

Tevfik Orkun DEVELİ

Arş. Gör. Dr. | Res. Assist. Dr.

Muğla Sıtkı Koçman Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi, Tarih Bölümü, Muğla-TÜRKİYE
Mugla Sıtkı Kocman University, Faculty of Letters, Department of History, Mugla-TURKEY

ORCID: 0000-0003-2768-111X

orkundeveli@mu.edu.tr

Nationalism and Football at First Glance: The Case of “Eternal Derby”

Abstract

From the beginning of its ‘invention,’ football has been a significant subject in politics, the economy, and other social disciplines. In this respect, the Yugoslav experience sets an excellent example for the symbiotic relationship between football and politics. Yugoslav politics evolved around nationalist tensions and has always had a complex and convoluted profile. In this context, it is argued that the *ressentiment* at the core of nationalism is a very observable dynamic of Yugoslav politics. Accordingly, the two major football clubs, Partizan FC and Red Star were deeply influenced by Yugoslavia's founding political principles. Moreover, the rivalry between these two clubs, known as the “eternal derby,” also symbolized the conflict between nationalist and socialist ideas. Although we can only talk about the former Yugoslavia today, these clubs are still among Balkan history's most significant living heirs. This paper provides ‘a first look’ at the political history of the “eternal derby” within Michael Billig and Liah Greenfeld's approaches to nationalism. In this context, it can be said that in addition to its irrational nature concerning *ressentiment*, nationalism is the subject of unconscious reproduction processes that take place among the habits of daily life. While nationalism is shaped by psychosocial concepts such as *existential envy*, *status inconsistency*, and *identity crisis*, the banal form can transform teams into armies, players into soldiers, pitches into battlefields, wins into military victories, columnists into embedded journalists. By simulating violence, the imaginary desire for revenge is also tried to be satisfied. The “eternal derby” serves as a suitable model in this regard.

Keywords: Football, nationalism, socialism, Partizan FC, Red Star

İlk Bakışta Milliyetçilik ve Futbol: “Sonsuz Derbi” Örneği

Öz

Futbol, ‘icadından’ bu yana siyasetin, ekonominin ve diğer sosyal disiplinlerin önemli bir konusu olmuştur. Bu açıdan Yugoslav deneyimi, futbol ve siyaset arasındaki simbiyotik ilişkiye iyi bir örnek teşkil etmektedir. Milliyetçi gerilimlerle evrilen Yugoslav siyaseti, her zaman karmaşık ve dolambaçlı bir profile sahip olmuştur. Bu bağlamda, milliyetçiliğin özündeki *hıncın* Yugoslav siyasetinin çok gözlemlenebilir bir dinamiği olduğu öne sürülmektedir. Buna bağlı olarak iki büyük futbol kulübü Partizan FK ve Kızılyıldız, Yugoslavya'nın kurucu siyasi ilkelerinden derinden etkilenmiştir. Dahası, bu iki kulüp arasında “ebedi derbi” olarak bilinen rekabet, milliyetçi ve sosyalist fikirler arasındaki çatışmanın sembolik bir temsilini üstlenmiştir. Bugün sadece eski Yugoslavya'dan bahsedebiliyor olsak da bu kulüpler halen Balkan tarihinin yaşayan en büyük mirasçıları arasında yer almaktadır. Bu makale, Michael Billig ve Liah Greenfeld'in sunduğu çerçevede “ebedi derbinin” politik tarihine yönelik bir ‘ilk bakış’ sunmaktadır. Bu bağlamda *hıncın* referanslı irrasyonel doğasına ek olarak milliyetçiliğin gündelik hayatın alışkanlıkları arasında kendine yer edinen, daha ziyade bilinçdışı yeniden üretim süreçlerine konu olduğu söylenebilir. Buradan hareketle, varoluşsal haset, statü tutarsızlığı ve kimlik krizi gibi psikososyal kavramlar tarafından biçim verilen milliyetçiliğin banal formu takımları ordulara, oyuncularını askerlere, sahaları savaş alanlarına, galibiyetleri askeri zaferlere, spor yazarlarını savaş muhabirlerine dönüştürebilmektedir. Şiddetin simüle edilmesiyle hayali intikam arzusu da tatmin edilmeye çalışılır. “Sonsuz derbi” bu konuya iyi model teşkil etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Futbol, milliyetçilik, sosyalizm, Partizan FK, Kızılyıldız

Introduction

Nationalism, which remains the “world's most powerful, general and primordial basis of cultural and political identity” (Greenfeld & Chirot, 1994, p. 123), has an ever-expanding product range on a global scale. In this context, many markers remind individuals that they are grouped as ‘we’ living in ‘here’ with what is ‘ours,’ which ensure they are distinguished from ‘others,’ ‘there,’ and ‘theirs.’ These “mundane symbols” of nationhood can often be found in “daily life,” on “banknotes,” billboards, on the “public buildings” visited every day, in “TV weather forecast” and indeed in “sporting events” (Spasić, 2017, p. 34).

