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The hooligan as 'internal' other? Football fans, ultras culture and nesting intra-orientalisms

Abstract

Football fans, specifically fan associations (*navijačkeudruge*), are sometimes depicted as stereotypical of Balkan 'mentality', drawing on associations with violence, organised crime and examples of 'primitive' behaviour and attitudes at football matches. In this paper, I argue that the drawing of such associations may be explored in terms of a nesting intra-orientalism, whereby non-European 'others' are constructed at different levels typically within a state, rather than projected outside to other geographical regions or states. On the basis of my experience as a member of an ultra-left fan association in Zagreb, I explore several characteristics of ultras' group participation – focusing on what they referred to as the 'supporters' world' (*navijačkisvijet*) and ultras culture (*ultras kultura*). I label three characteristics which also define the wider contemporary 'everyday geopolitics' in the Balkans at present. On the basis of these three characteristics, I evaluate the hypothesis of a nesting 'intra-orientalism' and the ideological purposes it may serve.

Key words: ultras, football, Croatia, political activism, orientalism

Introduction

Kako vi gledate na nas, tako Europa gleda na vas, BBB

Europe looks at you in the same way you look at us, BBB [my translation]

Walking down SavskaCesta, one of the main roads in Zagreb, one evening, I took note of the various graffiti messages written on the walls of buildings lining the street – a popular activity and source of commentary amongst the members of the antifascist and football ultras groups in which I was involved. The above quote, smeared across one wall, stood out as the comment struck me as particularly cleverly constructed.

This statement, written by members of NK Dinamo's fan association, the *Bad Blue Boys* (hereon BBB) was clearly intended for passers-by, i.e. people who lived in Zagreb, to read, and invited a comparison between how the BBB imagined some of the sign readers viewed them, and how 'Europe' viewed Croatian or perhaps 'Balkan' society.¹ The dominant associations amongst the main-stream public in Zagreb with an ultras group such as BBB were with violent behaviours and conservative nationalist ideology.² This knowledge, which BBB would have an awareness of, was cleverly used in the sign to suggest that the former Yugoslav region was viewed by other European citizens as an unruly, disordered part of Europe, a stereotype associated particularly with Western media depictions of the nineties wars and the discourse of 'Balkanism'.

Balkanism often refers to 'orientalist' depictions of Balkan states (Todorova, 2009), which often occurred during Western media representations of the nineties Yugoslav wars. It took inspiration from Edward Said's concept of orientalism, which understands Western narratives, depictions and statements about the 'Orient' as a 'man-made' distinction with a particular history relating to Western colonialism, whereby the Orient is constructed as a non-Western and inferior Other. Orientalism therefore refers to a "Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient." (Said, 1979: 3).

Balkanist representations were also internalised and reproduced by many academic and journalists in some of the states where the wars took place, projecting inferiority onto other former Yugoslav states perceived to be more primitive and less 'European'. This strategy is referred to as 'nesting orientalisms', as the process was iterated a number of times by different states denoting others as (more) 'Balkan':

[W]hile Europe as a whole has disparaged not only the orient "proper" but also the parts of Europe that were under oriental Ottoman rule, Yugoslavs who reside in areas that were formerly the Habsburg monarchy distinguish themselves from those in areas formerly ruled by the Ottoman Empire, hence "improper." Within the latter area, eastern Orthodox peoples perceive themselves as more European than those who assumed identities of European Muslims and who further distinguish themselves from the ultimate orientals, non-Europeans (Bakić-Hayden, 1995: 922).

Taking the BBB's statement as inspiration, in this article I will ethnographically explore – through participant observation of another Zagreb based ultras group with a radical left platform, *White Angels Zagreb* (hereon WAZ) - the hypothesis that, besides the above described nesting orientalisms, another kind of orientalism is at play in the post-Yugoslav region. Rather than projecting 'non-European otherness' onto another 'people' or geographical region amongst the post-Yugoslav states, I suggest that, within an imagined state boundary (a public), violence, disorder and 'primitiveness' is often projected onto a

subgroup of society marked as 'football fans', 'hooligans', 'ultras' or radical subdivisions in the ultras scene, depending on one's positioning with respect to these categories. As the projection has a number of levels and moves inside of a state boundary, focusing on social subdivisions rather than projecting undesirable qualities onto an external 'other', I use the term nesting 'intra-orientalism' to describe this discourse.

I begin by detailing the historical emergence of the categories of 'ultras' and 'hooligans' in the former Yugoslav states as a means of understanding the processes by which my interlocutors came to use terms first predominantly used in connection with football in Italy and the UK respectively. I explore what it meant, from their perspective, to participate in what many of the association members referred to as the 'supporters' world' (*navijačisk svijet*) and ultras culture (*ultras kultura*). I then outline six aspects of group involvement. The latter three describe key aspects of group interaction which resonate with the wider contemporary geopolitical positioning of the post-Yugoslav states, an observation I finally relate back to the concept of a nesting intra-orientalism.

