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Past imperfect continuous: remembering Serbia's 1915 retreat one hundred years later

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Past Imperfect Continuous:

*Remembering Serbia's 1915 Retreat
One Hundred Years Later*

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Past perfect continuous: Remembering Serbia's 1915 Retreat One

Hundred Years Later - Aleksandra Tomić

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Past Imperfect Continuous:

Remembering Serbia's 1915 Retreat One Hundred Years Later

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I was six years old when I first heard of *the Retreat*. Aleksa Petrović, a Salonika veteran, was a friend of the family. He wore medals and had studied in France after the First World War — the most ardent Francophile I remember meeting outside my own family.

My paternal grandmother's father Vlajko Velikić was a reservist, married with three children when the war started. He was lucky to return after the war — I have his name tag. My maternal grandfather's father, Miloš Nikić, left his wife Jelena and their four children behind when he was mobilised in 1914, also as a reservist. My grandfather, Ljubiša Nikić, lost his father at the age of 10, when Miloš died in Albania.

Some came back and some did not. I would have liked to dedicate this work to them all.

However, if there is anything I have understood in this research is that past can make fools of us all, if we let it. The future matters so much more than the past.

Marini i Lari, mojim ćerkama.

To Marina and Lara, my daughters.

A. T.

Past Imperfect Continuous:

Remembering Serbia's 1915 Retreat One Hundred Years Later

Introduction

In 1915, the Serbian Army retreated across Albania, following the Invasion of Serbia by the Central Powers. The retreating Serbian Army and government, including the king and his son, the regent, the state administration and almost all of the Serbian parliamentary deputies, church dignitaries and many other groups, were joined by thousands of civilians fleeing the invading enemy. The retreat took place in November and December across snow and ice-covered mountainous terrain in hostile territory. Many froze to death, or died from disease and hunger, some were killed by the local irregulars, while a large number of those who survived were so weakened by the ordeal that they died shortly afterwards. The retreat cost the lives of around 240,000 troops and civilians — the final numbers were never established. After the survivors arrived on the Albanian coast, they were evacuated by the Entente forces. Some were taken to Italy, others to French North Africa, but most were taken to Corfu. Today in Serbia, the retreat is not only memorialised in many different ways, it is *canonised*. The Retreat is seen to symbolise the sacrifice of the Serbian Army, of the entire Serbian nation, for the liberation of Serbia and for the subsequent establishment of Yugoslavia.

The thesis examines how the 1915 Retreat is remembered and represented in Serbia a hundred years later, and what this tells us about the Serbian relationship with its past. We will show who is doing the remembering of this event and why, what sites of memory memorialise it, how it is linked to the *Serbian national identity narrative*, and how the remembrance and representations of this event and its meaning were instrumentalised for political purposes during the First World War centenary commemorations in Serbia. With this research, our intention is to contribute to the knowledge of the role the 1915 Retreat plays in Serbian national identity and memory discourse and deepen our understanding of this discourse.

There are different reasons to consider why, in our view, the remembrance and representations of the Retreat, deserve such attention. These reasons can be broadly categorised as personal, historical, and political. The Retreat has a personal resonance for most Serbs today because many of their ancestors participated in it – some survived and others did not. Both groups are important for the *collective remembrance* of the event. Historically, it was a remarkable event in the First World War, which to our knowledge has no precedent. However, the dominant narrative of the Retreat insists *only* on the extraordinary side of it in a simplified account – although incurring vast losses, a retreating army avoids being defeated, reorganises after leaving the country and returns to liberate it. Other aspects of the Retreat, the disarray of the army and the government, the mass desertions, the catastrophic sacrifice of young men recruited prematurely, to name but a few, are marginalised. The support of the Entente is at times criticised as having been insufficient, incompetently executed or deliberately delayed. This brings us to the political angle. Politically, the Retreat evolved into a sacred symbol of Serbian suffering in the First World War and familiarised the trope of Serbs cast as *tragic heroes*.¹ This script is useful for various populist tendencies in Serbia whereby the context of the Retreat can be connected to current political

1 In the thesis, the general term “Serbs” is used to denote those Serbs who would use this as the first thing to describe themselves, i.e. those for whom every other characteristic comes second.

issues, framed as *Serbia vs. the World*. While the thesis does not focus on Serbian current affairs, we do examine certain instances where we identify *the glorious past* linked to the First World War being used for effect in political discourse.

In the aftermath of the Retreat, over the following few months in Corfu, with the assistance and support of the Allies, Serbian troops convalesced. Other Serbian refugees in Corfu revived the political and cultural life of the country from where they were exiled. It was a temporary exile soon to be continued in Salonika. Although the retreat was undoubtedly a disaster — it became known as *the Golgotha* — its subsequent outcome was that around 140,000 Serbian soldiers had recovered well enough by the early summer of 1916 to join other Entente troops in Salonika, where *l'Armée d'Orient* was being reorganised in preparation for the liberation of south-eastern Europe. The Allied Army of the Orient broke through the Salonika front at the end of September 1918. The Serbian Army, as part of the larger Entente forces, participated in the liberation of Serbia over the following six weeks. Soon afterwards, the war ended with the Armistice. The Entente was victorious. In November 1915, the retreat seemed to be the end of Serbia. Many perished but enough survived, including the state and political institutions of the country. The retreat was a defeat that was eventually turned into a victory. Both *because of* and *despite* the retreat, Serbia won. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes² was established on 1 December 1918. The Treaty of Versailles gave it its blessing on 28 June 1919.

The century that has passed since the end of the First World War produced much history: The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was attacked by Nazi Germany in 1941 and then taken apart by the Axis powers; the Nazi occupation and the civil war opposing royalists, communists, and nationalist collaborators of different types against one another continued until the end of the war; in 1945, a new state of Yugoslavia was established, now a republic with

2 The Kingdom of Yugoslavia as of 1929.

communist partisans in charge; Socialist Yugoslavia endured for just over 45 years, when it fractured into several countries. As we write this, in 2020, Yugoslavia is a *loaded* word. In the most simplified terms, what started as an idea and an ideal of a multi-ethnic state of South Slavs, and initially, mainly built on the basis of the Serbian victory in the First World War, was dismembered in the Second World War, was re-established by the communists, was then destroyed in the bloody civil wars of the 1990s, largely caused by the surge in Serbian nationalism which awakened all the other nationalisms in the country. The story of the disintegration of Yugoslavia is outside the scope of this thesis, but a number of the causes of its break-up can be found in the *idées fixes* of the Serbian national identity narrative.

In order to understand the remembrance and representations of the Retreat, as well as interpret certain of its political uses, we have to delve deeper into the history of Serbia and the Serbian national identity narrative. Each nation has its own national — more or less official — identity narrative, its own *story*. We look at the main carriers of the *Serbian story* — its constitutive elements. We research the themes we have identified as relevant for the study of the subject matter, such as memory and how it constructs the idea of the past; national identity and the pertinence of myths — for Serbia it is the Kosovo myth, which we will outline; we examine memorialisation as a form of sacralisation of the past; and we identify these themes in the Serbian context. We give an account of the Retreat and assess its wider historical impact. The remembrance of the Retreat is investigated through the exploration of the Serbian attitude towards the past, through street names, monuments, commemorations, and media coverage of past events in the shadow of the political instrumentalisation of history during the centenary events and beyond. We further examine the ways in which the Retreat is remembered and represented in music and in museums. The Retreat has its sites of memory and we visit these places of pilgrimage and meet the pilgrims. We recognise that these “agents of remembrance” form “fictive kinships”

of remembrance as termed by Jay Winter.³ We are interested in them, their motivations and their acts of remembrance, inside and outside the official narrative. Whether they fit in the narrative or not, they all have a need for replaying the past by *servicing* it or *performing* it.⁴

In examining the discourse related to the First World War in Serbia during the centenary events, against the backdrop of Serbian history and politics of the 20th and early 21st century, we demonstrate that the Serbian *attachment* to the past — in particular to the First World War⁵ — has an impact on the image that the Serbs have about themselves today. The First World War is *Serbia's favourite war* as we show further on. The war was ignited by the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand by a Bosnian Serb. The official narrative of the war is that Serbia was the victim of Austro-Hungarian aggression and in no way responsible for the assassination, despite the links between the chief of Serbian military intelligence and the conspirators. Serbia's subsequent participation in the war resulted in proportionally more casualties than any other belligerent state suffered.

The controversies about the role of Serbia began immediately after the Sarajevo assassination and continue to this day. A salient recent example is the *Sleepwalkers* controversy on the eve of the First World War centenary commemorations. The polemic was revived by Christopher Clark's book *The Sleepwalkers*,⁶ and works by Sean McMeekin and Margaret MacMillan.⁷

3 Jay Winter "Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War", in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 40-41.

4 Jay Winter "The performance of the past: memory, history, identity", in Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (eds.). *Performing the Past. Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*. (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 11.

5 "Ismar Dedović and Tea Sindbaek Andersen. "Answering Back to Presumed Accusations: Serbian First World War Memories and the Question of Historical Responsibility" in *The Twentieth Century in European Memory. Transcultural Mediation and Reception. European Studies* (volume 34, 2017), 85.

6 Christopher Clark, *The Sleepwalkers: How Europe Went to War in 1914* (London: Penguin Books, 2013).

7 Sean McMeekin, *July 1914: Countdown to War* (New York: Basic Books, 2013) and Margaret MacMillan, *The War That Ended Peace: The Road to 1914* (New York: Random House, 2013).

The publication of these books in 2012 and 2013, heated the atmosphere in historical and political circles in Serbia, with accusations of *historical revisionism* flying across the Serbian academic world and beyond.⁸ In his book, as part of the examination of the causes of the First World War, Clark examines the instability of the Serbian political situation and the dysfunctionality of the Serbian government in the early 20th century, particularly the rogue elements of the Serbian military, suggesting that the Serbian government in 1914 may have had more responsibility for the start of the war than what had been previously accepted. Although Clark's book was not *only* about Serbia, his reading of the events that led to the First World War,⁹ was interpreted in Serbia as *the West's reappraisal of the German guilt for the Great War*.¹⁰ Serbian reactions were often emotional, some decidedly paranoid, with one historian in particular alleging Germany was issuing grants to scholars with the specific goal of revising Germany's role in the Great War.¹¹ In his paper, "1914 Revisited: Commemoration of the WWI centenary in Serbia",¹² Aleksandar Miletić analyses the reactions of the Serbian historians,¹³ from those who were outraged and offended, to others who approached the subject in a professional and analytical manner — e.g. by examining the arguments

8 Dubravka Stojanović, "Onward! To World War II!", *Peščanik*, 16 December 2013 <https://pescanik.net/onward-to-world-war-ii/> (accessed May 15, 2018)

9 Clark occasionally makes some unexpected parallels, e.g. Serbia in 1914 and Syria in 2011. In his 2008 Stanford course lectures, *History of the International System*, James Sheehan compares Serbia in 1914 to Pakistan in 2008.

10 In the Introduction to *The Sleepwalkers*, Clark links the Serbian nationalism of the First World War to the wars of the 1990s, Clark, 2013, xxvi.