In this regard, either invented to respond to the social needs relatable to modernity or assumed the function of meeting the invented needs, as in anything prone to politicization, “sport is [also] never merely sport” (Billig, 1995, p. 119). When nationalism is examined through the *banal* reproduction processes asserted by Michael Billig (1995) upon decomposing it into psychosocial components such as *ressentiment*, *existential envy*, *status-inconsistency*, and *identity crisis* introduced by Liah Greenfeld (1994), it is possible to find several cases to verify this claim.

The rivalry known as the “eternal derby” of Southeast Europe, ongoing since 1945 between Partizan Belgrade and Red Star, can be considered. Both clubs have distinct traces from the story swung between Serbian ethnic-collectivistic nationalism and socialist ideologies. This turns dozens of matches in which these teams compete against each other in any branch into more than just a sports event. The aforementioned political content of this deep-rooted rivalry between these two creates an opportunity to satisfy the desire for imaginary revenge, which recurs in every match, concerning *ressentiment*-based nationalism of the Greenfeldian approach. The well-known phrase “kod nas,” which can mean anything from “at our home, in our house, or at our place to among us,” offers a new approach to the “Billigesque” analysis (Spasić, 2017, p. 45-46).

1. The Concept of Ressentiment and Its Role in the Serbian Nationalism

In the development of nationalism, the part of the world that followed Western Europe and Russia the closest, or in some cases, almost simultaneously, was Eastern Europe. “Balkan nationalisms were generally the creation of small, dissatisfied elites, whose great hopes and ambitions were then frustrated” (Greenfeld & Chirot, 1994, p. 106-107). This separation due to the dominant ethnocultural identity, which can be based on “language, religion, racial differences” or more ambiguous culture, tradition, and lifestyles, has led to a typical ethnopolitical condition in this geography (Neuberger, 2010, p. 61; Bunce, 1995, p. 125-126).

The Yugoslav experience is a shining example of it. The existence of a real or imaginary *ressentiment* atmosphere under the roof of a political federation in which each ethnic group considers itself a threat or under threat can be mentioned. This condition inevitably produced the phobic feeling that one’s aggression meant the other’s extinction (Pesic, 1996, p. v). In the case of Yugoslavia, the tension between the statist and ethnic interpretations of the right to national self-determination can be considered as the extension of a former case in which ethnocultural identities conflict with the state systems reminding the grandiose aims of Greater Serbia, the Greater Albania and Pan-Slavism of the nineteenth century Europe (Neuberger, 2010, p. 61).

Calendars are full of dates in which a national consciousness is discovered and reminding the moment it should be strengthened. Counterintuitively, these events reach beyond the limits acknowledged as the beginning point of the modern nations in the nineteenth century. Generally, historical validation of it is not required. Revealing the potential to enable the masses' mobilization is an essential element. A typical case regarding this aim is to follow the traces of modern Serbian nationalism in the battle of Kosovo in 1389 (Karpát, 1997, p. 348). The nationalism of the individuals who primarily consider themselves a member of an ethnic group

can evoke an underlying mass sensitivity rooted in the past more straightforward than a nationalism based on a state lacking an ethnocultural content (Neuberger, 2010, p. 61). The emergence of ethnic violence, which has not been seen since World War II following the revival of the national hostilities in Eastern Europe and Eurasia, provides an insight into the thoughts of the people who consider themselves primarily as members of ethnic communities, contrary to individualist nations of the West (Greenfeld, 2013, p. 97).

Like all the Balkan countries, Serbia was “economically peripheral, politically weak, and increasingly dissatisfied by their failure to achieve the early promises of nationalism.” (Greenfeld & Chirot, 1994, p. 107). By receiving the support of the Orthodox Church, Serbian intellectuals, who were against the rise of the rival Hungarian nationalism in the nineteenth century, have executed a cultural project and were “called upon to staff the state machinery and schools.” This struggle, which aimed to finalize the quest for reputation, is also the expression of the *ressentiment* wished to be satisfied by realizing the imaginary desire for revenge. Although the aggressive tendencies of the states are highly related to the conditions they are in or the opportunities that stand before them, it can be asserted that Serbian nationalism, which has *ressentiment* at its core, has been potentially aggressive from the very beginning and this potential was also revealed once again in the disintegration of Yugoslavia. (Roger, 2008, p. 171-173; Greenfeld & Chirot, 1994, p. 107).¹

In this analysis of the irrational nature of nationalism, *ressentiment* opens the door for criticisms against culture and history rather than being a mere aggression state. The collectivistic-ethnic nationalisms of Eastern Europe have handed down the typical politics of delusion, which fanned the flames of hostility against foreigners, and turned it into an effective instrument for the Serbians in Yugoslavia (Greenfeld, 2013, p. 625). It is possible to list the internal and external foundations of the *ressentiment* based Serbian nationalism in seven points in reference to Vesna Pesic (1996, p. 18-20):

i. The theme of delusion states that the contemporary Serbian national consciousness has fallen victim to the Yugoslav project's ideological fraud, which was built on the bones of dead Serbs and composed of *a priori* anti-Serbian parties.

