

From Saint Sava to Milosevic – The Pantheon of (Anti)heroes in Serbian Presidential Election (2017)

Agata Domachowska

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Poland

Abstract

This article aims to analyze the presidential campaign in Serbia (2017). It focuses on the presence of different significant figures from Serbian history and culture in the public sphere. It begins by presenting the pantheon of eminent figures in the history of Serbia. Next, the presidential election and its results are briefly described. Then, the text investigates the question what kind of eminent figures, by whom, and in which context were used in the last Serbian presidential campaign. The conclusion summarizes the specifics of the use of historical characters for political aims in that case.

Keywords

Serbia; national heroes; Kosovo myth; presidential election; culture; memory studies

Introduction

There are different ways of gaining broad support during elections. The Serbian presidential election in May 2017 was of key importance for the then ruling camp. The incumbent prime minister Aleksandar Vučić decided to run for president to further strengthen his position in the country. Through actions such as ordering early parliamentary elections or standing for the presidential office, Vučić consolidated his power in the country. However, despite constantly criticizing the government and the prime minister in particular for violating the principles of democracy, the opposition did not manage to unite and present a single contender capable of standing against the powerful leader of the ruling party. Instead of focusing on facts, during the campaign, the candidates frequently reached for tools involving symbolic messages intended to appeal to a broader spectrum of voters, drawn from national culture or history.

* Agata Domachowska, Department of Balkan Studies, Faculty of Languages, Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, Fosa Staromiejska 3, 87-100 Toruń, Poland; a.domachowska@umk.pl; ORCID: 0000-0002-8521-9399. The author would like to thanks to the two anonymous reviewers for their remarks and insightful comments on the manuscript.

Each nation has a catalog of famous characters to which people constantly refer. They include both the heroes and the traitors of the nation – the models fit to be emulated or condemned. During the centuries' long tradition, the Serbs also created a particular pantheon of national heroes. Their epiphanies and reincarnations were described by Ivan Čolović in his book titled *Politika simbola*.¹ A significant part of this group is connected to the Kosovo myth, based both on the history of the Serbian nation and on the culturally transformed folk memory of the medieval Battle of Kosovo (1389).² Among these figures are Prince Lazar,³ Miloš Obilić,⁴ and Vuk Branković.⁵ Other characters that form the particular pantheon of Serbian national heroes are Saint Sava⁶ and a medieval ruler of Serbia Tsar Dušan⁷ as well as Karađorđe, the leader of the First Serbian Uprising (Biernat 2014, 362–379). Furthermore, nowadays a particular position in the public space in Serbia is occupied by figures from the recent history of this country, such as Josip Broz Tito⁸ and Slobodan Milošević.⁹

In 2010, the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights (*Beogradski centar za ljudska prava*) carried out a survey among adult Serbs, which aimed at testing their knowledge of the history of their own nation. The questions included an open one concerning the most important figures in the history of the Serbian

1 According to Čolović, the epiphany and reincarnation of famous, heroic ancestors are not only the common truths of contemporary trite propaganda and political folklore – today, they are used most frequently by people considered to be political, scholarly, and literary authorities. The so-called elite of the nation commonly believes that an out-of-time experience, i.e., the phenomenon of epiphany and reincarnation of ancestors, can function as a political motivator. In this sphere, they look also for the evidence that ethnically oriented narratives related to politics and war, to everything that is based on the brotherhood of the living and the dead members of the tribe, are rooted somewhere in the depths of the so-called soul of the nation, Čolović 2001, 26.

2 More on the Kosovo myth, see Popović 1998, 266; Zieliński 2001; Rapacka 1995; Dąbrowska-Partyka 2004; Gil 2005; Czamańska, Leśny 2015, 143–155; Malcolm 1999, 58–80; Kola 2016.

3 Lazar Hrebeljanović – a Serbian prince ruling in the 14th century. He was killed in the Battle of Kosovo, Judah 2002, 56; see also: Lebor 2002, 121; Judah 1997.

