

Violence and masculinity amongst left-wing ultras in post-Yugoslav space

Abstract

In this article I discuss confrontations involving violence and discourses of masculinity in a left wing ultras group – White Angels Zagreb – on the basis of observations made as a group member involved in a number of overlapping antifascist activist engagements in Serbia and Croatia. Building my argument up from an ethnographic vignette, I discuss the historical context underlying the production of masculinities and heteropatriarchy in the post-Yugoslav context. I then examine material concerning violence and masculinities gained through participant observation. I argue that whilst not initiating violence against other groups, talk about violent incidents with other groups plays a similar role to that documented in right wing groups in cementing collective identifications, and that group concepts of masculinity are embedded within dominant discursive hegemonies established in post-Yugoslav space, whilst simultaneously rejecting enforced ‘hard’ masculinity, an important observation which differentiates them from many right wing ultras in the region.

Keywords: ultras, fan cultures, football, Serbia, Croatia, masculinity

Introduction

One day a female friend and member of Zagreb Young Antifascists¹ (*Mlade antifašistkinje Zagreba*) visited Belgrade, the capital of Serbia – where I was living at the time - for a conference. In the evening we went for drinks in downtown *Dorćol*, where she then suggested spray-painting some antifascist graffiti messages in the neighbourhood, in which there were a large number of rich and complex graffiti murals as well as a large amount of scrawl, largely written by a mixture of local ultras groups claiming particular territories, and far right political organisations such as *Obraz*, as well as occasional left wing messages. After some time in the neighbourhood, we were positioned outside an entrance to a residential building, spray-paint can in hand, when a man in his late twenties exited the building and tried to accost us. He first clenched his fists and challenged me to a fight in the street, which I refused. He then pulled out his mobile phone and flashed a Red Star Belgrade screensaver in my face, identifying himself with the football club. He then shouted at us, claiming that we wouldn't be able to leave the neighbourhood and that he had called for backup. It was clear that he had mistaken us for ultras associated with the other large club in Belgrade – Partizan, particularly given that the can of spray paint we had was black, a colour Partizan ultras often use. He had expected a confrontation, and was subsequently confused about who we were and what we were doing here – first as it was clear that Serbian wasn't my first language and second because the number of left wing groups spraying graffiti was tiny compared to the number of football ultras groups and right wing activists. When it was clear we were not going to physically confront him, and 'backup' was not on its way, he asked us whether we were fags (*pederi*), saying that he had no problem with such people, but wasn't interested in fighting them. The comment seemed less a provocation than an expression of irritation and mild confusion; we nevertheless said nothing and walked off, although he kept being pushy with us and in a miscalculation, handed over the graffiti can. He followed for a moment and attempted to spray my friend when she made a remark, this attempt being enough to satisfy him to then leave us alone.

Left-wing Activist Engagements: White Angels Zagreb

The incident described above took place in the context of a number of activist engagements I was involved in alongside conducting doctoral research with scientists in Belgrade, Serbia and Zagreb, Croatia. In Zagreb, I was, and continue to be, a member of White Angels Zagreb (hereon WAZ), a

small Zagreb based fan group following the football club NK Zagreb.ⁱⁱ It is the only fan group in Croatian professional football committed to a left-wing, anti-fascist, anti-racist and anti-homophobic platform in a context deeply affected by the recent wars surrounding the break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the early to mid-nineties. Croatia seceded from the Yugoslav federation, declaring independence in June 1991, the new government promoting the formation of a state in which Croatian national belonging was key. The secession was shortly followed by what is commonly referred to in Croatia as ‘the homeland war’ (*domovinski rat*) in which organised groups within larger football fan associations committed to nationalist platforms volunteered as paramilitary units.