ii. Anti-Titoism. The belief that Serbs have fallen victim to a conspiracy organized by decision-makers such as the Comintern, The League of Communists of Yugoslavia, the Croat Josip Broz Tito, and the Slovene Edvard Kardelj. In this respect, the opponent's attitude assumed against the 1974 constitution.

iii. The claims that Serbia is exploited by Croats and Slovenes and condemned to economic backwardness.

iv. The oppressed nation discourse states that Serbs were the winners of the war but losers of the peace; despite their struggle for democracy by themselves and two and a half million casualties in the world wars, they are the only nation which does not have a state of their own after forty years.

v. *Serbophobia* claimed to influence the Slovene, Croat and Albanian nations, Macedonian intelligentsia, and some Muslim communities. The thought that the Serbian nation had to endure the unequal and humiliating position and preference for war instead of peace due to the hatred that surrounds itself.

¹ Concepts such as *ressentiment*, *existential envy*, *master-slave morality* and imaginary revenge, which should be read in reference to Friedrich Nietzsche and Max Scheler, are at the centre of Liah Greenfeld's studies which examines nationalism in terms of psychosocial and even later psychoanalytic factors. For further reading see: (Nietzsche, 2008, pp. 10-34; Scheler, 1992, pp. 116-143; Greenfeld, 1994).

vi. The thought that Serbs were exposed to genocide by the enemy regimes such as the Croat Ustashe and their effort to protect themselves from a new ethnic cleansing wave would result from these fixed aggressive policies against themselves.

vii. The national project was frequently expressed in the media organizations of the republic by the Serbian intelligentsia and proposed the union of Serbs under the roof of a unitary state. As a result, Slobodan Milošević stated at the beginning of 1991 that he “accepted the right of all peoples to self-determination, but he did not accept the existing republican borders” (Pestic, 1996, p. 20).

As can be understood from here, the *other* is designed as the subject that would end the existential envy, which is the most potent source of the resentment by legitimating violence through revenge and hatred discourse in the construction of national identity. This represents precisely constant need for an external world for self-affirmation, which Nietzsche (2008, p. 20) refers to while explaining the *slave morality* (Scheler, 1992, p. 122). In this analysis, as in the opposition of the slave against any external action and relieving himself with imaginary revenge, the self-consciousness of victimhood in Serbian nationalism has been a vital source of motivation for war and mobilization. *Ressentiment* makes a nation more aggressive and has an extraordinary power of national sensitivity. This is a “stimulant for collective action” which facilitates the mobilization” of collectivistic nations (Greenfeld, 1994, p. 488).

This character of national identities in Eastern Europe and Eurasia has inspired thousands of Serbs to forget their political association with other Yugoslavs by communicating the story of a thousand-year-old defeat that was not present in the neurobiological memory (Greenfeld, 2013, p. 97).

2. Symbolic Quest for Victory: Projection of Nationalist Rivalry in Sports

Considering the role of the psychological factors such as the feeling of loneliness, xenophobia, and the sense of victimhood in the development of Serbian nationalism, together with the national memory of being traumatized and marginalization, it is not possible to state that the potential for the satisfaction of *ressentiment* based on imaginary revenge is limited with just battlefields.

In the collectivistic, mainly ethnic, form of nationalism as a restoration of honor project, demonstration, and will to power effortlessly reveals itself. Consequently, several cases from daily life in which nationalism constantly reproduces itself can be found. Therefore, a space is created for discourses and practices, emphasizing the consciousness of collective belonging in a dynamic, aggressive, and masculine manner. This space is politicized per se and expands as far as possible through the mass media. Thus, an opportunity for reminding the national identity rises. Individual differences, which may result in division within the mass, are reduced to a minimum or made to be forgotten. Eventually, the suffering and the joy are experienced passionately within limits shaped by the nationalist discourse.

Sporting events serve as an excellent example of this. Especially the need for others to be defeated in a professional sporting event offers relational spaces convenient for the emergence of this kind of belief set and establishment of a “simulative national unity by eliminating the real differences” which prevent them from being homogenous (Mutlu, 1996, p. 374). In this context, stadiums witness a strange showdown between 'us and them.' The other does not always have to be a foreigner from a different nation. Those who believe in carrying the same blood and culture may be a part of an internal conflict by marginalization due to various reasons such as ideological views, religious beliefs, sexual orientations, or lifestyles. Nationalism is intrinsically in rivalry with all of these. Supporters may have adopted only a mass culture, a subculture, or a counterculture in which a political ideology is represented by itself. Tribunes are decorated with flags, pennants,