4 Miloš Obilić – according to Serbian folk tradition, a hero of the Battle of Kosovo who killed Sultan Murad I.

5 Vuk Branković – a son-in-law of Lazar Hrebeljanović, the ruler of the Kosovo field. He withdrew with his army from the Battle of Kosovo. The folk tradition portrays him as a traitor, which is not historically accurate.

6 St. Sava (Rastko Nemanjić) – the first archbishop of Serbia and one of the most important saints in the Serbian Orthodox Church. Lived at the turn of the 13th century.

7 Tsar Stefan Dušan – the king of Serbia in the 14th century. The first tsar of Serbia. During his rule, the Serbian state occupied the largest area in its history.

8 Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) – the leader of Yugoslavia from the end of WWII to his death. During the war, he led the anti-Fascist resistance.

9 Slobodan Milošević (1941–2006) – a Serbian political leader, the president of Serbia in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1989–1997 and the federal president of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1997–2000.

state. The largest number of responders answered that it was Josip Broz Tito. Other popular choices included the mentioned Karađorđe, Nikola Tesla,¹⁰ Saint Sava, and Vuk Karadžić (Stojanović, Vučetić, Petrović-Todosijević, Manojlović Pintar, Radić 2010, 135) (see Table 1). The events from Serbian history considered as most important were the Battle of Kosovo (22%) and the uprisings against the Turks (11%) – the events that, according to Serbs, had a crucial influence on the fate of their country.

Table 1. *The most important figure in the history of Serbia according to Serbs*

Order	Historical figure	Percentage of responders
1	Josip Broz Tito	19
2	Karađorđe	12
3	Nikola Tesla	11
4	Saint Sava	8
5	Vuk Karadžić	7
6	Zoran Đinđić	5
7	Miloš Obrenović	4
8	Slobodan Milošević	4
9	Tsar Dušan	4
10	Prince Lazar	3
11	King Peter I Karađorđević	2

Source: *Stojanović, Vučetić, Petrović-Todosijević, Manojlović Pintar, Radić 2010, 135.*

Ivan Čolović points out a similar pantheon of Serbian national heroes. According to him, the main figures are Saint Sava, Tsar Dušan, Prince Lazar, Miloš Obilić, Marko Kraljević,¹¹ Old Novak, and the Mother of Jurgevićs¹² – the mythical and historical characters connected with the medieval state of Serbia (12th to 14th century), and the heroes who played a significant role in the Serbian fight for liberation from the rule of the Ottoman Empire (19th century) (Čolović 2001, 73).

Depending on the context and the person who mentions them, all these figures are evoked in order to legitimize or de-legitimize a particular person.

10 Nikola Tesla (1856–1943) – an engineer and inventor; although born in the Balkans, he spent the majority of his life in the United States.

11 Marko Kraljević – a historical figure of whom, however, little is actually known. A subject of many legends presenting his adventures as a great warrior.

12 Old Novak, Mother of Jurgevićs – fictional characters connected to the Kosovo myth.

For years, the heroes of the Kosovo myth have been most important for the Serbs in this context. A particularly frequent topic was the reincarnation of Prince Lazar: the list of people compared him with Slobodan Milošević in a given historical period:¹³

Slobodan is Mighty Dušan/when he Dušan must become,
Karadorđe when aggression/gets blood boiling in his veins
He is Lazar when he's needed,/reconciling Serbs today.

He is always, everywhere/where the heavy burden's heaviest. (Gil 2005, 161)

During his rule, Milošević was also compared to other important figures, such as Tsar Dušan and Karadorđe. It is worth mentioning, however, that in order to discredit him in the public eye, Milošević was often compared to Tito. In March 1992, a Serbian Orthodox bishop Atanasije Jevitić stated during his TV appearance that Milošević's rule was like Tito's rule, Milošević himself was a conceited and deceitful (evil) man, and it would be better for everyone if he resigned.