Ultras and Hooligans: Travelling Concepts

The fans with whom I spoke regularly referred to themselves as ultras and as part of ultras culture. I also found the term 'hooligan' to be in general use to refer to themselves in a joking manner. UK films detailing casuals culture and hooligan gangs, such as *The Firm*, *Football Factory*, *Green Street Hooligans* etc. were mentioned from time to time. The term 'hooligan' was first predominantly used to refer to certain groups of football fans in the UK. It became associated with violent behaviour at football matches during the 1960s, although the phenomenon of violent encounters between some fans, earlier described as 'roughs' goes back much further. As Dunning described, "the label 'football hooliganism' is not so much a social scientific or social psychological concept as a construct of politicians and the media" (Dunning, 2000: 142) and the term's emergence was associated with increasing tabloidisation of the press during the sixties, leading to increased competition and sensationalism in media coverage. The phenomenon has been discussed from a variety of

perspectives, including viewing such behaviours as ritualistic and largely non-violent symbolic acts (Marsh et al, 2005), as relating to an aggressive masculinity associated with lower class positions (Dunning & Murphy, 1988), as providing an outlet for males from a variety of class backgrounds to adopt a 'rough' working class style, due to a wider UK crisis of masculinity (Sugden, 2003) and from a social psychological point of view, as being connected with a search for flow/peak experiences (Finn et al, 1994).³ Significant evidence emerged in the later 1970s and 1980s that far right groups were recruiting amongst hooligan groups at football matches and the connections between racism and hooliganism became a dominant association for many (Back et al, 1999: 420).

The ultras movement which emerged in Italy before spreading to many other locations, particularly throughout Southern Europe during the 1980s, took its name from radical leftist political groups in late 1960s Europe (Guschwan, 2007: 254). This movement differed substantially from the context of hooliganism in the UK. Roversi&Balestri assert that the link between football and the working class is more tenuous in Italy than in the UK, a fact reflected in the broader backgrounds of ultras group members (2000: 187). AsSpaaij(2007, 414) described, compared to self-declared hooligan groups in northern and central Europe, "ultra groups usually feature a comparatively high degree of formal organization, including official membership and recruitment campaigns. Their basic function is to provide expressive and colourful support to the team, and therefore they are not necessarily concerned with defeating or humiliating their peers through intimidation or violence." This passionate support was reflected in organisation – choreography, more elaborate banners etc – in the football stands and the more frequent use of leaders coordinating match choreography and chanting. The groups also often have a more overtly political orientation, drawing on far left or far right ideology, linking back to local and regional traditions (see Testa& Armstrong, 2008; Doidge, 2013).

During the eighties the terms 'ultra' and 'hooligan' increased most dramatically in media usage, at this time being exported from Italy and the UK respectively to many locations throughout Europe and Latin America, in particular as international incidents occurring between different fan associations became more commonplace. The term was appropriated by such groups elsewhere on the continent, taking the two movements as inspiration. This included regions of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY). The 1980s also saw an explosion in the number of fan associations in former Yugoslavia, many with openly nationalist views, as the socialist federal leadership and their explicit anti-nationalist and anti-fascist platform was weakened, an effect attributed to the death of Tito in 1980 and with the increased regional decentralisation enacted by the federalist constitution in 1974. As concerns Zagreb, the Bad Blue Boys, associated with NK Dinamo, were founded in 1986 and the first White Angels Zagreb group, associated with NK Zagreb, was founded in 1989. Many of the fan associations whose presence increased during the eighties subscribed to a strong nationalist platform. Indeed, there were several conflicts between associations, culminating in the famous pitch invasion at Maksimir, Zagreb, during a football match between NK Dinamo and Red Star, Belgrade. This resulted in violent combat between members of several fan associations, notably Red Stars' Delije and Dinamo's BBB, and the police (Đorđević, 2012). Several such associations proved to be fertile recruiting grounds for military divisions during the nineties wars, whilst others, as we shall now see, have developed a more progressive and anti-nationalist platform of late.

White Angels Zagreb

White Angels Zagreb (WAZ) is a small Zagreb based ultras group committed to a radical left platform, following the club NK Zagreb.⁴ I have been a member of WAZ for two years so far, from 2011, living in Zagreb for three years between 2009 and 2013. I first began to participate in the group whilst writing up my doctoral thesis in Zagreb. I came to the group through an organisation named Zagreb Young Antifascists (*Mlade antifašistkinje Zagreba*, hereon MAZ), of which I am also a member. When I first started attending matches, I had been living in Zagreb for over a year, having completed doctoral fieldwork with scientists there and in Serbia. At that time I spoke fluent Croatian, including the use of local dialect (*kajkavski*) and Zagreb slang, both factors, along with my gender and my enthusiasm for Zagreb, which enabled me to quickly establish a rapport. My open identification as queer was also accepted. After some time in the group I wrote occasional texts for their fanzine and journalist articles about the group's engagements for an alternative news website in Croatia – H-alter (Hodges, 2012). This text is an extension of these engagements, writing from an involved academic perspective sympathetic to the group – an activist anthropological approach, extensively debated and critiqued in the literature (Scheper-Hughes, 1995; D'Andrade, 1995; Graeber, 2009).⁵

