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## **Twenty Years Later: The War Did (not) Begin at Maksimir**

### **An Anthropological Analysis of the Media Narratives about a Never Ended Football Game\***

The aim of this work is an analysis of the media narratives about the never ended football match between Dynamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade on May 13 1990. The article focuses on the media coverage twenty years after the incident in the context of the game's acquired mythic status, symbolically marking the beginning of the war in former Yugoslavia. The object of the analysis are Serbian and Croatian media with the aim of revealing the strategies of representing this event in the period of the normalization of the relations in the region.

*Key words:*

football, Maksimir,  
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"We have got McDonalds, where is yours?" This song reverberated throughout Zagreb's stadium Maksimir on May 13 1990. Had they known, the owners of the ubiquitous superbrand would have probably been proud about the fact that their "baby" was a relevant argument in a then-popular dispute about who is better: Serbs or Croats. Had the dispute remained about the strength of the multinational companies in the two republics of the SFRY, this bizarre anecdote would have probably served as an analytical framework for some research on the influence of the fast food chain on the transformation of East European societies. Instead, the potential "McDonaldisation" of Yugoslavia remained no more than another blank page of the former republic's history book, while the other chants echoing Zagreb's stadium that spring afternoon were far more serious and ominous than the song about the symbol of globalization.

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On that day<sup>1</sup> one of the former state's derby was to be played, a league game between Dynamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade. However, instead of football, on the field and among the spectators a massive fight erupted among the teams' fans and the police, fortunately without human casualties. Seemingly, we know everything about this event. The skirmishes began with the arrival of Red Star's fans, so-called "Delije", in Zagreb and evolved into tearing down of banners and, at that point, minor clashes between them and the Dynamo supporters in the south stands. Dynamo's supporters, so-called Bad Blue Boys (BBB), located in the north stands, marched towards their colleagues on the south to assist them, broke the fence, and engaged in a conflict with poorly equipped and outnumbered police forces on the pitch. A massive fight and chaos culminated when Dynamo's captain, Zvonimir Boban, in the attempt to rescue a Dynamo supporter, kicked a police officer in the chest. All these events that later spread to the streets of Zagreb were recorded and broadcast in live overage while music was played through the PA system.

Had this been one of many similar incidents of hooliganism that had earlier been frequent across Europe, this never ended game would have never reached the annals of Yugoslav/ Serbian/ Croatian, let alone world's football. However, the clear political dimension of this event led the American television network CNN to rank this game among "the five football games that changed the world". (CNN, January 13 2011)

The match between Dynamo and Red Star was supposed to be played in specific circumstances, two weeks after the Croatian Democratic Union under the leadership of Franjo Tuđman won the first free parliamentary elections in Croatia. The nationalistic program of this party, complementary to the nationalism of the official communists in Serbia<sup>2</sup> under the leadership of Slobodan Milošević, did not inspire hope for a peaceful denouement of the Yugoslavian crisis. The ethnic tensions that had grown in the country during the '80s, were escalating now and members of football clubs' fan groups served as a particular megaphone for the leaders of the Yugoslav republics. Nationalist cross fire among fan groups had gradually replaced common intolerances among supporters of different clubs (Čolović 2000, 338-342, Lalić 1990, 124-129). In this respect, Delije's and Bad Blue Boys' fans' "repertoire" before the game between Dynamo and Red Star was not the least surprising or unexpected. On one side of the stands, the fans were applauding the Independent State of Croatia and Serbs were hanged from trees in their chants, while their Serbian colleagues sang in praise of cetnik commandos and threatened with destroying the capital of Croatia, Zagreb. The big fight that occurred, did not surpass the scale of the common stadium behavior, considering the fact that violent

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<sup>1</sup> A curious detail says that that day was designated as National Safety Day in the SFRY.

<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary elections in Serbia were held a few months later, in December 1990, and they resulted in a triumph of Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia, which was the legal successor of the Communist Alliance of the SFRY.

clashes among fan groups, especially the clashes among the groups supporting the biggest Yugoslavian clubs were in that period a common sight.<sup>3</sup>

Still, it can not be argued that the escalation of such violence that obstructed the game belonged to usual fans clashes. Firstly, these clashes had mostly happened outside stadiums, while verbal violence dominated inside. Secondly, the media attention and the political implications that ensued singled out the Maksimir event from the previous similar ones. As could have been envisaged, the Serbian and Croatian press assumed completely different positions. The only thing the media of the two republics had in common was a declarative condemnation of the violence on the stadium. The Croatian side condemned the lukewarm reaction of the police to the rampage of the Red Star fans, stating that the police reacted only against the Dynamo supporters. It was argued that the whole event had been orchestrated from Serbia through Serbian personnel in the Croatian Secretariate of Internal Affairs with the aim of destabilizing the newly constituted government in Croatia. On the other hand, the Serbian media blamed the poor organization of the game, whose culprit they found in the newly formed Croatian government (Mihailović 1997). Logically, both sides blamed the other one for the violence. The media spinning soon resulted in the dismissal of the Serbian managerial staff from the Croatian police force (Sack, Suster 2000, 310-313), while in Serbia one conviction was strengthened - that any kind of agreement with the new Croatian government was impossible.