In contrast, WAZ has a radical left political platform. The term platform refers to a political code to which members are required to adhere, whereby homophobia, racism, fascism and forms of nationalism are not permitted amongst group members. In the case of WAZ there is also a commitment to direct democracy whereby all group members decide on political decisions made, as opposed to representative democracy where elected members decide on key matters. I have been a member of WAZ for over three years so far, from 2011, living in Zagreb for a total of four years between 2009 and the present. I came to the group through an organisation named Zagreb Young Antifascists (*Mlade antifašistkinje Zagreba*), of which I was additionally a member for several years. As an autonomous, queer identified individual, I also participated in a number of pride events in Belgrade and Zagreb and I occasionally draw on these experiences in the text which follows where the themes overlap, particularly as concerns surveillance of public space. Whilst I joined WAZ as an activist, outside of my official academic commitments, after two years of involvement I started to write about the group from an activist-anthropological perspective, extensively discussed in the discipline (see Schepher-Hughes 1995, D’Andrade 1995). In the text that follows, the method I use is participant observation, carefully highlighting situations in which I assume some anthropological distance from the categories the group uses.

Ultras and hooligans

What is particularly interesting about left-wing fan groups such as White Angels Zagreb is that they understand themselves as part of an ultras’ scene which does include physically violent acts or provocations on the part of certain other groups with right wing or apolitical platforms. The term ultra references a movement which emerged in Italy during the sixties and subsequently spread to many locations the world over. This movement “marries the typical youth protest with a political slant against the system“(Roversi and Balestri 2000, 187). Roversi and Balestri argue that the movement’s connections with extreme political movements during the sixties and seventies “helped the ultras movement to borrow modes of action and forms of organisation from the political sphere, and to endow itself with stable, complex organisational structures able to mobilise towards internal activities (choruses, production of banners and flags) and external ones (production and sale of gadgets, membership cards, subscriptions, relations with the club, etcetera).” (ibid.). Initiating physical violence against other groups is not a key part of group participation for a number of ultras groups, and certainly was not for amongst the left-wing groups I came into contact with. When ultras related violence did take place, it was often either prearranged between ultras groups, took place in the context of the match day spectacle, or related to disputes concerning sovereignty over particular urban territories. Nevertheless, during the eighties in Italy, the ultras movement became increasingly violent, with a focus on local identity, increasingly right wing politics and a shift in logic amongst some groups from viewing the terraces (*curva*) as a liberated space to viewing them as being a small mother country. This created “a political tension that could supply a surplus of identity, cohesion and aggression” (Podaliri and Balestri 1998, 94). The example at the start of this article makes the link to sovereignty over local territory clear, where my friend and I were initially

mistaken for *Grobari* (Partizan fans) using black spraypaint in a part of town over which Red Star fans made claim.

The practice of seeking out violence with other groups also relates to the ‘hooligan’ phenomenon, extensively investigated in the UK context in which it emerged, notably by the Leicester School (Elias and Dunning 1966; Dunning and Murphy 1988). It refers to groups which seek out violent encounters, primarily with other groups.ⁱⁱⁱ This tradition, which emerged in the UK and subsequently spread across the world, particularly during the eighties – including to the former Yugoslav states where numerous groups emerged in this decade - is just one of several different traditions with which the fans I spoke with engaged, although in the case of WAZ, they did not seek out violent encounters with other groups, instead stressing the punk, left wing and subcultural aspects, only occasionally making hooligan cultural references, to films such as *Football Factory* etc. Whilst football hooliganism is difficult to define and the category of ‘hooligan’ is commonly used a media ‘other’ in many locations the world over, including in the former Yugoslav region (Obradović 2007), Spaaij argues that “an ideal typical distinction can be drawn between spontaneous incidents of spectator violence and the behaviour of socially organized fan groups that engage in competitive violence, principally with fan groups of opposing football clubs.” (Spaaij 2007, 412). The encounter described in the introduction highlights several aspects of Spaaij’s discussion of masculinity and collective identity in football hooliganism which he suggests are common to many groups in different locations, although his material is based on observations conducted between 2001 and 2006 on the basis of participant observation and interviews conducted with groups from the Netherlands, Spain and United Kingdom. He identifies the following elements: excitement and pleasurable emotional arousal, hard masculinity, territorial identifications, individual and collective management of reputation, a sense of solidarity and belonging, and representations of sovereignty and autonomy (Spaaij 2008, 375),^{iv} several of which, as I will show, also apply to left-wing ultras groups such as WAZ.