11 Milan Dinić, "Ljubodrag Dimić: Gavrila Principa je srpska javnost podržala, a politička elita osudila, Nemačka stipendijama menja sliku o Prvom svetskom ratu" ["Ljubodrag Dimić: Gavrilo Princip was supported by the Serbian public but opposed by the political elite, Germany uses grants to change the picture of the First World War"], *Nova srpska politička misao*, 31 May 2014 <http://www.nspm.rs/kuda-ide-srbija/gavrila-principa-je-srpska-javnost-podrzala-a-politicka-elita-osudila-nemaacka-stipendijama-menja-sliku-o-prvom-svetskom-ratu.html?alphabet=l> (accessed, March 31 2020). In this interview Dimić also claims that most such scholars were Irish. It is not quite clear where this claim comes from, given that Clark is Australian, McMeekin American, and MacMillan Canadian.

12 Aleksandar Miletić, "1914 Revisited. Commemoration of the WWI centenary in Serbia", in *Memory and Memorialization of WWI in Eastern and Southeastern Europe*, edited by Gabor Egry, Múltunk Foundation, Special Issue 2016, 5-32.

13 Miletić points out that Fritz Fischer's theory on the German guilt for WWI "almost acquired a status of dogma among Serbian historians", in Miletić, 2016, 9.

of Clark's book through "a calm scholarly mode of reasoning and critical reflection".¹⁴ Nevertheless, the majority of the historians seemed to take this issue personally and view the *revisionist historians* as personifying *the West*. Serbian politicians¹⁵ and public figures were offended by the book, many of whom had probably not read it but quickly picked up on the outrage expressed by the majority of Serbian historians.¹⁶

Why was this such a scandal in Serbia and why does it continue to fill newspaper columns and discussion forums?¹⁷ The answer to this question lies partly in the role the 1915 Retreat and the First World War in general play in the Serbian national identity narrative, and the thesis aims to shed light on the matter. Jay Winter's comment about the reaction to Clark's book in Serbia was: "Of course the Serbs are furious — but that's their problem."¹⁸ We consider this *Serbian problem* to be an important factor in the *Serbian story*. In our view, the elements for the answer as to, *Why the Serbs were so upset by Clark's book?* and more widely to the questions about the Serbian relationship with the past can be found in the Serbian national identity narrative.

The thesis consists of five chapters, each contributing to answering our research question. We first outline the Serbian national identity narrative in chapter I — the Prologue. The *Serbian story* is essential for identifying patterns of acceptance or rejection of different versions of the past based on the type of *emotional formula* that can be found in Serbian history. Chapter II proposes a literature review exploring the main theoretical concepts, which we rely on to use as tools for identifying the *phenomena*, to use Eric Hobsbawm's term, involved in the interplay between memory, identity and history. Understanding these concepts

14 Danilo Šarenac reviewed the book on its merits: Miletić, 2016, 17. See, Danilo Šarenac, "O knjizi Mesečari. Kako je Evropa ušla u rat 1914, profesora Kristofera Klarka." *Vojnoistorijski glasnik* (2013), 1: 267–280.

15 Even Tomislav Nikolić, the president of Serbia in 2013, authored several articles denouncing the books as revisionist.

16 Miletić, 2016, 22.

17 J.K. "Predratni odgovor Klarku" ["Prewar response to Clark"], *Danas*, 29 October 2019, 6.

18 Jay Winter at the *To End All Wars? Conference*, Ypres, August 2018, used with permission.

is required to recognise patterns in subsequent readings and research. The account of the Retreat in chapter III is given based on our reading of selected sources, both Serbian and international, some well-known and others less well-known. We focus on the facts and analyse certain perceptions in primary sources such as diaries and memoirs. In chapter IV, we address the manner in which Serbs *remember* and *forget* their past, by looking at a selection of street names and monuments in the context of the turbulent Serbian history, and we then delve into the different ways the First World War and the Retreat are memorialised in Serbia and analyse the corresponding media coverage in light of the centenary commemorations, against the backdrop of the current Serbian political situation. Chapter V investigates the actual remembrance practices of the Retreat and establishes who are the agents of remembrance. Most of the research for this chapter was done in the field, at museums, at the sites of memory and by interviewing informed sources. We surveyed the museums by email and visited specific exhibitions organised as part of the centenary events. Owing to the large number of events commemorating the First World War in Serbia, only a representative selection of the surveyed and visited museums and exhibitions is featured in this thesis. The field research, museum surveys, visits to sites of memory, attendance of commemoration ceremonies, and interviews all took place between 2014 and 2019. The interactions that were done in person — with museum staff, guides, historians, local sources of information, participants in the acts of remembrance — were mostly carried out using unstructured interviews. Some sources were interviewed by telephone and email using structured questionnaires. Relevant observations outside the interviews, during the acts of remembrance and commemorations were noted in real time.¹⁹ These building blocks of the thesis are presented below in more detail and are all drawn together in the conclusion.

Chapter I: We formulate the Serbian national identity narrative as commonly interpreted and understood, found across history books,

¹⁹ Considerable number of photographs were taken, some speeches were audio or video recorded and subsequently transcribed.

political statements, television programmes, media, theatre and musical performances, literature, news reporting, comments on social media, as well as on official websites,²⁰ but also what it *looks like* to outsiders.²¹ We look at the role the First World War generally and of the Retreat specifically in the Serbian national identity narrative. We limit our consideration to the dominant *scripts* while recognising the aspects of the *Serbian story* that are marginalised. In general terms, the Serbian national identity narrative revolves around Serbia's potential greatness — military, intellectual, or spiritual — which is harmed through internal or external obstacles, for instance, betrayal, resulting in great suffering. The two-fold trope of the Serbian national identity narrative is *heroism* and *suffering*.²² This image is echoed even in history textbooks.

Chapter II: The literature review of the research project focuses on the main strands in literature on memory, history, identity, and memorialisation. We examine how societies remember and forget, or rather how people in different communities remember and forget, as well as the factors that impact remembrance. How do people deal with conflicting versions of the past and how might different versions of past events influence the present and why? We consider *collective memory* as defined by Maurice Halbwachs,²³ and *collective remembrance* as interpreted by Jay Winter,

20 On the Serbian Tourist Association's website, under the *Serbian History* section there are twelve articles on the First World War: "The project "Serbia at the beginning of the Great War and the memory of the heroic deeds" was implemented with the assistance of "The Office for cooperation with the Diaspora and Serbs in the region", in order to improve the image and rediscover the truth about Serbia's participation in the First World War." See *World War One* at Serbia.com <http://www.serbia.com/about-serbia/serbia-history/world-war-one/> (accessed May 15, 2020).

21 E.g. Tim Judah, "The Serbs: The Sweet and Rotten Smell of History", *Daedalus*, Vol. 126 (No. 3, *A New Europe for the Old?* Summer 1997): 23-45.

22 In 1915, moved by the suffering of the Serbian Army and civilians, Serbian poet Jovan Dučić, wrote a poem "Ave Serbia" where he poetically describes this fatidic duality. Dučić's vision is of *Mother Serbia* whose sons suffer and fight: "The milk you gave us poisoned us forever, to always be first in suffering and glory, for you have brought twins into this world, a martyr and a hero, to cry and to bleed" (Translated by A.T.). Jovan Dučić, "Ave Serbia" <https://www.poezija.info/srbija/ave-serbia-jovan-ducic/> (accessed March 31, 2020). More on this duality will be explored further in the thesis.

23 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited, translated, and with an introduction by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago and London : The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

through his extensive research into the remembrance of the Great War in the main former belligerent countries.²⁴ Every nation's past relies, more or less, on myths and legends that originate in real and imagined stories. Paul Cohen illustrates how historical events are mythologised and for what purposes.²⁵ On the basis of the works of Benedict Anderson and Anthony Smith, we seek to understand the origins of national identity.²⁶ Identity is a concept that has evolved over time; in particular national and religious identity, and the way we interpret it today is scrutinised by Leon Wieseltier²⁷ and Amartya Sen,²⁸ among others. The ethics of memory are explored through the work of Avishai Margalit.²⁹ Forgetting the past is done for different reasons and with different purposes — Paul Connerton explores different categories of forgetting.³⁰ In the last part of the literature review, the interconnectedness of memory, history, and memorialisation is examined in the context of the Serbian case. Against the backdrop of Serbia's problematic handling of the past in general, including the Second World War and the Balkan War of the 1990s, as well as Serbia's *infatuation* with the First World War in particular, we look at how the "sacrificial narrative",³¹ pervasive throughout the *Serbian national identity narrative*, is continuously applied in political and public discourse. Dubravka Stojanović uses the example of Serbia to make an insightful analysis of the role of history and memory in the rise of populism.³² Stojanović has carried out bold and important research in analysing how the current

24 Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, 2014); Jay Winter, *Remembering War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), and others.

25 Paul A. Cohen, *History and Popular Memory. The Power of Story in Moments of Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

26 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991), Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991).

27 Leon Wieseltier, "Against Identity", (*New Republic*, November 27, 1994) <https://newrepublic.com/article/92857/against-identity> (accessed November 1, 2016).

28 Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (New York. London: W.W. Norton and company, 2006).

29 Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of Memory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts. London, England: Harvard University Press, 2004).

30 Paul Connerton, "Seven types of forgetting" (*Memory Studies* 1, (2008): 59-71.

31 Nevena Daković, "The Serbian mythomoteur as sacrificial narrative", *Frontiers of Narrative Studies*, 4(1) (2018),140.

32 Dubravka Stojanović, *Ulje na vodi [Oil on water]* (Belgrade: Pešćanik, 2010); *Populism the Serbian Way* (Belgrade: Pešćanik, 2017).

Serbian regime — as well as previous ones — have been using the past, specifically the First World War, to influence the present. Through the examination of the commemorative practices, in subsequent chapters, we develop Dubravka Stojanović's assertions further, by exposing a specific tactic used by the current government to reframe political and economic issues through the filter of the perceived glorious Serbian past, which we have termed *historical frame switching*. This term will be explained in more detail through the examples in the thesis.

Chapter III: A number of historians have noticed that in the Great War histories as told in the West, Serbia is mentioned early on in 1914, before it *disappears* from view. As pointed out by Danilo Šarenac in his account of the Retreat,³³ many important episodes from the First World War on the Balkan Front have not been sufficiently examined, the Retreat being one of them. The Retreat is no longer a well-known event outside Serbia, although it was widely written about at the time, which is in itself a curious transformation from an event into a footnote. This part of the study presents significant research on the Retreat with an overview of variations in the way different historians, Serbian and foreign, as well as participants and eyewitnesses have given an account of the event. Our intention here is to give a comprehensive account of the Retreat and highlight the significant scenes that are echoed in representations and remembrance of the event known as *Golgotha* in Serbia. We will also consider less commonly mentioned aspects which are usually eschewed. The Retreat is well documented by participants' written testimonies, memoirs of surviving soldiers, public figures, writers, refugees, journalists, Serbs and foreigners who followed the army. There are photographs of the Retreat, even of the Albanian and Montenegrin mountain crossings,³⁴

33 Danilo Šarenac, "Golgotha: the retreat of the Serbian Army and civilians in 1915 – 16", in *Europe on the Move: The Great War and Its Refugees*, edited by Peter Gatrell and Lyubov Zhvanko (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 236.

