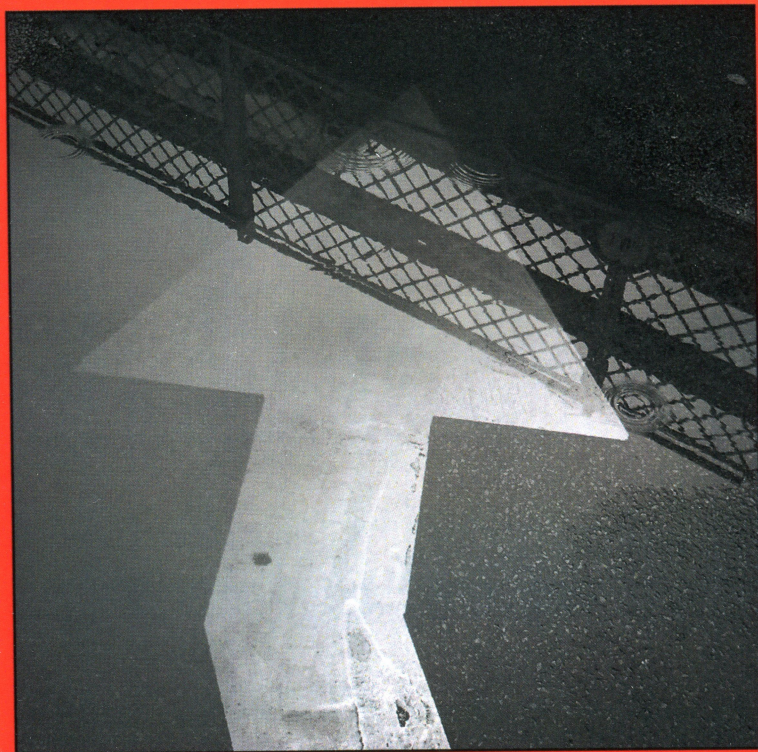


EDITED BY
MARINA MARTYNOVA
IVANA BAŠIĆ

**PROSPECTS FOR
ANTHROPOLOGICAL
RESEARCH
IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**



**PROSPECTS FOR ANTHROPOLOGICAL
RESEARCH IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE**

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Prospects for Anthropological Research in South-East Europe

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The book marks a new phase in the fruitful collaboration between the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology Russian Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Ethnography Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. It is an important publication for any future research on the development of ethnology and anthropology in Southeast Europe. The papers presented here, the topics they raise and the methods they employ, comprise an overview of the issues, concepts, phenomena and research methodologies anthropology in this has been dealing with in the early 21st century. Positions of the discipline itself, transformations of traditional culture and various phenomena of contemporary culture in Southeastern Europe are subjected to a theoretical scrutiny in the papers of this volume.

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Ivan Đorđević

**POLITICS ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD.
AN OVERVIEW OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
IDEOLOGY AND SPORT IN SERBIA**

This paper focuses on the historical context of the interrelation of sports and ideology in Serbia. Firstly, it focuses on the period between the end of WWII and the end of the 1980s, as well as on the role of sports in the activities of the communist and socialist ideology in Yugoslavia. Secondly, it demonstrates the ways in which football fans assumed the role of the carriers of nationalistic ideology in the political occurrences of the final decade of the twentieth century. The third segment of the paper brings into focus the activities of football fans in the new millennium when, after the wars of the 1990s, Serbia, at least nominally, became a state that internalizes “European values”, and ensured its position of an EU-acceding country. The central argument of the paper refers to the historically conditioned positioning of football fans that, as a group, still hold the role of an important political actor. They simultaneously act as subjects of the neo-liberal politics of the European periphery and keepers of the “national spirit”, which can be let out of the bottle again, if and when needed.

Keywords: Serbia, former Yugoslavia, football, ideology, socialism, postsocialism

Sport, especially football, and its relation to the complex societal process in Southeastern Europe and Serbia has become a prominent research subject of numerous disciplines in recent years. A significant volume of books, articles, and publications have approached this subject from their own unique position, aiming at disclosing and determining the role sport played in the historic developments surrounding the dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Indeed, football had a significant symbolic role in the process of the disintegration of SFRY. It was used as a peculiar type of catalyst in the shift of the ideological paradigm from the concept of the “brotherhood and unity” of Yugoslav peoples to individual ethnic nationalisms, breaking down the pillars of the post-WWII state. In the late 1980s, football fans across the territory of former Yugoslavia embraced nationalist ideology and introduced thus far unimaginable messages of ethnic intolerance into the public space, messages that were expressed week after week at the stadiums. The culmination of this process was reached on May 13, 1990 at Maksimir stadium. Namely, ahead of the match between Dinamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade a large clash between their fan groups and the police occurred (Brentin 2013; Đorđević 2012). Croatian and Serbian fans, determined to replace verbal with physical violence, confronted the police, which proved powerless in their attempt to prevent this escalation. Essentially, the scenario unfolding at the stadium in the Croatian capital symbolically pointed to the denouement of the culminating Yugoslav crisis, which would reach its peak during the 1990s in the armed conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Even though the armed conflicts started a year later, the riots at Maksimir are perceived in both Serbian and Croatian collective consciousness as the “day when the war began” (Mihailović 1997).