An activist approach often requires blackboxing particular assumptions about the social world in order to act quickly and purposefully. On the other hand, ethnography often requires 'slowing things down', being open to look at a particular event or situation from as many different perspectives as possible as a means of questioning or simply making visible commonly held assumptions. Such questioning is limited by the 'involved' approach taken. Nevertheless, a certain amount of ethnographic distance is maintained, and where I found commonly used categories to be problematic, I highlight the issue in the text that follows. Finally, the above approach opens questions concerning my status as an insider/outsider. Following Narayan (1993: 671), I reject such dichotomies, in favour of viewing the

anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications⁶, and argue that, after three years, Zagreb was a familiar place where I considered myself to be 'at home'.

The Supporters' World and Ultras Culture

Before considering the ethnographic material, a distinction I often came across is worth elaborating on. Descriptions of the various ultras groups and their images, displays and activities were often collectively referred to as *ultras culture*. Another commonly used term was *navijačkisvijet* (the supporters' world). Members of WAZ who positioned themselves as from this world were people who had followed football, and often NK Zagreb, for many years and who were both extremely knowledgeable (regarding fixtures, details of matches, players etc.) and passionate about NK Zagreb and football in general. They also had an extensive knowledge of football in other countries, especially throughout Europe, and knew details surrounding many UK Premier League and lower UK division teams. Not all people who identified with the supporters' world were ultras – there were people passionate about football who did not agree with some of the extreme views and/or practices of those who participated in ultras culture – lighting and throwing flares on the pitch is one example. Not everyone participating in ultras groups were characteristic of the supporters' world either; some were attracted to the match day routine and group because of its politics, or for other reasons, such as the banter, singing and risk taking aspects (see Finn et al, 1994), group belonging, and/or simply the tradition of consuming alcoholic beverages before and often after the game. Nevertheless, those who were most involved in the ultras groups considered themselves to be from the supporters' world and, in some cases, viewed themselves as its vanguard. These concepts affect both individual groups' self-understandings and inter-group dynamics, a topic beyond the scope of this article. In the analysis that follows, I describe fan practices in terms of these categories - **navijačkisvijet**(*supporters' world*) and **ultras kultura**

(*ultras culture*), although in assuming some ethnographic distance, I do not understand these concepts analytically as referring to a 'world' and a 'culture'. I have highlighted these two terms as they form one nested pair along which I found the intra-orientalism to operate – outside of WAZ, there were football fans who identified with the supporters' world, but who were very critical of the ultras scene, associating it as a whole with violence. From the perspective of ultras groups, as I shall now describe, the situation was quite different.

Aspects of Group Involvement

Some of the details below are inferred, via induction, as being true of other ultras groups in Croatia, who are, unlike WAZ, committed to radical right wing platforms. Where something is specific to WAZ, I elaborate it as such. I start with the most important and then proceed haphazardly, looking at football, ultras' structure and banter before moving on to consider three further aspects I suggest link to the everyday geopolitics of the Balkans.

(i) Football

First and foremost, from the perspective of the fans with whom I spoke, the supporters' world was characterised by a love and passion for following and/or playing football. Whilst WAZ did not sympathise with the political stance of almost all other ultras groups in Croatia and the region more generally, which were mostly from centre to far right politically, there was still a strong sense that these groups were part of the supporters' world and ultras culture. They were therefore often talked about; their choreography and symbolism were often commented upon, events in the media discussed and solidarity implied on issues where the groups had common ground, such as increases in police identification checks. Encounters, whilst few and far between as WAZ was small and largely ignored by the BBB, drew extensive commentary – where violence occurred, these scenes were dissected and analysed often alongside post-match drinks.

As earlier mentioned, not all members of WAZ however, came from the supporters' world. Within the group, people were often categorised along a continuum. At one end of the continuum were people who were from the supporters' world, whilst at the other extreme were people who were attracted to the group due to its antifascist political positioning and/or who were attracted by the prospect of joining an 'ultras' subculture. The extreme of this tendency was sometimes commented upon, as in one of the meetings:

Filip⁷: For some of them, it's about the joking around (*zajebancija*), as far as they're concerned, there could be twenty-two sheep moving around on the pitch, they wouldn't see it any differently

Hrvoje: Yeah, and we could find a dog to be the referee! (#woof)

Whether or not a WAZ member belonged to the supporters' world was clearly ascertained through his or her approach and comments during meetings and at football matches; belonging to the supporters' world presupposed having, (or quickly gaining) a knowledge of the team and their positioning within a wider world comprised of teams, each with their own special qualities, victories and struggles. This continuum was important when considering recruiting new members, particularly as football attendances at NK Zagreb had dropped significantly in recent years. Having a knowledge of and passion for football was necessary in order to be at the centre of the group, but those more interested in the socialising and banter were welcome at matches.