and banners, which reflect the feeling of consolidation and symbolic unity. The cheers and slogans serve as both an attack and defense mechanism. Therefore, they can be considered violence-oriented. The match reminds a war. The teams turn into actors in the identity construction process. Their aggressive energy sublimate on the battlefield where the nations they belong to had once fought and transformed into a struggle for victory on the field (Billig, 1995, p. 123). Especially in team sports, players take the field with uniform sports gear like soldiers. This is entirely a masculine field in implicit terms. The men win their trophies or lose their honor, doing battle on the nation's behalf, and the readers are invited to see these male exploits as a matter of homeland (Billig, 1995, p. 122-123). Furthermore, millions of television viewers, radio audiences, magazine subscribers, and internet users strengthen their proud and defensive national identities, reproduced daily, in these mediums (Porter, 2017, p. 480). In these sports pages, which are never left blank, men see the results of their favorite teams and read the true and glorious stories of other men struggling for a greater collective body than themselves (Billig, 1995, p. 122-124). Sports chatter can easily substitute political discussion (Eco, 1986, p. 170). The metaphors of “firing, shooting, attacking” are generally borrowed from the language of warfare (Billig, 1995, p. 123). The defeat of the opponent in each competition, which politicization of sports and penetration of nationalism is in question, at the same time enables the pleasure of satisfying the imaginary revenge desire and the joy of symbolic victory for a short period. Those defeated will return to take revenge and restore their reputation. A never-ending war recurs again and again. Therefore, an appointment to reproduce nationalism at a social level is taken in advance.

The practical correspondence of the theoretical framework outlined so far can be found in the rivalry between Partizan Belgrade and Red Star. The arch rivalry called the ‘eternal derby’ between these two clubs owes its reputation to the ideological showdown as much as it represents the rivalry based on sports. However, revealing the essential elements that played a role in the establishment and collapse of Yugoslavia is essential to better understand the dynamics fed from the outside of sportive competition between both teams. The non-sporting aspect of the Partizan and Red Star competition will be analyzed within the framework of these dynamics.

3. The Foundation and Dissolution of Yugoslavia on the Axis of Socialism and Nationalism

The anti-fascist tendency appears as a political reflex in many political structures established at the end of World War II. If the Nazis occupied these political units, the socialist founding values went beyond being a political reflex and appeared as a political necessity. Therefore, it is possible to argue that socialism seems like the ‘other’ of fascism here since fascism was seen as the significant reason for victimization. Socialist Yugoslavia, which experienced a civil war during World War II, is one of the prominent examples where the validity of this argument can be tested.

The conflicts between the Partisans and Chetniks that started during World War II and the human losses in the immediate post-war years (Geiger, 2012, p. 78) should be considered a disagreement about the ideological foundations of the new state to be established. Sinčić (2013, p. 135) is one of the names conceptualizing this separation. Two notions called ‘supranationalism’ and ‘supernationalism’ are the conceptualized form of the ideological split between Partisans and Chetniks. In this context, the Partisans, led by Josip Broz Tito, argued that the potential political structure had to be established by adhering to Tito's ideology and should be set in the center of a supranational structure that partially surpasses the political existence of the founding republics and feeds on socialism. In addition, they argued that this ideology was the best expression of anti-war understanding, just like in Europe (Pavković, 2000, p. 116). Thus, the Partizan movement saw the Socialist Yugoslavian projection as an ‘insurance’ against Serbian and Croatian

nationalisms, the two versions of nationalism most likely to dominate Yugoslavia. On the other hand, the Chetnik movement, organized under the leadership of Dragoljub Mihailović, had an anti-communist tendency at its core (Milazzo, 2019, p. 32-34).

Fed on historical and romantic elements, this movement advocated for a new political structure and had to be formed under the domination of Serbian nationalism. In other words, this struggle between the two groups, which can be evaluated both methodologically and ideologically, should be considered a struggle between Yugoslavian supranationalism and Serbian supernationalism. Although this struggle ended with the superiority of Tito's Partizans, Karge and Hayden's analyzes of the current reflections of this struggle are remarkable. Karge (2009, p. 49) describes the conflict between the two groups as a “frozen” problem in political minds. Similarly, Hayden (1992, p. 55) describes the events between 1941-and 1945 as “alive,” referring to the 1990s. In particular, with the death of Tito in 1980, the nationalist movements that came out of Tito's control ensured that the “ghost of Mihailović” once again took the Yugoslav political life in the ‘physical presence’ of Milošević. At this point, Yugoslavia was under the influence of supernationalism; Simultaneously, the Titoist understanding was considered an artificial state Project. All versions of nationalism have entered into a historical reckoning with a great sense of resentment fed by romanticism and theological elements.

