

*”We only sang songs for Serbia – then they  
started provoking us”*

Nationalism, Identity and Violent Discourses among Football  
Supporters in Post-War Serbia



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

Norah Lång

# Abstract

This thesis employs a theoretical framework of everyday nationalism, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and violent discourse theory to examine nationalism and identity-based violence among Serbian post-war football supporters. The Serbian supporter scene is known internationally because of the ideological standpoints brought forward in the stands, motivating a multimodal discourse analysis of these multifaceted messages.

The analysis reveals an ecosystem where nationalistic practices of Serbian supporters mobilize a shared national identity, nurturing violent discourses based on cultural constructions of reality and dynamics of in and out-group differentiation, othering and dehumanization. The analysis shows that more often than not, these violent discourses target other ethnonational groups, religious communities and the Kosovo independence, but also 'disloyal' Serbs. This process has an impact on how everyday nationalism is performed among supporters as these practices lie close to matters of identity and cultural violence, consequently existing in the same political and ideological cycle. Moreover, some discursive themes travel across supporter practices – especially 'war legacies' and anti-Albania sentiments.

As a result, this study proposes a theoretical and methodological framework which can be used in research on nationalist supporter scenes in post-war contexts, and thereby widens the scope of everyday nationalism.

*Keywords:* football supporters, everyday nationalism, violent discourses, social identity, post-war

*Word count:* 9959

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*Thank you to Amar and all the others I have met along the way.*

# 1. Introduction

*Once the concept of 'otherness' takes root, the unimaginable becomes possible. Not in some mythological country but to ordinary urban citizens, as I discovered all too painfully.*

– Slavenka Drakulić (1993:3)

When talking about Serbian football supporters, associations to ultranationalism and violence arise. Incidents during national and international games have marked the Serbian supporter scene as troublesome; hate speech directed at ethnic and religious groups constitute stadium culture across Serbia, and visuals of war-criminals such as Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić are a common element in the stands (Djordjević & Pekić 2018:355-356).

Nationalism in the Serbian supporter scene is represented in both media and academia. However, there are few reports depicting the ways Serbian supporters practice and embody everyday nationalism, creating the finer ideological grains from below (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008:553). Furthermore, there is a gap in previous research on how social identity and violent discourses interact with nationalism among post-war Serbian supporters.

This thesis dives into these supporter activities and, through a multimodal discourse analysis, engages with the violent and identity-based nationalism (re)produced by supporters (Kress 2012). The aim is to develop the scope of everyday nationalism by combining it with Social Identity Theory (SIT) and violent discourse theory (Jabri 1996), offering empirical evidence from the supporter scene and an analysis where the different theories interact. Such a theoretical and methodological approach is useful in the case of Serbian supporters as nationalism, identity and violence are intertwined in their multimodal choreographies. A multimodal discourse analysis, then, shines light on the myriad of ways violent nationalism is present in supporter culture: in tattoos, clothing, chants, quotes, celebrations and more.

Research on everyday nationalism among post-war supporters is scarce. This motivates an examination of the discursive nuances whilst simultaneously taking into account the power of both visible and subtle nationalistic tendencies. In addition, this thesis visually presents the relationship between everyday nationalism, social identity and violent discourses, linked to the different discursive supporter practices. Taking all of this into account, it fills a research gap as it provides a relevant academic take on a highly political phenomenon.

The Serbian supporter scene is unique: it is well-known and depicted in both national and international media. But it also says something vital about the rest of the Balkans – namely that football, nationalism and violence are sometimes inseparable at games across the region (Đorđević & Scaturro 2022). The

theoretical and methodological take of this thesis could also be helpful when analyzing other supporter scenes where an active conflict or post-conflict context is present, and where (violent) nationalism linked to identity matters is prevalent.

Some Serbian supporters might be mobilizing in the stands only for the team or the nation – while some might be there to support a violent ideological project specifically. In some cases, surely all three motives are intertwined. This thesis will approach those dynamics by investigating how nationalism is built from below through identity-based and violent discursive interaction in and between the stands. It matters not least because games are not simply a question of team versus team, but rather a competition between nations, peoples and ideologies, creating an aversion towards the 'other' and manifesting in violent responses (Warner 2013).

## 1.1 Purpose and research question

The purpose of this thesis is to examine nationalism among football supporters in post-war Serbia and its relationship to identity and violent discourses. It aims to widen the research possibilities of everyday nationalism by combining it with Social Identity Theory (SIT) and violent discourse theory, offering a new empirical base where these can work interactively.

The theoretical framework is applied with a multimodal discourse analysis and two sub-methods: Video Data Analysis (VDA) and visual analysis. This structure is crucial as the nationalistic practices differ and require different research approaches.

In order to realize the purpose of the thesis, the following research question will be employed: ***In what ways do football supporters in post-war Serbia practice nationalism and (re)produce violent discourses through a shared social identity?***

The rest of the thesis will be constructed as follows. First, a historical background is presented. Second, the theoretical framework will be explained in depth, as well as previous research. Following this, the methodology is established accompanied by relevant definitions and operationalizations, the chosen material and limitations of the thesis. Next, the main analysis will take place, and finally, a discussion and conclusion sums up the results.

## 2. Background

Football had a significant symbolic role in the disintegration of Yugoslavia, as a type of catalyst in the ideological shift from 'brotherhood and unity' to separatism and ethnic nationalism (Đorđević 2019:154). In the late 80s, Yugoslavia faced a political and economic crisis and interethnic tensions among the republics and peoples deepened it (Djordjević & Pekić 2018:357). Football supporters across the federation embraced nationalism and introduced messages of ethnic intolerance into the public space. The culmination of this process took place on 13 May 1990 at Maksimir stadium in Zagreb during a game between Dinamo Zagreb and Red Star Belgrade. A clash broke out and police got involved, provoking supporters from both countries to turn to violence and confront the police. Though armed conflict would begin a year later, the riots at Maksimir are perceived as the day the war begun and points to the final dissolution of Yugoslavia, peaking during the 90s (Đorđević 2019:154). At this point in time, power was being assumed by nationalist political groups in both Serbia and Croatia led by presidents Slobodan Milošević and Franjo Tuđman respectively, and politically heterogeneous supporter groups supported these nationalist platforms (Djordjević & Pekić 2018:357). From the Maksimir riots and onward, Serbian football became permanently influenced by nationalist ideology and supporters assumed the role of political actors (Đorđević 2019:154).

Soon after the Maksimir riots and the outbreak of war, many Serbian supporters joined the armed forces of Serbia. Red Star Belgrade supporters mostly joined the Serb Volunteer Guard under command of the paramilitary leader Željko Ražnatović Arkan, later indicted for severe war crimes. The interconnection between supporter groups and nationalist political elites became strong, parallel to the continuous legitimization of the nationalist agenda carried out by the same groups (Djordjević & Pekić 2018:357-358).

Supporters backed the toppling of the Milošević regime in 2000 and continued to be predominantly right-wing in their choreographies, with violent chants about Kosovo, Albania and Croatia. Since then, the political agenda has remained consistently nationalist and far right – despite the proclaimed liberalization following the regime change. The institutional and economic crisis realized by upholding the European Union as a desirable model, the difficult socioeconomic situation in Serbia as a result of the so-called 'transition', as well as the weak presence of left-oriented movements, further entrenched the right-wing political orientation of contemporary supporters (Djordjević & Pekić 2018:358).

## 3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework consists of everyday nationalism, Social Identity Theory (SIT) and violent discourse theory. These will be operationalized by laying the foundation for the discourse coding system presented in the methodology. More extensive operationalization strategies will be presented in the sub-sections below.