(ii) Structure

From a fan perspective, the supporters' world was composed of football fans, each supporting typically one football team, although sometimes more. This world did not exclusively consist of supporters who were members of a group such as BBB or WAZ; it was a wider pool of people with a love for football. As intimated in the previous section, ultras culture was the term I most frequently heard, as well as ultras consciousness (*ultras svijest*)

to refer to the various ultras groups and the ways in which they interacted across the backdrop of the supporters' world.

Sometimes two fan associations were associated with one team. Many of the large fans associations were split up into multiple subdivisions, often connected with a different geographical location and/or a different political sensibility. BBB for example reproduced their organisation in different neighbourhoods; they had BBB Dubrava, BBB Trešnjevka and so forth. Besides subdivisions on the basis of geographical location, there also existed other groups, associated with more 'extreme' political tendencies such as *No Profit*, who, it was remarked, contained a number of 'Nazis' and whose members often carried knives and other weapons. When referring to other teams, multiple groups for a single team would often be homogenised under an 'umbrella' group associated with a team. For Dinamo, this was BBB for example.

The various subdivisions typically painted murals and sprayed graffiti in neighbourhoods where they were active. For those groups – e.g. *No Profit* or *Skinsi* – which were not restricted to one neighbourhood, they would typically spray graffiti around more extensive parts of the city centre, where a number of social centres also existed in which members socialised and prepared for matches, the level of formal organisation suggesting comparisons with the Italian ultras movement are more appropriate (Dal Lago & De Biasi, 1994). Painting murals and graffiti both marked territory and celebrated group, club and fan association belonging. Some subdivisions of larger fan associations such as BBB had specially printed t-shirts.

(iii) Banter

In my experience, ultras groups such as WAZ I came across were organised around male, homosocial bonding. Women sometimes came to football matches, some of whom were the partners of group members, whilst others were from the Zagreb punk scene. Women typically participated less in the chanting and joking around (*zajebancija*) which accompanied

match day antics. 'Banter' regarding women – who was dating who etc. - was common at the meetings and matches. Amongst members of WAZ there was little homophobia, racism or misogyny – amounts were comparable with the left wing Zagreb punk scene, with which the group membership heavily overlapped. One difference with the punk scene was that sometimes 'macho' symbolic banter was used, albeit largely ironically to refer to other group members. When chanting, sometimes the group would reclaim such insults to describe themselves as a whole, such as the chant '*izjebatće vas ovepičkepederske*' (these [us] cunts/faggots will fuck you up). Nevertheless, on a couple of occasions the use of such phrases drew comment from members of non-governmental organisations promoting LGBT rights. Indeed, jokes were made which referenced ideological and political power changes over the past twenty years. For instance, after returning from several months living in Belgrade, WAZ members commented that people could mock me as the 'honorary Serb' (*počasniSrbin*) in the group on the basis of the vocabulary I had picked up in Belgrade. As the linguist Kapović (2011: 50–51) discussed, the term 'Serb' in Croatia is often used jokingly as an insult, whereas the term 'Croat' is not so in Serbia. Similar jokes were sometimes made about other group members on the basis of skin colour – joking that certain members are gypsies for example. Such phrases were never used and directed at people who might have been offended by such insults, rather they were used in an affectionate sense to promote homosocial bonding within the group. They were never directed individuals to whom the category actually applied. For example, I was never called a fag (*peder*), but sometimes presumed heterosexual members would jokingly introduce themselves to others as my boyfriend. Such banter was also directed at 'majority' social categories, whereby Croatian and Serbian nationalist mythology was mocked, often through the use of puns or hyperbole. Such banter may be interpreted negatively as reproducing what Feagin et al (2001) refer to as 'sincere fictions': "processes through which individuals both employ a view of society that denies the existence of racism and position themselves as not possessing any form of prejudice, yet simultaneously engage in behaviors that reproduce racial stereotypes and maintain inequalities." (Burdsey, 2011: 269). A more positive interpretation would understand

the use of such banter as a rejection of the norms of politically correct language associated with civil society organisations, from which the group's radical leftist platform wanted to distance itself, in a context (Zagreb) where following the wars, an NGO policy elite, promoting peace and 'democracy building' - within a depoliticised paradigm - appeared relatively conservative to a new wave of younger, more politicised activists (Stubbs, 2012).

Whenever homophobia or racism directed at individuals was encountered, either in the group or at the stadium, it was strongly reprimanded – NK Zagreb fans who were not in WAZ and who made racist comments were shouted down, and such attitudes were not permitted within WAZ. Strong links were maintained with a variety of 'minority groups' such as asylum seekers as well as with organisations in other states such as Serbia. There were a small number of openly non-straight members in the group, including myself, who were all accepted for their sexual preferences.