34 Sampson Tchernoff, *La guerre des cinq ans: les Serbes en 1912-1916*. S.a. s.l. <http://velikirat.nb.rs/items/show/6219> (accessed October 31, 2016) ; *Ratni album Riste Marjanovića 1912-1915 [Rista Marjanović's War Album 1912-1915]* (Gornji Milanovac: Dečje novine, 1987)

drawings by participants,³⁵ film footage of the soldiers' boarding ships for Salonika.³⁶ Representative samples from Serbian and foreign sources are examined, because there are different renditions of the Retreat. It is often forgotten that not everyone had the same experience.³⁷ We consider what led to it and what followed. Certain episodes of the Retreat have received more attention than others and these have come to symbolise the courage, the suffering, the sacrifice and the eventual redemption of the Serbian *peasant-soldier*. The redemption — resurrection — was embodied in the recovery of the Serbian Army which subsequently played an important role in the breakthrough at the Salonika front. Serbian historical narrative regularly underscores the *crucial role* of the Serbian Army as one of the main, although often unrecognised, contributors to the end of the First World War.³⁸ While the Retreat is well documented, photographed, and mapped, its human cost remains unknown: as said there is no definitive list of casualties, nor was there a complete inquiry to determine what went wrong and caused so many lives to be lost. There is an inherent contradiction in an experience shared by so many, passed on to their descendants, with many questions still unanswered. The remembrance is experienced emotionally, also because it was a defeat that turned into a victory: if the Retreat is mentioned at the beginning of a speech, it will almost certainly be followed by the mention of the Kajmakčalan victory at its end.³⁹ The Retreat remains alive in individuals' family histories: most Serbs who are fifty years or older today have at least one great-grandfather who participated in the Retreat. The proposed account includes the background and the context of the Retreat, the military and political circumstances as well as the main actors — it outlines the main episodes as described in outstanding testimonies and documents. Our aim is to

35 E.g. by William Smith, of the Scottish Women's Hospital unit.

36 Serbia's Exiled Army (1914-1918), *YouTube*, British Pathé News <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUbQEFmUVXg> (accessed October 31, 2016)

37 Olga Manojlović Pintar, *Arheologija sećanja. Spomenici i identiteti u Srbiji 1918 – 1989 [The Archeology of Memory: Monuments and Identities in Serbia 1918-1989]* (Beograd: Čigoja, 2014), 87.

38 There are frequent mentions of Serbia's contribution to the end of WWI in popular literature and media. This claim is frequently repeated at WWI commemorative events in Serbia.

39 The 1916 Kajmakčalan Battle is the first victory of the reformed Serbian Army. The Kajmakčalan Peak on Mt Nidža in present-day North Macedonia is 2521m high.

contribute to the historiography of the Retreat in English by combining different narratives of the Retreat and highlighting those episodes that are salient for the continuing popularity of the widely accepted Retreat narrative, and which form the essence of the Retreat remembrance. We note the considerable impact of the popular narrative on the scholarly research which may be partly explained by the subjectivity of scholars whose forefathers crossed Albania. Perhaps those historians whose great-grandfathers have participated in the Retreat are invested in protecting the conventional narrative.⁴⁰ This part of the research project further notes the direct and indirect consequences of the Retreat, both military and diplomatic. The Retreat, although disastrous, led to the reorganisation of the Serbian Army and to the creation of the new state. It is not stretching the truth to say that the Retreat — in all its heroic and tragic folly — paved the way for Yugoslavia.

Chapter IV: This chapter of the thesis looks at the way Serbia's past gets in the way of Serbia's future. Our intention is to shed more light on the degree of attachment that Serbs have to their past and how this bond is manifested. At the same time, we examine how the Serbian *national memory* is impacted by the politics of the day. Despite the apparent attachment to the past, we note a systemic volatility in relation to the past. We posit that this contradictory mixture is detrimental for the advancement of Serbia towards becoming a true progressive democracy. Serbs tend to take pride in the past of their country, as do many other nations. But Serbs also live in a country where the past matters to such an extent that it can be readily altered to accommodate the present. What does it say about a country where street names habitually change when regimes do? It could mean that nothing is certain, especially not an address. Monuments, through which common values are celebrated and remembered, are a way for society to signal its appreciation of an event, or a person — we remember and celebrate. Monuments in Serbia tend to be controversial and subject to much public debate. A closer look at commemoration events that take

40 While this is also true of this author, the intent is not to let it impact the research.

place around such monuments make for intriguing discoveries — for a number of politicians it seems that commemoration is a full-time job. Commemorations offer a platform and a forum where topics of political interest are raised without anyone challenging the content because of the commemorative context. In examining such occasions and speeches during the centenary events, we read between the lines and interpret the messages behind the official pronouncements. At the same time, the centenary years have given the Serbian press a staple supply of topics and themes. The battles of the First World War, the anecdotes surrounding the Retreat, tragic stories and selected moments retold in the language of today's media, are another way of looking at how Serbian society managed the past and its remembrance in the second decade of the 21st century. We make a distinction between *tabloids* and *broadsheets*, as well as between government-sponsored media and independent media, noting the different approaches on the same subjects.

Chapter V: Partly in comparison with and in contrast to the previous chapter, the last chapter of the research examines how the Retreat is remembered now, how its presentation is mediated in museums and exhibitions, and how the story is told and memorialised — rediscovered — a hundred years after the event. The Retreat also has music and songs that keep it alive because they are always present at commemorations. These acts of memory, be they officially or privately organised, all have the Serbian dead as their focus. The main reason for this is certainly that Serbia proportionally lost more men than any other WWI country — 25% of its male adult population.⁴¹ The Serbian dead of the First World War are honoured in Thessaloniki, and on the island of Vido, in Corfu. These places have special meaning for Serbs, acquiring new identities and even different names: Corfu as the island “where the yellow lemon trees bloom”, Vido as the “Island of Death”, the Ionic Sea as the “Blue Tomb”. The Retreat has its own *emotional geography* coexisting with the

41 This is mentioned at most commemorations in relation to WWI, including on 11 November 2018, Belgrade New Cemetery where the main commemorative event was held.

actual sites.⁴² Serbs who fell in the Great War are regularly and piously visited by their descendants, the actual and the notional. We examine these pilgrimages that have become increasingly popular over the years and look at the keepers of the Serbian flame in these sacred Serbian places in Greece. The examination of the remembrance of the Retreat would not be complete without looking at the individual initiatives to remember the Retreat and the First World War casualties. The people carrying out these acts of remembrance deserve special attention. Whether they are cleaning military cemeteries, researching the graves of Serbian soldiers in other countries and finding their descendants, retracing the steps of the Serbian soldiers in the Retreat 100 years later, cycling to commemorate the Retreat, or rowing around Greece with the same purpose, they are all actors of remembrance. In our view, they represent, as mentioned, what Jay Winter described as “fictive kinships” of remembrance. Their motivation is personal and often related to their family history, but there are also history enthusiasts and social activists. We examine the roots of their engagement and their enthusiasm as described through interviews, reports, and the actual acts of remembrance.

Conclusion: There are past events in a nation’s history that are never truly over. For a variety of reasons, they are replayed, re-enacted, reproduced, retold as they become *sacred scripts*. They shine so bright that everything else fades to black. The Retreat is one such crucial identity marker in the Serbian national narrative. As the symbol of Serbia’s Great War, we will demonstrate that today *the Retreat is in the service of the present*. Our research will provide us with the elements to formulate an answer to the research question: How is the 1915 Retreat remembered and represented in Serbia 100 years later and what does this tell us about the Serbian relationship to the past?

But first, our journey starts with the prologue.

42 There are Serbian WWI war memorials and cemeteries in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Tunisia, Algeria, Austria, Albania and France but none have the status of Salonika and Vido. The largest ossuary, in Jindrichovice, holds the remains of over 7,500 Serbs, former POWs. See mausoleum at Jindrichovice <https://www.secanje.nl/en/cemeteries/jindrichovice/> (accessed May 25, 2020).

I

Prologue

“We all were sea-swallow’d, though some cast again,
 And by that destiny to perform an act
 Whereof what’s past is prologue, what to come
 In yours and my discharge.”⁴³

In Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, Antonio the antagonist encourages his friend Sebastian to kill Sebastian’s sleeping brother, the king, in order to take his place and become the king himself. In a persuasive few lines, Antonio explains that since fate has led them to the present moment, it offers an opportunity which cannot be ignored. His words, “What’s past is prologue” were meant to spur Sebastian on. This phrase, out of the context in the play, is best known in its uncontracted form as the inscription on a monument.⁴⁴ In or out of context, the phrase has at least two differing interpretations: the past, as the origin of everything that is happening now, represents a preamble to the present and we need to know it. Another interpretation is that regardless of what happened in the past, even though it might explain the present, the past matters much less now that the present is here. The latter is possibly closer to what Antonio meant when he was encouraging his friend to commit regi-fratricide: let us seize the present and act. The past played a part it was supposed to play but — the past is past. The former interpretation

43 William Shakespeare, *The Tempest, Act II, Scene I* (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1984), 79.

44 The phrase *What is Past is Prologue* is engraved on the monument called *Future* in front of the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

has a different message — let us stop for a moment, because if we are to understand the present plot, we must know what precedes it, we must listen to what the prologue has to say. The past is never past, it matters now and always. One interpretation rushes ahead while the other pauses to look back. Although the present study is formally situated in the “past is never past” camp, it looks reflectively at the “past is past” school of thought, evaluating the philosophical gap between the two. Specifically, the study is motivated by a desire to understand why the Serbs have a difficult time dealing with the past of their country: the selected heroic parts from their history are worshipped alongside the mainstream refusal to accept any critical inquiries into these events. We examine both sides of this cavalier yet dogmatic attitude to the past arguing that it matters because *it informs Serbian political choices in the present*. Because the past, depending on whose version of the prologue we hear, creates our present and shapes our future, even if that past is over one hundred years old.

1. The Great War: The Past vs. the Present

“Public memory is a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past and its present, and, by implication, its future.”⁴⁵

The bond between the past and the present is complex for all of us. The past interests us because it tells us where we *historically* come from: by teaching us who we *were*, who we *are*, or who we *could be*. As the present demands our attention, we are drawn into exploring past events and looking for clues about our identity and our place in the world. The past can be seen as inspiring, instructive, and a source of pride. Harnessing the potential power of the *proud* past would require managing its narrative.

45 John Bodnar, “Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland” in *Commemorations*, ed. Gillis, *The Politics of National Identity* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), 76.

The past, told through stories, is subject to today's interpretation which gives it meaning in line with our purpose.