### 3.1 Everyday nationalism

Everyday nationalism considers the relevance of everyday experiences of nationalism, focusing on human agency and ordinary people as co-constituents, participants and consumers of national symbols, rituals and identities (Knott 2015:1).

Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) distinguish four forums for everyday nationalism: *talking the nation*, *choosing the nation*, *performing the nation* and *consuming the nation*. This thesis will deal with *talking* and *performing* the nation. *Talking the nation* refers to the conversation-based discursive construction of the nation and the ways it is constituted and legitimized in response to elites and the contingencies of everyday life. This is operationalized by looking for nationalistic quotes in the data. *Performing the nation* is defined as constructions of nationhood in the ways people act and produce national sensibilities through the ritual enactment of symbols – in this thesis presented as chants, banners and other supporter performances in the name of the nation (ibid:537-538). For national bonds to be tied, the *collective performance* is needed – creating unity and a national cohesion, which is crucial for national solidarity to be spurred (ibid:545-546). This will be operationalized alongside the principle of *performing the nation*.

Collective attachments are obvious in contemporary sports, capturing the national imagination and passion of the masses. Fans support their teams through national symbolism and in these moments, they become the physical embodiment of the nation (ibid:547) – in this thesis operationalized as instances where nationalistic outfits, garments, tattoos, gestures and other bodily practices are present. This principle of *embodied nationalism* is accompanied by Miltz's and Schurr's (2016:54) idea of the nation being represented and embodied in various ways, brought forward through encounters between different bodies and objects through embodying, sharing, enjoying or disliking what feels national.

Skey's (2011) five dimensions of everyday nationalism – *the spatial*, *the temporal*, *the cultural*, *the political* and what is here called *the identity-based* –



are also relevant. In this thesis, *spatial, temporal and political* dimensions will be employed. The *spatial dimension* highlights the concept of dividing territory, foundational in nationalist imagination. This will be operationalized by examining territorial statements in supporter discourses. In the *temporal dimension*, the past is defined in national terms and the present embodied through mass 'national' rituals. This thesis will focus on timely aspects of supporter nationalism in operationalizing this dimension. Moving on to the *political dimension*, the importance of political actors and their (violent) struggle to privilege their own definition of the state and why it matters is underlined. This will be operationalized by searching for instances where the political mobilization around a fixed idea of the Serbian state is present (ibid:11-12).

Critics of everyday nationalism focus on how the idea of nationalism among 'ordinary people' is overly homogenous and rejects status and class aspects of different groups. They also underline the potentiality of ahistorical studies, ie. researchers restricting themselves to contemporary aspects of nationalism, becoming dependent on context-sensitive research which may limit the theoretical utility. Another point of criticism is the focus on human agency, potentially blurring the influence of pre-existing structures, institutions and elites (Smith 2010, Goode & Stroup 2015, Malešević 2013). Though acknowledging these critiques, everyday nationalism is still relevant for this thesis, as it provides a background to the present-day context and connects discourses to both historical and contemporary events and processes. The thesis further benefits from a context-sensitive approach as it deals with a multitude of nationalistic expressions linked to the supporter scene, thus taking a stand for human agency.

### 3.2 Social Identity Theory (SIT) and violent discourse

Social Identity Theory (SIT), as defined by Jabri (1996), examines how mobilization for conflict is carried out through homogenous and discursive identification with the group, community or state – shadowing the multidimensionality of an individual's identity and creating ethnonational differences. Social identity is clarified through comparison with other individuals and groups, making up the basis of inter-group discrimination and violence. SIT shines light on practices where enhancement of traits of the own group is carried out, consequently discriminating or creating negative images of other groups (ibid:120-125).

In some cases, these proposed inter-group differences are ideologically legitimized. They become ritualized and habitual practices, eventually leading to dehumanizing attitudes towards the 'enemy' and motivating violence or discrimination. Discursive continuities generate and reproduce differentiation processes, establishing violence as a social continuity. Moreover, by conceptualizing conflict as constructed discourse, agency and structure are not separate; individuals are agents who draw upon their 'experience' or 'knowledge' in their social interactions and interpretations. Through memories, myths,

ideologies, symbols and geographic locations, individuals create practical and meaningful identity-based interactions (Jabri 1996:126-129). As the nation is the most commonplace of identities where discursive practices generate legitimation and exclusion, it can be described as a location of a remembered past, of symbolic reification, of relieving traditions and territorial claims, and of mobilization in time of conflict (ibid:134).

This relates to discourses of exclusion in conceptualizing conflict as constructed discourse (Jabri 1996:130-131). These dynamics legitimize violence and could be described as 'othering'. McManus (2017) argues that othering is a crucial component in defining attitudes of in-group 'self-righteousness' over the lesser and threatening Other, marking those thought to be different from the self. 'Cultural constructions of reality' are shaped by processes of othering, located in the roots of a conflict. If the conflict becomes embedded and long term, the 'cultural constructions of reality' come to play a crucial role in sustaining othering across generations (ibid:412-414).

In this thesis, SIT and violent discourse theory are operationalized by examining dominant identities and how they are constructed and reinforced through discourse. The thesis will look for evidence of in-group enhancement and out-group discrimination, along with cases of othering and dehumanization of Others. It will assess how supporter practices legitimize discriminatory behaviors and contribute to violence. Moreover, an investigation of how historical events and myths shape identities and violent discourses will be carried out.

A critical view of SIT and violent discourse theory is needed. In this theoretical mash-up, we are not invited 'behind the curtains' of the actors who practice these identity-based violent discourses. Sociological questions of *why* football supporters are practicing discursive violence and *why* the construction of a shared social identity is carried out are left to be interpreted by me as a researcher. However, in the context of this thesis, guiding principles on how to approach tendencies such as othering, fixed in discursive material, are fruitful – not least because the Serbian supporter scene is operating in a post-war context, influencing and nurturing new generations of supporters.

## 3.3 Previous research

### 3.3.1 Nationalism in the everyday sphere

Billig (1995) has guided the field of nationalism in the everyday sphere and approached how nationalism is represented outside of extreme expressions, describing these dynamics as 'banal nationalism'. The construction and remembrance of national identity is influenced by how the homeland is 'flagged' on television, in newspapers, national anthems, language etc., which creates a sense of collective belonging and the nation as community (ibid).

Literature on everyday nationalism has built upon Billig's (1995) arguments, but criticized how Billig and others alike overlook human agency (Knott 2015:2).

Skey (2011) argues that we need better theories on how different groups bond with the nation through identification with nationhood. The idea that nations are entities that can be categorized in accordance with general rules is rejected, instead underlining the everyday discursive processes which create a system of national and cultural inclusion and exclusion. A central argument is that national frameworks, (re)produced through continuities of language, habit, symbols and materiality, are crucial elements in sustaining a stable sense of self.

Closely related is research on 'affective nationalism'. The point of analysis is how the nation takes shape through bodily and emotional encounters. Militz and Schurr (2016) present a take on this through field work in Azerbaijan carried out during a publicly staged ceremony of the collective remembrance of martyrs and the celebration of a national holiday within a family context. Closs Stephens (2016) grounds the analysis in the event of the London 2012 Olympic Games, and deals with how we can understand nationalism as being reproduced 'softly and happily' through affective and emotional atmospheres. The article addresses how national feelings are hard to track down to one single source. They appear at multiple sites as part of a diffuse atmosphere, restricting critical questions about how nationalism takes hold of populations. Antonsich and Skey (2017) seek to specify this approach through three key issues: power, agency and method. The article highlights the need to analyze uneven power relations and their effects on affective experiences. Emphasis is placed on human agency in the context of bodies responding to nationally coded affective situations. The article also calls for locating affective nationalism within people's meaning-making practices and examining affective practices alongside representational and symbolic aspects.