The Maksimir riots had one important consequence in terms of the relation(s) between football and politics. From that moment onward, football became permanently contaminated by nationalistic ideology¹, and football fans of the two respective countries assumed the role of an important political factor, drawing their legitimacy from “patriotic” capital, formulated by their participation in the events of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

However, the involvement of the football fans in the dissolution of Yugoslavia was far from accidental. As noted by Hoberman, “sport may serve any (...) given ideology” (Hoberman

¹ Nationalistic ideology was also visible in Yugoslav sport during socialism (Zec 2015), but without ubiquitous presence as it was the case in late 1980s and early 1990s.

1993: 16). This is clearly visible in the significant impact level of socialist ideology in determining the framework of sports development in post-WWII Yugoslavia. This feedback relation between sports and ideology often demonstrated all the contradictions of the socialist system, in which football served as a playground for diverse societal and economic experiments of the system. Additionally, the game of football was often used as a factor of homogenization of Yugoslav identity (Zec and Paunovic 2015). Logically, the ideological transformations occurring in the former Yugoslavia were mirrored in football and, in turn, the game had the role of a symbolically important societal segment, a phenomenon that through its mass character, popularity, and *omni*-presence crucially influenced the stated transformation processes, or at least made them visible.

The main goal of this paper is to point out the historical context in which the intertwining of diverse ideologies and football occurred in Serbia (and former Yugoslavia), and which determined the specific role of this sport in contemporary Serbian society. Through the analysis of football's role in socialist and post-socialist times, I will attempt to highlight the importance of this societal phenomenon in the transformation processes of Serbian society, with special attention given to contemporary occurrences – from the role of football in the creation of the communist “new man”, through its position as a messenger of the capitalist relations in a socialist society, to the creation of the nationalistic “avant-garde” and patriotic heroes. Through these stages, football fans transformed into relevant societal actors, and in the contemporary context of Serbian society they are perceived as the “keepers of national interests.” This transformation determined football in contemporary Serbia through a specific supra-ideological prism, with an unquestionable nationalistic agenda.

In the first section of the paper I focus on the historical context of the interrelation of sports and ideology in the period between the end of WWII and the end of the 1980s, as well as on the role of sports in the activities of the communist and socialist ideology in Yugoslavia. In the second section I demonstrate the ways in which football fans assumed the role of the carriers of

nationalistic ideology in the political occurrences of the final decade of the twentieth century. The third segment of the paper brings into focus the activities of football fans in the new millennium, when after the wars of the 1990s Serbia, at least nominally, became a state that internalizes “European values” and ensured its position of an EU-acceding country. The central argument of the paper refers to the historically conditioned positioning of football fans that, as a group, still hold the role of an important political actor. They simultaneously act as subjects of the neo-liberal politics of the European periphery and keepers of the “national spirit”, which can be let out of the bottle again, if and when needed.

FROM THE MAKING OF THE “NEW MAN” TO “SELF-MANAGEMENT”. The end of World War II instigated a core-transformation of the political and societal system in Yugoslavia. With the victory of the Partizan troops under the leadership of Josip Broz Tito, the final remains of the former Kingdom were gone, and the new socialist system became the official polity of the liberated country. The transformation of the entire state system caused drastic changes in the domain of sports as well. To a certain extent, the new socialist government appropriated the heritage and experiences of pre-WWII Yugoslav sports², but it did primarily lean on the vision based on the ideological pillars and practical models developed in USSR (Riordan 1999; Brentin and Zec 2018: 717). In this respect, the former “bourgeois” teams, especially those from the larger urban centers such as Belgrade and Zagreb, were practically erased, and new teams were established instead (Wood 2013). In 1945, two new football clubs were founded in Belgrade – first Red Star in March, and then Partizan in October, as the official club of Yugoslav Peoples’ Army (JNA). Even though the two teams used the stadiums of the pre-war teams Yugoslavia and BSK, no intentional continuity

² The main reason behind this appropriation is the fact that many of the sporting societies in Yugoslavia before WWII were the core of the workers’ movement and closely connected to the Communist Party. Therefore, the relation between the new socialist government and sports had already established some type of continuity.

was proclaimed by the new teams. On the other hand, a new team was founded in Zagreb in the aftermath of WWII. It is assumed that Dinamo's patrons were the members of the police and state-intelligence structures. The only significant exception in this process was the fate of Hajduk from Split, whose management and players took an active part in the resistance against the Italian occupier and acted as the unofficial "Partizan representation," playing twenty matches on the freed territories during WWII (Wood 2013, 5; Dežulović 2013).