Theorising Masculinities amongst Left Wing Ultras

Spaaij’s typology also describes hard masculinity as a key aspect of hooligan membership. What might ‘hard masculinity’ entail in the Balkan case and was it present amongst left wing ultras as well? In Hughson’s (2000, 10) discussion of the Bad Blue Boys in Melbourne, Australia, he identified “machismo, chauvinism, misogyny, and homophobia”, as what he terms the basis of a male identity. Whilst these ultras do not live in the Balkan region, they were nonetheless influenced by the war situation and certainly by Croatian nationalist ideology – the connections between war participation and hegemonic constructions of masculinity has been extensively discussed (see Milićević 2006). The argument can be made that national stereotypes and expected gender roles frequently perpetuate hetero-patriarchy, with ultras’ groups ‘hyper-masculinity’ in this context confirming such models. The relationship between masculinities, national belonging, hetero-patriarchy and ultras’ participation in the post-Yugoslav context, characterised by recent wars and nation-state formation, is therefore worth exploring in more detail. At one extreme, anthropological and social theorising on gender describes the existence of a hegemonic masculinity inscribed in the actions, behaviours and thinking of social actors. This view is compatible with an, in my view problematic, culturalist view that there exists a specific ‘Balkan’ masculinity – sometimes described as *homo balcanicus* (for a discussion, see Bechev 2004), as well as with a Marxist view which understands such a dominant masculinity as resulting from state hegemonies established over the course of and following the recent wars. At the other extreme is the view that there exist multiple individual and/or group masculinities in lots of different local (albeit possibly in Appadurai’s (1995) sense of local) contexts. Connell’s (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity, closer to the Marxist view, is particularly useful here. For Connell, gender describes “a way of structuring social practice

in general, not a special type of practice” (ibid. 75). On her view, the state is substantively, not metaphorically masculine, based on “the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable”. (ibid. 76). In different settings social actors engage with elements of hegemonic masculinity, whilst simultaneously discarding or even contesting elements of it.

I suggest that tracking understandings of violence and masculinity amongst left wing ultras is particularly revealing of the dynamics of the ultras scene, the wider context and the contradictions such groups face, for such groups confront aspects of a hegemonic masculinity present in some corners of the ultras scene, whilst – I will argue – producing alternative masculinities which seek to simultaneously challenge and engage with hegemonic masculinities prevalent in other, including right wing ultras groups. In so doing, I intend to contribute to an emerging literature on left wing fan cultures. As Kennedy and Kennedy (2013, 119) stated, the “traditional attitude to football on the left has been less than favourable, veering somewhere between outright hostility and indifference”. Academic literature on ultras' is dominated by discussions of racism and connections with the far right, whilst as Spaaij and Viñas (2013, 183) note “the ideas and actions that inspire thousands of football fans who identify with the far left remain underexamined”, with some important exceptions (Doidge 2013, McDougall 2013, Daniel and Kassimeris 2013, McManus 2013). Yet, “sport activism engenders critical consciousness and acts as a form of critical praxis and resistance to dominant hegemony; ideologically, economically, politically, socially and culturally, in sport and sometimes outside sport too.” (Totten 2014). This paper is therefore a reflexive and critical reflection on the group practices of a left wing ultras group, written from an 'involved', close-up perspective. I first consider the relevant context for the argument which follows – discourses of masculinity in post-Yugoslav space. I then discuss certain forms of surveillance in post-Yugoslav space which affect visibly non-straight identified individuals (hereon I use the term LGBTQ) and members of ultras groups respectively. This is important as WAZ is an LGBTQ friendly ultras group, its membership therefore being directly affected by **both** modes of surveillance on occasion. Following this, I discuss understandings of violence and masculinity dominant within the group respectively.

Historicising Post-Yugoslav masculinities

During the recent wars which occurred during the nineties following the collapse of Yugoslav 'socialism', the political principles around which the new states became organised were national. The context in which the newly legitimised national categories were elaborated – war - definitely contributed to the nationalisms having a strong masculinist component (see Milićević 2006). As the anthropologist Greenberg discussed:

The rise of masculinist nationalism provided a powerful linkage between an emerging post-socialist citizenship and male identification and privilege. While gendered forms of citizen belonging were also a feature of socialism, this new nationalism was grounded in a normative, masculine basis for citizenship. This and other cases demonstrate that normative gender categories can be resources that people mobilize to produce a sense of continuity and agency in times of drastic social, political and economic change. (Greenberg 2006, 322–3)