Mougoué (2019) understands the associated concept of 'embodied nationalism' as a mash-up of banal nationalism and affective nationalism. Benign, everyday or unnoticed representations of the nation reflect ideologies and facilitate the process by which nations are reproduced (Billig 1995:5-6). The nation is represented and embodied in various ways, brought forward through encounters between different bodies and objects through embodying, sharing, enjoying or disliking what feels national (Militz & Schurr 2016:54).

### 3.3.2 Football and politics in (former) Yugoslavia

Extensive research has been carried out on the links between Serbian supporters, nationalism, far-right politics and the authoritarian regimes. Đorđević (2019) provides a historical overview, going back to the post-WWII era and acknowledging the role of sports in communist and socialist settings in Yugoslavia until the late 80s – similarly diving into how football supporters took on the role of nationalist actors in the critical political landscape of the 90s. It also approaches how post-war supporters still embrace nationalist politics in the light of the EU progression and neo-liberal politics. Bakić (2024) approaches the legacy in a similar manner, starting from 1990 and moving forward to 2022. Three successive periods of the Serbian far right are connected to the football scene, namely the Milošević authoritarian regime in the 1990s, the oligarchic regime

2001–2012, and the Vučić authoritarian regime from 2012. As they are inseparable from the development of the far-right Serbian Radical Party (SRS) and its offspring Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), election results for the SRS accompany the arguments.

A break from these historical case studies is da Silvas (2019) article, presenting a post-structuralist theoretical approach enabling a different comprehension of war, national identity and football in the context of Yugoslavia. It examines the construction and reconstruction of national identities after the dissolution of Yugoslavia through symbolic representations and practices, such as football. The article highlights how football is intertwined with nationalist movements and shapes national identities and collective consciousness – pushing the legacy of war further in time.

In dealing with the symbiotic relationship between football and politics in Yugoslavia, Develi (2022) zooms in on the two major Serbian clubs from Belgrade, FK Partizan and Red Star, and the rivalry between them known as the 'eternal derby' – a symbolic representation of the conflict between ideas of nationalism and socialism. Presenting the history of the 'eternal derby', Develi argues that nationalism is unconsciously reproduced through habits of daily life, transforming teams into armies and pitches into battlefields.

A more regional take is produced by Đorđević and Scaturros (2022). Their report maps out the most relevant hooligan groups in the Western Balkans, diving into the organizational structures and communication strategies of the groups, outlining reasons why one may join an ultras group, participant behavior and more. The report also compares the hooligan scenes and their respective levels of violent, political and criminal connections.

Trost's and Kovacevic's (2014) paper on hooliganism and nationalism links the issues to reactions and offenses against the pride movement in Serbia. This phenomenon can be related to the pursuit of a 'true' Serbian identity, moral and nation, which is seemingly important for supporters. The paper includes a discourse analysis of 2.700 digital comments responding to the events surrounding the 2010 pride parade to note themes in the public view of hooliganism.

### 3.3.3 Academic contribution

The previous sections have presented an excerpt of existing research on nationalistic practices in the everyday sphere and the intertwined nature of football and politics in Yugoslavia with its succeeding independent states.

What is lacking is research exploring how everyday nationalism can be supported by SIT and violent discourse theory in studies on nationalist supporter culture in a post-war context. Although everyday nationalism has been dealt with in the context of football stadiums and surrounding landscapes, it has not been applied to the political context in Serbia or the Balkans, nor been used as a tool to investigate the legitimation of violence against other groups through collective

supporter ideology and identity. Neither has the supporter scene in Serbia been examined through a discourse analysis where several modes are involved.

These facts motivate a thesis like this one. Through a multimodal discourse analysis, several types of nationalistic expressions appear where identity come into play and violent messages are present. This enables an investigation of how these themes – be they expressed through tattoos, banners or chants – are interconnected. It is a relevant research approach as the Serbian supporter scene is still to its majority nationalist and right-wing to this day – built on a legacy of ethnonational differences stemming from the dissolution of Yugoslavia (Djordjević & Pekić 2018, Đorđević 2019).

As Gorvett (2022) argues: "A strong national identity is essential for any country's survival – and the easiest route to acquiring one is to unite behind a common enemy". If people feel proud of being part of this entity, patriotism is layered on top. The next step is nationalism, shaping a person's ideas of the boundaries between their home territory and the rest, leading them to support it as a political entity. A passionate national may have a strong belief in the survival of the nation and might even help furthering its interests through extremer measures (ibid). These ideas are present in the Serbian supporter scene, highlighting the need for research on how supporters practice ideology in the stands and legitimize violence against the 'Other', who is perceived as a threat to the survival of the home nation.

## 4. Methodology

Based on the theoretical framework, this thesis employs a multimodal discourse analysis with Video Data Analysis (VDA) and visual analysis to find expressions of everyday nationalism, social identity and violent discourses. This section will go deeper into the methods as analytical tools. It provides definitions of relevant concepts and presents the discourse coding system. Furthermore, it exhibits an overview of the analyzed material and limitations of the thesis.

### 4.1 Multimodal discourse analysis

To analyze the different nationalistic and violent expressions of football supporters in post-war Serbia, a multimodal discourse analysis will be used. The multifaceted character of nationalist supporter culture in Serbia motivates this as it results in a rich discursive reading and finds ways to connect different types of political messages.

A discourse analysis is interpretative and explores how discourses legitimize and give meaning to social practices – consisting of ideas, concepts and categories. It assumes that people act on the basis of beliefs, values and ideologies, which gives meaning to their actions. In this way, the aim is to uncover how discursive practices construct meanings through the production, dissemination and consumption of various forms of texts. It is, however, essential to understand the meaning of these discourses in relation to a broader context, ie. the relationship to power, authority, sources, messages, channels, intended audiences, other texts and events (Halperin & Heath 2019:364-366).

A multimodal discourse analysis uses the vagueness of the term 'discourse' to establish a foundation where the textual threads are many and materially diverse. Gestures, speech, images, writing, music and other three-dimensional entities create a textual or semiotic whole. In a multimodal approach, all modes are equal in their capacity to contribute to meaning; they are jointly treated as one connected cultural resource for representation and meaning-making by members of a social group at a particular point in time (Kress 2012:35-38).

### 4.1.1 Video Data Analysis (VDA)

Through Video Data Analysis (VDA), a researcher can explore videos relevant for the study of peace and conflict found online and beyond, and apply it to analyze micro-dynamics of phenomena such as violence and conflict. While losing the ethnographer's benefit of 'being there', videos allow researchers to replay events and thus capture subtle dynamics of timing, interaction and affect (Bramsen & Austin 2022:457).

VDA usually begins with an open-source collection of videos through search engines, video platforms and social media. These are coded with different strategies – involving body postures, visible interactions, material artifacts, environments or language. VDA benefits from being coupled with other methods, such as discourse analysis, as triangulation can help to ensure the 'complete' or at least 'more complete' capture of an event or phenomenon, providing a more comprehensive, overall picture of the given circumstance (Bramsen & Austin 2022:458-459).

The videos presented in this thesis are analyzed by looking at what supporters are wearing, saying, performing and doing. Emotions and affections are not necessarily analyzed, as a focus is rather put on political messages – obvious and subtle.

Complementary to the principles of VDA, a method for visual analysis will be used, applicable to both moving and still images. This will be dealt with below.

### 4.1.2 Visual Analysis

Images can reflect ideologies of political actors, helping us understand how actors use visuals for their messaging and ideological and organizational strategies (Loken 2021:373&379). This is relevant for visual elements of the Serbian supporter scene, thus motivating a method for visual analysis to be included.