The main motive of the new system was to symbolically establish a new order within this segment of society, not allowing any possibility of continuity with the past societal values, with the past "bourgeois" identity. The new teams established by the pillars of the socialist revolution – the JNA and Alliance of the Antifascist Youth – were to promote the values seen as adequate in the newly-formulated state order. Therefore, following the Soviet model, the general direction of the development of organized sports, football included, was set to their promotion as the main form of leisure time of socialist youth. Through this, sports were to serve as the ideal mechanism for emphasizing the reconciliation and the idea of "brotherhood and unity." Additionally, sports were seen as a means for improving the working and defence capacities of the state. Finally, the organized sports were to serve as a tool for promoting the accomplishments of Yugoslav socialism around the globe, mainly through participation in international sporting events. Essentially, the first postwar period was characterized by diligent application of the Soviet model with the goal of making the Yugoslav "new man" (Zec and Brentin 2018: 718; Mills 2016).

However, this vision of socialist sports was not kept for long. The crisis following the clash between the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and Cominform in 1948 had a crucial impact on all the segments of Yugoslavia's society. One of the consequences of the breach between Tito and Stalin was the abandoning of Soviet models, not only in the political and economic spheres but also in other societal domains, including organized sports. In this sense, the making of the Yugoslav version of socialism caused the abandoning of the centralized models of managing sports, and turned towards

promoting the idea of “self-management” as the main functioning model of managing organized sports. Expectedly, the application of this model was not successful as the sustainability of sports clubs was far from realistic, even when it came to highly popular sports such as football (cf. Zec and Brentin 2018, Kovačić 2016). Therefore, even if officially independent, sports clubs were closely connected to state structures, and often, to large companies. In this way, their functioning was made possible due to the political and economic support of state agencies.

Nevertheless, the transformation from a centralized model to a significantly autonomous functioning model of sports management resulted in a changed status of players. They were not necessarily amateurs anymore but were granted payment for their performance, as all other workers in the state. These early stages of the professionalization of sports had a crucial impact on the development of football during the years of “mature” socialism, in the 1960s and 1970s.

The split-up between Tito and Stalin did not only have impact on the ways of managing organized sports but also granted them an additional, and in many ways important, ideological and political role. The sport matches between Yugoslavia and USSR transformed into more than a game. They became a stage for the duel between the “apostate” Yugoslav socialism and its stiff Soviet version. A mere chance led to one such game being played out during the Olympic Games in Tampere (Finland) in 1954. The match attracted a significant level of public attention in both countries, and telegrams of support to the teams were sent by the state leaders, Tito and Stalin, warning the players that this event is more than a football game. It was regarded rather as a matter of highest national interest. The match itself was one of the most spectacular events in the history of the game. The USSR team managed to retrieve the difference of 5:1, equalizing the score in the final fifteen minutes of the playing-time and ensuring a re-match. This result was greeted with exultation in the Soviet media. However, the re-match was won by Yugoslavia with a score 3:1, demonstrating a symbolic superiority of the Yugoslav socialist model. The players were greeted as heroes; nevertheless, they lost the competition finals

against the national selection of Hungary. However, the faith of the Soviet team was significantly different. As a consequence, CSKA Moscow, the military team which most of the representation's members played for, was dismantled and they were stripped of all the privileges they enjoyed in society until that point (Goldblatt 2007, 341; Anđelić 2014, 113–114; Mills 2016, 1747–1756). The connection between football and politics demonstrated its full potential and confirmed the importance of sports as a tool for promoting Yugoslavia as a state outside of its borders. Additionally, it confirmed the potential sports had in making and reinforcing the internal cohesion of the state.

The economic transformation of football from an amateur activity to a professional sport, occurring during the 1960s and 1970s, had an interesting impact on the perception of the national football selection as a symbol of Yugoslav identity. Viewed through the political lens, it can be noted that the national football selection was always formed following the “republic key”, in which attention was given to the proportional allocation of positions so that each SFRY republic had its representatives, which in numbers were selected according to the size and “importance” of each republic (Đorđević 2015, 50). In practice, the model of “brotherhood and unity” functioned without many obstacles. However, issues lay elsewhere. The World Championship in 1974 can serve as a good example for visualizing the model of managing sports by the means of political influence. The national selection for this Championship grouped a number of highly respected players that were seen as a squad with the potential for great performance. The team was truly “Yugoslav”, under the direction of the selectors’ team, headed by the successful coach Miljan Miljanić, and by respecting the principles of self-management. The national team promoted both the main pillars of the state’s ideology – “brotherhood and unity” – and the unique model of Yugoslav socialism. The squad was strongly supported by the public, setting the bar of their future achievement very high. However, in practice the situation was different. The Yugoslav model of managing football proscribed a rule by which any player younger than twenty-eight was not allowed to play for any team outside of the state borders. Even though the sports market was not nearly as developed as it is today, already at that time the best