In the introduction to his book *Serbia and the Balkan Front 1914*, published in 2015,⁴⁶ James Lyon provides insight into the fraught preparations for the commemorations of the centenary of the Sarajevo assassination of 1914, and the subsequent start of WWI, because of the old but unsettled question of whether Gavrilo Princip should be seen as a terrorist or a freedom fighter. The commemoration of the start of the war was already troubled when the controversy on the causes of the war was revived with the publication of books by Clark, McMeekin and MacMillan, as mentioned previously. Since commemoration is always linked to interpretation of an event, and since moving on 100 years had not assuaged "polarized views",⁴⁷ there was to be more than one commemorative event. In late June 2014, a series of cultural, artistic, and academic events were to take place in Sarajevo to commemorate the start of the First World War and a conference was to assemble the most prominent world historians on the subject. The commemorative events, accompanied by local protests,⁴⁸ were to begin with a symbolic Vienna Philharmonic concert on 28 June in Sarajevo, attended by dignitaries from the EU and the former belligerent states.⁴⁹ In a farcical re-enactment of the taking of sides in the Great War, albeit 100 years later, Austria and France were at odds regarding the organisation of commemorations. Although the French official delegation attended the concert, many of the French academics shunned the conference. The Serbian and Bosnian Serb delegations boycotted the entire series of commemorative events in Sarajevo proper, and attended a rival event at the unveiling of a statute to Gavrilo Princip

46 James Lyon, *Serbia and The Balkan Front 1914* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 8.

47 Lyon, 2015, 8.

48 Some Sarajevo protesters wore Princip masks, as noted in Jonathan Casey, "Eyewitness to History", entry for 28 June 2014, website of the National WWI Museum and Memorial (US), <https://www.theworldwar.org/eyewitness-dispatches-sarajevo-and-vienna-2014> (accessed May 11, 2019).

49 "Sarajevo Concert: Eurovision and Vienna Philharmonic Unite Europe In WWI Commemoration", Press Release, *European Broadcasting Union (EBU)*, 19 June 2014, <https://www.ebu.ch/news/2014/06/sarajevo-concert-eurovision-and> (accessed May 11, 2019).

in Serb-dominated eastern Sarajevo.⁵⁰ “The conference included over 100 scholars from North America, Europe, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine and all the Balkan States. Official Serbian and French institutions, as well as French scholars, were notably absent, although four Serb scholars defied official Belgrade and participated.”⁵¹ A century may have passed, everyone who was alive in 1914 is now dead, but the past is truly alive — and kicking.

The centenary of the First World War and related commemorations elsewhere in Europe generated considerable interest too, not only among academics and amateur historians, but also among the general public. It is possible to interpret this attraction through the prism of current acute complexities of European and worldwide politics, and the rise of uncertainty. The past may appear simpler and clearer than the present as we are drawn to *remembering* the past event because we know how it ended: it was not exactly a happy end, but we understand what happened and why — at least we think we do. While the present lacks this finality, the past showcased through commemorative events also draws us in through its escapist aspects. The past in general, but the First World War in particular, is often romanticised. Perhaps it is the weight of the sheer magnitude of the loss of life, or the tragic beauty of pointless sacrifice that fascinates us. In our mind’s eye, we move into another time and other circumstances while accompanied by history books, fictionalised accounts, and heroic narratives. With no living contemporaries of the Great War at the centenary celebrations, we may also feel freer to look at the events in different ways. Historians, on the other hand may see the absence of living witnesses as an opportunity to acquire a monopoly on the narrative.⁵²

Remembering the Great War today also means revisiting and reinterpreting an already sizeable body of research that keeps growing,

50 “WWI centennial event without Serbs”, *Deutsche Welle*, 28 June 2014 <https://www.dw.com/en/wwi-centennial-event-without-serbs/a-17743319> (accessed May 11, 2019).

51 Lyon, 2014, 9. Also in Miletić, 2016, 18-19.

52 Antoine Prost and Jay Winter, *Penser la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2004), 15.

changing and challenging entrenched ideas. Researchers are repositioning their views in the polemics on the causes of the war, renewing the debates on its conduct, its turning points, strategies, and legacy. Many welcome it, while others deplore it, or feel threatened by it, as will be discussed further. The Great War is popular also because it “*n’appartient à personne, pas même aux historiens.*”⁵³ The Great War is a *sure bet* in terms of new publications and crowd-pulling exhibitions. In France alone, there are over 13,700 monuments dedicated to the memory of the Great War⁵⁴ that still hold a central place in the communities. During the centenary years, the US writer and actor Indy Nydell hosted a successful series of the retelling of the Great War, “covering WWI in real time” using *Pathé News* footage. The series was posted on *YouTube* and acquired a respectable audience ranging between 150,000 to nearly 2,800,000 for 671 different videos, with well over a million subscribers worldwide.⁵⁵

The Great War has a recognisable brand; the symbols and imagery are powerful enough to summon our emotions directly. For instance, the large-scale art installation of ceramic poppies at the Tower of London enjoyed mass appeal by combining art, memorialisation, education, legacy-building, and charitable activities. In such memorialisation events, victims and heroes are remembered generally and specifically. Poppies that represent the “Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red”⁵⁶ make the experience universal, while the roll of honour and dedications of descendants also make this project personal. During the centenary years, 2014 – 2018, a number of museums and dedicated exhibitions offered *the experience of trenches*, with mock-up sandbags and sound effects of machine guns and artillery in an attempt to reconstruct *what it must have felt like*, as in the *Centre d’interprétation Marne 14 – 18* in Suippes, Champagne,

53 Prost and Winter, *Penser la Grande Guerre*, 2004, 9.

54 *36,000 cicatrices, Les monuments aux morts de la Grande Guerre* (Paris: Editions du Patrimoine, 2016), 9.

55 *The Great War*, <https://www.youtube.com/user/TheGreatWar> (accessed May 11, 2019).

56 “Tower of London Remembers” http://www.hrp.org.uk/tower-of-london/history-and-stories/tower-of-london-remembers/#gs.syJl_Pg (accessed May 11, 2019).

France.⁵⁷ The *Yser Tower* in Diksmuide in Flanders, an important Flemish monument, which has been turned into a museum,⁵⁸ went a step further by making one of its floors into a pretend gas-attack area, with dark corridors, from which noise of explosions, and soldiers screaming and coughing could be heard. Visitors to such museums and exhibitions are encouraged, in fact, they are almost forced, to take part in a kind of role play. The purpose of this trend — to offer a better understanding of the war, to further mystify it, or perhaps to provide a form of *educational entertainment* — is not always clear.⁵⁹

In many countries, collective cultural and artistic marking of anniversaries is seen as encouraging creativity and inspiring the study of history. At the same time, such commemorations are also opportunities for the political interests of the day to use public memorialisation to their advantage, usually to confirm the continuity between the past and the present with the underlying message that the holders of political office today represent an unbroken line of common values.⁶⁰ Continuity matters because it asserts authenticity and bolsters legitimacy of the *commemorators*. They expect that the heroic deeds of fallen heroes would improve their reputation through commemorative association. As Prost and Winter write: “*La commémoration devient, pour les acteurs sociaux, collectivités publiques, institutions, entreprises, etc., le moyen d’affirmer leur importance et de confirmer leur être. Elle remplit une fonction de légitimation en attestant l’ancienneté et en marquant les différences. Par quoi elle contribue à la valorisation des identités, si caractéristique du monde contemporain.*”⁶¹ [emphasis mine] Celebrations of past events are thus imbued with multiple acoustics resonating with different audiences and representing a variety of emotions. Local events celebrating heroes

57 Visited in August 2016 <http://www.marne14-18.fr> (accessed May 11, 2019).

58 Visited in August 2018. “The Yser Tower” <http://www.museumaandeijzer.be/ijzertoren/en/ijzertoren-diksmuide/yser-tower> (accessed May, 11, 2019).

59 Susan Sontag notes the *Imperial War Museum* in London offering *The Trench Experience* and *The Blitz Experience* in Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004), 109.

60 In a parallel to 1914, Serbia sought the support of Russia and France, but this time to oppose the commemorative conference on the 1914 Sarajevo assassination, organised by the Sarajevo Historical Institute. See Lyon, 2015, 9.

61 Prost and Winter, 2004, 45.

fallen for a greater cause, also involve a current political agenda as well as a permanent and genuine need of the community to reflect, to take a moment to be silent and pay one's respects at the same time (*se recueillir*). They look at the *remembered* event whose impact has stretched to the present day and whose meaning has evolved. While just invoking the name of someone can be a powerful message,⁶² the remembrance goes beyond the event remembered. It is never *just* about the event, it could be about a range of issues that the people assembled care about. It could also be about the events that are seemingly unconnected to what is being remembered, as in some Serbian First World War commemorations where references to the 1999 NATO air strikes were made.⁶³ These apparently disparate needs of remembrance — political, emotional, social, individual, national — are embodied through places known as *lieux de mémoire*, defined by Pierre Nora.⁶⁴ As communities disappear, they become the *milieux de mémoire*. Human activities change as occupations, habits, and rituals disappear. It is up to history to “organize the past”.⁶⁵ But while the world changes, the actual places are still here. They have to be *remembered*, associated with the events that happened there, which is why we need to keep retelling the story, so that the sites will preserve their meaning. The meaning of the *site of memory* is found in the interpretation — it tells the story of the way the past was *organised*. We lose the past if we lose the story.

This research recognises that history can never be contemplated in a vacuum. The context of when history is written matters: record of what occurred during a war will depend on the consequences of the outcome.

62 In his lecture on the remembrance of WWI in Europe, Jay Winter speaks of 11 November commemorative events in France, where the teacher reads the names of the fallen in the war, engraved on the local WWI monument as the children reply “*présent*”. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpH5I6EA1t0&list=PL3A8E6CE294860A24&index=18> 26’ (accessed May 11, 2019).

63 Serbian WWI commemorations described in chapter V “Retreat Remembered and Rediscovered”.

64 Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire.” *Representations* 26 (1989): 7-24.

65 Nora, 1989, 8.

The government in power, depending on the type of regime in question, may also control the official *remembering* which will shape the perception of the event for newer generations. They may rebel against the official version, or go along with it. The dominant narrative is perpetuated in history books, official commemorations, street names, monuments, museum exhibitions and other mediated acts of memorialisation. Dominant historical narrative elements in everyday life represent the internalisation of history: we live in streets with specific street names, near certain monuments, and we do not work on public holidays that are assigned such status because of something that happened in the past. All these aspects of our lives, and much more, are ruled by the dominant narrative. Since the reality is thus directed by “mnemonic hegemony”, to use Berthold Molden’s coinage,⁶⁶ the imbibed perception of history becomes the truth we live by, barring active resistance of significant counter narratives. Moreover, the perception of a historical event matters more to a national group than a factual historical record of what actually happened. National groups will, in fact, forget parts of their past. Indeed, forgetting parts of history and adopting historical errors is necessary for the nation to come unto itself, Ernest Renan boldly asserted in 1882. “*Une nation est un principe spirituel, résultant des complications profondes de l’histoire, une famille spirituelle, non un group déterminé par la configuration du sol.*”⁶⁷ In other words, national belonging is about ideas and ideals. They are transformed into collective memory which will include manipulation, false remembering as well as forgetting.⁶⁸ Part of the identity of each national group comes from the perception of its history which depends on how a national group and its antagonists (choose to) remember the actions of their ancestors in a specific set of historical circumstances. This perception is part of the cohesive force that defines national identity.

66 Berthold Molden, “Resistant pasts versus mnemonic hegemony: On the power relations of collective memory”, *Memory Studies* (2016, Vol. 9 no. 12), 125-142.

67 Ernest Renan, “Qu’est ce qu’une nation”, (Paris: Conférence donnée à la Sorbonne, 1882), 49. http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/renan_ernest/qu_est_ce_une_nation/renan_quest_ce_une_nation.pdf (accessed September 28, 2016).

68 Renan, 1882, 37. Also, David Rieff, *In Praise of Forgetting: Historical Memory and Its Ironies* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 135.