Although it would be natural to expect that after such a violent denouement of a football game, the story of a dying state's football league would be over, that was not the case. Ball kicking across the former SFRY continued until the summer of 1991, when the Slovenian and Croatian teams left the Yugoslav league and formed their own national leagues (Mills 2009, 1202).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it was in this period that the full former state's team achieved one of the biggest successes in its history, by ranking fifth in the World Cup in Italy in 1990.<sup>5</sup> However, having learned a lesson from Maksimir, the football decision makers decided to forbid away teams' fans from attending matches, especially the ones played in the towns of other republics, thus preventing the repetition of incidents. There is one event that deserves at-

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<sup>3</sup> Even today on numerous fans' forums an often found view is that the clash between the Bad Blue Boys and Delije was an ordinary fight, one of many that preceded it. In this view, the political connotation was additionally attached.

<sup>4</sup> Although the SFRY league stopped existing once the Slovenian and Croatian teams left, another season was played under the same name and completely irregular conditions with the former republics' teams' formal participation. It was not before the season 1992-1993 that the league of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formed, in which only Serbian and Montenegrin clubs took part.

<sup>5</sup> The national team that took part in the championship was comprised of players from all former Yugoslav republics. The best Croatian players contributed to the big success, except one - Zvonimir Boban, who had been suspended due to the assault on the police officer. Interestingly enough, a friendly match was played between Yugoslavia and Holland at Maksimir in Zagreb, only a month after the Maksimir disarray, in which the spectators booed the national anthem and whole-heartedly supported the opposing team.

tention, though – a game played on September 25 1990 in Split between the home team Hajduk and Partizan Belgrade. Although there were no visiting team's fans, whereby violent incidents were avoided, this match was remembered for the burning of the Yugoslav flag by the Hajduk fans, known as Torcide. In a text commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of these events entitled *Time to say adieu. The Day When Yugoslavia Died*, a Split daily Slobodna Dalmacija, announces that September 25 1990 was "a Wednesday that symbolically foreshadowed the end of Yugoslavia". In the same article sociologist Dražen Lalić explains "It happened five months after the big disorder at Maksimir. It is usually said that the war started at Maksimir, but we could say that Yugoslavia stopped existing at Poljud when the Yugoslav flag was burned, because when flags and other insignia get burned, people get killed. I believe that this event was underestimated, and that the Maksimir event received unreasonably much attention." (Slobodna Dalmacija, September 26 2010)

The preceding examples indicate that there has been a certain contest in the discipline "which match started the war in former Yugoslavia". Indeed, the thesis that the war started at Maksimir has become one of the most popular metaphors when referring to violent conflicts in the former state.<sup>6</sup> Despite the fact that the actual hostility started almost a year after the Maksimir incident, it is evident that football played a major role in the symbolic explanation of the inter ethnic hatred in the SFRY. This event, to a certain extent, became a mythic topos, a symbolically established border between the "old" and the "new" age.

The reasons why a football match, however violent the surrounding incidents, could have become as much symbolically important, I've addressed elsewhere (Ђорђевић 2006; Ђорђевић 2009). That war is a convenient metaphorical source domain for sport is obvious (Maguire and Poulton 1999) as well as the fact that this human activity "by invoking stereotypes, generic references, shared sporting and military history, and the timelessness of the nation spanning mythical past and indefinite future" (Bishop and Jaworski 2003, 244) can serve as a very potent mechanism for the homogenization of collective identity, in this case, national identity. What should be mentioned here as a particular connection between the football fans in ex Yugoslavia and the war is the fact that football hooliganism, to a certain extent, served as "pre-military training", to use Čolović's expressive explanation (Čolović 2000, 348). Namely, after the onset of armed conflict in Croatia, and afterwards in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Football fans' groups were an important military recruitment centre. Under the command of Željko Ražnatović Arkan<sup>7</sup> the Serbian Volunteers Squad was formed, the majority of

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, one journal cited in this paper dedicated to the media reporting in the period of the SFRY dissolution is titled "The war began at Maksimir"