Sourcing images for research is an important task. Verifying producers and production dates is significant for understanding context, content and intention (Loken 2021:375-376). For this thesis, the visual material is gathered from big media actors and produced in open, public settings, verifying their legitimacy.

As this thesis deals with the discursive realm of the Serbian supporter scene, an interpretative approach to the visual material is used. This enables an assessment of what images can mean and why actors mobilize certain visuals in specific contexts. As an image cannot be analyzed definitely, the researcher must triangulate contextual information in order to explicate intention and meaning (Loken 2021:376-377). Visual discourses are constructed from a series of related visual statements on a particular topic and make up a language for speaking about it – shaping the way it is understood and seeking to understand what images claim is the 'truth' (Ong 2020:40).

A few guiding generalizations for approaching the visual material that supporters create and put forward are added. Being patterns of representation available for people, images encode experience visually. Being patterns of

interaction available for people, images allow people to do things to and for each other through visual communication, as well as create certain relations between the authors and viewers of visual texts. Being internally coherent with each other and with the context in which they are produced, images form texts. Being material visual signs, images presuppose the usage of different tools and materials which in their turn contribute to meaning-making (Savich 2012:171-172).

Finally, Burke's (1960, in Savich 2020:172-173) method of 'dramatism' can be applied to better understand the semantic potential of images and symbols in discourse analysis. 'Dramatism' applies to images of Serbian supporters *in action*, as the previous paragraphs have revolved around the political visuals they themselves *use*. The five central elements are: *scene* (the place where action takes place – its physical location, situation, occasion and time), *act* (the people acting in the scene), *agency* (the tool, method or means used by persuaders to accomplish their ends), and *purpose* (the reason an agent acts in a given scene using a particular agency).

## 4.2 Definitions and operationalizations

### 4.2.1 Cultural violence

Galtung's (1990) 'cultural violence' involves aspects of culture which can be used to justify violence in direct (eg. killing) or structural (eg. exploitation) forms. Religious symbols, flags, anthems, military activity, portraits, speeches and posters can be included in this definition.

What is specific about cultural violence is its time frame. In contrast to direct violence (an event) and structural violence (a fluctuating process), cultural violence is a sort of permanence, remaining essentially the same for long periods of time due to the slow transformations of basic culture (Galtung 1990:291-294).

Religion is a domain where cultural violence can grow and legitimize direct and structural actions. Empirical evidence show patterns where a transcendental and sacred 'God' is seen as closer to some rather than others, who are perceived as evil and unchosen underdogs. These 'others' could be women, people of color, lower classes etc. – resulting in violent dynamics of various forms (Galtung 1990:296-297).

Another domain is ideology. Through nationalism, where the state takes the throne of 'God', sharp and value-loaded dichotomies are created where the value of the Self is inflating in light of defaulting, debasing or dehumanizing the value of the Other (Galtung 1990:298-299).



## 4.2.2 Nationalism – what to look for

Barrington (1997) defines nationalism in its most basic form as "the pursuit – through argument or other activity – of a set of rights for the self-defined members of the nation, including, at a minimum, territorial autonomy or sovereignty" (714). All nationalisms (roughly) define the territorial boundaries that the nation has a right to control, as well as the membership boundaries of the population that makes up the nation. This creates a 'we' who possess the right to control the homeland and a 'they' who do not share this right (ibid).

To this we can add the notion of combining territorial self-determination with the cultural idea of the nation as one's primary identity and a moral idea of justification of action to protect the rights of the nation against the other. Nationalism, then, is as a process: a creation of the unifying features of the nation, or the actions that result from the beliefs of the group. Moreover, it is fruitful to include the sentiment of greatness and unity of one's own people, and the political mobilization of people based on ethnicity (Barrington 1997:713-715).

## 4.2.3 Discourse coding

Loken's (2021) research constructs a methodology for coding different themes in public campaigns of armed groups. It codes images' content according to common visual icons across six broad content themes. This enables cross- and within-case examination of how organizations use images to articulate ideologies and appeal for public support (ibid:376-377).

Nationalistic and violent discourses found in the Serbian supporter scene will similarly be coded based on the theoretical framework and general themes found in the material. Every separate tattoo or tattoo piece has been defined as one discourse. This also goes for gestures, clothes and quotes, however not for garments such as flags and other national accessories, as they are often seen on several supporters and therefore counted as one collective discourse linked to a specific event. As for chants and banners, these have been counted as separate discourses. The category of celebrations only relates to one specific celebratory day, but every separate arrangement from that day is still counted as one discourse.

The coding system emerges in the table below.

*Figure 1: Discourse coding system based on the theoretical framework and general themes found in the material, along with their separate codes.*

Discursive theme	Discourse code
National identity/solidarity	NIS
Orthodoxy/Christian faith	OCF
(Territorial) claims in Kosovo	TCK
(Territorial) claims in Bosnia	TCB
Anti-Muslim sentiments	AM
Anti-Turk sentiments	AT
Anti-Albania sentiments	AA
'War legacies'	WL

### 4.3 Material

Using data from existing archives to carry out a discourse analysis allows the researcher to widen the scope of the work beyond what could be collected single-handed. When dealing with this kind of data, it is a good idea to use multiple sources and methods of data collection. This enables the researcher to approach a research problem from different angles, strengthening triangulation and increasing the reliability of the data and its gathering process. It yields more complete and credible data, enabling researchers to find agreement between different perspectives. A researcher might also choose to involve different theoretical perspectives to look at the same data (Halperin & Heath 2017:174-175).

The data of this thesis is multimodal and secondary, consisting of 3 videos and a total of 72 press photos, though most of these images are parts of collections and therefore dealt with in that way. An array of journalistic reports is also included. All data in the chosen sample refers to instances where a crossover between (violent) nationalism and supporter culture can be noted. The aim is to represent a diversity in the nationalistic practices of supporters by using multiple sources and data gathering methods, taking on a triangulation approach to the research and striving for strong reliability.

2004-2023 sets the time frame for the data. 2004 marks the qualifying rounds for the World Cup 2006 and the first game between Serbia and Bosnia after fighting a war only some ten years prior. It is a suitable starting point for the material as it enables a focus on specifically the post-war supporter context, but also represents the ongoing friction between civilians in the newly formed nations in light of their national teams. It also enhances the triangulation approach as it widens the scope. 2023 marks the ending point of the time frame because data from 2024 – the year this thesis is written – is scarce.

## 4.4 Limitations

It is important to ask critical questions when carrying out a thesis like this, and a great level of plausibility is required. Do I as an interpreter account for observations in relation to relevant contextual factors, or am I enhancing my potential researcher bias? Can I provide explanatory coherence within a larger theoretical frame? The validity of a discourse analysis is judged in terms of its credibility, showing how it fits together in terms of content, functions and effect, as well as its ability to provide useful insights. A discourse-analytic study should demonstrate a careful reading of the 'texts' and provide an interpretation that is clearly related to the textual evidence. It should be open and transparent, both with regards to the evidence under review and the basis of the claims made about it (Halperin & Heath 2017:373).

A limitation of this thesis is the dependence on secondary data. I as a researcher am not directly involved in the process of data collection, consequently at mercy of the procedures of the actors that have collected it. These practices are not always transparent, thus one particular issue to be aware of is bias, making it highly significant to assess the validity and reliability of the data (Halperin & Heath 2017:200-201). This has been a guiding principle in the work on this thesis, and a thorough investigation of all sources has been carried out. As I do not have the permission to reproduce any of the videos or images analyzed in this thesis, I have made clear references to them throughout and included them in the reference section in order for the reader to easily access them – further deepening the transparency and reliability.