Yugoslavia was surrounded by highly complex dynamics, depending on the developments in the international system at the end of the 1980s. In particular, rather than projections for the future, past events have become the determining dynamics in Yugoslav politics, creating an irrational political life space in the country, which has been under the decisive influence of Serbian nationalism, where Serbs accuse everyone except Serbs. This conjuncture describes a historical “obsession” (Zimmermann, 1995, p. 3). On the other hand, what happened in Yugoslavia between 1991 and 1995 indicates how the notion of nationalism ‘stretched in meaning.’ In the Yugoslav Wars, which was essentially a Slavic civil war, religion and historical background were also the essential causes of conflict. Catholic Croats, Muslim Bosnians, and Orthodox Serbs frequently emphasized their religious identity during this process. On the other hand, Serbian political elites, referring to the Ottoman period of Kosovo and Bosnia-Herzegovina, evaluated these two countries' historical and cultural past as a “spiritual genocide” against Serbs (Perica, 2002, p. 3). In this context, the situation in Yugoslavia in the early 1990s expresses the absolute superiority of Serbian nationalism, which was firmly consolidated against external actors, forgetting the ideological divergence of the 1940s. The transformation that Yugoslavia has experienced in the historical process will be tested by putting the country's two most popular football teams, Partizan FC and Red Star teams, in the center.

4. Red Star and Partizan FC Between Disintegration and Integration

The year 1945 is essential for Yugoslavia not only in terms of the end of World War II and the socio-political consolidation of the country under the leadership of Tito but also as a turning point in terms of sports since it coincides with the establishment of Partizan FC and Red Star teams, which will become iconic in terms of firstly Yugoslav and later European football. The importance of this data for the study is to provide a more realistic representation of the ideological analysis of the two teams, which were established and developed under similar sociopolitical and chronological conditions.

The common point of the football teams established in Yugoslavia in the first half of the twentieth century is that they have high nationalist motivation. At the same time, they are intensely nourished by ethnopolitical symbols. When this argument is elaborated, it is seen that the ethnopolitical dynamics that exist in Yugoslav football are not derived solely from Yugoslav nationalism; on the contrary, the founding elements of Yugoslavia, especially Croats, use football as a tool to preserve their national identity. In other words, although the Red Star and Partizan

FC teams here are considered the ‘dynamo’ of Yugoslav football, the Serbian nationalism that is inherent in both teams can be suppressed from time to time but never completely pacified. According to Mills (2018, p. 16), Croatian teams such as Hajduk Split or HŠK Građanski Zagreb in regions where Croatia and Croats live intensely have constantly been fed by ethnopolitical solid symbols. Therefore, the ties of the Red Star and Partizan FC teams with the Serbian national character appear an undeniable fact in the historical process.

The primary source of the nationalist motivation that always persists in Yugoslav football is hidden in the fact that many footballers left their teams to become soldiers during wartime. Looking at the essential ideological dynamics of the two teams established in 1945, it is seen that the Partizan FC team took its name from Tito's famous Partizans and found an organic bond with the Yugoslavia National Army (JNA). On the other hand, the Red Star team was represented mainly by young people qualified from sports units. Both teams represent ethnopolitical equality (Armstrong & Vest, 2013, p. 45-47). In other words, both teams were shaped around the founding values of Yugoslavia and did not have any attempts to force the political system in this process. There are other comments on this issue, and Blasius's (2017, p. 785) argument stands out. He reveals that both clubs did not assume “socialist” or “nationalist” identities during the foundation years and presented an “objective” profile within the official ideology of the state. On the other hand, Jiang (2016, p. 72) emphasizes that while the Red Star is the “ideal” formation of Serbian nationalism, FC Partizan has always been on a “federalist” line by sharpening this faint distinction. The main pillars of the argument are based on the name of the FC Partizan club, the club's organic ties with the army.²

Whether both clubs are ‘socialist’ or ‘nationalist’ is closely related to whether Yugoslavia is ‘socialist’ or ‘nationalist.’ It is pretty challenging to make an objective interpretation of this because the *sui generis* formation can ironically be answered as either ‘both’ or ‘neither.’ The fact that the ideological transformation experienced by the clubs can be proved in practice confirms them ‘both’ but at ‘different times.’ On the other hand, a consensus point of reference is the basic chronological reference where this transformation began in 1980 when Tito died. In the final analysis, in the light of what has been stated so far, it is understood that between 1945-and 1980, FC Partizan was in complete harmony with the founding values of Yugoslavia. It would be appropriate to claim that the Red Star was not ‘incompatible’ with the ideological values of Yugoslavia in the same period but represented the ‘hidden’ tendencies of Serbian nationalism, which was relatively suppressed during the Tito period, especially among the youths.