What is specific about nationalism in the post-Yugoslav context, as we shall see, is the way in which nationalist 'identities' - a concept I use ethnographically and not analytically – were inflected with a particular nested discursive opposition concerning Europe and 'European identities'. Greenberg described how, in this post-war context, a particular discursive opposition came to dominate in which a gendered, feminised citizen came to stand for elite politics:

In addition to the tension between masculine national citizenship and democratic multicultural citizenship, there was another drama at work. This conflict had its roots in the alignment of elite politics with the feminine and collective working class politics with the masculine. Homosexuality had come to stand in for new democratic forms, elite political agendas, an active NGO and human rights sector, Europe and the West. I argue below that the conflict between nationalist and multicultural forms of inclusion/exclusion was an expression of a larger struggle over who is entitled to define democratic practice and behavior in post-Milošević Serbia: the gendered citizen marked by particularity and associated with elite politics, or the ordinary Serbian, masculine citizen, the voice of “the masses.” (ibid.,326)

I understand this tension to be a discursive effect produced both by the establishment of new discursive hegemonies on the part of individuals promoting nationalist mobilisation and, on a political economic level, as having particular appeal amongst many – but by no means all - who felt disempowered by the changes and the drop in living standards, particularly in Serbia. On this view, the increase in chauvinist/extreme masculine performances can be seen from a social psychological point of view as compensatory, whereby many individuals in particularly disempowered and insecure class positions attempted to prove one's masculinity in a context where they were unable to fulfil the expectations often associated with their gender role. Both the discursive hegemonies and political economic aspect relate to the changing character of state institutions and the politics which legitimate them. These two aspects are therefore interconnected and, despite local variations on the theme^v, describe a new form of heteropatriarchy established (see Jansen 2008).

The popularity of this discourse was strengthened in part due to the actions of Western European embassies and civil rights organisations, primarily from Europe and North America, promoting LGBT rights amidst a wider discourse of human rights, which appeared hypocritical to many given civilian deaths during the NATO airstrikes in 1999.^{vi} The actions of these international institutions promoted a view whereby ‘tolerance of difference’ and an elite liberal cosmopolitanism was viewed as bringing the Balkans ‘closer’ to Europe. This is evident in the following anthropologist’s description of the 2010 pride event in Belgrade, Serbia:

Surrounded by the globalised iconography of the LGBT movement and cheesy Western pop, I could not help feeling that almost the only local thing about the Parade were the militarised, violent conditions under which it was happening. If the speakers mentioned Serbia, they mostly denoted it negatively, as a site of deviation from the European norms of respect for human rights that the Parade begins to rectify. (Mikus 2011, 836)

In Croatia, where the left wing ultras group I consider in the remainder of this article operated, the dynamic was slightly more complex as the dominant nationalist narrative during the nineties contrasted a European, cultured Croatia grounded in a central European cosmopolitanism with their more ‘primitive’ Balkan neighbours (Obad 2010). However, as we shall see, the same dynamic persisted in some domains.

To conclude this section, the above descriptions of the context suggest that persons identified as LGBTQ would evoke a number of symbolic political associations to which advocates of everyday heteropatriarchy in Serbia and Croatia – including members of many football ultras groups – would be opposed, grounded as they often were in what Spaaij (2008) describes as ‘hypermasculinity’ – exaggerated forms of hard masculinity, which may have included seeking out physical confrontations with other groups. A consequence of this is that visibly LGBTQ identified

individuals were singled out in particular as an object of surveillance in public space and a symbolic and moral threat to the newly established national order of things (Malkki 1995).

Surveillance in post-Yugoslav urban public space

As the above details illustrate, understanding modes of surveillance is useful and important in understanding the context in which WAZ was working, and so in this section I take time to explain such surveillance in more detail. In the Belgrade context and to a slightly lesser extent in Zagreb, visible signifiers denoting membership to an ultras group or identification as a gay male, particularly items of clothing, could result in problems when passing through public spaces. To give an example, on one occasion in Belgrade I wore a red star replica hooded jumper, a few months after arriving there for the first time; we sat in the park by the fortress Kalemegdan on a Saturday evening on a match day. They commented that I shouldn't wear it, especially not in the evening if walking home alone. Their comment referenced a particular kind of surveillance, in this case on the part of other, rival fan associations, who might take issue with my wearing the hoodie, which could then escalate into a physical confrontation. Men (in particular) wearing clothes that were viewed as feminine or camp could also lead to altercations. To give another example, on one occasion I wore a hat with flowers on it on a bus one evening, my friends insisted I take it off. Some friends also disparagingly referred to the 'fascist fashion police', who on occasions had attacked people on the basis of wearing, for example, tight jeans etc.