During the 1990s civil war in Bosnia, Ratko Mladić¹⁴ was also compared to Prince Lazar, (Gil 2005, 162) while Radovan Karadžić himself drew attention to the heritage he shared with Vuk Karadžić.¹⁵ In one of BBC documentaries, Radovan Karadžić presented himself to the wide audience as he was sitting in the family home of Vuk Karadžić in Tršić and playing *gusle*, an old traditional Balkan folk instrument (Čolović 2001, 28).

The aim of this article was to study which specific characters connected with Serbian culture, and thus immensely important for strengthening Serbian national identity, were used in the public space in order to strengthen the position of a particular candidate or conversely, to discredit him during the last presidential election in Serbia. The analysis covers the period of the election campaign from January 2017 to April 2017.

Collective memory is one of the key aspects of strengthening national identity (see also: Anderson 2006; Hobsbawm & Ranger 2012). As Ana Milošević and Heleen Touquet note,

Given memories "deep connections to societies" cultural codes and myths [...], they can become powerful tools for collective mobilization.

13 As we can see, Slobodan Milošević was also compared to tsar Dušan and Black George; see more in Biernat 2012.

14 Ratko Mladić (1942) – a Serbian general, participant of the military actions in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992–1995). In 2017, he was sentenced to life imprisonment by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

15 Vuk Karadžić (1787–1864) – a Serb linguist and philologist, considered the father of modern Serbian language.

Political elites instrumentalize the past for particular purposes: to put a troubled past to rest, or in order to frame a particular future. In this sense, political elites function as *memory entrepreneurs*: “those who seek social recognition and political legitimacy of one [their own] interpretation or narrative of the past, engaged and concerned with maintaining and promoting active and visible social and political attention on their enterprise”. (Milošević & Touquet 2018, 381).

Furthermore, the use of specific symbols or construction of a particular narration about the past translates into creation of specific auto-identification elements, which allow a given group to integrate internally and to differentiate from this or that other group (the dichotomy of us vs. them).

The choice of appropriate research methods should facilitate finding the answer to the posed research problem. Considering the subject of this study, qualitative research seemed necessary while the formulated research topic justifies application of content analysis; as this is a method that takes into account the origins of a source, its contents, and the context of its creation, it will ensure the validity of research. As the last stage of the research process involves conclusions or placing the collected information in a wider context, case study method has been selected as well.

Simultaneously, in a detailed study, it is helpful to create an initial classification of characters that might be used during an election campaign. These categories may also serve as a useful research tool for further studies in this field. First of all, such characters can be historical or mythological. Second, they can be religious or lay. What is more, individual figures can be perceived positively or negatively by particular social groups and sometimes even by a whole nation. Thus, evoking specific characters can have a positive impact on the image of a person who is compared to such a figure or the effect can be completely opposite, i.e. negative. If we consider the third formulated category, we should add that whether a particular figure strengthens the image of a given candidate or, conversely, has a negative impact on it depends on a multitude of different factors, often independent of each other: e.g. who uses such characters and to what aim? Does the target group of message recipients have positive or negative associations with a given figure? Therefore, determining whether evoking a particular character will have negative or positive result is not easy. However, it is possible to study the intentions of the person referring to a given character. By analyzing the content of particular documents, the researcher is able to conclude whether the particular figure was used by the author to influence the perception of a given candidate positively or negatively. Also in this aspect, the method of content analysis is an extremely valuable tool.

This article opens with a discussion of the process and results of the presidential election in Serbia in May 2017, as well as of the candidates' characteristics. Next, the campaign is analyzed in the context of exploiting cultural figures important for the Serbian nation and identity. Finally, the conclusion of the analysis also highlights the issues that merit further research in the context of applying symbolic tools in election campaigns.

The 2017 presidential election in Serbia

As President Tomislav Nikolić's first term in the office was drawing to an end, the next election was planned for 2 April 2017. In 2012, Nikolić defeated Borislav Tadić, who was then running for re-election (*Izbori za Narodne...*, 2012, 101). According to the provisions of the Serbian constitution, the incumbent president has the right to vie for the second five-year term (Ustav Republike Srbije 2006). Ultimately, Nikolić relinquished his right and announced in February 2017 that he was not going to fight for the extension of his tenure (*Nikolić: Neću biti...*, 2017). The reason for such a decision could have been the fact that his own political party, the Serbian Progressive Party (*Srpska napredna stranka*, SNS), had already announced their support for Aleksandar Vučić, who was at that time the prime minister and the leader of this party.