Indeed, we accept that what distinguishes a national group from others is, in Anthony Smith's definition, "a named human population sharing a historic territory, or homeland, **common myths and historical memories** [emphasis mine], a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members".⁶⁹ There seems to be a symbiotic yet troubled relationship between common myths and historical memories because myths may be, and often are, partially based on historical events with fictional and factual elements combined in a potentially intoxicating cocktail.

2. Serbia's Main Event

"No one knows what's hard suffering until they've crossed Albania walking."⁷⁰

For *small* and relatively *new* nations, there are no small or unimportant historical events. If a small nation becomes *famous* on the international stage through an event, this becomes a defining marker in the small nation's identity. The *fifteen minutes of fame* may pass quickly for everyone else, but the event remains central to the nation in question. Past wars and battles depicted in textbooks, or fictionalised in novels and films, defeats and triumphs that are remembered, commemorated, and celebrated, represent more than routine public life and popular culture — the sanctity of past events is actively maintained. Consequently, there is little distance between the event and the national group. The present is judged, usually harshly, when compared with the glorious past. Every nation needs an imagined *Golden Age*, which is longed for and used as a reference, as will be discussed later on. The imagined values we believe inspired the deeds of the past are maintained as a roadmap for the present and the future. In 2013, the Serbian Minister of Culture and Information, Ivan Tasovac, used exactly this image in his speech on the occasion of the commemoration

69 Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 14.

70 Serbian saying.

of the 1918 breakthrough of the Salonika Front: “We have an obligation to ask ourselves what messages and signposts we can draw from this feat carried out by the most glorious generation in our history”.⁷¹ Minister Tasovac was talking about Serbia’s Great War. In both Serbia’s history and collective memory, the Great War (*Veliki rat* in Serbian) has pride of place. In the run-up to the centenary of its beginning and in the centenary of every year of the war, Serbia has been publicly remembering a great many events of the Great War. Not only its first shots fired by a Bosnian Serb in Sarajevo in June 1914, but more importantly, one century later, Serbia remembers and celebrates the war which made it “famous”, as expressed by the Serbian Prime Minister, Ivica Dačić, in 2013, in his speech on the occasion of the commemoration of the 98th anniversary of the arrival of the Serbian Army on the islands of Vido and Corfu: “For us Serbs, every time we come to Corfu and Vido, we experience it as a memorial service. More than 10,000 people rest in the ossuaries and in the deep blue sea tomb. As someone once said, here lies the best part of Serbia⁷² — the eternal Serbia. An entire generation went through the Golgotha here, followed by the start of the resurrection. Serbia paid for her freedom dearly, in the words of a British military adviser, she paid for it in blood and tears. This was the war that made Serbia famous.”⁷³ The passage above exemplifies a number of the issues in examining the memory of the event that is the subject of the present research: there are different ways in which this event is remembered and represented 100 years later, but it always tends to generate a strong emotional response. This is in itself contradictory to serious historical investigation but it represents part of the *Serbian problem* as mentioned previously. The 1915 Retreat is considered

71 “Podvig Solunaca putokaz za nas” [“The feats of Salonika veterans are the signposts on our road”] *B92*, 28 September, 2013 http://www.b92.net/kultura/vesti.php?nav_category=1087&yyyy=2013&mm=09&dd=28&nav_id=759029 (accessed September 30, 2015).

72 John Kelly, White House chief of staff (July 2017 – January 2019), considers that the best Americans are in Arlington. *Time*, 19 October 2017 <http://time.com/4990521/john-kelly-donald-trump-soldier-death-transcript/> (accessed November 30, 2017).

73 “Nama je svaki odlazak na Krf opelo” [“We hold a memorial service every time we come to Corfu”]. *B92*, September 26, 2013. http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2013&mm=09&dd=26&nav_category=11&nav_id=758324 (accessed September 30, 2013).

sacred — nationally, historically and emotionally. The research explores the Retreat transposed into the wider *mythomoteur* of the Serbian national consciousness, within the Serbian national identity narrative.⁷⁴ The Serbian Retreat and the associated First World War events are emotional triggers for commemorations with an agenda, and one might argue that there are no commemorations without one. Referring back to Mr Dačić's quoted speech, we note that the passage is heavy with an emotional charge that cannot be countered. The facts ("10,000 in ossuaries") are correct and they are juxtaposed by a value judgement that seems completely arbitrary ("here lies the best of Serbia"). Mr Dačić then refers to an unnamed British military adviser,⁷⁵ presumably to add credibility to his claims. One could say that Mr Dačić is speaking as a politician and does not burden himself with the desired neutrality of a historian. Nevertheless, the speech is symptomatic of the way the subject of the First World War is treated in Serbia. Many historiographic texts, articles and books by Serbian authors on this subject seem to contain objective facts interspersed with value judgements, frequently supported by statements reputedly belonging to foreign observers as a way of claiming objectivity. It appears that a certain amount of bias is inevitable among a number of Serbian historians — to say nothing of politicians — when it comes to the First World War. The general discourse surrounding the centenary commemorations is predominantly about the righteousness of the Serbian cause. The works of outstanding historians such as Andrej Mitrović⁷⁶ were not used as reference for the centenary events, ostensibly because they were based on facts, not emotions. As Latinka Perović⁷⁷ explained in 2014, at the start of the centenary commemorations, the First World War is used by Serbian politicians to glorify the participation of Serbia in the war — always eager

74 The Kosovo legend is the main Serbian story. The First World War is used in the same way as the Kosovo myth, see Nevena Daković, "The Serbian mythomoteur as sacrificial narrative", *Frontiers of Narrative Studies*, (4(1) (2018)), 140-145.

75 This is probably Rear Admiral Troubridge, see chapter III.

76 Andrej Mitrović's *Serbia's Great War, 1914-1918* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2007) is considered standard work on WWI in Serbia in English.

77 Latinka Perović (b. 1933) is a Serbian historian.

to debate what caused it while crying foul over an *anti-Serbian conspiracy*.⁷⁸ As we shall see in the research, the Serbian government's discourse in contemporary political communication mirrors their stance on the Great War — there is a tendency to emphasise *Serbia's dual status as a victim of the Great Powers and a small heroic country*. In the context of the Entente, Serbia views itself as a *loyal but abandoned ally*. This serves the government well with an internalised message: *despite our qualities and loyalty, the world is against us*, providing room for populist rhetoric and policies.

Commemorative events in relation to the Great War in Serbia can generally be divided into two types. There are official commemorations, where a solemn crowd is gathered around a freshly cleaned monument, and after a minute's silence, a politician makes a speech, or several politicians make a speech each. But there are also grass-roots commemorations in Serbia which are more creative, sincere and usually self-financed. Ordinary citizens express their gratitude or pay their respects through a variety of community-based projects, seemingly unprompted by the establishment — citizens' associations, mountaineers' clubs, pensioners' groups, history enthusiasts, completely independent of official commemorations which they may even hold in contempt.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the official commemorative events of the Great War in Serbia accurately illustrate Jacques Le Goff's assertion that memory is in the service of today and tomorrow.⁸⁰ This does not necessarily make the emotions behind the commemorative events less genuine, but they require interpretation in relation to political agendas and the uses of memorialisation.

While endeavouring to mark what is largely seen as a *debt* to its forefathers through many commemorative events and a peak in the interest in

78 Miloš Teodorović, "Stotinu godina Velikog rata u Srbiji: Mitovi ispred činjenica" ["Hundred years of the Great War in Serbia: Myths above facts"], *Radio Slobodna Evropa* [Radio Free Europe] 28 July 2014 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/latinka-perovic-za-rse-bez-price-o-stvarnim-posledicama-velikog-rata/25472877.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

79 From interviews and correspondence with individuals involved in such initiatives.

80 Rieff, 2016, 22.

memorial culture,⁸¹ Serbia is a country dealing with many issues from the past while contemplating a tentative European Union future, having become an EU candidate country in March 2012.⁸² Serbia is struggling to come to terms with the ways in which it has to adapt and change in order to be accepted as a reliable EU partner following the tragic Yugoslav wars of the 1990s in which Serbia is largely seen to have played a prominently negative role. In this undoubtedly painful process for Serbian society, collective memory, historical and national identity narratives — in all their ambiguities — play an important role.

In the 1980s, a series of revived historical traumas from the First and Second World Wars, through arguably manipulative encouragement by a number of historians, writers, and scores of politicians and other public personalities, surfaced in the Serbian political and public arena. Serbia was undergoing an invasion of memory. It was the *collective memory* of the mythologised defeat of the Medieval Serbian Kingdom against the Ottomans in the Kosovo battle in 1389, which played a crucial role in strengthening the position of Slobodan Milošević (1941 – 2006) in 1989, and bolstering the revival of Serbian nationalism. Triggered by Serbia, the subsequent resurgence of nationalism throughout the rest of the multi-ethnic state, under the influence of their own memories and narratives, led to the Yugoslav wars between 1991 and 1999. The date with which the Kosovo battle is associated, 28 June/15 June (Gregorian/Julian calendars), is poignantly the date when the Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo on the occasion of his visit to the city in 1914. The date is thought to have been chosen as a provocation against the Serbs in Bosnia. While Serbia may or may not have been instrumental in starting

81 At an event promoting the publication of a brochure on Serbian POWs who died in the Netherlands, M. Dačić, the Serbian Foreign Minister, stated that preservation of memorial culture was a way of resisting “revisionist tendencies of part of the international community”: “Dačić: 91 srpski vojnici poginuo u Holandiji, pamтите to” [“Dačić: 91 Serbian soldiers had fallen (sic) in Holland, remember that.”] *B92*, 2 November 2017. http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=11&dd=02&nav_category=11&nav_id=1321075 (accessed November 30, 2017).

82 Coincidentally, Serbia made 11 November Armistice Day a national holiday starting in 2012.

the Great War, depending on the approaches of different historians,⁸³ the subsequent mobilisation, battles, occupation, retreat through Montenegro and Albania to Greece, and eventual triumphant return and the liberation of Serbia, together with the Entente forces, has the Great War standing on a pedestal of the Serbian past perceived as heroic.⁸⁴ This event is known as “the Crossing of Albania”, “The Retreat”, or “Golgotha”, and it took place in November and December 1915. Attacked from three sides in October 1915, the Serbian Army continuously retreated south in order to survive. The retreat eventually meant the evacuation of the territory of Serbia, not only by the army, but also by thousands of civilians, thousands of young men and boys, thought to be likely targets of the enemy.⁸⁵ Originally, instructions were issued to military commanders to ensure that other civilians refrained from evacuation, but instead be kept away from hostilities as much as possible and hand over any weapons they had, since the enemy would confiscate them anyway.⁸⁶ Army commanders were attempting to provide structure and order in an increasingly chaotic situation. It was clear that almost an entire country was on the move. The elderly King Petar I, his son, Regent Aleksandar, the Prime Minister Nikola Pašić and his cabinet, all retreated with the Serbian troops. Most of the Serbian parliament deputies, public and less public figures, academics, writers, and ordinary people retreated. The state seals, the archives, and the state treasury, in a specially guarded convoy, were sent into temporary exile, extraordinarily improvised in dire conditions. The routes into safety

83 These controversies were mentioned in the introduction and are explored to a limited extent in chapter III.

84 Curiously, Belgrade weekly *Nedeljnik's* special issue *100 Events that Changed Serbia* (2017), excluded the Retreat, but included the first *Rolling Stones* concert in Serbia in 2007, among a variety of political, cultural, and sports events. When asked about it, the acting editor-in-chief answered that omitting the Retreat was an “oversight, “was forgotten”, adding that space was limited.