In both of these instances, surveillance relates to a threat of possible physical violence, on the basis of visual signifiers which marked myself out as having a particular relationship with hegemonic masculine and state orderings. The effect of such surveillance was to alter codes of dress, behaviour and corresponding social identifications made. In both cases, surveillance in this context presupposes a dominant and threatening male gaze on the part of certain individuals hidden in the crowds that traverse urban spaces. This gaze is associated with a hard and hegemonic masculinity (in the context of war, hegemonic and hard masculinity often converge; it is therefore unsurprising that they are closely linked in a post-war context where war had been fought nearby). The threat is reinforced when sporadic violent incidents between fan groups, or attacks on LGBTQ individuals occur.

However, the gaze was only panoptic in the LGBTQ case, for panoptic power is asymmetrical. As Foucault (1997, 362) commented, 'The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen... There is a machinery that assures dissymmetry, disequilibrium, difference.' In the case of fan group members, the gaze was frequently reciprocal and often based on a common and mutual (symmetrical) recognition of a 'worthy' opponent, with corresponding expectations of behaviour: this is clear from the introductory vignette where the opponent expected a street fight when assuming we were members of a rival fan group, later refusing to engage. Whilst the cultural content of hegemonic masculinities might differ from fan group to fan group, the expectations and deeper recognition demonstrate a high degree of code-sharing. As Spaij commented:

A shared cultural practice of self-styled hardcore football hooligans is their involvement, to varying degrees, in violent confrontation with opposing hooligans. A key aim of all hooligan groups is to successfully challenge their rivals through intimidation and violence as a way of securing or enhancing their status as a good "firm" in the hierarchy of hooligan oppositions (Armstrong, 1994, p. 299). Spaij (2008, 373)

Whilst there is a hierarchy, depending on the value and reputation of each ultras subdivision, there is also recognition of a common masculinity and common structure of practice, even if the ‘cultural’ content of those practices differed in different fan groups.

For those who identified as non-straight, no claims were made to public space in the same fashion. Public display was made for different reasons. There were a small number of places designated as safe space – cafes and clubs, largely hidden from public view. Public displays of affection between partners were possible only in locations where it was clear no one was able to see them in that moment. Public space was experienced as liminal and many chose not to display visible signs of their sexuality, so as to avoid possible conflict. Whilst public space was not liminal for members of ultras culture, many also covered up, so as to avoid possible conflict in an inappropriate context (e.g. walking home through an ‘enemy’ part of town at night by oneself). Both groups had a conception of particular spaces as identified with their subculture/group: for ultras, this was public space and the stadium grounds, for non-straight individuals, this was particular, often commercial or activist spaces. Having now explained the relevant contexts, I will now turn to consider discourses concerning violence and constructions of masculinity amongst ultras in former Yugoslavia, drawing on encounters such as that described in the introduction and my experience as a member of WAZ.

Violence

In the introduction, the red star fan’s provocation to fight places him, and willing participants, in a situation characterised by excitement and pleasurable emotional arousal, also connected with stadium performances and participants’ desire for ‘flow’ and/or ‘peak’ experiences (Finn et al. 1994), experienced collectively as a group. Such excitement and pleasurable emotional arousal frequently occur in ‘dangerous’ situations, ranging from committing illegal acts – such as in some countries letting off pyrotechnics, drinking and/or painting graffiti in forbidden locations, as well as engaging in violent encounters with other groups. In my experience, amongst members of WAZ and other left wings ultras groups, actively seeking violent encounters was not part of how group members identified with the group, an observation which differentiates left wing ultras groups from many right wing ultras groups.