<sup>7</sup> Ražnatović, a criminal who was famous for collaboration with the State Security Service, as well as for numerous criminal offenses in Western Europe during the '80s, in this period became known to the public as leader of Red Star fans. He was "credited with" uniting, until then, dis-united Red Star fans into a single group Delije, which was, as has been speculated to date, an assignment he had got from the State Security Service, the purpose of which was to express the growing nationalist and anticommunist sentiments in the stands. As leader of the Serbian Volunteers Guard, he was indicted by the International Criminal Court for War Crimes in the Hague. He

which came from the Delije group, while a large number of the Bad Blue Boys<sup>8</sup> and the Torcide groups joined the units of the Croatian army in the making (Čolović 2000; Vrcan and Lalić 1999). Ražnatović later explained that immediately after the Maksimir events he decided to form a paramilitary group, having, allegedly, forseen the war (Čolović 2000, 344).

This paper aims to analyze the media narratives about the aforesaid events at Maksimir, twenty years after they took place. In my focus in this paper is the fact that this match achieved a mythic status in Serbia and in Croatia by marking the symbolic beginning of the war in ex Yugoslavia. The object of this analysis is the media coverage in both states with the aim to reveal the strategies of representing this event in the period of the normalization of the relations in the region. My intention is to ascertain what kind of stories are told about the Maksimir event today, what these stories tell, and what they are quiet about, and within what sort of discursive strategies. At that, I would like to underline that my intention is not to direct attention to any kind of "objective" chronology of the events or "truth" about why the incident happened. I approach the media content as a cultural form which incorporates general values and beliefs in a society, emphasizing the fact that the media operate within cultural borders under the influence of the dominant societal values and conceptions (Vasiljević 2008a). The analyzed media coverage encompasses daily and weekly press, Internet portals and television shows and serials produced in the period from 2009 until 2011. For the sake of the analysis' systematic approach the Serbian media coverage will be presented first and that of the Croats after.

## Uncomfortable Feelings

If CNN saw the match between Dynamo and Red Star as one of the five matches that changed the world, the media in Serbia did not quite share the same view. In comparison to the surge of patriotism and vaguely concealed glorifications of the heroic members of Delije in the period of the Maksimir incident (Mihailović 1997), the Serbian media approach has considerably altered two decades later. To begin with, in most media outlets this event is barely mentioned, or mentioned very tersely giving the basic facts and striking details such as Zvonimir Boban's assault on the police officer. The majority of the headlines are neutral, e.g. *Two decades of the incidents at Maksimir* (Mondo, May 12 2010), *21 years of the 'Maksimir' '90* (B92, May 13 2011), *Two decades of the Maksimir incidents* (the daily Blic, May 13 2010), or *Anniversary of the Maksimir riot* (S media, May 13 2011). The pervasive position is that this match symbolically represented the beginning of the Yu-

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didn't live to see the beginning of the trial because he was killed in a shoot out of criminal groups in Belgrade in 2000.

<sup>8</sup> At Maksimir stadium in Zagreb today stands a monument commemorating the Dynamo fans died in the Homeland War, and the engraving reads: "To all Dynamo fans for whom the war began on May 13 1990 at Maksimir stadium and ended in giving their lives for homeland Croatia! BBB Zagreb, May 13 1994"

goslav War. Thus, the daily Blic reports that "the termination of the match in Zagreb signified the beginning of the state's break-up" (Blic, May 13 2010), another daily, Danas reminisces "the day when football resembled war" (Danas May 18 2010), the daily Kurir publishes a text with an explicit title "The war started at Maksimir" which read "there are many who argue that the open break-up of the SFRY began on that day" (Kurir, May 13 2010) and the portal of the Serbian Radio Television (SRT) in an introduction to an article asks "How did the war at Maksimir begin?" (Srt January 15 2011). The major part of media coverage that to some extent addressed this incident exhibit a tendency to link the Maksimir incidents to the wars and politics. In a documentary serial "Football and other things" (Absinthe Production, 2007) scenes of the stadium incident are immediately followed by those of tanks in the streets of Belgrade and in documentary "An arranged war"<sup>9</sup> the footage of the attack on the Yugoslav Army soldiers in Split are immediately preceded by the clash of the football fans. This method of illustrating the beginning of the conflicts in former Yugoslavia indicates the extraordinary visual effectiveness of the Maksimir event. Despite the fact that there was no causal connection between the incidents in Zagreb and Split (since it was more than a year between them), this representation creates a metonymic relation between a fans' fight and the actual war. In this way the belief that "the war started at Maksimir" is additionally asserted.