Vučić himself for many months denied that his aim might be the presidency. However, in February 2017, he decided to accept the decision of his party's leadership and run in the election (Teodorović, Komarčević, 2017). Taking into consideration the numerous opinion polls carried out between December 2016 and February 2017, one could suppose that the candidate whom the SNS would decide to support would be Vučić, not the incumbent president (*Istraživanje: Koga...*, 2017). The polls showed that Vučić had a chance to win over other candidates already in the first round of the election, while Nikolić would be able to do it only in the second round and without a significant winning margin over his rivals.

Apart from Vučić, ten other candidates ran for the president. The analysis of the poll results shows that out of these ten candidates, Saša Janković and Vuk Jeremić had the greatest support (*Istraživanje Demostata...*, 2017). Janković was a former ombudsman and ran as an independent candidate, but with the support of some political parties and non-governmental organizations. Despite his young age, Jeremić was already an experienced politician, who had worked in both the country and abroad. His previous posts included the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Chairman of the General Assembly of the United Nations in the years 2012–2013 (*S.E. M. Vuk Jeremić...*, 2017). He

decided to take part in the presidential election despite lack of support from his former party, the Democratic Party (*Demokratka Stranka*, DS), which supported Janković as the candidate.

Undoubtedly, the greatest surprise of the presidential campaign turned out to be Luka Maksimović, a comedian not yet twenty six years old, known under the pseudonym Ljubiša Preletačević “Beli”. His nickname was derived from the word *preletač*, which denotes a politician who switches political parties for financial gain (*Zašto Ljubiša Preletačević...*, 2017; Čančarević 2017, 36–37). He managed to collect the required number of signatures (10,000) to be registered as a candidate by the state electoral commission. It should be noted that he had already gathered some experience in running an election campaign: the satirical party he had invented (*Sarmu probo nisi*, SNP) took part in 2016 local elections in Serbia, in the municipality of Mladenovac. They managed to get as much as 21 per cent of votes, which gave them the second place (*Izmislili ličnost...*, 2016).

Maksimović’s concept of a presidential campaign was to behave like a typical politician. This convention allowed him to ridicule the whole political class in Serbia. Thus, as a stereotypical politician, he made many promises, particularly those that were impossible to keep – for example, he promised to “create a sea” in Serbia (*Beli Preletačević na...*, 2017). Through his behavior, he brought out the most important flaws of politicians who had been ruling the country for thirty years, such as corruption, nepotism, and dishonesty. Another contribution to the success of his campaign was the way in which Luka Maksimović or – more precisely speaking – Ljubiša Preletačević “Beli” communicated with his potential voters. He used mostly the new media, releasing simultaneously multiple short spots that captured people’s attention. At the same time, he did not abandon personal contact with people; he was travelling through different parts of the country, meeting the citizens face to face.

What the candidates opposing Vučić had in common was accusations against the latter concerning violations of rules of democracy and law in Serbia. As pointed out by different international reports (prepared by, e.g., Freedom House, Economist Intelligence Unit, Reporters Without Borders and Transparency International), Serbia governed by Vučić did not make any significant changes toward democratization. Lack of fundamental reforms of the state is evident, and the freedom of media is being undermined, while the regime build by the SNS is described as “stabilitocracy” – or a type of semi-authoritarian regime that currently can be found in some of the West Balkan states. A characteristic feature of these political systems is that anti-

democratic practices of local leaders are ignored by the Western states as long as the situation in the region remains stable.¹⁶ Thus, entrenchment of stabilitocracy in the region means that the process of introducing radical reforms that would strengthen democracy has been hampered. These states are governed by powerful politicians with an authoritarian way of thinking, who exercise their power by using a tight network of mutual connections.