among the players could earn a significant amount of money for their performance and achieve a very sustainable level of income from playing abroad. Logically, the state's prohibition caused a significant level of frustration among the players. Even though they were well paid and privileged within the state, they were denied the right to temporary work abroad, granted by that time to all citizens of Yugoslavia. This relic of the state orchestrated managing of football displayed its shortcomings at the Championship in Germany in 1974. Most of the players of the Yugoslav selection were approaching the age when they were allowed to offer their services to foreign markets, and their real aspirations were well mirrored on the football field. The team effort was replaced by individual display of skills, which led to a complete malfunction of the team and resulted in its elimination in the early phase of the competition (Anđelić 2014, 114–115). Until that point, playing for the national team had been raising unquestionable enthusiasm among the players. However, some serious, mostly financial issues, started to spoil the good team spirit. Even President Josip Broz Tito, after visiting the national squad, concluded that “it would be a good idea to provide additional payment for the players when performing for the national selection” (Wilson 2006, 129). The Yugoslav football selection and the public at this point were not yet shaken by inter-ethnic tensions. Rather, the friction appeared due to economic reasons and announced the coming crisis of the Yugoslav socialist model based on self-management. The political and ideological power of the Yugoslav project was still strong, but on this occasion the first cracks in the system of default solidarity presented themselves on the football field. In the same way, the game and the field were to be the spaces in which the announcement of a different crisis would be made during the 1980s – the crisis with ethnic nationalism at its core.

NO LONGER “BROTHERS”. Sunday afternoon in the Croatian town of Split on May 4th, 1980 was reserved for football. On this day Hajduk Split and Red Star Belgrade met at Poljud Stadium for an important match in the champion's title race. At 5 minutes past 3, the Sunday afternoon was transformed into something much bigger

than football. At that moment, it was announced that the president of Yugoslavia Josip Broz Tito had passed away. Following the official announcement, the players of both teams gathered in center field, many of them crying. The gathered crowd broke into then popular song about Tito, expressing their grief and readiness to keep the direction the Yugoslav leader paved in building the socialist Yugoslavia³. Only ten years later, on September 26, 1990, at the same location, the match between Hajduk and Partizan Belgrade showed just how far things had gone in the process of keeping Tito's socialist heritage. The match was stopped due to the attack of Hajduk's fans on Partizan's players. The climax of the riot was the burning of the Yugoslav flag on the highest flagpole at Poljud Stadium⁴.

Similar images from football fields, accompanied by an escalation of ethnic hatred, had by that time become a rather common message sent from stadiums throughout the territory of Yugoslavia. The ten years between the mourning of the loss of the beloved president and the symbolic burning of the state's flag in Split were marked, as stated by Brubaker, by an all-encompassing nationalization of the political sphere of the state (Brubaker 1996, 3). Football culture during the 1980s was closely related to the political occurrences in the SFRY preceding the final dissolution of the state. The economic and political crisis which had already entered the stage in the early 1980s only deepened the already existent inter-ethnic tensions among the constitutive nations of Yugoslavia (Glenny 1996; Silber and Little 1996; Gagnon 2004). Football stadiums became the perfect scenery for the escalation of nationalist conflicts. Fans replaced team rivalry with a search for a new enemy, finally found among their peers on "the other side of the border". Fans of the Belgrade-based teams became explicitly Serbian, both in their self-perception and in the gaze of the others.

³ Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyG7CzjBFHI>, accessed: 28.4.2018.

⁴ Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJSrjckW-js>, accessed: 28.4.2018.

The same goes for the Croatian football fans in this period. Their agency was strictly defined through the prism of the national question, and the newly discovered ethno-nationalistic discourse was seen as the perfect tool for promoting the ideas of the new nationalistic elites gaining power in some of the Yugoslav republics (Đorđević 2015; Anđelić 2014; Brentin 2013). Nevertheless, the inter-ethnic clashes still remained at the level of verbal expression. However, soon enough violence took on flesh with the already mentioned Maksimir riots in May 1990. The clash among the fans of Red Star Belgrade, the fans of Dinamo Zagreb, and the police marked a symbolic turn in the unfolding of the Yugoslav crisis. During the commentary section following the broadcast of the riots, a television reporter of the Croatian Broadcasting Service warned the audience that what they witnessed was an event which, “if there is no wisdom, can soon enough happen to all of us”⁵. In later-day interpretations, the riots in Zagreb were marked as “the day when the war began.” and the global impact of this event is somewhat confirmed by CNN, declaring it to be one “of five football matches that changed the world” in 2011⁶ (Đorđević 2012, Mills 2009, Mihailović 1997).

The importance of the transformation of stadium stands into bastions of Serbian, Croatian, and other ethnic nationalisms should be firstly related to the high level of the presence of football in the public sphere, as a phenomenon of popular culture. Hundreds of thousands of people at stadiums across Yugoslavia participated, actively or passively, in the rituals celebrating one’s own nation. At the same time, through media, millions of viewers participated in the thus far unseen promotion of “new” values, undermining the main pillars of Yugoslavia. The countercultural character of fan groups, among other aspects, allowed for the “forbidden” content to be easily appropriated, and both verbal and physical violence, which

⁵ Video available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=En6wViD1jtY&t=6s>, accessed: 26.4.2018.