As noted earlier, with the death of Tito on May 4, 1980, Yugoslavia underwent a significant transformation process. The most dominant outcome of this process was that Yugoslavia was now detached from the supranational understanding and came under the influence of supernationalism controlled by Serbian nationalism. In other words, this process can be called the “nationalization” of the founding political elements of Yugoslavia and the dissolution of Yugoslavia, and gaining the form of a nation-state. (Vrcan & Lalic, 1999, p. 176). Such a radical transformation was undoubtedly not only limited to the political arena but also had been reflected in different areas, especially on sports platforms. Moreover, the Dinamo Zagreb Red Star match dated 13th of May 1990, described as the symbolic event of the collapse of Yugoslavia, was also a so-called “sportive” event. In this context, it is understood that football is a fundamental ‘laboratory’ in terms of the political profile of Yugoslavia. The most prominent outcome of the period from the 1980s to the early 1990s for both clubs is that the ideological divergences between the two clubs gradually blurred, and nationalism became the absolute ideology for both Red Star and FC Partizan. In particular, during the Bosnian War and the

² Partizan FC named after Tito's guerrilla forces. The federalist line of the club is hardly surprising. Even Tito himself was born to a Croatian father and Slovenian mother.

Kosovo Crisis, the resentment and grudge felt by both clubs regarding their Bosnian identity against Croatian and Albanian nationalisms appear as the fundamental dynamics that carry the sportive rivalry to a political agreement. Although both clubs started to share the nationalist ideology in the period above, the Red Star club has always been ‘one step ahead’ of FC Partizan.

After the death of Tito, chanting “Kosovo is the heart of Serbia” or “Kill a Croatian, so you lose an Albanian brother” became the most famous slogans of the Red Star supporters (Đorđević, 2016, p. 117). In particular, when the Red Star fan groups came under the influence of Željko Ražnatović, the leader of the Arkan's Tigers paramilitary group and the Red Star's *Delije* fan group, which was also one of the closest names to Slobodan Milošević, (Sack & Suster, 2000, p. 311) portraits of ultra-nationalist war criminals such as Slobodan Milošević, Ratko Mladić, and Radovan Karadžić began to find places in stadiums.

Another club with a similar trend was FC Partizan, Red Star's ‘eternal’ rival. According to Zec and Paunović (2015, p. 238), Partizan FC was one of the most “diverse” clubs in ethnic Yugoslavia. In other words, Partizan FC represented the Yugoslav ‘mosaic’ in the football arena. Therefore, FC Partizan club, which had a little more difficulty in ‘adaptation’ to this process than Red Star, had started to reject its origins and frequently sang, “Partizan, Partizan that is a Serbian team, and Milošević was proud of them,” which was pointing out that the club struggled to assert its Serbian identity (Mills, 2009, p. 1196). On the other hand, this situation also emphasizes nationalist support for the Bosnian War. One of the exciting anecdotes told during this process focuses on the fictional character ‘Jusuf Mehmedovski.’ Mehmedovski was created to emphasize that FC Partizan represents not only ethnic Serbs but also Muslim Bosnians and Albanians, while the club still followed the Titoist line before 1990 (Djordjević & Pekić, 2018, p. 361). During the 1980s and 1990s, it is seen that Jusuf Mehmedovski was first ‘killed’ and then ‘reborn’ by observing ethnic, sectarian, historical, linguistic, and sociological dynamics.

It should be noted that Serbian nationalism can unify both teams against all odds. In 2014, after a Red Star basketball fan was stabbed in a fight in Istanbul, Partizan FC fans were one of the biggest supporters of the Red Star. (Pipini, 2019, p. 125). The temporary ideological separation between the two clubs suggests that Serbian nationalism was successfully consolidated against the traditional ‘others’ due to the nationalist reflexes that developed in the post-1980 period. Although the occurrence is widespread in the footballing world, it is not something to be witnessed easily between the sides of a rivalry such as the eternal derby.

Conclusion

Today, nationalism is still seen as one of the most potent reference sources for collective identities. Although nationalism is a frequently embodied concept, it can also appear as having abstract and emotional components, such as a strong sense of superiority, a distinction manifested as ‘we,’ ‘others,’ ‘them,’ and also anger and resentment towards ‘others,’ ‘them.’

In Yugoslavia, which was born as the political output of a very ‘painful’ and bloody process, it is seen that these dynamics can be observed at different levels and forms in the historical process. Nationalist movements suppressed by supranationalism from 1945 until 1980 were grouped as ‘Yugoslav nationalism’ under the charismatic authority of Tito. In particular, during this period from the 1980s to the 1990s, sub-nationalisms suppressed by the Yugoslav upper identity exploded and caused the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Serbian nationalism, which replaced Yugoslav nationalism in the chaotic climate of the 1990s, tried to settle accounts with its Muslim-Ottoman-Turkish ‘other’ in the historical sense. One can say that such a ‘showdown’ was not solely political. In particular, the ‘reaction’ that also extended to the pitch can be observed synchronously in the essence of Red Star and FC Partizan, which are the two most important representatives of Yugoslav football.