Nevertheless, events where scuffles and acts of self-defence occurred were frequently commented on, often alongside post-match drinks. Participating in narrating such events and joking about them played a role in constructing collective group identifications (intra-group solidarity). For instance, in May 2013 WAZ participated in a pan-European fan initiative – Football versus Homophobia, as part of a wider European level campaign, whereby a banner featuring two male footballers kissing was put up during a football match. The banner did not cause any problems with the staff at the stadium during the match, but at the end of the game three young men walked up to us as we were putting the banner away. One of them turned to me and a friend and said “Let’s have a look at that banner.” I folded it open to show them. “Are you faggots (*pederi*)?” one of them asked. “Is that really important?” I replied, “the point is that we support them.” The next few seconds were a blur, the result of which two members of WAZ and two of the three men were fighting on the floor of the stand near the rails at the front by the pitch. A minute or so later, a police officer came and broke up the scuffle and took two of the men and one member of WAZ to a police station. This event was commented on extensively over the evening whilst we were drinking in the yard of an alternative cultural centre. Several members of WAZ claimed that the provocateurs were members of the Bad Blue Boys, the mostly right wing and strongly nationalistic fan association associated with the largest team in Zagreb, NK Dinamo. One friend said that they had likely come to watch the match as they had placed bets on NK Zagreb, whilst another mentioned that he recognised one of them as having been in his class at school. The main conclusion drawn was that they were the aggressors

whilst we had stood our ground. It was also joked that we had finally been noticed by the Bad Blue Boys, pointing to a desire for recognition as part of the ultras scene.

Despite conducting research in a different context – Manchester United fans in the late nineties - King's (2001) observations concerning the importance of physically violent acts towards others in constituting a sense of what he refers to as 'collective memory' in hooligan groups are worthy of consideration in the Zagreb context, as they concern a globally connected movement with similar characteristics, and as Spaaij (2008) commented, this is a movement in which certain generalisations may be drawn. King argued that whilst self-identified hooligans only spend a fraction of their lives engaged in physical violence towards others, they spend a much larger amount of time discussing these acts, and that such discussions are a resource fans use to cement a sense of group belonging. He states “collective memory must be periodically reaffirmed and each new affirmation presents opportunities to the virtuosi in the group to reinterpret the past in line with their interests.” (King 2001, 583).^{vii} Such incidents therefore constituted ‘significant events’ which had to be selected, ordered and reinterpreted in line with the ordering principles of the group, based on its political platform and commitment to the team. A comparison may be drawn here with the practice of producing national mythico-history (Malkki 1995). Nevertheless I would describe the process as ‘strengthening collective identifications’ amongst members, as ‘collective memory’ implies that such a ‘collective mind’ – existed.^{viii} Such violent encounters, experienced in terms of self-defence amongst left wing ultras, whilst provocations amongst many right wing ultras groups in Croatia, created a sense of emotional arousal which played an important role, similar in left and right wing groups, of strengthening collective identifications.

Contested Masculinities

Being recognised as a participant in the ultras scene required a certain amount of code-sharing with other groups, which were clearly complicit with hegemonic masculinity on the basis of internet forum discussions and appearances at football matches I experienced. This raises the question of in what ways WAZ members confirmed and/or contested hegemonic masculinity. Whilst male homosocial ‘banter’ was an element of left oriented ultras’ groups in Zagreb such as WAZ, hard masculinity was not. My fieldwork suggest that the fans with whom I spoke drew on aspects of state established discursive hegemonies – such as hegemonic masculinity, as well as other social contexts of importance to them – such as being considered part of the ultras scene as well as the importance of local traditions. As concerns local traditions, the area of town around the stadium, *Trešnjevka*, was understood as WAZ’s territory, although the Bad Blue Boys also had a lot of graffiti and a regional subdivision for this part of town, and due to the relative size of the groups, as earlier mentioned, WAZ were largely ignored by them – a fact which irritated some members. This area of Zagreb has a strong working class tradition, often referred to as *Crvena (Red) Trešnjevka*. It contrasts with area around the Maksimir Stadium home to NK Dinamo and the Bad Blue Boys, which is located in a more affluent part of town. As concerns ultras traditions, in addition to using a number of forms associated with the ultras movement (choreography, flags, membership cards etc.), some members of the group also followed Italian clubs and we occasionally watched videos of altercations between Italian fans and the police for example.