In the end, Vučić won the presidential election already in the first round, receiving more than 55% votes (see Table 2). However, in the third place, with almost 10% of votes was Ljubiša Preletačević “Beli”, who managed to get almost twice as many votes as Jeremić, a person singled out by many political commentators in Serbia as a potential future leader of the opposition against Vučić’s government.

Table 2. *Results of the 2017 presidential election in Serbia*

Candidates	Number of votes	Percentage of votes
Aleksandar Vučić	2,012,788	55.08
Saša Janković	597,728	16.36
Luka Maksimović	344,498	9.43
Vuk Jeremić	206,676	5.66
Vojislav Šešelj	163,802	4.48
Boško Obradović	83,523	2.29
Saša Radulović	51,651	1.41
Milan Stamatović	42,193	1.15
Nenad Čanak	41,070	1.12
Aleksandar Popović	38,167	1.04
Miroslav Parović	11,540	0.32

Source: *Author’s own work based on RIK data Rezultati izbora za predsednika Republike, <http://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/latinalica/izbori-za-predsednika-republike-2017-konacni-2004.php> (accessed 19.05.2017).*

Part of the Serbian society protested against this result, accusing the new president of violating democracy and dictatorial tendencies. What was considered as the infringement of the constitution was his decision regarding “freezing” his position as a party leader (instead of tending a resignation) while

¹⁶ More on stabilitocracy is given in Bieber 2017a, 2017b; BiEPAG 2017a, 2017b.

simultaneously holding the presidential office (The House of Lords 2017, 32). Vučić described the organized protests as a sign of “healthy democracy” in Serbia, of which he was proud (Karnitschnig 2017).

Figures from Serbian culture in the presidential campaign

From the very start of the presidential campaign, many politicians attempted to evoke in their speeches characters important for Serbs. Such figures often were referred to in order to recall their greatness and confirm that the speaker is a continuator of their thoughts, works, and visions. An example can be Jeremić's speech given on 27 January 2017 in Novi Sad during the evening of Saint Sava (*Svetosavska večer*). At that time, he was explaining that Saint Sava would not understand today's divisions in Serbia because for him the highest value was national unity (*Jeremić: Sveti Sava...*, 2017). As a result of quarrels and divisions, young people leave their homeland in droves, stressed Jeremić. At the same time, he stated that Saint Sava was “the father of the nation, a European, the creator of Serbian national identity and a cosmopolite.” (*Jeremić: Nema veče...*, 2017). This way of describing one of the most important figures in the history of Serbia corresponded to the image of Jeremić himself, which he promoted during the campaign. He was trying to present himself on the one hand as a “true Serb” revering the tradition and on the other hand as a “cosmopolite” who knows the world and has international experience. It is worth noting that it was Jeremić who in the years 2012–2013 held the function of the chairman at the sessions of the General Assembly of the United Nations. By referring to the “work of St. Sava”, he also stressed that the priority of the current authorities in Serbia should be providing help to young people who are leaving their homeland *en masse*. They should have a guarantee of a good future in Serbia because the country will not survive without them (*Jeremić: Nema veče...*, 2017). Therefore, the Serbs should follow the teaching of Saint Sava, which prepares the nation to be ready for the challenges posed by the present times.

The public debate during the presidential election also included the figure of king Alexander I Karađorđević. He was introduced by one of the candidates, Nenad Čanak, the leader of the Socialdemocratic League of Vojvodina (*Lige socijaldemokrata Vojvodine*, LSV), in order to evaluate Janković. Čanak stated that Janković, and more specifically the way he acts, reminds him of the pre-war dictatorship of Alexander I: Janković decisively emphasized in many interviews that he was not going to establish his own political party as he did not need such an institution to maintain a dialog with the nation (*Čanak: Janković me...*, 2017; *Saša Janković...*, 2017). Čanak reminded that a similar

attitude to political parties – which are a necessary element of a multiparty system – was shown by King Alexander I, who ordered the dissolution of political organizations, arguing that he did not want any intermediaries between him and the nation.