⁶ <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/SPORT/football/01/05/iraq.asia.six.games/index.html>, accessed: 5.5.2018.

were already common during the 1980s among the organized fan groups, instated aggression as the main means of communication. By understanding the potential of football as a means for fulfilling real political and ideological goals, the new political elites in Serbia and Croatia met their coincidental, but very vocal ally, an ally they would use for nesting of the narratives directly opposing the accepted socialist ideology. In these terms, Red Star's winning of the European Cup was used for determining this football team as one of the "pillars of Serbianness" (Đorđević 2016). Similarly, the nation-building project in Croatia following its declaration of independence in 1991 was largely based on the employment of sports for promoting the "young" state and nation. Therefore, it can be concluded that, in the context of former Yugoslavia during the 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, football can be defined following Eric Hobsbawm's thought that "an imagined community made out of millions seems more real when represented by eleven people with a name and surname" (Hobsbawm 1992, 143).

However, the ethnic-based conflicts between fan groups were not limited only to the stadiums and streets within the borders of Yugoslavia. In the early 1990s, many fans replaced the symbolic wars with the real one, joining the armed formations in Serbia and Croatia. In Serbia, some of the Red Star fans enlisted in the so-called Serbian Volunteer Guard under the leadership of Željko Ražnatović Arkan, later accused of war crimes⁷ (Čolović 2000). Their taking part in active combat on the former Yugoslavia territory caused the permanent colonization of football by politics and the ideology of nationalism. Most of the authors researching this subject interpret this period as the turning point in defining the relations between fan groups and the nationalistic political elites. Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of football culture in the processes of legitimizing the nationalistic agenda in Serbia and Croatia (Foer 2004; Wilson 2006; Mills 2009; Nielsen 2010; Vrcan 2003). In the

⁷ Ražnatović was one of the leaders of the Red Star fans during the late 1980s. According to the testimonies of contemporaries, he had an important role in the uniting of heterogeneous groups at the stands into the unified fan group of "Delije". (Đorđević 2015, 98–99). At this point in time they were the carriers of the idea of Serbian nationalism.

coming decades, football fans gained patriotic capital, as defined by Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986). By means of the symbolic power they had at their disposal, football fans were granted the role of important advocates regarding the issues of the so-called “national interest”, and they were transformed into a significant political force, whose opinion was closely considered during the 1990s.

“ZVEZDA, SRBIJA, NIKAD JUGOSLAVIJA” [“RED STAR, SERBIA, NEVER YUGOSLAVIA”]. The shifts in the politics of Milošević’s regime, especially when it came to the denial of support for the Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia in the mid-1990s, have been perceived as betrayal by the members of the “patriotic public” the football fans belonged to. The interrelation between the war politics of the “rump” Yugoslavia, i.e., Serbia and Montenegro, and the nationalistic ideas of football fans slowly faded. At a symbolic level, this “break-up” was mostly mirrored in the fans’ support to the national selection of the rump Yugoslavia. The new state, named Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) and made as a result of the dissolution of SFRY in 1992, kept the symbols of the previous one, only removing the five-point star from the flag. This ideological continuity, perceived by football fans as the continuity of communist heritage, was a paradigm of Milošević’s regime – a paradigm that fluctuated between the socialist values officially appropriated by Milošević’s political party and the factual promotion of ethnic nationalism as the dominant ideological pattern in Serbia at that time (Jansen 2005, 20–24).

The state’s anthem “Hey Slavs”, the official anthem of SFRY, which was kept by the leaders of the rump Yugoslavia, was transformed changed within the frame of the “war of symbols” at the stadium stands, which culminated in the period between 1996 and the fall of Milošević’s regime in 2000. The attitude of the Red Star fans toward FRY and its state symbols is most potently expressed by the then extremely popular chant: “Zvezda, Srbija, nikad Jugoslavija” [“Red Star, Serbia, never Yugoslavia”]. The Red Star fan group “Delije” even took an official stand not to support the

national selection as long as the state carried the name Yugoslavia and kept the coat of arms of the previous state⁸. Furthermore, those fans that did attend the matches of the national selection expressed their discontent during each intonation of the anthem with overpowering booing. Over time, this form of protest against *ancien régime* was transformed into a potent means of rebellion against the governmental and political power structures. The booing of the anthem was no longer only a means to express “national sentiments”; it became an efficient method for a symbolic clash with Milošević’s regime, perceived as anachronous as the symbols of “his” state (Đorđević 2015, 119–120). Due to the appropriation of expression and communication means, football fans presented a powerful political force at the time of overthrowing Milošević’s regime in October 2000.

