

## **Serbian Nationalism – the use of history**

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This research focuses on how and why Serbian nationalism developed from visions of national coexistence to ethnic cleansing in about a decade, from the death of Tito in 1980 to the first systematic ethnic cleansing in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1992. In this short timespan the nationalistic idea of Greater Serbia arose and gained prominence with the well-known result: civil war and ethnic cleansing of groups deemed undesirable in Greater Serbia. A nationalistic ideology does not in itself evoke political action. It is essential that someone gives nationalism direction and expresses it. In a given population there will be some key players or idea carriers, who articulate and express nationalist ideas. In the period in question, three main actors were instrumental in the transformation of Serbian nationalism: The Serbian Orthodox Church, the intellectual elite and the Milošević regime. They were key players in developing nationalism through construed narratives, which were given power and legitimacy through history. Especially the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 and the genocide perpetrated by the Ustaša against the Serbs during the Second World War were central. The latter also being used to discursively construct the narrative of at first the Albanians and later the Croats as fascists or Nazis using history to dehumanize *the other* and construing a threat. The Milošević regime orchestrated spectacular events based on history to discursively construct and thereby put life into especially the narratives of victimization of the Serbs and dehumanization of *the other*. Graves and dead bodies were used massively to transcend time making history present and emphasize the narratives of victimization and dehumanization. Milošević used these constructions in his massive nationalistic propaganda. He controlled all important media and used them intensely to bring the propaganda to the people in order to mobilize them. Through the media, using historically legitimized narratives, it was possible for Milošević to create a convincing image of a terrifying enemy threatening the very existence of the Serbs. This made aggressive nationalism in the shape of war and ethnic cleansing possible.

In short I argue that the constructed narratives, given power and legitimacy through history, were used purposively and massively in the nationalistic propaganda and played a substantial part in structuring the actual war and enabling ethnic cleansing.

Today such powerful narratives based on history are again surfacing now as a prominent part of the Russian propaganda in the Ukraine conflict. The similarities in the Russian propaganda to the Serbian propaganda are obvious. And like Milošević, Putin has almost total control of the media, which he uses intensely to bring propaganda to the people. The Russian propaganda clearly seeks to build up hate and fear in the population by using history especially the Second World War, making Nazi comparisons and referring historically to Hitler collaborators in Ukraine, to build up and legitimize narratives about the inhuman *other* posing a threat. The propaganda articulates the fascist threat from the Ukrainian revolt supported by fascists of the West. It is the narrative of Russia against facsism.