85 “Naredjenje 21969” [Order regarding next class of recruits and all bans] 27 September 1915, *Serbian Military Archive*, 16/19, 2-1, box no. 59.

86 “Vrhovnoj komandi – uputstvo 7199” [“To the Supreme Command – instruction 7199”] These instructions issued by the Minister of War cover different topics related to the expanding war operations: how to protect the civilian population, getting civilians to hand over any weapons and food they had (against receipts), how to deal with state property, what to do with prisoners etc. The instructions were issued on 1 October 1915 in Niš: *Serbian Military Archive*, 16/34, 2-4, box no. 59.

were few and the refugees, civilians and military, were forced to cross Albania in order to get to the Adriatic. The original plan was for the Allies to help the Serbian Army recover in Albania. Meanwhile, as the refugees fled, in groups, in pairs, on foot, on mules, or simply walking alone, many succumbed. Casualty estimates differ widely — one such estimate is that 94,000 soldiers died of hunger, cold, and disease while another 174,000 were captured or went missing.⁸⁷ Another set of data states that 144,098 soldiers and officers died of disease or fell in combat between September 1915 and March 1916,⁸⁸ and yet another, sent by the War Minister Terzić to Prime Minister Pašić, was 243,877.⁸⁹ Thousands of civilians died, their definite numbers unknown. Since the plan for reorganisation of the Serbian Army *in situ* had to be abandoned — the Austro-Hungarian Army was getting closer — it was decided that the weakened Serbian troops and a number of civilians would be taken to French North Africa,⁹⁰ Greece and metropolitan France. Many who made it to the Adriatic on the Albanian coast had to wait too long for the Allied ships in inclement weather and died. Others made it to the ships and then died. When Serbian refugees landed on the Greek island of Corfu, the camps were not ready and as the cold weather continued, many perished. The refugees who were sick with typhus and other infectious diseases were placed on the small island of Vido, where they died in great numbers, making Vido known as *the Island of Death*. They were given burial at sea and this body of water became known in Serbian history and tradition as the “Blue Tomb”. This site of memory is personified in a poem by a young poet Milutin Bojić who died at Salonika in 1917. It is said that Greek fishermen did not fish in

87 Hew Strachan, *The First World War* (London: Pocket Books, 2006), 154.

88 Aleksandar S. Nedok, *Povlačenje srpske vojske ka albanskom primorju I njena evakuacija na Krk 1915/1916. Rad vojno-sanitetske službe*, [Retreat of the Serbian Army towards the Albanian coast and its evacuation to Corfu: Work of the Medical Service]. (Beograd: AMD system, 2006), 83.

89 Sladjana Zarić, “Od Srbije do Krfa – Put albanske Golgote” [“From Serbia to Corfu – The road of Albanian Golgotha”], *RTS* (Radio Television Serbia), centenary article, 17 January 2016. <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/Velikirat/story/2528/srbi-na-krfu/2175355/od-srbije-do-krfa-put-albanske-golgote.html> (accessed May 11, 2019).

90 The story of Serbian evacuee soldiers in North Africa is mentioned but not covered in the thesis and it deserves a separate study. E.g. see Nedeljko Gizdavić, *Srpska Afrikijada – Naši u Africi* [*Serbian African Adventure – Our people in Africa*] (Beograd: Medija Centar Odbrana, 2017, reprint from 1922).

these waters for 50 years out of respect for the dead.⁹¹ This is an example where one nation's collective memory is shared by another, acquiring additional meaning for the Greeks who became the people of solidarity and faithful friends of the Serbs. The study looks at these *lieux de mémoire*, the memorials erected in memory of those who died, and their role in the Serbian national identity narrative.

3. The Serbian National Identity Narrative

“Whoever is a Serb, of Serbian blood,
 Whoever shares with me this heritage,
 And he comes not to fight at Kosovo,
 May he never have the progeny
 His heart desires, neither son nor daughter;
 Beneath his hand let nothing decent grow —
 Neither purple grapes nor wholesome wheat;
 Let him rust away like dripping iron
 Until his name shall be extinguished!”⁹²

The *Serbian national identity narrative* is part of the pre-existing assumptions of the research. Any part of this narrative, even if it is mentioned in only a few words, will require no added explanation for the Serbs. Certain events, situations, or people, might be referred to in passing and *everyone* in Serbia will know what is meant. A fitting illustration of this would be the 2017 Haradinaj Case. In 2017, Mr Ramush Haradinaj, a Kosovo politician who had been charged with war crimes and then acquitted before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (2005

91 “Položeni vencu u “Plavu Grobnicu” [“Wreaths laid at the “Blue Tomb”], *Politika*, 16 April 2016 <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/353345/Polozeni-venci-u-Plavu-grobnicu> (accessed October 30, 2016)

92 “Propast carstva srpskoga” [“The Downfall of the Kingdom of Serbia”], translated by John Mattias and Vladeta Vučković https://www.rastko.rs/knjizevnost/usmena/battle_of_kosovo.html#s02 (accessed May 11, 2019).

– 2012),⁹³ was still under investigation by the Serbian judiciary, when he travelled to France. Serbia asked French authorities to arrest him based on an international arrest warrant, which they did. A Serbian request for extradition followed. This was eventually rejected by a French court in Colmar.⁹⁴ There was consternation and anger in the Serbian media about the decision and Mr Dačić, the Serbian Foreign Minister, issued a statement of rebuke saying that, “the French generals from the First World War would have been ashamed”.⁹⁵ This is a direct reference to the traditional Franco-Serbian friendship going back to the Great War and the French role in the recovery of the Serbian Army following the Retreat. Mr Dačić was thus using historical events from 100 years ago to present the Serbian point of view in a Franco-Serbian judicial *contretemps* in 2017. The audience for his statement were, of course, not the French authorities, but the domestic public, who could understand the reference. It was a calculated emotional retort intended to remind the home crowd of the Serbian national identity narrative trope: *everyone* is against Serbia so she must fight alone for what is right since her allies of old have forgotten their friendship. This is a useful device for the government to emphasise their hardship in leading Serbia, or seeking justice for Serbia — against all odds. Evoking the past in this way sheds a different light on the matter, removes the regime’s responsibility, and distracts the public from what really happened (e.g. perhaps there was insufficient evidence, or there was a legal problem with the warrant), as the context becomes transformed through the introduction of a historical reference that has meaning for the Serbs as *the French* are accused of betraying their ancestors. We refer to this device as *historical frame switching*. Because the dominant narrative of the past is not only well known but regularly reinforced in Serbia —

93 Haradinaj et al. (IT-04-84), ICTY <http://www.icty.org/case/haradinaj/4> (accessed May 11, 2019).

94 “La justice française rejette l’extradition du Kosovar Ramush Haradinaj vers la Serbie”, *Le Monde*, 27 april 2017 https://www.lemonde.fr/police-justice/article/2017/04/27/la-justice-francaise-rejette-l-extradition-du-kosovar-ramush-haradinaj-vers-la-serbie_5118447_1653578.html (accessed May 11, 2019).

95 “Dačić o Haradinaju: Francuski generali bi se stideli ...” [“Dačić on the Haradinaj Case: The French Generals would have been ashamed ...”]. *B92*, 27 April 2017. http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=04&dd=27&nav_category=11&nav_id=1254778 (accessed April 27, 2017).

particularly in the centenary years — reframing a current political issue by giving it a different historical context, historical frame switching can be turned on quickly, almost as a backdrop to any political, economic, or other issue. Such tactics are frequently used by the Serbian government: one of the ways to remember the Retreat 100 years on is to use its *well-remembered* tropes for whatever political purpose they fit.

But how did the *Serbian national identity narrative* evolve? We have to go back — into the past. The Serbian Medieval Kingdom is generally imagined by Serbs today as having been a long, uninterrupted and magnificent reign when Serbian culture surpassed that of Byzantium. This much-mythologized Serbia had its beginnings as a decentralised medieval polity under the relatively powerful Nemanjić dynasty, which held on to power, and gradually took possession of the lands around its fiefdom.⁹⁶ Different mixed and evolving entities were vying for prestige gained through territory acquisition — the glory was in the size of the territory not its ethnic composition,⁹⁷ as Bulgarians, Greeks, Vlachs, Hungarians, Venetians, among others, squeezed in different polities, challenged and allied with each other, sometimes in opposition to, and frequently in jealous imitation of, the great maverick empire of Byzantium. On today's map of Europe, the former Serbian Empire would have occupied roughly the southern part of Serbia south of Smederevo, Kosovo, Macedonia, Albania and Northern Greece.⁹⁸ The Serbian realm under the Grand Prince Stefan Nemanja (1113 – 1199) became the Kingdom of Serbia under his son Stefan *Prvovenčani* — The First Crowned (1196 – 1228). The kingdom gained its own autocephalous Eastern Orthodox Church in 1219 through the skilled diplomatic efforts of the king's younger brother Rastko (1176 – 1228) who, having become a monk under the name Sava, subsequently became the Serbian Church's first archbishop. Serbia

96 RTS [Serbian Radio and Television] released the TV series *The Nemanjić Dynasty* in 2018 and a monument to the founder of the dynasty Stefan Nemanja is being prepared in Belgrade in 2020.

97 Vladimir Ćorović, *Istorija srpskog naroda [History of the Serbian People]* (Beograd: BIGZ, 1989), 167.

98 Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia: The History Behind the Name* (London: Hurst and Company, 2002), 6.

grew to its apogee under Tsar Stefan Dušan (1308 – 1355) after which its decline loomed against the backdrop of the Ottoman expansions in south-eastern Europe. Two battles against the advancing Ottomans, the battle of Marica in 1371, and the battle of Kosovo in 1389, are considered to have marked the beginning of the Ottoman arrival in the Balkans. The Battle of Kosovo on 28 June 1389, “gave rise to legends so soon after the event that its basic facts were quickly obscured”.⁹⁹ Prince Lazar Hrebeljanović (1329 – 1389), connected through marriage with the Nemanjić dynasty, and other Serbian lords, were to defend a much-reduced Serbian realm (from the time of Tsar Dušan), against the Ottoman armies led by the Sultan Murad and his sons Bayezid and Jacup. The probable truth is that Lazar’s Army wasn’t only Serbian and their opponents weren’t only Ottoman.¹⁰⁰ Serbian lords from the south of Lazar’s town of Kruševac did not send troops to fight on the Serbian side, presumably in anticipation of Ottoman success. Lazar’s Bosnian ally King Tvrtko I Kotromanić (1353 – 1391) did send troops, joined by Croatian crusader knights,¹⁰¹ as well as by Albanians, Vlachs and Bulgars¹⁰².

According to the myth, one of the Serbian knights, Miloš Obilić, killed Murad before the battle by approaching him under the pretence that he was crossing over to the Ottomans. It is known that both Murad and Prince Lazar died in the battle, but “there is no detailed battle report which is close to the time of the battle”.¹⁰³ The cult of Kosovo and Prince Lazar grew and constitutes the main narrative of Serbian identity in the coming centuries under the Ottoman occupation. The cult of “the Kosovo tyrannicide” flourished, making Miloš Obilić a mythical hero who sacrificed himself for his country. Obilić was greatly admired by Gavriilo Princip, among others. Edward Gibbon presciently commented

99 Pavlowitch, 2002, 10.

100 “The battle of Kosovo in 1389 was fought not between a Serbian and a Turkish Army, but between two feudal leagues of no clear ethnic loyalty.”; Pavlowitch, 2002, 227.