Thus, once the symbolic connection between the infamous match and subsequent armed conflict is acknowledged, it is interesting to find out how the media discourse interprets the reasons behind the fans violence. In other words, who is to blame for the stadium incident in 1990, twenty years later?

The Serbian Radio Television does not leave space for doubt: "Croatian Democratic Union staged riots in the football match between Dynamo and Red Star in 1990 in Zagreb",

says the then chief inspector of Croatian Secretariat of Internal Affairs Petar Đukić. According to him the CDU by that time already had their own men in the police who made the disarray possible (...) In the preparations of the game politics dominated over professional safety concerns which is why his suggestion that Croatian SIA handle the matter had been dismissed and the authority was transferred to the SIA of Zagreb, says Đukić. (...) Shortly after the game Đukić was blamed for the overstepping of police authority, was made to retire, although he had previously applied for retirement." (SRT, January 15 2011) According to this interpretation, the outcome of the event was known in advance, home supporters had a ready-made scenario agreed upon with the newly elected authorities in Croatia, while visiting fans from Belgrade, unaware of all this, fell prey to provocations, whereby conflict was inevitable. An interesting detail is that this article uses, so to say, ethnographic strategy "the key informant" – which, being based on an eyewitness, who not only has participated in the event, but has been involved in it, becomes the more convincing and authentic. Belgrade based television and radio station B92 reports in a

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<sup>9</sup> A two-part documentary serial produced by SRT in 2011, that investigated the secret agreements between the Serbian and Croatian presidents, Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman during the armed conflicts in former Yugoslavia.

similar tone: "The whole incident was believed to have been orchestrated because the stones and bottles had previously been supplied around and within the Dynamo stadium. The incidents culminated with a fight of police and both teams' supporters on the pitch as well as in the stands." (B92 May 5 2011) Weekly magazine *Vreme* points: "Twenty years later, there is a nearly unanimous conviction that the whole incident had been orchestrated to serve the newly appointed authorities for taking over (almost) all media in Croatia, first TV Zagreb, then the Croatian TV (...) The information that stones had been brought to the north Dynamo stands, but also to the south stands designated for Red Star supporters speaks in favor of the thesis that the incident had been orchestrated." (*Vreme*, May 20 2010) Similarly, the daily *Kurir* alleges that "Boban's "mawashi" had been instructed by the CDU and Croatian secret services, which used this incident to purge Croatian police forces of Serbian personnel", backing this assertion by a participant's statement, namely the then Red Star's coach Dargoslav Šekularac: "I think that all that had been orchestrated and fixed on higher positions, especially Boban's attack on the police officer (...) They wanted to kill us all because they regarded all of us as Serbs, therefore the enemies." (*Kurir*, May 13 2010)

The dominant strategy of these media narratives is victimization (Jusić 2008, 59). In a tone similar to that of the media reporting immediately after the incidents (Mihajlović 1997, 93–108) the Serbian media insist on "conspiracy theory", that is, on an intent of the organizers of the match supported by the state leadership to provoke a conflict. This interpretation serves to acquit Red Star's supporters of responsibility whereby their behavior is normalized within the framework of expected violent "supporters' rituals". If some responsibility for the incidents is attributed to Belgrade fans, it is minimized by the fact that "somebody powerful" from the "high position", i.e. the new authorities embodied in the CDU, had wished for and provoked the incidents.

Even the participants in the conflict, Red Star fans were given space in the media to give their understanding of the never ended match. The pervasive belief among them is that despite the obvious politicization the fight was but one of many "just atop all fights we engaged in as visiting fans in Croatia, the only difference being that the previous ones had not been covered by the media so as not to harm brotherhood and unity", says one of the then fans leaders Peca the Punker (Danas, May 18 2010). Another fans leader Zoran Timić Tima points out to further details: "At one stage the Croats started singing: "Slobodan, you will get hacked." They had, of course, seen Slobodan Milošević as personification of Serbs and Serbia. At that moment we joined the song as well and sang the same verse. That May 13 was the first time in history that we sang publically against Slobodan Milošević." (Danas, May 18 2010).

From the aspect of football subculture, self victimization is not the most popular strategy especially not amidst claims that football fans have been manipulated. More importantly, a question raised here that relates significantly to the subsequent war in ex Yugoslavia is the question of winners and losers. While their colleagues in Croatian fan groups perceive their battle against Serbian fans and the police as the beginning of the Homeland War, Red Star fans are reluctant to talk

about that.<sup>10</sup> Apparently, a lack of social consensus regarding Serbian role in the Yugoslav Wars and an indefinite role of Serbia in military campaign the "Storm" that put an end to the conflicts in Croatia<sup>11</sup> had a considerable impact on Delije's reserve on this issue. Although they pride on the lives given for Serbia, a lack of further elaboration on the issue and a lack of commemorative moments related to the war period, indicate an unease about their engagement in the war because of the fact that "the war in which Serbia did not take part" was actually lost. Stripped of a glorious victory, a generation of Serbian youths from the '90 was deprived of an important generation symbol." (Kuljić 2008, 82-83).