I myself have never attended a football game in Serbia. Nonetheless, I have been to many other games in Europe, and am accustomed to supporter culture. I have an understanding of the atmosphere and can see relevant tendencies in the data. Another limitation is my lack of language skills: I do not speak Serbian or any related language, and have to rely on English sources, risking to lose key events in the data gathering process. However, as Serbian supporters are known outside of the region, relying on English sources has not been an issue. There is also extensive reporting on the topic in English by researchers and journalists based in the region. In addition, I can read Cyrillics, which is a resource that has made analyzing elements such as tattoos and banners more reliable.

I would like to provide a quick reflection on the term 'football supporter' used in this thesis. It has been difficult to distinguish supporters from ultras and ultras from hooligans in this research process, especially since I have done it digitally and distantly. Because of this, I have chosen to work with the term 'supporter' in a cross-club sense in order to be inclusive and make no ungrounded claims about the nature of individuals. Nonetheless, a reader might interpret this as a generalization of the whole Serbian supporter scene. This is not in any way my intention – I am solely focusing on supporter groups represented while in stadiums, stands and other public settings, clearly expressing politics. The aim of this research is therefore to create an illustrative study of the most 'outspoken'

supporters in Serbia and the ways they practice everyday nationalism based on social identity and violent discourses.

Finally, it is important to show reflexivity with regards to the instances and events portrayed in this thesis, as there are obviously many which have not made the headlines. Capturing them would require some of the research strategies not taken on here – specifically doing ethnographic field research with a longer time frame and having access to sources in other languages/who speak other languages. Even so, I find that my theoretical framework, methodology and data can say something vital about a politicized football culture and its violent post-war dynamics – even though the research is carried out far away from the affected stadiums.

## 5. Analysis

The data has been coded in accordance with the system presented in the methodology section. The analysis will be carried out in three steps based on the data – each representing one or several related ways Serbian football supporters practice nationalism, embedding specific events to the tendencies. Throughout these parts, the theoretical framework will be applied to motivate the discourse coding.

### 5.1 Enemies in the field – World Cup 2006

*They were singing songs about hanging Serbs from trees, and killing Serbs. I'd be the happiest man in the world if we only sang football songs. And that's what I promised. We only sang songs for Serbia. Then they started provoking us, and we retaliated (NIS1).*

– Serbian supporter after the World Cup 2006 qualifying game between Serbia and Bosnia (BBC 2005)

On 9 October 2004, in the qualifying rounds for the World Cup 2006, Serbia met Bosnia and Hercegovina for the first time in the football field after the dissolution of Yugoslavia – having fought a war only some ten years prior (Traynor 2004, BBC 2005). As the Serbian supporters filled the stand for away supporters, some wrapped in Serbian flags and other national attire which were missed during the body checks (NIS2), they rolled out a message which the police also missed to confiscate: a banner with the phrase 'Serbian Sarajevo' (TCB1). This enraged the Bosnian supporters, who tried to get closer to tear the banner down. However, the Serbian supporters rushed forward to defend it. Another similar incident pre-kick-off was the chanting of the phrase 'Bosnia will be the heart of Serbia' (BBC 2005, TCB2).

Wearing the Serbian color palette and garments with the Serbian flag (NIS2), Serbian supporters shouted 'We screw him, we fuck him, the Muslim man' (AM1). Later, when Bosnian supporters attacked their visitors with stones, Serbian supporters switched to chanting 'Kill them, kill them, kill all the Turks' (BBC 2005, AT1).

In the documentary "Frontline Football: Bosnia vs. Serbia" (BBC 2005), journalist Ben Anderson tries to get two young male supporters – one Bosnian, the other Serbian – to meet after the game. The Bosnian supporter refuses because of the Serbian's hostile chanting. After hearing about this, the Serbian supporter responds: "They were singing songs about hanging Serbs from trees, and killing

Serbs. I'd be the happiest man in the world if we only sang football songs. And that's what I promised. We only sang songs for Serbia. Then they started provoking us, and we retaliated (NIS1)". Ben Anderson explains that the Bosnian supporter thought that a meeting would only result in a fight. To this, the Serbian supporter answers: "We could talk about it. If he thinks it will end up in a fight, then so be it. I will not run away" (ibid, NIS1).

Throughout this game, Serbian supporters are *collectively performing* everyday nationalism through banners and chants (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008) and *embodying* their nation by dressing in national garments (Fox & Idriss-Miller 2008, Militz & Schurr 2016). *Embodiment* is also present in the quote of the Serbian supporter after the game, describing how he would stay and fight the Bosnian if there was to be an argument. In the same quote, he is *talking the nation* (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008) by referring to the act of 'singing songs for Serbia'. The national enhancement could further be linked to a *spatial dimension* (Skey 2011), where messages of territorial claims in Bosnia and an 'expanded Serbia' are *performed* (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008). These territorial claims are *embodied* when the Serbian supporters protect the banner with their own bodies (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008, Militz & Schurr 2016). The foundation of this message could be multifaceted. By the time of the Yugoslav wars in the 90s, Serbs had already inhabited Bosnia for centuries, comprising more than one-third of the total population. The majority of Serbs in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo opposed the independence of all three countries and fought against it, supporting the idea of homogenous Serb statelets that would be able to join Serbia (Keil 2017).

Social identity and violent discourses come into play in this event. By supporting the team in the name of Serbia, ethnonational differences and a system of inclusion and exclusion are constructed – a kind of 'us' and them' dynamic found in the quote introducing this section of the thesis (Jabri 1996). This is related to the need for a *collective performance* for national bonds to be tied (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008:545-546). The individual supporter's multidimensional identity is overshadowed by one dominant identity whose unity is constructed upon Serbia. Supporters are seen mobilizing for the nation via a shared identification, which legitimizes cultural violence such as the anti-Muslim and anti-Turk sentiments, based in turn on the phenomenon of 'othering' (Jabri 1996). Related is the fact that the uprising of Serbian national identity in the 19th century was influenced by the killing of Serbian Prince Lazar by Ottomans at the Battle of Kosovo 1389, creating a narrative where Slavic Muslims are transformed into 'Turks' – the destroyers of Serbia and the 'polluters' of the Slavic 'race' (White & Karčić 2024:2).

## 5.2 'Ivan the Terrible'

*I grew up with values. The first relates to the motherland. The other to a feeling of belonging and affinity with regards to football.*

– Ivan 'The Terrible' Bogdanov, Red Star Belgrade supporter (Niva 2013, NIS3)

On 12 October 2010, during the Euro 2012 qualifier between Italy and Serbia in Genoa, the infamous Red Star Belgrade supporter and ex-soldier Ivan 'The Terrible' Bogdanov climbed the stall fence equipped with barb wire cutters and an Albanian flag (Villa 2010, Niva 2013, Brenning 2014). Villa's (2010) photos show Bogdanov lighting fire to the flag, with fellow Serbian supporters waving flags and other national garments behind him (AA1, NIS4). He is also accompanied by supporters unfurling a banner reading 'Kosovo is Serbia' (Bandini 2010, TCK1).

Bogdanov traveled to Genoa with the intention to force the game to be abandoned, after the former Red Star goalkeeper Vladimir Stojkovic had joined city rivals PK Partizan on loan a few months earlier (Bandini 2010). Even Stojkovic's family was a reason for Bogdanov's nationalistic rage: "He is a pig. He has betrayed Serbia, married an Italian woman and settled down there. He has not even taught his sons Serbian" (Niva 2013, NIS5). Bogdanov also had a more general mission. After the Genoa riots he told Italian media: "The Serbian national team needed to be punished. They have let their country down too many times, and it has been going on for too long. The game was not to be played that night. It was a question of respect towards one's own people" (Brenning 2014, NIS6).