Fans were perceived as a vital ally for the political opposition of that time, endowing the “pro-European” political block with the much needed legitimacy through the “patriotic capital” already won by the fan groups in the previous decade. Additionally, the inclination to violence characteristic of this subculture was more than welcome in the very specific political circumstances, and they assumed the role of the “punching fist” against the repressive state apparatus. In fact, football fans were the only group willing and ready to physically clash with the law-enforcement forces at that point. A good example of such a clash, which carries great symbolic significance, is the Champions League qualification match against Georgian Torpedo at Red Star’s stadium in Belgrade, on July 27th, 2000. This game was marked by a large clash between the Red Star fans and the police, as an answer to the police action at the North stands after the first ever performance of the cheer “Spasi Srbiju i ubi se, Slobodane” [“Save Serbia and kill yourself, Slobodan”]. The riot on the stadium marked the beginning of the open war between the Red Star fans and Milošević’s regime, and the mentioned cheer became the unofficial anthem of the protest against the state system, resulting in the “revolution” of October 5th, 2000. Football fans played a significant role in the protests following the attempt of

⁸ <http://www.oaza.rs/sport/delije/prica> , accessed: 24.04.2018.

the regime to forge the results of parliamentary elections, which resulted in Milošević's resigning from power. The narrative of their action in the "first lines" of the rebellion rapidly rose to the level of myth. Only two months later, in December 2000, the leading oppositional media Radio B92 awarded the Red Star fans for their contribution to the "revolution" at the ceremony held at the Rex Cultural Centre in Belgrade. On this occasion, they were named "Heroes of Democracy" with the following elaboration: "Guys who defied the regime for ten years, clashed with the police while others slept in their beds. They are -'Delije'".⁹

The political capital of football fans, gained already at the time of the dissolution of SFRY, was now revalorized and reinforced. They were no longer publically perceived as patriotic heroes but as the heroes of a democratic revolution. Nevertheless, the nature and character of the fan culture remained the same. In their perception, Milošević was not to be blamed for participating in the war, but for losing it. By accepting this subcultural group, the new "pro-European" and "democratic" regime renewed the political credibility of football fans, still firmly based on the "title on patriotism". Football fans remained an important political factor after the so-called "democratic turn", and the stadiums were kept as one of the central political arenas in the first decade of the new millennium.

However, the formed alliance soon dissolved. The fall of Milošević's regime led to a thorough rearrangement of the existent political paradigm. The new government chose the road of the so-called "Euro-integrations", promoting the values of liberal democracy and market economy as the cornerstones of the desired EU accession. This agenda did not align with the ideological visions of fan groups, which still firmly held their position on the right pole of the political spectrum, and their enthusiasm for emitting political messages and cheers from the stadium stands had not diminished since the 1990s. Now, the articulation of their right wing-oriented ideology was manifested in slogans such are "Kosovo is Serbia",

⁹ According to: <http://www.nspm.rs/komentar-dana/licemerje-i-neprofesionalnost-medija-druge-srbije.html?alphabet=l>

sending a clear signal to the new regime that the fans were still the keepers of the “national question”. The new millennium brought the new stadium folklore of chants filled with ethnic hatred and homophobia, such as “Ubij Hrvata” [“Kill the Croat”], “Ubij, zakolji, da Šiptar ne postoji” [“Kill, slaughter, so Shqiptar is gone”], “Nož, žica, Srebrenica” [“Knife, wire, Srebrenica”], or “Ubij pedera” [“Kill the faggot”]. The repertoire was accompanied by explicit support to the Bosnian Serb leaders Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić, both of them indicted for war crimes.

The best example of the political influence the football fans had in Serbia during this period are the attempts at organizing a PRIDE parade in Belgrade, intended to promote the rights of the LGBT community (Đorđević 2015b). Already in the beginning of the 2000s, the first attempts at organizing this event were made as a part of proclaiming “European values”. However, Serbian political elites were not fully committed to supporting PRIDE, mainly as a way of avoiding a direct confrontation with the still powerful conservative political forces (Greenberg 2006; Mikuš 2011). Football fans, yet again, assumed the role of the “punching fist” in preventing the organization of PRIDE. Alongside performances at the stands (“Peder gradom neće šetati” [“Faggot will not walk the streets”], “Ubij pedera” [“Kill the faggot”] etc.) and graffiti on the city walls, they resorted to physical violence (Pavasovic Trost and Kovacevic 2013), successfully preventing PRIDE from taking place. As noted by Nielsen, in this way fan groups became “stronger than the state” (Nielsen 2013). The public perception of their actions was at least twofold. On the one hand, their actions of PRIDE prevention marked them as “violent hooligans” and “enemies of the state”. But on the other hand, a certain part of the public perceived their actions as justified. The direct opposition to the promotion of the rights of the LGBT community, as part of the right-wing agenda in Serbia, reinforced the capital of the football fans within this segment of the political spectrum. They were imaged as “true patriots”, as “our Serbian children” that were defending the “true”, “traditional” values.

It is important to note that, regardless of the clearly political content that they are promoting and the influence they have,

football fans determine themselves as explicitly apolitical. A valuable illustration of this is the interview of the leader of the Red Star fan group given for the magazine of the Serbian Orthodox Church, "Pravoslavlje":

"Older friends went to war when it all began, and we, at age eighteen, nineteen, took over the responsibility to lead the stands, and nationalism was left as inheritance. (...) We are not interested in politics; we all have our own private opinion on the elections. We managed to be apolitical because many attempted to win us over. In this we remained united; the Serb-hood is above everything else" (Pravoslavlje, 15.10.2008).