Another interesting detail is the reminiscence of the singing against Milošević at Maksimir in 1990. Although politically heterogeneous, supporters of various right-wing movements, the hard-line supporters of Red Star were not the hard-line opponents of the (at that time still) communist leader Milošević.<sup>12</sup> This kind of reminiscence relates to an observation made by Kuljić that reminiscence gives the preserved contents topicality, it is "a reach into the past always form a fresh present." (Kuljić 2006, 6). Evoking a purported anti-regime attitude twenty years after serves the purpose of legitimizing Delije as an important factor in the struggle against, (as years later would be perceived) "traitor Milošević".

## For All Times

If May 13 1990 was not mentioned much twenty years after, Svibanj<sup>13</sup> 13 certainly was. This match in the Croatian ethno myth represents a cornerstone in their struggle for independence. The notorious match has been remembered for many years through commemorative texts in the media and concrete activities such as laying of wreaths on the tomb of the members of the BBB died in the Homeland War. In May 2010 a commemorative match was convened between the players of Dynamo from the generations 1982 and 1990 in honouring the anniversary of the

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<sup>10</sup> Compare the perception of the war on official BBB sites (<http://www.badbluebozs.hr>) and Delije ([www.delije.net](http://www.delije.net)). Both stress as important the Maksimir event and their participation in the war respectively, with the difference in emphasis. Dynamo fans put more stress, alongside an explicit statement that for the majority of the BBB, the Homeland War began on that day. Such a claim does not exist on Red Star fans site.

<sup>11</sup> A dominant Serbian public opinion is that Slobodan Milošević "betrayed" Serbs in the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina, leaving them helpless during the Croatian military campaign in which the majority of Serbian population fled from Croatia to Serbia and Bosnia. This conviction is particularly cultivated among the nationalists who did not fault Milošević for waging the wars, but for losing them.

<sup>12</sup> Already that year, more prominently in the following years, the Red Star fans under the leadership of Arkan refrained from supporting any political party, and were not criticizing Milošević. This is best illustrated in an article in Red Star Review published in December 1990, where Arkan is portrayed as "a man close to the club with a good insight in the happenings at the Marakana stadium, who helps the fans to leave politics to the political arenas." (Čolović 2000, 342).

<sup>13</sup> The Croatian term for April.



Maksimir incident.<sup>14</sup> The Croatian media, accordingly, covered the event much more pompously than was the case in Serbia. Headlines such as "Boban and the BBB saved Maksimir from Arkan and Delije" (Jutarnji list, May 13 2010), "The Day When the Homeland War Begin" (Index.hr, May 13 2008), "Boban was at gunpoint" (Jutarnji list May 13 2009), "Anniversary: Boban and Dynamo 21 ago made history" (24 hours, May 13 2011), are illustrative enough to convey the basis of the Croatian media narratives about the Maksimir incidents. Evidently, similar to that of Serbian, the conception of this football game as introduction to the war is still dominant in public discourse.

The basic overview of the Croatian presentation of May 13 1990 anniversary is mostly monolithic. Red Star fans are designated as major initiators of the conflict: "The clashes started when Serbian hooligans under the leadership of war criminal Željko Ražnatović Arkan started vandalizing the south stands, attacking spectators afterwards. Police did not react, so the BBB pulled down the fence and surged into the pitch, where chaos began. (Croatian TV, May 13 2011). Similar reports are found in other media. Jutarnji List publishes the following view: "While the majority of Croats share the conviction that the physical break up of the artificially created state began at Maksimir, certain public opinion creators considered it "a regular hooligan match" in which fight started between the RS and Dynamo fans and police. But the truth is completely different, everybody who was at the stadium testifies to the fact that that RS fans came to Zagreb incited by the parole: "We will destroy Zagreb". And everybody saw that Delije's conductor was Željko Ražnatović Arkan, a man under whose command RS legions marched to Zagreb and afterwards to Croatia." (Jutarnji list, May 13 2010). The daily 24 sata assumes a similar tone: "It was clear from the first second that the match will not be played. Delije had only one purpose in Zagreb – to destroy everything Croatian" (24 sata, May 10 2010), while the daily Sportske novosti asserts that this day was a "historical "no" to swallowing pride and to Serbian hegemony" (Sportske novosti, May 13 2009). Evidently, the never ended match between Dynamo and Red Star in Croatian public discourse represents an event of much greater significance than is the case in that of Serbian. The fans confrontation obviously possesses all the elements and functions of the founding myth. Firstly, there is the "Struggle", the conflict between the embittered-by-injustice Dynamo supporters, and the anti-Croat police which acts against them and tolerates the Red Star "barbarians"; then, there is the "Sacrifice" embodied in the fight between weaponless youths and the alienated state force; and, finally, the "Victory", a symbolic victory contextualised in the "historical 'no' to Serbian hegemony" which was embodied in the confrontation with the police which personified this hegemony and finally achieved in the realization of the project of Croatian independence and the subsequent victory in the war. (see Đerić 2008a, 97). Of course, there is the "Enemy" embodied in police as well as in Serbian hooligans, "Red Star legions", or "the elite cetnik squads" (Jutarnji list, May 13 2010) under