What is particularly interesting, I will now argue, is that WAZ’s simultaneous desire for recognition as an ultras group and promotion of left wing and LGBTQ politics left the group in a contradictory position, simultaneously seeking (non-hierarchical) recognition and being open to hierarchical surveillance. This led the group to attempt to subvert, yet also be partially complicit with hegemonic masculinity. This was particularly visible when some members of WAZ talked about other groups. Guests, primarily from other European cities, visited Zagreb and came to matches

from time-to-time. There were often activists from Berlin or Hamburg, as well as members of organisations such as Football Supporters Europe.^{ix} Some of these fans insisted on vegan diets and/or used ‘politically correct’ language in a way which irritated some members of the group. Some of these individuals were sometimes derided as being *hipsteri* (hipsters) or *šminkeri* (cosmetic activists [my translation]; from the verb *šminkati se* – to put on make-up) implying a mixture of the following attributes: conspicuous consumption; paying attention to cultivating a fashionable, perhaps metrosexual image; following a vegan diet; insisting on political correctness; focusing on activist aesthetics and forms more than – in their opinion - concrete action. There was a sense that those who were ‘hipsters’ were less ‘authentic’ activists, having a view of activism as a ‘trendy subculture’ and often coming from more economically privileged backgrounds and behaving in a more individualist manner. This lack of authenticity contrasts sharply with Michael’s (2013) research with cultural consumers deriding a category of ‘hipsters’ on the grounds of them not making individual, authentic consumer choices, but instead following trends. Rather, the distinction between the ‘hipster’ and ‘authentic’ activist cited by some members of WAZ mirrors Greenberg’s (2006) opposition between the ‘feminine, homosexual, elite European institutions’ and the ‘authentic, Serbian, male voice of the people’. Despite identifying as queer and coming from what was understood as Europe, I was never positioned by group members in the same way as some of the fans who visited, presumably because I was fluent in Croatian and engaged in local practices and organising. I was only once or twice referred to in banter as a hipster, suggesting that such an involvement in local (WAZ) practices was central in defining a person’s position and not a perceived geographical belonging, as might be the case with some groups oriented around nationalist ideology, which WAZ completely rejected.

This activist association was likely exacerbated in the Balkan context due to two important details. First, there existed a class of professional activists, including LGBT activists, connected with an expanded and lucrative NGO industry, who received wages well above the national average for their work, several of whom cultivated this ‘hipster image’. The second was that, amongst some visiting activists, there was a feeling that some of them had not sufficiently questioned their European privilege, having different understandings of what was expensive and cheap, spending money on some expensive vegan products in health food shops for example, in a context where there was less consumer choice and such vegan products were often a luxury item compared to Berlin for example. These political economic differentials were particularly obvious when attending a conference in Amsterdam, where the exorbitant prices highlighted economic inequalities between different regions of Europe, along the lines of east/west and north/south divides. In summary, post-Yugoslav discursive hegemonies concerning gender shaped the background upon which individual group members interpreted their concepts of gender and sexuality. Whilst having relatively coherent gendered expectations, their group acceptance of alternative sexualities radically differentiated them from the right wing groups. For those accepting –consciously or not – hegemonic masculinist discourse within the ultras scene, behaviours and attitudes understood to not fit in with normative understandings of masculinity could result in being interpreted as gay (*pederski*). As the anthropologist Mary Douglas may have described it, such individuals constituted a symbolic threat to individuals’ masculinity in hetero-patriarchic constructions of social reality, being ‘matter out of place’ (Douglas 2002). The relative individualism of the category – being ‘gay’ was commonly understood as an individual identification, rather than an organised social group with specific, local qualities – such as a ‘nation’ or ‘the people’ - may also have grated with a construction of the social world in terms of groups with specific local or national identities. Whilst amongst members of WAZ there was an openness to sexual difference, including trans and queer group members, despite the majority of the group defining as heterosexual, openness regarding consumption patterns and unbounded individualism, in addition to racism or homophobia was not accepted.