Acceptance is viewed as part of the 'platform' of WAZ and as an important feature which makes them stand apart from the majority of BBB. These experiences contrast strongly with Hughson's (2000) fieldwork with BBB supporters in Melbourne, Australia. In drawing out various dimensions of group membership, Hughson described the macho attitudes of many members, dehumanising tendencies, homophobia, importance of fighting and misogynistic attitudes towards women. I tentatively suggest that the extremes he came across in his study are characteristic of diaspora, which tend to be the most extremely nationalistic – amongst the BBB in Zagreb there is, in my view, a greater diversity of opinion and behaviour.

Nevertheless, despite the 'male' element to group interaction I have mentioned, there was no focus on 'proving ones heterosexuality' or on having multiple sexual encounters with different women characteristic of Hughson's experiences with the BBB in Melbourne.

Homosocial banter was particularly prevalent on match days. To give one example, I turned up at the stadium on a match day with a small bag from one of the bookshops in Zagreb.

This became the subject of ridicule, some friends saying that WAZ will lose their reputation if other ultras groups see us in the stadium with books – one couldn't simultaneously be absorbed in a book and participating in the social, group based match day antics. One friend then sauntered over to the bag and took a look inside before exclaiming to the others, 'it's OK, it's an ultras book' upon seeing that it was a pocket dictionary of Zagreb slang (*purgerskiriječnik*). In so doing, 'matter out of place' (Douglas, 2002) was reinterpreted and inserted into the match day antics of flow. Outside of the match day context, formal education and training formed a part of WAZ's program, working with schools and organising workshops against discrimination.

This was one example of playful banter which always accompanied match day antics and was often a part of meetings and informal socialising. WAZ members would often make fun of each other and themselves. Those most heavily involved in the group were subjected to and threw around the largest amounts of joking insults. Such joking also often involved bodily contact. What was important in the match day context was having a presence (turning up) and entering into flow, which consisted of joking around, chatting with one another, singing etc. Football matches were viewed as spaces in which traditional social conventions and hierarchies could melt down or momentarily disappear in a carnivalesque manner (Armstrong & Young, 1999); an observation as true of the opposition groups, likely more so the bigger the mass, as of WAZ. Such behaviours contrasted with expected norms of 'civilised society', an issue the sociologists Elias & Dunning (1966) famously discussed with respect to sport more generally. This was a characteristic of the ultras groups that differentiated them from many left wing activist groups who insisted on order and seriousness in their forms of protest.

Banter extended to using particular words which typically have a pejorative connotation to describe oneself. When assembled en masse, one collective noun used to refer to the group was *bagra* (scum). The word *bagra* has deliberate connotations of being uneducated, even illiterate, referring to an undifferentiated mass representing everyday folk at the bottom of the

social hierarchy. I suspect that if ultras groups were to develop a new political theory on the basis of their experiences, the fundamental political category would be *bagra* (scum) rather than *narod* (the people).

Aspects of group participation which relate to everyday geopolitics

I now consider three more aspects of group participation which I suggest express, in intensified form, particular aspects of what Jansen (2009) referred to as everyday geopolitics relating to the Balkan region. 'Everyday geopolitics' describe the ways in which wider economic and political processes impinge on and shape aspects of our everyday routines and experiences. I suggest that these are the vectors along which 'intra-orientalisms' move and which increase in intensity as we move towards more radical right groupings of self-proclaimed ultras, as displayed in the figure below. The characteristics I consider are as follows: **the predominance of identity politics, historicity, and surveillance.**

Figure 1: Levels on which 'nesting intra-orientalisms' operate

FIGURE ABOUT HERE

(iv) The predominance of identity politics

Filip: Have you fallen in love since you arrived in the Balkans?

Andy: (#hesitation)

Filip: Wrong answer, you should have said 'with Zagreb'

The above conversation, which took place in a service station car park en route to an away match typifies, in a joking manner, the importance of championing 'local identity'. In the case of NK Zagreb, this referred to the city of Zagreb and especially the neighbourhood where the stadium is located – *Trešnjevka*. The anti-nationalist positioning of WAZ meant that whilst the town level (Zagreb) was championed, the national level (Croatia) was ignored – I came

across few expressions of patriotic feeling; rather a feeling that this new state was the latest creation in a series of many. Whilst this resonates with King's (2000) 'post-national' description of Manchester United fans, in the Croatian context this group was small, almost all larger ultras groups such as BBB supporting strong Croatian nationalist ideology.