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<sup>14</sup> The irony was that the commemoration was boycotted by the major actors of the Maksimir event, the BBB, who were protesting against the excessive use of force by the police in disarrays that happened only two weeks prior to the event during a Dynamo – Hajduk derby. The supporters laid wreaths on the tomb, but did not join the official celebration.

Arkan's leadership. In order to have a complete list of the constitutive myth elements, there has to be the "Hero" personified in Zvonimir Boban who made history by hitting the police officer in the chest after trying to rescue a supporter from the police. The 24 Hours describes the role of the future captain of Croatian national team "On this day 1990 the Yugoslav league match was to be played between Dynamo and Red Star. However, supporters and police were major actors. The footballers stood aside all except one...Photographs of Zvonimir Boban, Dinamo and Croatia that day were seen around the world..." (24 sata, May 13 2011), while the Sportske novosti announces that "cameras around the world captured Zvonimir Boban's blow delivered to a police officer, but more importantly to the regime. (Sportske novosti, May 13 2009). The footballer himself gladly remembers that day: "I remember that day with pride. Our reaction was a human reaction to the injustice that had lasted too long (...) It was a deliberate provocation that we fell prey to. But it was good that we reacted, and that we didn't even consider not reacting. We showed firm attitude. Thank God nothing more dangerous happened and thank God for the creation of Croatian state. (Sportske novosti, May 13 2009) In a much more poetic tone Boban explains: "I was a kid who dreamed something. And who couldn't bear injustice. And that day the injustice was more apparent than ever. That day while we were beaten by comrades police officers... I am proud of that day and all of us who were part of that story (Index.hr, May 13 2009). Through the story of the footballer and his "high kick" the whole mythic narrative was told. Confronting the hated regime, the big risk he took by exposing himself in such a way that could have produced serious consequences for his future career, and the rescue of an "ordinary" supporter earned Boban the role of the mythic hero who made sacrifice for a humiliated nation. It is interesting to note how Boban's career advanced in the following period. He was penalised for the incident by the Football Association of Yugoslavia and got a nine-month suspension, which is why he did not play in the World Cup in Italy the same year. However, his penalty was reduced to four months, and, contrary to expectations, he continued playing for the national team of the SFRY, even after the so-called "Bloody Easter", i.e. the beginning of the armed conflict in a place called Plitvice in Croatia. Moreover, on the day of the "historic" match between Croatian and American national teams<sup>15</sup> Boban played for the youth team of Yugoslavia against the Russian team.

Boban's<sup>16</sup> role was also the motive for some Croatian media to deconstruct the myth of "the Maksimir war". "The supporters' riot in which the majority of the opposing teams' fans did not clash head-on, nor were there any human casualties cannot be compared to Plitvice "Bloody Easter", the death of Josip Josipović in April 1990, especially not to the massacre of 12 police officers in a cetnik stronghold Borovo Selo in May the same year, a year after the Maksimir disorders. These events have the tragic right to be marked the beginning of the war", announces an

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<sup>15</sup> This match was played in September 1990 and counts as the first match of the independent Croatia's team, although the official separation happened some months later, in June 1991.