A further comparison which can be used to make the argument that the groups masculinity had some features in common concerns an insult used to refer to rape. In Belgrade, there is a widely circulated urban legend that, on one occasion, male fans of Partizan (*Grobari*) came across a male red star ultra (*Delije*) and during the violent confrontation which followed, as an ultimate mark of humiliation, one of them raped him. Another version of this tale, concerning a Partizan fan and a fan from Torcida Split in Croatia is also related by Partizan fans in the TV programme *The Real Football Factories International: Croatia and Serbia*. I found this comment was often used by some students and friends to point to the absurdity of the 'hard masculinity', which is present amongst many of these ultras groups – they would question why such an act is viewed as macho whilst some individuals in these same groups provoke verbal or physical confrontations with the non-straight population. Of course, the perpetrator of such an act plays a symbolic role as an 'aggressive, masculine tormenter', imposing his power on a 'passive feminised victim', a discursive opposition discussed in the war context with respect to Serbian nationalist victim narratives that Serbian women were being raped, primarily by Albanian men, in Kosovo (Bracewell 2000). Amongst WAZ, one popular chant shouted at the opposition was “these cunts/faggots will fuck you (up)” “*izjebat će vas ove pičke pederske*”.^x Such a comment preserved the underlying discursive opposition prominent amongst right wing groups, but reversed it back on their opponents with whom the group are, or wish to be in confrontational dialogue, through WAZ's assuming, and being proud of assuming, a subordinated position. Such comments, particularly when making use of irony, implied the existence of clear reflexive moments concerning the social context in which such masculinities were articulated and a mocking of the nationalist, politicised dimensions of the context in which they were working. Numerato's (2014, 14) conclusion that “the reflexive discursive practices diffused in late modernity are not necessarily viewed as deliberate and emancipating forms of social action,” also holds true for WAZ, wherein such insights were primarily enacted through the use of performed chants and banter in the match-day context rather than direct, serious discussion within the group at meetings – such discussion was restricted to formal situations, such as round table discussions the group occasionally organised, in which social issues were debated alongside academics and activists.

Conclusions

In this article, through a number of examples, I have analysed concepts of violence and masculinity amongst ultras, drawing attention to the peculiar position of a group – White Angels Zagreb – advocating LGBTQ rights in the context of an ultras scene in which hypermasculine and heteronormative ideals were prominent. I have made use of Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity and Foucault's (1997) concepts of surveillance and the gaze; tools which, as Pringle (2005) noted, are often used in theorising masculinity and power in sports studies. Importantly, Pringle argues that the concepts relate to different theoretical traditions which are not necessarily compatible and he suggests that ‘researchers who combine the concepts of hegemony with discourse should offer an explanatory account’ (Pringle 2005, 263). To render them compatible, I suggest the key link to be made here is an understanding of the production of discourses as grounded in practices; ultimately the discussion of surveillance describes how oppressive practices (or a perceived present threat based on past practices) associated with a male gaze and ultimately, a hegemonic masculinity influenced the behaviour and dress of certain individuals, notably LGBTQ identified persons and football fans, as they passed through urban public space.

In this article, I have also described how WAZ's group identifications overlap with the role of violence and hetero-normative discursive hegemonies. I suggest that this overlapping is contingent and relates to their geopolitical situation, where the group's positioning is very much a minority position. As such groups open up new discursive spaces in the Balkan fan scene, it remains to be

seen how the above discourses and positions will transform as the geopolitical positioning of the various post-Yugoslav states continue to change.

ⁱ The group has now changed its name to the Women's Antifascist Network Zagreb (*Mreža Antifašistkinja Zagreba*)

ii The group has approximately thirty members. Typical home attendance ranges from 10-15 members, whilst 4-5 typically attend away games each time

iii See Pearson (1984) for a discussion of the origins of the use of the word 'hooligan'.

iv Several of these aspects, in my experience, also apply to antifascist activist groups such as the Zagreb based group mentioned. Nevertheless, a detailed comparison is beyond the scope of this paper.

v See Blagojević (2013) for a discussion of an ontological approach to masculinities in the Balkan semiperiphery.

vi This resonates strongly with Puar's (2007) concept of homonationalism.

vii I choose not to use the term 'collective memory' as it reifies a group form, or 'group ego', a move I find unsettling due to its links with nationalism.

viii I find this problematic due to its connections with 'banal' nationalism (Billig 1995), that the social world is made of up collective groups, each with their own separate history and identity.

ix <http://www.fanseurope.org/en/> (accessed on 09/3/15).

^x More precisely 'izjebati' means 'fuck until you cannot go on'

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