Four years later, on 14 October 2014, Bogdanov appeared at a Euro 2016 qualifier between Serbia and Albania. The game was cancelled when a drone carrying a 'Greater Albania' flag was flown into the stadium, descending to the pitch and sparking chaos including both sets of players, stewards and supporters (Novakovic 2014). Video footage shows the turbulence after the flag had landed in an Albanian player's hands (Sportska centrala 2019). Several Serbian supporters, some dressed in flags, enter the pitch and participate in the happenings – one of them trying to attack an Albanian player with a chair. Another one is Bogdanov, appearing to try to confront the opposing side. One of his fellows, wearing the Serbian flag, is seen trying to kick the Albanian players as they seek refuge in the player's tunnel (ibid, NIS7, AA2).

Bogdanov's 'legacy' displays the connections between nationalistic practices, identity and violent discourses – directed at other nationals and at persons of the same ethnonational group. By burning the Albanian flag, he is legitimizing cultural violence by domination; he is 'eliminating' the lesser and threatening Other, marking ethnonational differences (Jabri 1996). Identity matters are present when the burning of the flag is accompanied by several other supporters unfurling a banner with territorial claims in Kosovo (Jabri 1996, Skey 2011). The event as a whole relates to the state of Kosovo, being mainly ethnic Albanian territory but previously part of Serbia before its declaration of independence in 2008. Serbs and Kosovo-Serbs cherish the area as central to their religion and statehood – opposed to Kosovo's majority of ethnic Albanians, mostly Muslims, who view

Kosovo as their country and accuse Serbia of occupation and repression (Stojanovic 2023).

Bogdanov is *talking the nation* by smearing the Serbian national team and their 'betrayal' of the Serbian nation and people, enhancing the mobilization around a 'true' Serbian identity (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008, Jabri 1996). During the 'Greater Albania' flag incident, Bogdanov and his colleagues are *embodying* the nation by storming the field and attending to physical violence dressed in flags (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008, Militz & Schurr 2016). In interaction with Albanian players and supporters, this could be described as an identity-based dehumanization of the enemy where violence is motivated by cultural means (Jabri 1996).

### 5.2.1 Tattoos and gestures

On the right bicep, in photos by Bellini (2016), Bogdanov has a tattoo of the Serbian coat of arms and its famous two-headed eagle – the eagle being Serbia's national bird and the name of the national teams (EU Delegation to the Republic of Serbia 2023, The Government of the Republic of Serbia, NIS8). This motive is also noted on Bogdanov's left wrist in photos by Cebrelli (2010, NIS9). Going back to Bellini's photos (2016), the national emblem of Serbia is tattooed on Bogdanov's left bicep (NIS10). This emblem symbolizes the national slogan 'Only unity can save the Serbs' (Šuber 2006).

In Schulze's photos (2017), Bogdanov has a tattoo of the Serbian national patron saint Sava on his right upper arm (Vukic 2021, OCF1). In Bellini's photos (2016), several other Orthodox tattoos are visible. On his left shoulder, below the Christian monogram 'Chi-Rho' (Merriam-Webster, OCF2), the Church of Saint Sava can be hinted – honoring the first archbishop and founder of the Serbian Orthodox Church (Tourist Organization of Belgrade, OCF3). On Bogdanov's collarbones, there are two tattoos – 'IC' and 'CV' – stemming from the Byzantine tetragram 'IC XC NIKA' (Rhoby 2013, OCF4). Orthodox Christianity represents an integral part of nationalist ideology in Serbia, merged with nationalist discourse during the 90s and urging football supporters to embrace Orthodoxy as a crucial identity marker (Djordjević & Pekić 2018:360).

Bogdanov's right arm differs from the rest of his body art as it can be interpreted as a bigger piece based on Bellini's (2016) photos. Starting from the previously mentioned Serbian coat of arms, several skulls appear next to an explosion, accompanied by a crescent – assumably a reference to Islam (CBC 2008). A tattoo of the year 1389, indicating the legacy of the Battle of Kosovo (Šuica 2011), ends the piece (TCK2).

Bogdanov can be seen doing the Serbian salute in photos by NurPhoto (2018, NIS11), which can be read in the light of the Christian Holy Trinity, but in this context rather as a wink to Serbian ethnonationalism (Gligorijević 2019). The same salute is noted in Villa's (2010, NIS12) photos from the Albanian flag burning.



Nationalistic *embodiment* and *performance* (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, Militz & Schurr 2016) is prevalent in the case of Bogdanov. Many of his tattoos have nationalistic connotations, some with Orthodox Christian motives. He is signifying the relevance of Serbia through bodily gestures: more specifically by doing the national salute, influenced, again, by Christian faith. The big tattoo piece on his right arm portrays the Serbian nation as a great power: the national coat of arms is grand, placed above skulls, an explosion, a crescent and the year of the Battle of Kosovo. Skey's (2011) *temporal dimension* comes in handy here as the Battle of Kosovo has become a catalyst for Serbian national identity and is through simplified historiography seen as the clash between Christianity and Islam (Parppei 2017), which makes it arguable to establish this piece as an example of cultural violence. Moreover, since the breakup of Yugoslavia, the 'Kosovo Myth' has been used to legitimize the incorporation of Kosovo into (Greater) Serbia and mark Albanians as treacherous people who settled in Kosovo to terrorize Christian Serbs (MacDonald 2002, Segersten 2011).

In sum, Bogdanov's tattoos and gestures can be seen in the light of the nation becoming a location of a remembered past and symbolic reification (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008). A homogenous identity is reflected in solidarity with an imagined nation, laying the groundwork for culturally discriminatory and violent acts noted in several of Bogdanov's practices (Jabri 1996).

### 5.3 The legacy of the 'war heroes'

*We need to finish them off, stop dragging our feet.*

– Red Star Belgrade supporter at a game between Red Star and Radnički in 2023 (Sauer 2023)

Bosnians, Albanians, Muslims and the Kosovo independence are often targets in violent Serbian supporter culture (Vladisavljevic & Jeremic 2020), not seldom canalized through an honoration of Serbian 'war heroes' or other types of 'war legacies'.

In Sulejmanovic's (2007) photos from a game between FK Partizan and HSK Zrinjski on 2 August 2007, Partizan supporters are chanting with their arms around each other behind a banner reading 'ЦРНА РУКА' ('BLACK HAND'). The Black Hand, or 'Unification or Death', was a secret paramilitary terrorist organization created in 1911 in support of a Greater Serbia, a unification of Serbs and a fight for their interests – in opposition of ethnic Albanians but in favor of incorporating Kosovo into Greater Serbia by violent means (Kurtishaj 2020, TCK3).

A later incident occurred during a game between Red Star Belgrade and Radnički 1923 on 8 October 2023, when a supporter summoned the crowd to get on their feet and raise their hands. "Kosovo is Serbia", a few hundred supporters yelled in unison, moments before the game kicked off (TCK4). The away supporters were members of the Red Star ultras group Delije, known for

ultranationalist views. The pro-Serbia chants were applauded and repeated by supporters of the home team, Radnički 1923, on the other side of the stadium. Before half-time, the Delije members unrolled a banner which read: 'When the army returns to Kosovo' (Sauer 2023, TCK5, WL1).