101 Ćorović, 1989, 202.

102 Pavlowitch, 2002, 10.

103 Marko Šuica, “Kosovska bitka – moral manipulacije” [“The Kosovo Battle – the moral of manipulation”, in *Bolja prošlost [Better Past]*, preface by Radivoj Radić (Beograd: Evoluta, 2018), 72.

on the Obilić cult: “It is a commentary on the Serbian character that this questionable act has been held up to posterity as the most saintly and heroic deed of national history”.¹⁰⁴



On the map above, we can see the borders of Serbia under Tsar Stefan Dušan.¹⁰⁵ (Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.)

It could be said that the core of Serbia’s identity gradually developed in opposition to the Ottoman occupation. Certainly, the 19th century Serbian philologist and language reformer, Vuk Karadžić (1787 – 1864), who collected traditional folk poems and songs, including the series of narrative poems on the Kosovo battle, further popularised the legend

104 Quoted in Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1967), 251.

105 William R. Shepherd, *Historical Atlas* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1923).

which ultimately shaped the Serbian national identity.¹⁰⁶ We highlight two key elements in the Kosovo myth, as told through these epic poems. The first element is supernatural and is meant to explain the Serbian defeat: Prince Lazar lost the battle because on the eve of the battle, he was offered a choice between the “earthly kingdom” — triumph in the battle, and the “heavenly kingdom” — defeat on Earth but reward in Heaven. The second element concerns the alleged betrayal by Vuk Branković, one of the Serbian lords under Lazar, which also seems to explain the Serbian defeat, although there is no historical evidence for this.¹⁰⁷

This identity centred around the cult of Kosovo was possibly spread through panegyrics written by monks. Belgrade fell to the Ottomans in 1521, but in 1557, the Patriarchate was restored at its See in Peć, “this sole surviving institution of the Nemanjić monarchy continued the development and the extension of Serbian consciousness”.¹⁰⁸ The Nemanjić rulers’ lasting legacy are monasteries of remarkable art and architecture. With strong ties with the monastic ideal, several of the rulers became monks before they died and were subsequently declared saints. The monasteries became the visible custodians of the Kosovo flame and ensured the centrality of spirituality in what emerged as Serbian ethnicity: “the constructed Serbian ethnic memory ensured a successful future for a long-gone historical event”.¹⁰⁹

As the Ottoman expansion continued, many Slavic peoples, including Serbs, moved towards the Christian realms of Austria and Hungary when

106 Leopold Ranke became interested in the history of Serbia through Vuk Karadžić who was a central figure in the Romantic Nationalism in 19th century Europe. See Biljana Marković, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić <http://ernie.uva.nl/viewer.p/21/56/object/131-158707> (accessed May, 11, 2019).

107 Niko, Županič, “Lazar Dimitrijević. “Narodna epopeja “Kosovo””. *Etnolog* (Ljubljana) knj. 5/6 (1933) str. 134-176. https://www.etnomuzej.si/files/etnolog/pdf/Etnolog_5_6_1933_zupanic_narodna.pdf (accessed March 31, 2020). It is worth noting that both elements still persist in the Serbian public discourse, e.g. some Serbs may refer to themselves as “heavenly people”, while anyone who is seen as a traitor — or even just critical of the Serbian cause — will be called “Vuk Branković”.

108 Pavlowitch, 2002, 16.

109 Šuica, 2018, 67.

the Turks were stopped at Vienna in 1683. The Habsburgs established the so-called *Vojna Krajina*, military frontier, as a buffer zone against the Turks. This attracted large numbers of mostly Serbian settlers. Among the different migrations of Serbs escaping Turkish reprisals, the Great Migration of 1690 under the patriarch Arsenije Čarnojević (1633 – 1706) remains entrenched in Serbian historical memory.¹¹⁰ Following several uprisings against the Turks in the first half of the 1800s, Serbs began to regain control of their lands. The last Turkish troops left in 1867 and Serbia became an independent state at the Berlin Congress in 1878. The *Serbian national identity narrative* could thus be described, albeit reductively, as dominated by a great defeat in Kosovo which ended the *Golden Age*. This was followed by centuries of Ottoman occupation after which much blood was spilled before the country became independent again. Serbian people on the move and seeking sanctuary also feature prominently in the narrative.

In the aftermath of the First World War, through its sacrifices and its position of strength as a victorious nation belonging to the Entente, Serbia was instrumental in the establishment of Yugoslavia, which began as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Yugoslavia was also the country that would subsequently gain the extraordinary distinction of breaking apart twice, first in 1941¹¹¹ and then in 1991,¹¹² with arguably both causative events ignited by Serbia. In the spring of 1941, after Serbian army officers staged a coup, and Serbs revolted against the Yugoslav government's signing of the Tripartite Pact, Hitler launched an attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. A swift defeat by Nazi Germany led to the dismemberment of the country. In the late 1980s, aggressive political machinations of the Serbian leadership, accompanied by strident nationalist rhetoric — which

110 Pavlowitch, 2002, 20.

111 The military coup led by Serbian army officers on 27 March 1941 prevented the Kingdom of Yugoslavia from implementing the pact with Hitler signed on 25 March 1941 by the Yugoslav government, subsequently deposed by the army. The coup was supported by mass demonstrations. The attack on Yugoslavia by Nazi Germany started on 6 April 1941.

112 Although there were strong nationalist elements across Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, it is widely argued that the Serbian leader Slobodan Milošević was instrumental in starting the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s.

came to a head at the 600th anniversary commemoration of the Kosovo battle — triggered nationalist responses in the other republics and the 1990s Balkan wars ensued.

Serbs see their history as turbulent and heroic, and themselves as having always been a nation focused on *state building*.¹¹³ The *Serbian national identity narrative* considers that the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, built on the sacrifice of the Retreat, was destroyed by *others*. There are Serbian historians who view the establishment of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as a Serbian “error”.¹¹⁴ This *ex post facto* speculation is taken further through the explanation that because Serbia was a winner in the First World War, she **saved** the other South Slavs, who would otherwise have ended up as citizens of other countries. The often-repeated trope of the late 1980s, that Serbia was *a winner in wars and a loser in peace*, is the essence of the revival of Serbian nationalism exemplified in the infamous 1986 *Memorandum*.¹¹⁵ Although this document was only ever a draft and not officially published at the time, it had considerable impact. Catching the latent mood of the Serbs following the loosening of one-party rule in Yugoslavia, the *Memorandum* expanded on the ills of the position of Serbia in the then Socialist Yugoslavia. The *Memorandum* — at the time accepted as the voice of the Serbian *intelligentsia*¹¹⁶ — clearly stated that Serbia was in an inferior position in relation to other republics: “the Serbian people could not achieve equality in Yugoslavia for which establishment they

113 Serbs in fact use it as an adjective to describe themselves as *državotvorni narod*, state-building people, or nation.

114 This approach is comprehensively refuted in Miroslav Jovanović, “Dominacija tradicionalnog pozitivizma” [“Dominance of traditional positivism”], in *Bolja prošlost [Better Past]*, Preface by Radivoj Radić, (Beograd: Evoluta, 2018), 50-56.

115 *Memorandum Srpske Akademije Nauka i Umetnosti* (nacrtno), Jesen 1986. [*Memorandum of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences* (draft) Autumn 1986] <https://www.helsinki.org.rs/serbian/doc/memorandum%20sanu.pdf> (accessed May 12, 2019)

116 216 Serbian intellectuals linked to the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences signed it, see Christina Morus, “The SANU Memorandum: Intellectual Authority and the Constitution of an Exclusive Serbian “People””, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* Vol. 4. No.2 (June 2007), 143; 18 intellectuals protested and signed an antimemorandum, see Branka Mihajlović, “Mirko Simić: Memorandum SANU, crna tačka srpske istorije” [“Mirko Simić: SANU Memorandum, the black spot of Serbian history”], *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 1 October 2016 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/mirko-simic-sanu/28024025.html> (accessed April 11, 2018)

have borne the greatest sacrifices".¹¹⁷ This sense of injustice permeates the Serbian story. The narrative can be summarised in the following way: Serbs believe to be losing, be it territory or heritage, despite being braver, having won battles and wars against a stronger enemy, blaming either the other *ex-Yugoslav*, or other neighbouring nations for hypocrisy and betrayal. The Great Powers usually fail to lend the Serbs sufficient, or any, support against their opponents while the Serbs have to defend themselves from superior and ruthless enemies. This feeling of injustice, defined by Dubravka Stojanović as, "probably the strongest glue of a nation",¹¹⁸ is kept alive through repetitions of the narrative. It is intensified through claims of Serbian *antiquity*,¹¹⁹ and its *superiority* as demonstrated in exceptional artistic and cultural achievements, such as in medieval monasteries and frescoes.¹²⁰ The frequent repetition of 1389¹²¹ is meant to reinforce legitimacy which comes from history, from whence the great pride in Serbian monasteries in Kosovo and elsewhere, dating back to the Golden Age. The Golden Age could also be conceived as Paradise, embodied by the mythical Nemanjić Dynasty Empire, which is followed by the fall personified by the Kosovo Battle defeat. The suffering under the Ottomans can be seen as the search for God — or nationhood — state building — which is eventually achieved. The Balkan Wars 1912 – 1913 brought Kosovo back into the fold of the Serbian nation for a short while before the Great War threatened to take it all away. The Retreat is Golgotha and the Resurrection is the reorganisation of the Serbian Army leading to the final victory and the liberation of the country. In this context, the historical pattern works not because it is true, but because it is familiar, therefore recognisable. In this case well-known Biblical elements

117 *Memorandum*, idem.

118 Dubravka Stojanović "The Mythical War", *Peščanik*, 5 July 2014 <https://pescanik.net/the-mythical-war/> (accessed March 18, 2017).

119 Regional comedians like to make fun of Serbian nationalists' propensity to call the Serbs "the oldest nation" or "the heavenly people".

120 Another Serbian trope is that Serbs were using the fork very early on since it was pictured at a medieval fresco, this "fact" is usually accompanied by the comment "while the rest of Europe were eating with their hands".

121 There is a political group called '1389' in Serbia, politically veering to the extreme-right, although they deny being a party, calling themselves an "association" or even an "NGO".

can be set up *to explain* what happened to the Serbs. In the same way, if the pattern of the national identity narrative is well established (*Serbs vs. the World*) then each new event that happens today can be framed so it is understood/interpreted against the backdrop of that narrative: Mr Haradinaj did not get off because the judicial case against him was below par but because of the French betrayal. This argument only makes sense in the alternative reality of this narrative. This is how controlling the memory of the past serves a real-world purpose. The feeling of injustice, the “glue of the nation” has to be kept strong. Thus, the *Serbian national identity narrative*, strengthened by targeted memorialisation, serves to frame each new event so that it will fit the pattern. This approach paralyses a nation — if everything that happens is interpreted through *old* historical patterns, not only is there no hope of future renewal, but there is no hope, no future, and no renewal. The past rules supreme: everything that has already happened will continue to happen.