The story of Yugoslav football from 1945 to the present day is mainly told as the story of Serbian football. Undoubtedly, Red Star and FC Partizan are the two protagonists of this. The ‘eternal’ competition between the two clubs was not only fed by sportive dynamics in the historical process. Both have had their share of football's power to turn clubs into ‘political parties and have experienced sharp transformations in their history. FC Partizan seems more ‘loyal’ than Red Star in terms of representation of Titoism. However, the ideological dissent between the two clubs, which generally remained within the framework of the official ideology of Yugoslavia until 1980, was mostly blurred. On the other hand, from the 1980s and 1990s to the 2000s, both clubs were greatly influenced by the feelings of resentment and hatred that can form nationalism and became the representatives of these tendencies on the football fields, which was more of a sociological ground. Needless to mention that the rivalry between both teams nowadays occasionally witnesses ‘chronic’ violence. Last but not least, it will be a strained interpretation to discuss the competition between Red Star and Partizan FC on a purely ideological ground today. It seems the rivalry between the two teams is no longer determined by the deep ideological divisions of the past. Even though it cannot be said that the traditional threat perception of the Serbs towards their others has come to an end, it should be remembered that nationalism reinforces ‘us’ as much as it separates the ‘other.’ Today, both teams are proud representatives of Serbia. Yet, neither politics nor football can be predicted.

References

- Amstrong, G. & Vest, E. (2013). Mirror to the state: Politicisation of football clubs in the history of Bosnia-Herzegovina. *International Centre for Sport Security Journal*, 1(1), 44-51. <https://theicss.org/2019/03/07/icss-journal-vol1-no-1/>
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. Sage.
- Blasius, M. (2017). FC Red Star Belgrade and the diversity of social identifications in socialist Yugoslavia: Representative dimensions of the “big four” football clubs. *The International Journal of The History of Sport*, 34(9), 783-799. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2017.1402763>
- Bunce, V. (1995). Should transitologists be grounded?. *Slavic Review*, 54(1), 111-127. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2501122>
- Djordjević, I. & Pekić, R. (2018). Is there space on the left? Football fans and political positioning in Serbia. *Soccer & Society*, 19(3), 355-372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2017.1333678>
- Đorđević, I. (2016). The role of red star football club in the construction of Serbian national identity. *Traditiones*, 45(1), 117-132. <https://doi.org/10.3986/Traditio2016450108>
- Đorđević, A. Đ. (2020). *Stadion Partizana*, [Image]. <https://streetartbelgrade.com/galerija/gtr-slobodan-aligrudic-dorcol/>
- Eco, U. (1986). *Travels in hyperreality*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Geiger, V. (2012). Human losses of Croats in World War II and the immediate post-war period caused by the Chetniks (Yugoslav army in the fatherland) and the partizans (People's Liberation Army and the partizan detachment of Yugoslavia/Yugoslav army) and the Yugoslav communist authorities: Numerical indicators. *Review of Croatian History*, 8(1), 77-121. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/103223>
- Greenfeld, L. & Chirot, D. (1994). Nationalism and aggression. *Theory and Society*, 23(1), 79-130. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00993674>
- Greenfeld, L. (2013). *Mind, modernity, madness: The impact of culture on human experience*. Harvard University Press.
- Greenfeld, L. (1994). *Nationalism: Five roads to modernity*. Harvard University Press.

