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Comparative study of ideas and cultures

Cultural history

Prospective mentor: dr Ana Hofman

-Short description of thesis proposal presentation-

Postfeminist matrices in contemporary Serbian popular music: cases of Mimi Mercedez, Sajsi MC, Sendiah and Teodora

My primary goal in the presentation will be to define the research subject, as well as the main research questions: understanding how elements of postfeminism are being accepted/adapted/negotiated within contemporary Serbian popular music and its music industry. I focus on the music industry because as a dynamic field which operates through various, often discrete processes of borrowing, transmission, appropriation and/or negotiation of different elements and influences. My aim is to understand how femininities are constructed within such matrixes, and how postfeminism is negotiated in the local context, via the music industry.

I will offer a brief critical outlook on the notion of postfeminism, which I chose because it is, as a tool for critical analysis, used primarily by authors in the domain of popular culture and media studies. In other words, it is used to shed light how femininities are constructed within different media contexts, taking into account specificities of said contexts – television, music, advertising, magazines, etc. –, and to understand the position of feminism, as well as how it is being (re)constructed in contexts of neoliberal capitalism. As the term was popularized during the 1990's, and especially in the early 2000's, and used mainly by authors in the Anglo-American context, my focus will be placed primarily on the writings of those who used the term to understand how postfeminism is negotiated in contexts where neoliberalism was introduced, and in which it operates differently than in the U.S. or Great Britain. The starting point of my research will, in other words, be the critical outlook on postfeminism, and the goal – to understand what are the

possibilities offered by adapting such analysis to the context of Serbian popular music/music industry, as well as to find possible limitations.

In the presentation, I will offer some of the research question I hope to answer. I propose that postfeminist elements present in local popular music are not the result of the “development” of feminism in Serbia, but are in fact products of the music industry, a way in which femininities are “packaged” within popular culture. Thus, I wonder what strategies within the music industries are used to “sell” postfeminism? And in turn, which ones are employed to sell music via deploying postfeminist elements? Which tropes are used to “domesticate” postfeminism into the local context? In addition, I will emphasize certain broader questions: How is postfeminism lived in contemporary Serbia? What is feminism today, and what is its role in the construction of contemporary femininities in this context?

The presentation will also briefly explain methodologies I propose to use in the analysis – e.g., a mixed method analysis, focused on analyzing music, lyrics and visual representation of the artists; discourse analysis, focused on discourses created by the artists about themselves, as well as discourses about them created by others; online ethnography focused on their presence in social media.

I will briefly present the four case studies upon which I will base my analysis – Mimi Mercedez, Sajsi MC, Sendiah, and Teodora – focusing on reasons why they were chosen as examples, and upon the “section” of local music industry to which they pertain. I will also present some of the the themes/tropes, or rather common threads which will be followed through the four case studies, tropes through which postfeminism is adapted to local context(s), and through which local popular music is sold to the audiences. Among them are the construction of “the Balkans”, and of femininities within Balkans; negotiation of feminist elements, such as empowerment, sexual liberation, economic emancipation, “self-improvement”; commodification of feminism and social critique as aspects of the music industry; emphasis on music making as labor (intellectual and bodily) and importance of “making money”.