Amongst members of WAZ, the attachment to Zagreb varied amongst group members from a serious tendency to idealise one's town, neighbourhood and/or club heavily, assert its superiority in the face of others, to a more gentle and jokey affection. The former was visible in bombastic comments and graffiti making claims such as 'my club is sacred' (*moj klub je svetinja*), which members of other groups such as BBB regularly chanted. Amongst the ultras groups, as earlier described in the section on structure, teams and the subdivisions of ultras groups were often bound up to specific geographical locations. Visual logos and identities were associated with the groups and sometimes with particular subdivisions. Many fan associations and subdivisions used English in their choice of name, perhaps in reference to the English hooligan scene, or as a reflection of the contemporary geopolitical dominance of English in Europe, perhaps an instance of what Giulianotti & Robertson (2004:547) describe as the 'particularization of universalism', where globally travelling discourses acquire distinct meanings in different socio-political contexts.

More 'gentle' forms of affection for a club or a team were discounted by some members, seen as contradicting the intensity of the feelings and emotions which a fan should have towards his or her club. Others viewed such an extreme kind of obsession as infantile, or as a kind of psychological escape from life problems and/or associated with the performance of a particular kind of masculinity. For example, one week whilst at a football match, a female member of the antifa group came and participated, joining in with the singing. One of the songs we sang went as follows:

"tusamrođenja, podnosljemena, volim Zagrebajersampurger"

*(I was born here, beneath the sljeme (mountain), I love Zagreb, because I'm from here
(purger))*

She found the song ridiculous – although anyone in principle was free to sing it – as she was from another Croatian town, and did not feel a strong, intense connection neither with Zagreb nor her home town.

Whilst such practices are by no means restricted to football fan associations in the Balkans, nor to the ultras scene, they relate to a preoccupation with identity politics, particularly visible in the ultras scene, a politics which have come to dominate in the Balkans more generally, particularly since the collapse of the SFRY. In the context of ultras groups, an interesting side remark is that the terms most frequently used – *supporters' world, ultras culture, ultras consciousness* – all denote totalities, an observation I suggest relates to the predominance of an identity based politics, concerned with collectivities. More generally, the relative lack of hierarchy in Balkan societies compared with Western Europe has been attributed as a reason for the predominance of identity politics in the region, as class differentials were weaker, meaning that political movements were primarily organised around group identity politics rather than class struggle. Furthermore, identity based forms of politics have been heavily promoted throughout the region since the collapse of socialism, both via the liberal identity politics agenda of the NGO industry and by nationalists alike.

(v) Historicity

Many ultras groups included the year in which the fan club was 'officially' founded on their murals; e.g. BBB 1986, Torcida 1950. This pointed to the importance of history and historical claims. Records of activity stretching back over longer periods of time were respected. Amongst the right wing ultras groups, the claim to longevity was perceived to make a claim to authority. Similarly, a respect and authority was also accorded to long standing members of the group and fans who had followed NK Zagreb for many years.

Some members of WAZ thought similarly, whilst others thought that deliberately 'making up' a long history of your club and/or association was pointless and referred to members of other ultras groups who engaged in such activities as *mitomani* (mytho-maniacs). The issue relates to the importance of invented tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1992) in defining group belonging; heroising a long history could create a moral charge on individual members to build and develop the group and produce a sense of honour – a process commemorated via statues and monuments, several located near football grounds and frequented by fans in the former Yugoslav region (Mills, 2012); an issue touched upon in the discussion of others and the importance of narrating violence and skirmishes with other groups, in shaping a sense of collective memory. Such a process was directly parallel to nationalist politicians' reliance on a national mythico-history (Malkki, 1995). Historical continuity came up as a topic for discussion when debating club history. Whilst the name White Angels was first used in 1989, the platform and orientation of the group has changed a great deal since then. These questions also related to club history – could clubs which ceased operations during World War Two and which then recommenced, at the same ground, but with a different name, different management and a completely new set of players after the war be considered 'the same team'? Some members of the group argued not, whilst others argued for the importance of a long club history in earning more respect from other fans clubs associated with other teams in the supporters' world, whilst others argued that having an aura of ambiguity surrounding the origins of the club/group could create a sense of mystery. Amongst the left wing ultras, this historicity was therefore a bone of contention. If the intra-orientalist hypothesis obtains, an obsession with and concern with developing narratives of historical continuity and the use of historicity as a moral charge shaping individual group members actions would be expected to increase as we moved towards the more radical right groupings in the ultras scene.

(vi) Surveillance

When entering the stadium each match day, WAZ always passes through a security check by the main gates at the front, where several members of stadium security, who wear yellow neon jackets, complete a body search and check bags for flares and other such items. They are familiar with the group and always check the messages on the banners as well – messages allowing broader political messages are typically allowed, whereas messages bringing WAZ into conflict with the management are frowned upon. Several police officers are also often positioned there by the stadium entrance. On one occasion, I was the last person to go through, with a friend. We were carrying the banners. On this occasion, the police stopped us and asked to look at the banner. They then asked for identification. I had to give my passport whilst my friend gave his ID card. They noted down our details and the date that I entered Croatia, before letting us through. I asked why they had taken our details as we had not committed, or were suspected of committing any offence. Other members of WAZ told me that the practice, which they called *searching for identification (traženje evidenciju)*, is a means of police surveillance at football matches. If something were to happen during the course of the match, the people whose details had been taken would be sought out by the police and questioned. A consequence of the identity search was that the police were able to modify WAZ's behaviour at this particular game, to which they had brought flares they intended to set off, but subsequently chose not to.

