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Ingroup, Outgroup, Out of Group: Milosevic's Propaganda Failure

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Abstract. This article describes a social psychological perspective on Slobodan Milosevic's loss of political power in Yugoslavia.

Analysts can make the case that Milosevic's hold on power was significantly strengthened by a very basic social psychological technique--strengthening the identification with and homogeneity and cohesiveness of the ingroup while increasing the salience of threat from the outgroup. Bosnian Muslims of the present were constructed as predatory and destructive Ottoman Turks of the past as well as cohorts and colleagues of fundamentalist Islamic terrorist groups seeking to construct a Muslim theocracy on the ruins of Serbian Orthodoxy. Croats were ascribed a déjà vu construct of World War II Nazi-Ustashe primed to continue the tradition of atrocities against Serbians. Kosovar Albanians had much to share with the Bosnian Muslims and were even more of a threat given their living on some lands deemed spiritually and politically sacred at least by Serbian nationalistic screeds. The United States and its Western allies were hegemonic and imperialist--left over terms of demonization from the Communist propaganda cookbook of the Cold War. The United Nations and various multilateral governmental and nongovernmental organizations were also available when necessary as threatening outgroups.

Concurrently with outgroup construction and increasing the salience of outgroup threat were paeans to Serbian nationalism, culture, history, and myth. Successes and triumphs were trumpeted as such. But so were failures and defeats. In fact, the latter were sometimes promulgated as even greater successes and triumphs. And so the ingroup identification was strengthened.

But, finally, none of this was enough. The ingroup itself became a target of outgroup construction. In other words, greater and greater segments of the ingroup were constructed by Milosevic as the outgroup. (Although the ingroup had had segments whittled away previously, such whittling was secondary to the primary construction of the outgroups described above and maintenance of as big an ingroup as possible.) However, this time the people weren't buying any. The jarring cognitive dissonance of going--via propaganda--from ingroup to outgroup was not associated with the paradoxical behavioral effects often seen in cognitive dissonance induction. There was no increased sense of now belonging to the outgroup as opposed to the ingroup. Instead, there was a paradoxical effect boomeranging back from the expected paradoxical effect--targets became even more wedded to being Serbian and more likely to view the propaganda purveyor as being less Serbian.

Hoisted on his won petard, master of the game of ingroup and outgroup, Mr. Milosevic eventually was out of the group. (See Aberson, C. L., Healy, M., & Romero, V. (2000). Ingroup bias and self-esteem: A meta-analysis. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4, 157-173; Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love or outgroup hate? *Journal of Social Issues*, 55, 429-444; Hopkins, N., & Murdoch, N. (1999). The role of the 'other' in national identity: Exploring the context-dependence of the national ingroup stereotype. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 9, 321-338; Leyens, J.-P., Paladino, P. M., Rodriguez-Torres, R., Vaes, J., Demoulin, S., Rodriguez-Perez, A., Gaunt, R. (2000). The emotional side of prejudice: The attribution of secondary emotions to ingroups and outgroups. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4, 186-197; Mackie, D. M., Ahn, M. N. (1998).

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Ingroup and outgroup inferences: When ingroup bias overwhelms outcome bias. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 28, 343-360.) (Keywords: Ingroup, Milosevic, Outgroup, Serbia.)