It is worth adding that Čanak referred in an equally critical way, also recalling past events, to another of his opponents, Vuk Jeremić. He compared Jeremić to Vojislav Koštunica who, like Jeremić now, presented himself as a legalist, a scholar who had all the features necessary to be a good president. However, it turned out that he pursued a nationalistic policy, worsening the relations of Serbia with its neighbors and the situation in the country itself by bringing the enactment of the 2006 constitution. According to Čanak, keeping this basic law in force “means drowning in mythomaniac, Koštunica-Miloševićan version of Serbian history whose heart is Kosovo, right hand – the Republic of Serbia and the other eye – Montenegro” (*Čanak: Janković me...*, 2017). Furthermore, according to the leader of the LSV, Jeremić is a politician very similar to the former prime minister of Serbia Vojislav Koštunica, who tried to recreate himself yet again on Serbian political stage to the melody of *The March on the Drina*¹⁷ but in reality was just a mixture of nationalist populism and legalism.

Another figure present in the campaign was Slobodan Milošević, mainly due to the fact that another anniversary of his death (11 March) fell during the campaign run. One of the candidates for the post of the president of Serbia who visited the tomb of Milošević in Požarevec was Vojislav Šešelj, the leader of the Serbian Radical Party (*Srpska Radikalna Stranka*, SRS). He openly said that if the former president of Yugoslavia was alive, he would certainly support him as a candidate for Serbian presidency (*Šešelj: Da je...*, 2017). Šešelj also added that ultimately history will objectively judge Milošević, who during his stay at the Tribunal in Hague became Šešelj's true friend (*Šešelj, Vulin, Bojić...*, 2017).

The candidate who during his campaign particularly often used a variety of cultural elements and reached for key figures was Luka Maksimović. He clearly used Marshal Tito as a model when he created his image: he always appeared in public in a white suit (Čongradin, Marinković 2017; Bogusławska 2015). Preletačević never hid the fact that his political idol is Tito and that

17 The beautiful melody of the March on the Drina was created in 1914. It was composed by Stanislav Binički to celebrate the heroism of Serbs and their victory over the prevailing forces of the Austro-Hungarian army in a battle that took place between 16 August 1914 and 19 August 1914 on the Drina river. The piece became a symbol of Serbs' courage during the First World War, and until today, it remains in the centre of national consciousness as a symbol of fight and defence against aggressors. The lyrics were written in 1964 by a Serbian journalist and Miloje Popović.

he wears white, smokes cigars, and travels in a limo as a homage to him (*Ljubišin cilj je ...*, 2017; *Tko je Beli...*, 2017). A symbolic event also occurred in Kragujevac, the heart of Šumadija, where under the monument *Relay Race of the Youth* (*Štafeta mladosti*), Preletačević was symbolically handed the baton (Raus 2017). After this, his meeting with the voters turned into a joint walk around the city. It should be added that it was in Kragujevac where in 1945 the first “Tito’s Relay Race” took place (from 1957 onward, it was called the “Youth Relay Race”), in which young people were crossing the country and passing to one another a baton that held inside a card with birthday wishes for Tito (Čolović 2005, 141).

However, it was not only his external appearance that Preletačević modeled on Tito. The views he expressed on the position of Serbia in the world were similar to those of the Marshal, one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement, as Preletačević opted for maintaining equal relations with the West and with the East: “(...) good relations with Russia and with NATO are necessary. As our geographical location is not the best, we are forced to constantly balance between both sides” (Belić 2017). With regard to the potential membership of Serbia in the European Union, Preletačević as a new president would organize a referendum so that the society itself would decide on the future of Serbia – whether it should move toward the West or perhaps toward the East (*Ljubiša Preletačević...*, 2017).

What is more, Preletačević stressed that he was going to “reconcile the East and the West”, so he would maintain friendly relationships with both the president of the USA Donald Trump and the president of Russia Vladimir Putin (*Maksimović: Preletačević kao...*, 2017; *Nesvakidašnje predstavljanje...*, 2017). He was also going to maintain friendly relations with the other states in the region. His vision of the future of the Balkans also resembled Tito’s plan: Preletačević’s antidote for the problems of the region was to implement the plan of reunification of all the states in the Balkan peninsula, including Bulgaria, Greece, and Albania.