"We need to finish them off, stop dragging our feet," said a Red Star supporter during half-time, referring to the ethnic Albanian population in Kosovo (AA4). The supporter was wearing a t-shirt with the face of Stefan Nedeljković – one of three Serbs killed during an ambush by Serbian paramilitaries on Kosovan police in September 2023, sparking one of the most serious regional crises in years between Belgrade and the breakaway state (WL2). The battle between Kosovan police and 30 armed Serbs holed up in a monastery turned a quiet village in northern Kosovo into a war zone. "Stefan is a hero and his death needs to be avenged", said the Red Star supporter (Sauer 2023, WL3). This is not necessarily a 'war legacy' like the rest described in this section, however the situation turned into something alike and is related to the growing friction between Serbia and Kosovo stemming from mediation attempts, Serbia's refusal to recognize Kosovo as an independent state, and Kosovo refusing greater autonomy for its Serbian population (Stojanovic 2023, International Crisis Group 2024).

Both Belgrade rival teams, Red Star and Partizan, have praised the life sentenced Bosnian-Serb military officer and convicted war criminal Ratko Mladić, who is seen as a national hero among ultranationalist groups (DW 2017). A video uploaded by Delije shows supporters chanting Mladić's name during a game against Čukarički on 26 November 2017 (Delije Sever Beograd 2017, WL4). Red Star supporters also displayed a banner glorifying Mladić during a Europe League game towards Bate Borisov on 23 November 2017: 'A thousand life sentences and an honorable Serb would still hail you', referring to the life sentence that Mladić received only days prior (Milosavljevic 2018, Human Rights Watch 2017, WL5). Isakovic's (2017) photos further show Red Star supporters centering a Serbian flag with Mladić's face during a game against Partizan several days earlier, on 17 November 2017 (WL6). As for Partizan, members of the ultras group Grobari displayed a message to a relative of Mladić during a game against Swiss Boys on 23 November 2017, decorated with a symbol worn by him at his trial: 'May your mother have (our) thanks' (DW 2017, WL7).

On 9 January 2022, 30 years had passed since the establishment of Republika Srpska, and the unofficial Day of Republika Srpska was celebrated though rulings against the annual holiday had been set by state-level Constitutional Court because of its discriminatory character. Bosnian-Serb supporters in many towns in Republika Srpska made their own contribution to the celebration (Zorić 2022). In Prijedor, supporters of FK Rudar Prijedor flew a flag of Mladić over the city stadium (WL8). In the city of Visegrad, Delije members held up torches in front of an inscription honoring Mladić with the words 'Your honorable fight, our eternal freedom' (WL9). Delije also went to a memorial to fallen soldiers in the same city, lighting more flares and setting off fireworks (WL10). In Zvornik, Grobari members celebrated in silence, holding up torches and a banner reading: '30 years of freedom' in front of the Central Memorial to Fallen Soldiers (WL11). A smaller banner with the words 'Josanica 92' – a reference to a wartime

massacre of Serbs – was hung in Foca, as well as a huge picture of Mladić. Supporters gathered in front of it and lit torches and set off fireworks (Zoric 2022, WL12).

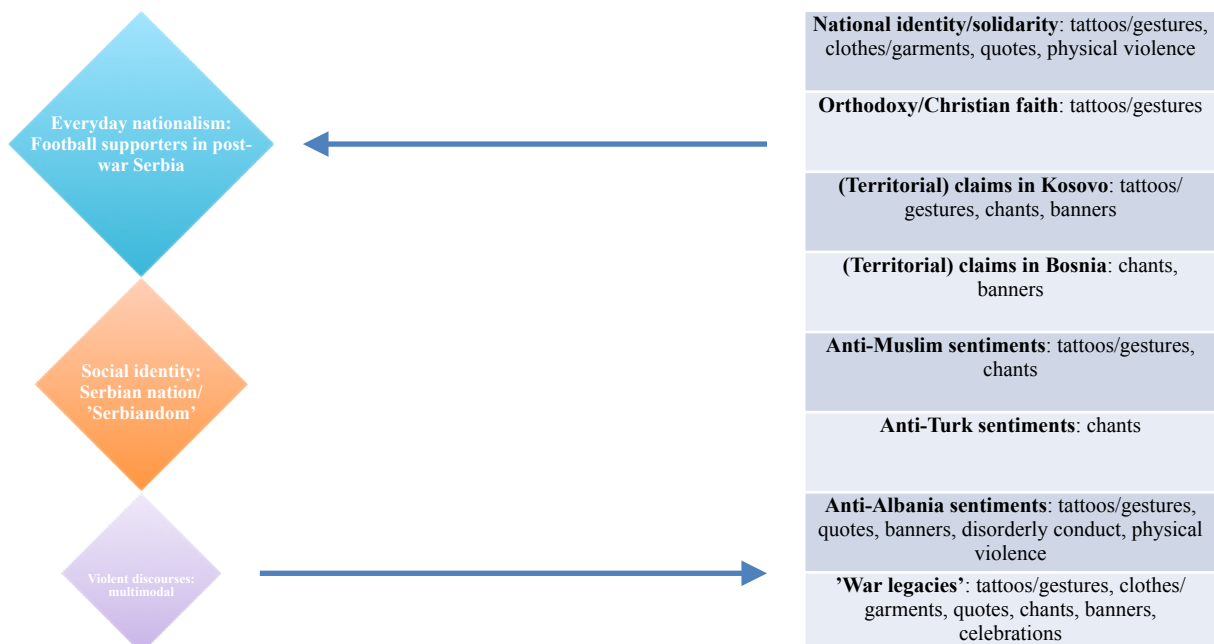
These 'war legacies' in Serbia and Republika Srpska can be linked to both *temporal* and *political dimensions* of everyday nationalism (Skey 2011), as they define the past in national terms and create contemporary action through mass national rituals, similarly mobilizing a definition of the state/political entity and why it matters. These sentiments are *collectively performed* and *embodied* (Fox & Miller-Idriss 2008, Militz & Schurr 2016) with violent messages and symbolism depicting soldiers, paramilitaries and officers as heroes. Supporters join in solidarity with mythical war memories related to the supremacy of Serbia, discriminating and dehumanizing victims of these events and categorizing them as nameless Others, resulting in cultural violence with cross-club ties as seen during the game between Red Star and Radnički 1923. These cultural constructions of reality may play a crucial role in sustaining dynamics across generations (Jabri 1996), minding that the Yugoslav wars took place several decades ago but are still highlighted. The quote by the Red Star supporter wearing a t-shirt with the face of Stefan Nedeljković, establishing that a 'we' (Serbs) need to finish 'them' (Albanians) off, strengthens the presence of discourses of exclusion and othering, legitimizing cultural violence against the enemy (ibid).

## 6. Discussion

The multimodal discourse analysis provides an understanding of how post-war Serbian football supporters practice everyday nationalism and through a shared social identity construct culturally violent discourses. The analysis has been carried out with a detailed coding system, allowing for a transparent examination of the data.

The following figure presents the relationships between everyday nationalism, social identity and violent discourses in the Serbian supporter scene as evident in the analysis. It also shows in which supporter practices each discursive theme (consisting of several discourses) has been found. This figure is based on a table of the results from the discourse coding procedure featured in the appendix (see: Figure 3).

*Figure 2: Relationships between everyday nationalism, social identity and violent discourses in the Serbian post-war football supporter scene.*



The figure reveals an intricate ecosystem where nationalistic practices of Serbian supporters create a shared social identity relating to the Serbian nation, or 'Serbiandom', resulting in violent discourses based on cultural constructions of reality and dynamics of in and out-group differentiation, othering and dehumanization. This process has an impact on the presence of everyday nationalism among supporters as these practices take shape close to matters of identity and cultural violence, consequently existing in the same political cycle. The figure also shows that 'war legacy' discourses travel across practices more than others, and appear in almost all categories, followed by Anti-Albania discourses. Discursive (territorial) claims in Kosovo and Bosnia, instead, are more closely related to collective performances. This also goes for anti-Muslim and anti-Turk sentiments. Discourses on Orthodoxy and Christian faith are only found in individual and embodied forms. As for supporters turning to actual disorderly conduct and physical violence, these activities are related to Anti-Albanian and national identity/solidarity discourses.