<sup>16</sup> Stripping Boban off the hero medal could be motivated by his reluctance to appear in Croatian media and his refusal to participate in the anniversary of the Maksimir event.

article published by Index.hr on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Maksimir event under the title "Why we need the story that the war began on May 13 1990". The article continues: "Do you know that Boban and Šuker scored goals for Yugoslavia two weeks after the war actually started? (...) Yes, the same Boban, who, in the "official" interpretation of history, one year before "discharged the first bullet" when he kicked a police officer." (Index.hr, May 13 2010). Some media, though less explicitly, join the reevaluation of the importance of the Maksimir riots in the context of the imminent war, mostly bringing into relief the fact that the actual armed conflict started a year later. The deconstruction of the Boban-the-hero myth on the part of Croatian public is undoubtedly motivated by the passing of 20 years since the Maksimir event. The importance of this narrative is gradually decreasing in the period when Croatian independence was long ago recognized, the situation in the region has been relatively stable and the country will officially become a member of the EU. However, it is interesting to consider some other details of the above mentioned article. "The parade of the bearded creatures on the athletic track below the Maksimir stands, their orgies in the south stands and Cyrillic banners Čačak, Tuzlaci and Delije flaunt now as they did 20 years past, so a justification for tolerating them then should be found, and that is "the beginning of the war" which happened on the very day we experienced a blackout from those Serbs and police (that opposed only the BBB and tolerated Delije), so we declared war on everybody: the General Staff and Serbian Autonomous Region Krajina, Terazije square and Yugoslav football. But, we didn't, not that day" says the article. On the other hand, if the Maksimir myth is indeed deconstructed, some of its constituent elements, primarily the "Enemy", remain, and are conveyed in the manner identical to the nationalist discourse and its perception of the "antagonistic other" (in this case Serbs) which was in power in the '90s during the war. Clearly, it is the application of a classic strategy of establishing internal Balkan hierarchies (Živković 2001), through invoking "the bearded creatures" as a typical stereotype whereby East Balkan is orientalized by the "Central European" Croatia (Jansen 2001, 45–46). A quote from the daily Jutarnji List reveals the same strategy of representation: "Ljubomir Bracanović (*an official delegate at Red Star-Dynamo match, author's note*) from Podgorica was educated in Zagreb. He studied economy in Zagreb but says – One used to graduate from two colleges in Zagreb simultaneously, one taught you etiquette and refined manners, the other your future profession. (Jutarnji List, May 13 2010). This is a clear reference to the "cultural superiority" of Croatia over the "backward south and east of Yugoslavia, (Jansen 2001, 44–47, Živković 2001, 83–87) which functions as a mechanism of exclusion in the process of the forming of national identity. The orientalizing narrative, as Jansen explains, was at the core of the Croatian nationalist discourse on identity". (Jansen 2001, 42). The reference is self-explanatory, "It is the Balkans as we know it! It is the omen of political scheming and fraudulent behavior of the others, backwardness and primitiveness of those (we know who)." (Rihtman-Auguštin 1997:29). Therefore it is not difficult to conclude that even when the myth is deconstructed, the media narrative in Croatia functions within a familiar nationalist discourse, which actually reproduces similar strategies of representing "us" and "them", as was the case during the '90.

## We All Have McDonald's

The analysis of the media coverage of the never ended match between Dynamo and Red Star 20 years after the event shows that the public discourses in Serbia and Croatia haven't changed too much in the period when the two countries are ever more relaxed. The media in Serbia devoted little attention to the event, mostly insisting on the "innocence" of the Serbian side, that is, on the fact that the whole event had previously been orchestrated so that Croatian authorities would score political goals that would lead to independence. What could be inferred is that Serbian public is predominantly silent on the matter. Any liability of Red Star fans for the Maksimir event was never mentioned, nor was, say, the role of Željko Ražnatović Arkan questioned, despite his being a figure so frequently mentioned by the Croatian media. In fact, the loudest message conveyed by Serbian media outlets is this silence. This conclusion is coherent with Đerić's account of the military operation "Storm": This period has been completely erased from the public perception - became empty, nonexistent time, without any reflection". (Đerić 2008a, 70). In other words, this approach has shaped Serbian public discourse when referred to the wars in the '90s- the absence of any consensus and strategy for dealing with the responsibility for the participation in the wars in former Yugoslavia. Therefore, as Kuljić explains, "the reason behind this is a striking absence of the sense of generation unity (such as the unity provided by the National Liberation War or the Homeland War). All in all, what is missing is an indisputable authority of the generally accepted liberating discontinuity, i.e. the consensus on the zero hour as the sensory core of a comprehensive memorial community:" (Kuljić 2008, 80)

Unlike Serbia, in Croatia the Maksimir incident function as the founding myth. Twenty years later when independence has been achieved and further strengthened by winning the Homeland War, the memory of this event is powerful and unquestionable. Like a mirror image, Croatian media blame "the other side" for the Maksimir incident, withholding the possibility of the event's orchestration and the real political consequences that ensued. Fitting into the broader mythic image of the Homeland War, the Maksimir incident "functions as a symbol of the new beginning (the rebirth of the nation)" (Đerić 2008b, 53) "serving as the backbone of the realistic as well as imputed liberation experience and achievement" (Kuljić 2008, 79), which includes a political generation created in memory of of the almost absolutely acceptable beginning of a new era – the state's independence. (95). The uncomfortable memory and the strategy of withholding the dark side of the struggle for independence – the civilian casualties and large number of Serbian refugees in the wake of the military operation "Storm" - are circumvented by retaining the nationalist discourse whereby the enemy is excluded by various strategies – transferring responsibility for the war and the common orientaling narratives.