On another occasion, we organised and gained a permit for a stand selling paraphernalia associated with the White Angels outside the football ground. It was located by the entrance, stood next to other sellers, the stadium security staff and a police van. The vendors were selling polystyrene squares for people to sit on so they would not be cold at the football match, and also snacks such as peanuts and seeds for consumption during the game. A police officer came up to us and started to joke informally, taking a look at the items on the stand, being friendly and recognising the group effort. He then joked, "I'm sure you are paying PDV (Value Added Tax) on all these goods.", he said smiling. We smiled back. He then continued, "no I'm serious, can I see your permit?"

When we pulled out the permit, he looked surprised, took a hold of it and then turned smiling to the other sellers, “look at this, you could learn something from these guys,” he called out before walking away without asking the other sellers whether they had permits or not.

On another occasion we went to an away game in a village located near the Serbian border in Slavonia. We were the only people from Zagreb attending and the football match was quite an event for the village. There was a sign put up mentioning the tournament and a 'special' ticket price of fifty kunas per person, which we managed to bargain down to forty. There was a lot of police present and a lot of people from the village, including a number of (mainly) young ultras who greeted us with shouts of '*purgerskepičke*' (*Zagreb cunts*). On this occasion, police surveillance was the most intrusive; we were locked inside a wooden pen for the duration of the game, which we weren't allowed to leave. There were police behind us and also situated above us on the balcony of the clubhouse, from where they could observe the game. We could order beer through the railings, but if we needed the toilet, we had to go on the grass in the pen. Following the game, one of the NK Zagreb team members brought us all a drink and the village policeman, who had been pally with us, came over and joked a little, having a sip of beer and giving us instructions on how to get back to the main roads leading back to Zagreb. “See you,” he said, glancing at the empty beer glasses we were all clutching before staring at us for a second, “I’d be interested to know which of you will be driving,” he said sarcastically. Following this, there was a burst of laughter and he let us go on our way.

These examples illustrate various ways in which surveillance was achieved and the particular challenges the stadium space presents in avoiding possible surveillance, actions such as *traženje evidenciju* exerting a Foucauldian disciplinary effect reminiscent of the ‘gaze’ associated with Bentham’s panopticon (Foucault, 1995). In the final example, we were physically contained, whilst in the first example the practice of conducting identity searches raised the stakes in the event of any misconduct (such as lighting flares) at the football match. Faced with the prospect of two members of the group receiving a fine for misconduct,

group behaviour was correspondingly modified. I suggest that the police attempt to identify, and subsequently ban group leaders from the stadium area through the identity searches. The second interesting aspect of both the second and third examples above is also the police's 'flexible' use of personalising their relations with us. In the final example, there is an ambiguity concerning whether the police officer is going to check up on us when driving away, whilst in the second example, what began as a 'friendly' conversation resulted in the police asking us for a permit (which we had). Nevertheless, the other sellers were not asked for an official permit and a joke was made out of this. These examples resonate with Brković's discussion of how state officials in Bosnia were able to place or remove obstacles, often on the basis of personalised connections between state officials and individuals in need (Brković, 2012). In these situations, the context determined the choice the police officers made of whether to exercise particular powers they had or not.

Concerns over surveillance were therefore part and parcel of group participation. Besides surveillance by the police (particularly at the stadium), surveillance by other ultras groups (particularly when gathering in other locations before entering or after leaving the stadium) and a wider, European level of political surveillance, through sanctions against particular teams placed by organisations such as UEFA, Football Against Racism in Europe (hereon FARE) and the Hrvatski helsinškiodbor (hereon HHO) were regularly discussed.⁸

Surveillance on the part of other ultras groups was also factored when considering where pre-match socialising and drinking was to take place. In the case of larger teams with extreme subdivisions, such as BBB's *No Profit*, there were occasional concerns over the safety of drinking in 'usual spots'. Nevertheless, the group was small and although concerns over larger 'others' were voiced regularly, it was generally accepted that many such groups largely ignore us due to our small size.

The third mode of surveillance was on the part of the club management. As earlier mentioned, stewards at the club grounds would not permit messages criticising club

management onto the terraces. There were also rumours that some members of the group had been directly threatened by members of the club management.