This statement clearly implies that their form of apolitical is deeply ideology-based, foremost through the discourse of nationalism (Đorđević and Pekić 2018). Additionally, the fact that this interview was published by the official newsletter of the Serbian Orthodox Church points to the importance of the Orthodox religion in the process of formulating the ideology in question. Many of the fans see themselves as deeply religious, and very often the stands are decorated with slogans with unquestionably Orthodox insignia. The importance and influence of this peculiar religion-fan union were clearly visible in the initiative of the Red Star fans to boycott all the games that take place on Easter Sunday. One of the fans' leaders explained this initiative in the following words: "The idea was started when we wanted to raise awareness of "Serbianness", which is very important in our stands. And we all know that Serb-hood does not obtain its intended importance without Orthodoxy"¹⁰.

Here the repetition of the pattern established already during the 1990s comes to the foreground. The pattern in which national identity is necessarily intertwined with the religious one (Malešević 2005; Malešević 2006; Čolović 2012) is clearly visible. Additionally,

¹⁰ Daily Newspaper "Telegraf", 9. 4. 2018. <http://www.telegraf.rs/sport/navijaci/2949537-vodja-delija-vladimir-savija-objasnio-kako-je-rodjena-ideja-da-se-bojkotuju-utakmice-za-veliku-subotu-i-uskrs-video>, accessed: 10. 5. 2018.

the integration of the Orthodox identity in the sum of the fan identity implies that “Serb-hood,” inherited by football fans, similarly to the Serbian Orthodox Church represents a sort of supra-ideology, which is above the affairs of everyday ideology and politics. In this way, fans are (self-)declared as authentic keepers of the nation, as the main advocates and voice of the structure of the desired behavior designating the entire large, and highly diverse, group of people who feel or represent themselves as the Red Star fans.

The appropriation of the “watch dog” position basically functions as an “anti-political machine” (Ferguson 1990) by actively procuring ways to depoliticize space, diminishing the possibility of the appearance of any other alternative ideology, at the same time establishing “apolitical normality” which is, itself, highly political. This strategy can be referred to as the exploitation of a very specific condition of Serbian society following the fall of Milošević’s regime in 2000 and onward. During the period of transition, Serbia made an attempt to implement the principles of market economy and liberal democracy, as all the other states in Eastern Europe. This process of the so-called “transition” (Mikuš 2013) is still ongoing, today transformed into a self-fulfilling prophecy, “revolving mostly around the following tropes: oscillation between liberalisation and authoritarianism; the complex relationship between the state, organized crime and the economy; corruption (...) regional cooperation or disputes, successes and failures in the EU accession process” (Štiks and Horvat 2015, 1). The overall disappointment with the outcome of such transition, especially in terms of the unfulfilled expectation of economic prosperity, resulted in “democratic policies understood as elitist, corrupt, morally suspect, and disempowering” (Greenberg 2010, 48). It led to the lack and deliberate rejection of active participation in the political process and “non-participation in politics as a ‘rich set of moral, political and cultural engagements’” (Greenberg 2010, 43) became a legitimate political stand. The current-day fan ideology aligns with this political position, with members of fan groups refusing to take part in the political process they perceive as intrinsically rotten. On the other hand, the position they do assume is presented as a step-away from the corrupted politics, as a value set that is “above us all”. They

naturalize “Serb-hood” and “Orthodoxy” as above all ideological values. In doing so, they directly reject the proclaimed “European path” of Serbia and offer a moral position as an alternative – the moral position based on a totalizing narrative that leaves no room for a different interpretation.

The mutual dependence of football and the ideology of nationalism can be observed in the context and circumstances of the match between the national selections of Serbia and Albania that was to take place in Belgrade, in October 2014. In public, the match was predominantly shaded by the tensions of the unresolved issue of Kosovo, additionally boosted by the fact that most of the members of the Albanian selection were born there. Despite the high level of security, and the decision that the Albanian fans cannot attend the match, first incidents occurred soon after the game’s beginning. Just before the end of the first half-time, in the atmosphere resembling more a political rally than a football game¹¹, a drone carrying the flag of the so-called Great Albania flew over the stadium. The “explosive load” symbolically carried by the drone did not only have impact on the event at the stadium. Its effects were felt in a much larger radius. The eruption of hatred in the media and all over social networks caused a state of general mobilization against the Albanian arch-enemies, and it was not limited only to the highly biased rhetoric. In the following days, the patriotic “revengers” defended the “victimized Serb-hood” from the threats such as shops owned by Albanians (Đorđević 2015, 13–17).