Therefore, the possible conclusion is that the Maksimir metaphor is still functional in public narratives in Serbia and Croatia serving as a framework for understanding the broader political situation in the two countries and indicating that the nationalist discourses still seek their "significant other" in the immediate surrounding. Legitimization of oneself through the "Enemy" establishes an ideology

that obscures potential debate outside the premises which are set in advance (see Verdery 1991, 11). In conclusion, I will quote Croatian author Boris Dežulović: "Red Star and Dynamo which have dubbed themselves symbols of the Serbian and Croatin cause respectively, in the end became those symbols: Serbia was defeated 1:3, losing the match, championship and war; Croatia is the champion, albeit not the winner<sup>17</sup>, Boban is a rich bonvivan, Arkan a dead dandy, all in all, nobody cares any more. There is nobody at Marakana and Maksimir to celebrate or mourn, the stadiums are ghostly concrete ruins much alike long ago dilapidated socialist factories, the teams wander mindlessly in the fifth European league, while the tired and bludgeoned supporters have given up on football, clubs, states, and, finally, themselves. Happy National Safety Day, football lovers", (Dežulović 2010).

Translated by Andrijana Aničić

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<sup>17</sup> The author refers to the fact that Red Star and Dynamo both played league games with empty stands; Red Star due to the suspension of stadium after shooting in the stands, Dynamo because of the fans' boycott. The Belgrade club lost to a local club 3:1, the Zagreb club's match ended in a draw against Karlovac.

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**Иван Ђорђевић**

## **Двадесет година после: рат (ни)је почео на Максимиру**

### **Антрополошка анализа медијских наратива о једној никада одиграној фудбалској утакмици\***

Циљ овога рада јесте анализа медијских наратива везаних за никада одиграну фудбалску утакмицу између Динама из Загреба и Црвене Звезде из Београда, заказану за 13. мај 1990. године. Текст се фокусира на медијске записе двадесет година након овог догађаја, у контексту чињенице да је, временом, ова утакмица прибавила практично митски статус, симболички означавајући почетак рата у бившој

Југославији. Предмет испитивања били су медији из Србије и Хрватске, са циљем да се укаже на стратегије представљања овог догађаја у периоду нормализације односа у региону. Анализа указује на то да се приступ унутар јавног дискурса није значајно променио. Медији у Србији овом догађају нису посветили превише пажње, а уколико су то и чинили, углавном је инсистирано на "невиности" српске стране, односно – на чињеници да је читав догађај унапред испланиран како би нова хрватска власт постигла политичке циљеве који су водили остваривању независности. Може се закључити да се у српском јавном простору о овом догађају заправо много више ћути но што се о њему говори. Управо овакав приступ присутан је у јавном дискурсу Србије када се говори о ратовима из деведесетих година — ради се о недостатку било каквог консензуса и стратегије везане за суочавање са одговорношћу за учешће у ратовима на простору бивше Југославије. У Хрватској, за разлику од Србије, максимирска догађања функционишу као оснивачки мит. Двадесет година касније, када је независност успостављена и додатно учвршћена победом у "Домовинском рату", сећање на овај догађај снажно је и неупитно. Уклапајући се у ширу митску слику рата, максимирски догађаји представљају слику новог почетка, а nelaгодна се сећања, попут бројних цивилних жртава и избеглих Срба, на изванредан начин заобилазе задржавањем националистичког дискурса, у оквиру кога се "непријатељ" искључује помоћу различитих стратегија. Може се закључити да метафора Максимира и даље функционише

*Кључне речи:*

фудбал, Максимиру,  
медији,  
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национална  
митологија

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у јавним наративима у Србији и Хрватској, служећи и данас као оквир за разумевање ширих политичких прилика у ове две земље и указујући на то да националистички дискурси и даље траже свог "значајног другог" у најближем комшилуку/сусједству. Легитимишући се кроз "непријатеља", успоставља се идеологија која заправо замагљује било какву потенцијалну дебату ван премиса које су унапред и одавно задате.