The fourth mode of surveillance was indirect and at the European level. This mode of surveillance was based on expected codes of fan behaviour at football matches and criticism was mostly directed at right wing ultras groups using phrases or gestures deemed discriminatory, most often racist.⁹ Amongst WAZ and almost universally amongst football fans with whom I spoke, the HHO were regarded as the worst of the three, having little insight into football in Croatia, and making liberal use of NGO funding. UEFA was largely regarded as corrupt and as having links with the local political elite, including Zdravko Mamić, the executive director of NK Dinamo, the largest team in Zagreb. Opinions were divided over FARE. FARE developed from a string of independent fan football initiatives drawn from the left wing ultras scene in the 1990s, which then received EU funding and scaled up their activities. They organise a week of football against racism activities each October, in which WAZ participated, organising a football tournament. However, a minority of group members shared BBB's concerns that FARE had connections with UEFA and that Mamić had deliberately asked them to put pressure on BBB, most recently over the use of the phrase *Mamićucigane* (Mamić, gypsy) at two football matches, which the vast majority of BBB members and a small minority of WAZ argued was not discriminatory towards the gypsy minority, but an application of political correctness which was killing the game.

This fourth, European mode of surveillance, resonates heavily with the anthropologist Greenberg's (2010) work with an NGO based in Niš, Serbia, wherein she picked apart the meanings behind the attributions and opinions some students made of her, being a US citizen in Serbia conducting social research shortly after economic sanctions and the 1999 NATO bombings. She described the preconceptions of some of the students as interpreting her as embodying a 'judging Western gaze' who was monitoring (*nadziranje*) the situation in Serbia and prescribing what was and what was not appropriate behaviour. This was echoed

in the Hague War Crime Tribunals which were taking place, wherein military leaders were being put on trial, sentenced and judged.

Again, as we move through the supporters' world through to ultras culture and finally to increasingly radical (right wing) groupings within ultras culture, all four modes of surveillance would be expected to increase significantly, European institutions and club management, the police and other ultras groups paying more attention to more extreme groupings.

Conclusions

In this article I have outlined, from several key aspects of what my interlocutors referred to as ultras culture and the supporters' world. I have described several aspects associated with participation in an ultras group, albeit a non-typical example, due to its left wing platform. In describing these aspects associated with participation in ultras groups, and to a lesser extent in the supporters' world, I have suggested that three aspects – the predominance of identity politics, historicity and surveillance – resonate, in intensified form with features of contemporary Balkan experience resulting from its geopolitical positioning rather than any 'cultural' specificity. I have also suggested that these three aspects intensify as we move from the supporters' world to ultras groups and then to more radical right wing subdivisions within ultras culture, as illustrated in the diagram below: For this reason, I have playfully suggested that we may consider such a set of groupings as a 'nesting 'intra'-orientalism'. Such a nesting, in this case, would have a certain end point, whereby violence may be attributed to a small number of 'radicals' in extreme subdivisions of fan associations, a project which would require further ethnographic research.

The broader point I wish to make in connection with this is to suggest that another ideological formation is at play here. In the case of nesting 'intra'-orientalisms, both non-Europeanness,

and responsibility for disorder and violence is projected onto another group. Such a view argues against the banality of violence as built into the rules and patterns of everyday social life, as anthropologists such as Malkki (1995) have persuasively argued. Such a view allows for the portioning up of the social world into what the Leicester School would name the 'respectable population' and the 'rough working class', absolving the 'respectable population' of responsibility for violence and disorder.

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¹For the purposes of the argument in this paper, I will relate the term to 'Balkan' society – I believe I could have read similar messages in cities in other states in the region.

²See, for example, (Obradović 2007) for a discussion of media depictions of ultras groups in the Croatian media. This resonated with what the Leicester School of football hooliganism in the UK context described as the 'rough working class.' (Best 2010, 575). In my experience, members of fan associations came from a wide variety of social positions and class hierarchies although as in the UK, "the majority come from the ranks of the working class and have low levels of formal education" (Dunning 2000:153). Nevertheless, understandings of class in the Balkan context differ substantially from the UK, where in the latter there exists a much longer history of class production and a greater degree of social hierarchy. Nevertheless, if we understand class as a process taking place, with greater intensity during the post-socialist period, then we can understand the category as corresponding to socially and economically deprived groups who have less mobility and cultural capital.

³It is important to note that certain academics, notably those associated with the Leicester School, received significant UK state funding for their research on hooliganism.

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

⁵An early version of this text was posted on an online facebook group and sent to some members for comments.

⁶ My motivation here is that the ideas of 'nativeness', and identity, conceived as something which individuals and groups possess has an uncomfortable relationship with nationalism as political and cultural ideology. Given the context of the recent wars, I therefore avoid the analytical use of these terms, choosing instead 'self/group understandings' and 'identifications' which convey process rather than reify form. See Bowman (2001); Brubaker & Cooper (2000) for more information.

⁷The names have been changed.

⁸See <http://www.uefa.com/>, <http://www.farenet.org/>, and <http://hho.hr/> [accessed on 30/08/13].

⁹Media representations also play an important role here, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this article.