The outburst of ethnic hatred, both verbal and actual, demonstrated once more the potential of the football stadium to mobilize for the defence of the “endangered nation”. The naturalization and continuous reproduction of the “acceptable nationalism”, embodied in both the promotion of the “ideal Serb” and in the constant locating of the “Other” (Croat, Albanian, EU, homosexual), transformed football fields across Serbia into tanks of the unquestionable nationalism that political elites can dive in when needed. Football fans are transformed into “professional patriots”,

¹¹ The cheering from the stands was mainly focused on the issue of Kosovo’s status and on the proficient insulting of Albanians.

ethno-political entrepreneurs as worded by Brubaker (Brubaker 2004, 10). Due to their “title on patriotism”, they can always offer their services to the “market of national goods”, as they proved many times to be always ready to mobilize their forces and assume a role in the complex social and political process in the post-transitional Serbia. Their activities are closely related to the current interests of the political elites, aiming to keep the game colonized by politics as long as possible.

CONCLUDING REMARKS. The development of football in Serbia in the past eight decades has been conditioned by a transformation of the game itself but always heavily influenced and formed by broader societal and political contexts. Diverse dominant ideologies in the stated period determined the ways in which football has been perceived by both the political elites and “ordinary” fans. Following the end of WWII, its purpose was defined through building the “new socialist man”. In this period, the primary focus was put on its educational role and its important position as a vehicle for rebuilding the state in the aftermath of WWII. The breach in the relations with USSR and the partial abandoning of the Soviet model led to the conceptualization of football, based on the ideals of self-management, as the main pillar of Yugoslavia’s socialist system. During the same period, and with the growing tension between SFRY and the Eastern Bloc, primarily with the USSR, the symbolic importance of sports as a resource in the political fight between ideologies was brought to the foreground. On the other hand, societal and economic contradictions of the Yugoslav system caused a continuous reproduction of crisis that also influenced football. This process culminated during the final years of the 1980s, with stadiums transformed into the symbolic loci of inter-ethnic clashes, merely announcing the events of the final dissolution of Yugoslavia.

Viewed from the symbolical point, the song of oath to Tito and his Yugoslavia sung at Poljud in Split in 1980, and the burning of the flag of that country on the same site only ten years later, illustrate the state’s dissolution process. Additionally, these two events emphasize the importance of the football stadium in communicating powerful political messages, transmitted via

television to the millions of citizens of the former SFRY. The ideology of nationalism that rose to prominence by the end of the 1980s became the main explanatory key for understanding the ongoing processes in football until today.

By comparing football in the time of socialism and post-socialism, as the period symbolically starting after the riots at Maksimir in Zagreb in May 1990, it can be concluded that the dissolution of Yugoslavia had a profound impact on the transformation of the game. Regardless of the fact that “socialist football” was heavily influenced by the state’s ideology, it can be claimed that at that time football was mostly focused on the game itself. The main actors were the players, and the achieved results were the point around which the interests of both the public and the elites managing the sport were formulated. With the start of Yugoslavia’s dissolution and with the triumph of the nationalist political elites, the focus was shifted from the game to a new group of actors – football fans. Their actions became more important than the achievements of football players, and their influence spread to a much broader arena of society. The situation didn’t change much until today, and the fans are still the most important actors in football in Serbia. Their actions, closely related to the unresolved issue of Kosovo, the EU accession, or the PRIDE Parade, are publicly followed and perceived as socially and politically relevant.

This stated core change in the perception of the game at the same time illustrates the process and the results of the so-called transition. The sport is defined within the framework of Serbia as a state on the European semi-periphery (Hughson 2015; Đorđević 2012: 444). When considering the semi-periphery as a “system of structural societal dispositions which are intertwined with their location and territoriality that impact the core of their functioning” (Hughson 2015, 26), football in Serbia can be understood through the prism of the local market’s structural economic dependency in relation to the states of the center, in our case located in Western Europe. In such a division of power on the football market, Serbian teams have the role of making “raw material” i.e., making players who will after a few matches leave for the richer countries, mainly in Western Europe. In such circumstances, the quality level of the

game is rather low, and the main task of teams' management is the successful trade of young players, whose names the public do not even attempt to remember. Football in contemporary Serbia is left to live within the intertwining of neoliberal politics and the ideologies of nationalism, reproducing the *status quo* in which the main actors are moved from the field to the stands, and in which the game itself has almost no importance at all. The ideal of reaching the "British model" in which football games are attended by parents and their children, present in every discussion on the issues of Serbian football (Đorđević 2012), in its essence is a "cosmopolitan desire" (Simić 2014). The later presents an implicit political stand that in ideal parameters is the ultimate goal of the "civilized" society, to which all post-socialist countries, Serbia included, are aiming. Such a political position, either conscious or subconscious, that sets the states of the center as the ideal model (Spasić 2011, 278), is mainly used as the justification for the struggle endured along the way. However, in reality the functioning model of British football is structurally inapplicable on Serbian society. Here, the interplay in which the trade of half-products is presented as only a stage on the road to success and the achieving of "European relevance", and in reality is a structural demand and a necessity, makes the maintaining of this model possible. The cosmopolitan dream is placed on one side, while the nationalism of football fans flourishes on the other side of the political spectrum. They function as two sides of the same coin, therefore allowing the continuous reproduction of the state of "eternal transition".

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