- Hayden, R. M. (1992). Constitutional nationalism in the formerly Yugoslav republics. *Slavic Review*, 51(4), 654-673. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2500130>
- Jiang, E. (2016). Football as a social device: The sport's relation to the Balkan antagonism. *The Literary Journal of Students in Balkan Studies*, 13(1), 70-73.
- Karge, H. (2009). Mediated remembrance: Local Practices of remembering the Second World War in Tito's Yugoslavia. *European Review of History*, 16(1), 49-62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507480802655394>
- Karpat, K. (1997). The Balkan national states and nationalism: Image and reality. *Islamic Studies*, 36(2/3), 329-359. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047400899_019
- Milazzo, M. J. (2019). *The Chetnik movement and the Yugoslav resistance*. John Hopkins University Press.
- Mills, R. (2009). 'It all ended in an unsporting way': Serbian football and the disintegration of Yugoslavia, 1989-2006. *The International Journal of The History of Sport*, 26(9), 1187-1217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523360902941829>
- Mills, R. (2018). *The politics of football in Yugoslavia*. I. B. Tauris.
- Mutlu, E. (1996). Avrupa'yı salladık, İngiltere'yi sarsacağız: Futbol, milliyetçilik ve şiddet. *Cogito*, 6-7, 367-378.
- Neuberger, B. (2010). National self-determination and democracy. In A. Lecours & L. Moreno, (Eds.), *Nationalism and democracy: Dichotomies, complementarities, oppositions* (1st ed., pp. 52-79). Routledge.
- Nietzsche, F. (2008). First essay: 'Good and evil', 'good and bad' (C. Diethe, Trans.). In Keith A., (Ed.), *On the genealogy of morality* (2nd ed., pp. 10-34). Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1887).
- PA Archive/Press Association. (2016). *A graffiti painted by The Red Star supporters*, [Image]. <https://www.the42.ie/ireland-serbia-world-cup-qualifier-belgrade-2964226-Sep2016/>
- Pavković, A. (2000). Constructing a European identity: Problems of supranationalism. In J. Andrew, M. Crook & M. Waller (Eds.), *Why Europe? Problems of culture and identity* (1st ed., pp. 115-130) Palgrave Macmillan.
- Perica, V. (2002). *Balkan idols: Religion and nationalism in Yugoslav states*. Oxford University Press.
- Pesic, V. (1996). *Serbian nationalism and the origins of the Yugoslav crisis*. United States Institute of Peace.
- Pipini, M. (2019). Exploring the digitalization of football violence: Ultras, disembodiment, and the internet. In S. Lawrence & G. Crawford (Eds.), *Digital football cultures: Fandom, identities, and resistance* (1st ed., pp. 125-138) Routledge.
- Porter, D. (2017). Sport and national identity. In R. Edelman & W. Wilson (Eds.). *The Oxford handbook of sports history*, (1st ed., pp. 1-15) Oxford Handbooks Online. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199858910.013.33>
- Radoja, Z. (2021). *Ratko Mladić salutes in front of Partizan FC emblem*, [Image]. <https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-mladic-mural-protests/31555357.html>
- Roger, A. (2008). *Milliyetçilik kuramları*. (A. U. Kılıç, Çev.). Versus.
- Sack, A. L. & Suster, Z. (2000). Soccer and Croatian nationalism: A prelude to war. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 24(3), 305-320. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723500243006>

Develi, T. O. (2022). Nationalism and football at first glance: The case of “Eternal Derby”, *Mavi Atlas*, 10(1), 310-322.

Scheler, M. (1992). Negative feelings and the destruction of values: Ressentiment. In H. J. Bershady (Ed.), *On feeling, knowing, and valuing: Selected writings* (1st ed., pp. 116-143). The University of Chicago Press.

Sinčić, M. (2013). Do you remember Milena and Merlinka? Gender imagery from the Yugoslav supra nationalism to the super nationalisms and war in the Nineties. *West Croatian History Journal*, 8, 133-149. <https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/212289>

Spasić, I. (2017). The universality of banal nationalism, or can the flag hang unobtrusively outside a Serbian post office?. In M. Skey & M. Antonsich (Eds.), *Everyday nationhood: Theorising culture, identity and belonging after banal nationalism* (1st ed., pp. 31-51). Palgrave Macmillan.

WM/Darwinek. (2009). *A Nationalist Graffiti Painted by The Red Star Fans*, [Image]. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/red-star-serbia-never-yugoslavia-football-politics-and-national-i/>

Vrcan, S. & Lalic, D. (1999). From ends to trenches, and back: Football in the former Yugoslavia. In G. Armstrong & R. Giulianotti (Eds.), *Football Cultures and Identities* (1st ed., pp. 176-185). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230378896_15

Zec, D. – Paunović, M. (2015). Football's positive influence on integration in diverse societies: The case study of Yugoslavia. *Soccer & Society*, 16(2-3), 232-244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2014.961387>

Zimmermann, W. (1995). The last ambassador: A memoir of the collapse of Yugoslavia. *Foreign Affairs*, 74(2), 2-20.

Appendices:

Illustration 1

A Graffiti Painted by The Red Star Supporters



Note. Fed by militaristic and nationalist elements, the picture on the left is of Branslav Zeljković Zelja, one of the most prominent names among Delije fans [Image], by the PA Archive/Press Association Images, 2016 (<https://www.the42.ie/ireland-serbia-world-cup-qualifier-belgrade-2964226-Sep2016/>)

Illustration 2

A Nationalist Graffiti Painted by The Red Star Fans



Note. The inscription in the picture says, “Let’s follow the spirit of our ancestors” [Image], by WM/Darwinek, 2009 (<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/can-europe-make-it/red-star-serbia-never-yugoslavia-football-politics-and-national-i/>)

Illustration 3

Stadion Partizana



Note. For many years, Partizan Stadium was called Stadion JNA, using the acronym for the Federal Army of Yugoslavia. Stadion JNA discourse is still used as a “Yugonostalgia” discourse today [Image], by Aleksandar Đalek Đorđević, 2020 (<https://streetartbelgrade.com/galerija/gtr-slobodan-aligrudic-dorcol/>)

Illustration 4

Ratko Mladić salutes in front of Partizan FC emblem.



Note. FC Partizan supporters were also affected by the ultra-nationalist wave. A graffiti tributed to one of the Balkans' most notorious war criminals, Ratko Mladić [Image], by Zarka Radoja, 2021 (<https://www.rferl.org/a/serbia-mladic-mural-protests/31555357.html>)