group of young Marxists claims that Dizel from the nineties and their successors are completely neglected by official politics. They assert that majority of Dizels are unemployed and without job prospects that could secure their living. Therefore, Dizels opt for petty criminal and hooliganism. My informants believe that the violence that is distinctive for Dizels, is a consequence of the violence that is otherwise performed on them. Nevertheless, they argue that the Dizels' constant conflict with the repressive state apparatus represents a revolutionary potential. These young leftists, whose ideology is articulated as *Dizel-left*, believe that Dizel is an emancipatory practice as it directly confronts to the cultural hegemony of the middle class. They believe that middle-class discourses stigmatize Dizel by constructing it as a threat, which allows to the repressive apparatus to undertake repressive measures against them. In that sense, the Dizel-left assumes that Dizels do not have anything to lose and have an interest in changing the social system.

This group of activists is aware that their political project has many practical flaws, from the question of class consciousness amongst their potential revolutionary subjects to the question of nationalism amongst Dizel. In the interviews I held with the members of Dizel-left they expressed their belief that a political party that would recognize Dizel as a political project is necessary. In that sense, they position themselves as kind of *organic intellectuals* (Gramsci 1992 [1975]), an intellectual strata within Dizel that aims to raise class consciousness amongst Dizels and to demystify issues of nationalism within the working-class. In order to position in such role, Dizel-leftists believe that at the first place they have to talk the language of the Dizels and

embrace their practices in order to become one of them. Therefore, they dress like Dizels, go to football matches, participate in nightlife with Dizels.

None of the 76 answers from my questionnaire held a similar position towards Dizel. One respondent mentioned the Dizel-left as one of the contemporary Dizel practices. The answer could be searched in the fact that Dizel-leftists do not belong to the Generation W and that the nineties discourses that stigmatized Dizel did not affect their upbringing as much as members of Generation W. Having a distance from the stigmatizing discourses, the younger generation gathered around Dizel-left possibly holds a position from where they could understand symbolic struggles and perceive the social whole without strong nineties preconceptions that are present in the opinions of the Generation W.

Chapter four: Conclusion

The research leads to a general conclusion that Dizel represents a polysemic signifier for the contemporary class of professionals. For some, it is a nineties subculture formed as a consequence of the socio-political turmoil of the early nineties, while for the others it is a criminal structure that lived in the moment – like there is no tomorrow. For the majority, Dizels are still around, yet they evolved and improved cosmetically. Ambiguity, in general, comes from different explanations where this cosmetically improved version could be located today.

One of the explanations states that the nineties Dizel is an inspiration for the revival. “Real” Dizels from the nineties, however, in my respondents’ opinion, live on the outskirts of the cities and in small towns. Using Wacquant’s theory of advanced marginality as the analytical lens, this explanation leads to the conclusion that Serbia today resembles the western capitalist countries that suppress its underclass to the margins of urban environments. The other explanation sees Dizel in an upgraded version, in smart suits and in official politics. This explanation especially draws attention to the polysemy of Dizel as it uncritically mixes criminals and sub-culture members. Morrison (2010:185), on this account, notices that “criminals involved in smuggling and extortion (as well as ethnic cleansing) had accumulated enormous political capital in addition to their significant profit.” The survivors of the turbulent nineties, in Morrison’s opinion, are not on the pages of newspapers as extravagant street warriors anymore but in the lime light of official politics. However, using Dizel to signify this group of people

stigmatizes numerous followers of the subculture that were neither criminals, nor politicians today. Such understanding also shows transition of fear, which Dizel represented. While in the nineties Dizel was a metaphor for the loss of legitimacy of middle-class cultural capital, today, merged with general negative opinion towards politicians, it stands for fear of loss of social position. Finally, the emerging political practice that articulates the Dizel sub-culture within left politics shows that Dizel is still highly topical in Serbian society and that it still represents a vibrant field of symbolic struggles.

Finally, regarding the analysis, could it be perceived how this symbolic struggle is structured? It could be argued, following Bourdieu (1989:20), that the class of professionals act by “actions of representation” which are undertaken to “display and to throw into relief certain realities.” Regarding that they obtained significant amount of cultural capital, they exploited the cultural field to represent as a cohesive and influential group. On the other hand, Dizels undertook “strategies of presentation - designed to manipulate one's self-image and - especially something that Goffman overlooked - the image of one's position in social space.” The underclass appropriates symbols that signify crime and aggression, in order to participate the struggle. Nevertheless, from the position of power, their agenda is presented as a threat to the social tissue and, as such, stigmatized. Specificity of the post-socialist region intensifies this struggle as social turbulences are frequent and the stakes for maintaining cultural capital as valid are consequently higher.

It could be argued, regarding the findings of the analysis, that the Dizel-left, as a hybridized political identity, holds significant potential. The activists of the Dizel-left also belong to the class of professionals; however, when they show up at the university dressed as Dizels in

Nike air-max and tracksuits they impose public space in a double role as both “rural” and “urban”, as “us” and “them”. They represent as “them” but they are also representing “them”. By layering their ideology with Dizel, they are co-opting a significant amount of currently unarticulated social power. The articulation of this potential and tactics of transformation of weaknesses into power, is, however, a topic for a completely different analysis.

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