However, Marshal Tito was not Preletačević’s sole role model; when he was planning and implementing his election campaign, he evoked other historical figures as well. A characteristic event was his visit in the town of Orašac, where the first Serbian uprising started. He appeared there under the monument of Karađorđe, the famous leader of the uprising. In the speech he gave there, Preletačević recalled that the historical events connected with Serbian strife for independence. He also stated that he would continue the work started two hundred years ago by the Serbian leader. His most important aim would be restoring the dignity (*dostojanstvo*) of the Serbs (*Beli kao Karađorđe...*, 2017).

Notably, when building his image, Preletačević also used references to those figures important for Serbia who made their mark only in the last twenty five years, namely, Zoran Đinđić, the Serbian prime minister assassinated in 2003 in Belgrade. During the election campaign, Preletačević decided to put on his social media profile a photo of himself and Đinđić in which the former leader of the Democratic Party (DS) is embracing him (*Šta Beli Preletačević...*, 2017). Furthermore, in his unique style, Preletačević explained that “Comrade Đinđić – a legendary man” baptized him, his father, and his brother. The photo was taken during the protests organized by the coalition of anti-Milošević forces “Zajedno” (from November 1996 to February 1997), which arrived at the municipality of Mladenovac (*Slika koju svi...*, 2017). Preletačević also admired Zoran Đinđić’s rhetoric, noticing that the latter was able to talk both with farmers and with intellectuals, which was his greatest advantage (*Preletačević je budala...*, 2017).

It should also be mentioned that during the campaign, the figure of Tito was not only used to strengthen a positive image but also was evoked by Vojislav Šešelj with the intention of discrediting one of his main opponents, Vuk Jeremić. Šešelj stated that Jeremić was “a man from Tito’s establishment”, brought up in an exceptional, influential family, so he was arrogant and unfit to rule the country (*Šešelj: Jeremić je...*, 2017).

Conclusions

When analyzing the narrations built during the latest presidential campaign in Serbia, we must state that most frequently used figures were the characters connected with Serbian culture, both religious and lay (see Table 3). However, evoking religious figures was rare. The only religious figure used in the campaign was Saint Sava. It is also worth highlighting that none of the presidential candidates decided to use a mythical character such as Miloš Obilić. Furthermore, neither the characters nor motifs related to the Kosovo myth were visible in the public space during the election campaign.

Depending on which voters were the potential target of the message, the aim of evoking specific characters was to strengthen or weaken a given candidate. A part of the society would see Josip Broz Tito as a figure carrying a positive message, while another part would have negative associations with this person. Similar polarity was observed also in the case of other figures. Yet, undoubtedly, the character that evoked positive associations in most of the Serbs, the one whose use offered a positive image boost, was Saint Sava.

Table 3. *Characteristics of the figures used in the 2017 presidential campaign in Serbia*

Category/ Example	Historical figure	Mythical figure	Religious figure	Lay figure
Saint Sava	X		X	
Slobodan Milošević	X			X
Josip Broz Tito	X			X
Zoran Đinđić	X			X
Vojislav Koštunica	X			X
Alexander I	X			X

Source: *Author's own research.*

It is also worth noting that the only candidate who in building his message to the society used multiple characters (often negating each other) was Ljubiša Preletačević. However, this resulted from the structure of his election campaign, which was based on ridiculing all Serbian politicians ruling the country for more than twenty five years. Reaching for the grotesque and comic quality allowed Preletačević to freely evoke various figures related to Serbian culture.

With a view to further research on using characters and symbols from the past as well as historical memory in election campaigns, a detailed comparison should be made, covering at least the Balkans, including the specific cases of Macedonia, Montenegro, Croatia and Albania. Furthermore, there is still no comprehensive study of election campaigns and tools used at that time in order to mobilize the society and indirectly shape a particular version of historical memory.

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