The theoretical framework has proved to be a strength as it allows for a nuanced interpretation of the data, highlighting the intersections between nationalism, identity and violence – broadening the potential scope for studies on everyday nationalism. The methodology has enabled the use of detailed examples from real-life supporter culture. The empirical grounding provides illustrations of the theoretical concepts, and all discourses found in the material can be traced to historical and/or contemporary political processes and events, placing the study in a bigger context.

Nonetheless, the analysis has limitations. One of them is the focus on actions of specifically ultranationalist Serbian supporters. This does not capture the perspectives of other groups involved in similar events. Indeed, there are individuals and collectives which focus on alternative forms of political action, thus confronting the dominant mainstream nationalist discourse (Djordjević & Pekić 2018). Neither does the analysis include nationalistic influences stemming from heads of football clubs and associations, or from players (Rudic 2017, Rudic, Lakic & Milekic 2018). Moreover, the analysis does not deal with the fact that all supporters in the data are men. This requires a different research approach on gendered nationalism and masculinities (see eg. De Smet & Hwang 2021). Another weakness is the reliance on secondary data such as media sources and reports, which may themselves be biased or incomplete (Halperin & Heath 2017:200-201). The empirical scope of the analysis could also have been broader if the thesis would have employed an ethnographic method.

However, these limitations do not impact the end result as the alternative research approaches presented have not been relevant. The analysis offers an illustration of the interplay between supporters, nationalism, identity and violence in the post-war era. In this way, it can be submerged in a wider research tradition of the role of sports in peace and conflict.

## 7. Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine how football supporters in post-war Serbia practice nationalism and (re)produce violent discourses through a shared social identity. It aimed to widen the research possibilities of everyday nationalism by combining it with Social Identity Theory (SIT) and violent discourse theory, offering a new empirical base where these can be applied interactively. This was done through a multimodal discourse analysis and two sub-methods – Video Data Analysis (VDA) and visual analysis – enabling an embedment of several types of supporter activities.

The analysis revealed an ecosystem where nationalistic practices of Serbian supporters create a shared social identity related to the nation or 'Serbiandom', resulting in (violent) discourses based on cultural constructions of reality and dynamics of in and out-group differentiation, othering and dehumanization. This process, in turn, has an impact on how everyday nationalism is present among supporters as these practices take shape close to matters of identity and cultural violence, consequently existing in the same political cycle. Moreover, some discursive themes travel across practices more than others – especially 'war legacies' and anti-Albania sentiments.

As a result, this thesis broadens the scope of everyday nationalism and proposes a theoretical and methodological framework which can be used in research on nationalist supporter scenes in post-war contexts. The theoretical approach enables a nuanced interpretation of supporter practices and the methodology gives the possibility of zooming in and out on a myriad of discursive practices, differing from each other in shape and form.

As this field has shown to be multifaceted, future research could easily draw inspiration from this thesis but develop new paths that have not been walked here. The militaristic character of Serbian supporters, or a comparison of everyday nationalism among supporters in all former Yugoslavian countries, are relevant future research areas. Another is a feminist reading of the supporter scene in Serbia, focusing on masculinities and gendered violence in the stands.

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## 8. Appendix

Figure 1: Discourse coding system based on the theoretical framework and general themes found in the material, along with their separate codes.

Discursive theme	Discourse code
National identity/solidarity	NIS
Orthodoxy/Christian faith	OCF
(Territorial) claims in Kosovo	TCK
(Territorial) claims in Bosnia	TCB
Anti-Muslim sentiments	AM
Anti-Turk sentiments	AT
Anti-Albania sentiments	AA
'War legacies'	WL

Figure 2: Relationships between everyday nationalism, social identity and violent discourses in the Serbian post-war football supporter scene.

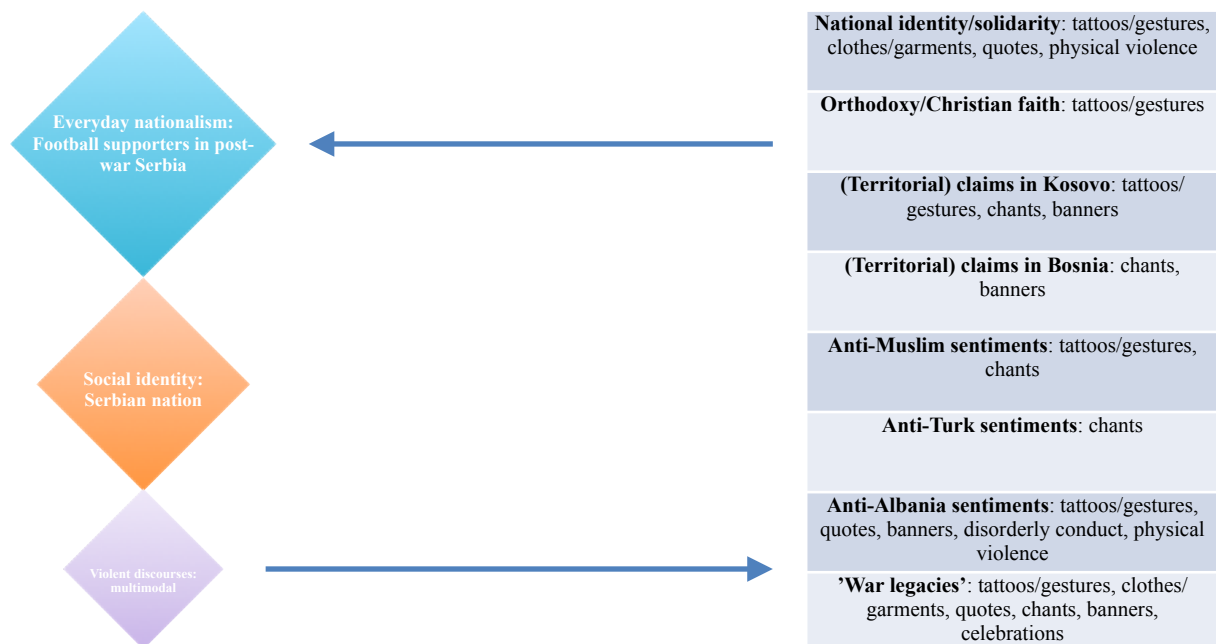


Figure 3: Links between documented discourses and types of supporter practices.

	Tattoos/gestures	Clothes/garments	Quotes	Chants	Banners	Celebrations	Disorderly conduct	Physical violence
National identity/solidarity	NIS8, NIS9, NIS10, NIS10, NIS11, NIS12, TCK2	NIS2, NIS4	NIS1, NIS3, NIS5, NIS6					NIS7
Orthodoxy/Christian faith	OCF1, OCF2, OCF3, OCF4							
Territorial claims: Kosovo	TCK2			TCK4	TCK1, TCK3, TCK5			
Territorial claims: Bosnia				TCB2	TCB1			
Anti-Muslim sentiments	TCK2			AM1				
Anti-Turk sentiments				AT1				
Anti-Albania sentiments	TCK2		AA4		TCK3		AA1	AA2
'War legacies'	TCK2	WL2	WL3	WL4	TCK5, WL5, WL6, WL7	WL8, WL9, WL10, WL11, WL12		