Elements confirming the contours of this assumed narrative can be found in the news, feature and documentary films and productions, public events and private initiatives: “Serbs were the first among the enslaved nations to regain their sovereignty, [...] with much blood and intellect, and then invested it several times into different states until they were recently forced to take their sovereignty back”,¹²² says a commentary from a documentary on the history of Serbia from 2008. Sovereignty is gained, given, taken, or constructed, but how can a nation be *forced* to take its sovereignty back? This would be baffling to those unfamiliar with the Serbian penchant for victimhood. While it may be interesting to examine this sentiment at greater length, i.e. why are Serbs so attracted to suffering and to the idea of suffering; however, this may be outside the scope of this study.

122 *Kneževina Srbija [Principality of Serbia]*, documentary film, *Košutnjak Film*, 2008.

4. The Retreat in Time

“How easy it is to talk and invent the past and how hard it is to face the present. Serbian mythology about long-gone heroic days is becoming meaningless in the horror we are living through today. If we are descendants of such heroes, how come we turned out to be such cowards? If our history is so bright, how come our present reality is so dark?” (Tired from the past, 28 September 2013)¹²³

The quote at the beginning of this section illustrates the disconnect between the perception of the heroic Serbia and the real Serbia. Serbs generally perceive their past as valiant and glorious, containing all the elements of the narrative already mentioned, while the reality of the last quarter of the Serbian century has seen civil wars, economic decay, civil unrest, NATO air strikes, and the assassination of a progressive prime minister in 2003.¹²⁴ This disconnect is not necessarily a universal feeling and there is much division between Serbs as to how their past is viewed and its connection to the present. As noted by Dušan Kovačević, a contemporary Serbian playwright, Serbs worship their great and heroic ancestors, even though they did not recognise them as such while they were alive. On the contrary, Kovačević says, “they were unacknowledged at best, and persecuted at worst. Now that they are safely dead, all sorts of things can be said and done *in the name of the heroes*: The abuse of heavenly ancestors is common, inappropriate, rowdy, and appallingly distasteful.”¹²⁵ This phenomenon is significant in considering the way Serbs perceive and deal with their past. As previously mentioned, Serbian historians, perhaps mirroring Serbian society, are divided among themselves in respect of the cause of the Great War, its meaning, and its legacy.¹²⁶

123 Anonymous comment on news site B92 in relation to a commemorative event from WWI, http://www.b92.net/kultura/komentari.php?nav_id=759029 (accessed September 28, 2016).

124 Zoran Djindjić (1952 – 2003).

125 Dušan Kovačević, *Dvadeset srpskih podela. Kako se Srbi množe deljenjem*. [Twenty Serbian Divisions. How Serbs Multiply by Dividing.] (Belgrade: Laguna, 2017).

126 The divisions are examined in Miletić, 2016.

Nevertheless, the Retreat as an event had major historical consequences. The Retreat not only expanded beyond the borders of the Serbian nation, involving other nations in its drama, but the Retreat also had long-term results in several other aspects. The military impact was significant — the sheer feat of survival legitimised the Serbian demand for independent command at the Salonika front in 1916. Consequently, the liberation of Serbia in 1918 was carried out not only by Allied troops but also by the Serbian Army. Moreover, the Serbian Army continued its advance all over the South Slav-inhabited territory of the soon to be former Austro-Hungarian Empire, scuppering Italian hopes of keeping Dalmatia, as promised to them by the Entente in the 1915 London Treaty.¹²⁷ This in turn gave Serbia a stronger voice at the Versailles Conference.¹²⁸ In this sense, the Retreat as a historical event can be interpreted as an affirmation of the perennial Hegelian question on the direction of history. The Retreat, as terrible as it was, could be interpreted as not having happened in vain: Serbian sacrifice was the price placed on the altar of future resurrection. Without the triple offensive, there would have been no Retreat, without the Retreat there would have been no suffering, and no renewal of the Serbian Army — no Golgotha thus no Resurrection. It is not a coincidence that Regent Aleksandar's 1916 speech to his troops makes this direct Christian link as his soldiers take their Easter communion on Corfu.¹²⁹ The sacrificial element in the Serbian national identity narrative is deeply embedded since the cult of Kosovo. This was described by the American writer and participant in the Retreat, Fortier Jones, as the Serbian "capacity for sacrifice".¹³⁰ The dominant narrative links the suffering with the final victory — the Retreat is seen as the price paid for the Salonika Front breakthrough, the liberation of the country, and the establishment

127 The secret treaty promised Dalmatia to Italy as incentive for joining the Entente. See *The Treaty of London* (1915) [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_London_\(1915\)](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_London_(1915)) (accessed May 12, 2019).

128 The Versailles Conference is not covered in the thesis.

129 "H.M. Aleksandar inspects Serbian units in Corfu", *YouTube, Kraljevina Srbija*, published on March 15, 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9cdgZ-GCKA> (accessed November 1, 2016).

130 Fortier Jones, *With Serbia into Exile: An American's Adventures with the Army that Cannot Die* (New York: The Company Co., 1916), 389.

of Yugoslavia. The Serbian role in the Great War is considered sacred mostly *because of* the Retreat, which represents the pinnacle of suffering. Consequently, each *new look* at the War is perceived as an attempt at reassessment, therefore as *revisionism* which is by definition viewed as anti-Serbian and insulting to the martyrs of the Retreat and the Great War. Foreign commentators are always acclaimed when they reiterate the Serbian point of view, as Boris Johnson did in 2014, when writing in *The Telegraph* about Germany's responsibility for the First World War. The target of his article was not Germany but "the Left."¹³¹ However, the Serbian media acknowledged Johnson as a friendly voice, his article was widely reported,¹³² and his later appointment first as Foreign Secretary, and subsequently as Prime Minister was welcomed.¹³³ It seemed as if Johnson's view on the First World War was his most important quality. The debates in the Serbian public sphere during the centenary years are animated by a *personal* interest. This is undoubtedly related to the family history of many Serbs whose great-grandfathers fought in the Great War and the personalisation of such discussions can be seen through expressions such as, *our grandfathers fought*.¹³⁴

The *grandfathers* are the so-called *solunci*, Salonika veterans, or Salonika warriors. The term refers to the Serbian troops after 1916, part of *l'Armée d'Orient*, who participated in the liberation of Serbia, having previously survived the Retreat. They are invoked as the ultimate holders of Serbian

131 Boris Johnson, "Germany started the Great War, but the Left can't bear to say so", *The Telegraph*, 6 January 2014. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10552336/Germany-started-the-Great-War-but-the-Left-cant-bear-to-say-so.html> (accessed May 12, 2019).

132 "Londonski gradonačelnik: Nemci su krivi za rat" ["London Mayor: The Germans are to blame for the war"], *Blic*, 10 March 2014, <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/politika/londonski-gradonacelnik-nemci-su-krivi-za-rat-i-oni-ne-krive-srbe-za-to/t1q2dlb> (accessed May 12, 2019).

133 Milivoje Pantović, "Serbia Welcomes Boris Johnson as UK Foreign Secretary", *Balkan Insight*, 18 July 2016. <https://balkaninsight.com/2016/07/18/serbia-praising-johnson-appointment-as-uk-s-foreign-secretary-07-15-2016/> (accessed May 12, 2019); M.B. "DŽONSON O SRBIJI! Dva puta je bio u Beogradu, a evo šta misli o NATO bombardovanju naše zemlje" ["JOHNSON ABOUT SERBIA! He was in Belgrade twice and here is what he thinks about the NATO bombing of our country"], *Blic*, 24 July 2019. <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/dzonson-o-srbiji-dva-puta-je-bio-u-beogradu-a-evo-sta-misli-o-nato-bombardovanju-nase-h91j8fq> (accessed March 28, 2020).

134 "Naši su se dedovi borili ..." – This phrase is often found on social media and heard in everyday speech.

ideals and values. The values that are considered to have carried the retreating soldiers through the Retreat and given them strength for the final victory in 1918, have been appropriated as components of the Serbian national identity as an ideal — on an abstract level. In reality, young Serbs of today, who may well feel patriotic and brave, are leaving the country of their birth in growing numbers.¹³⁵ Remembering the glorious past and professing faithfulness to the Great War ideals cannot distract forever from a range of serious economic and political issues in Serbia, and yet it happens a great deal. The issue of the disputed territory of Kosovo is a case in point. Those who do not believe that Serbia should recognise Kosovo as an independent state will invariably mention past sacrifices and among them the Salonika veterans' contribution to Serbia. In 2007, a well-known Serbian playwright said in an interview that Kosovo would never be Serbian again, and the following comment was typical of many that were posted: "... If *solunci* had given up like you, you would have been reading and writing in German."¹³⁶ In other words, an emotive argument is put forward, that *we* cannot abandon what was fought over in the past when blood was shed by *our* ancestors, regardless of reality. Remembering *solunci* is an answer to everything: whatever the issue, we can say that we will follow in the footsteps of the *solunci* — *our* ancestors, who have shed their blood *for us*. This guilt-inducing cliché is shorthand for reminding people of who they are — whatever that may be — and who they should aim to be, whatever the elusive goal. This imagined and constructed image of a First World War veteran connects the Retreat, the narrative, and the national identity.

In popular culture in the former Yugoslavia, the First World War was not a frequent choice as a film subject. Significantly, only two feature films were made about the First World War between 1945 and 2018.¹³⁷ With the

135 654,000 people have left Serbia since 2000. "Anketa: Zbog čega mladi napuštaju Srbiju?" ["Survey: Why are young people leaving Serbia?"] *Blic*, 12 February 2019 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/anketa-zbog-cega-mladi-napustaju-srbiju/1ffsssd> (accessed May 20, 2019).

136 "Kosovo više nikad srpsko" ["Kosovo will never be Serbian again"] *B92*, 4 May 2007 http://www.b92.net/srbija2020/komentari.php?nav_id=244938 (accessed May 12, 2019).

137 *March on the Drina* in 1964, and *St George Slays the Dragon* in 1984.

exception of a documentary by Stanislav Krakov from 1940,¹³⁸ no feature film was produced with the Retreat as its subject until 2018, when a film entitled *King Peter I*,¹³⁹ was scheduled to premiere on the centenary of the Armistice. At the same time, another film which focused on 1914, was released in Serbian cinemas.¹⁴⁰ It is worth noting that almost every other important historical event in the former Yugoslavia, and later in Serbia, was made into a film or a television series. In socialist Yugoslavia, *the communist partisans vs. the Nazis* films dominated film production.¹⁴¹ The Kosovo Battle, and the uprisings against the Turks, became topical in the 1980s and 1990s. Subsequently, many different eras were depicted in television and feature films, the interwar years, the wars of Yugoslav succession of the 1990s and the 1999 NATO airstrikes. The absence of the Retreat as a subject has never been satisfactorily explained. A novel published in 2015¹⁴² mentions that the American film director John Ford became interested in filming the epic of the Retreat in the 1960s but was put off by the communist authorities offering other historical events instead as *more suitable*, namely partisan operations against the Nazis from 1941 to 1945. Even if this story is not true, the fact that this anecdote is in circulation fits perfectly with the conspiracy element in the *Serbian national identity narrative* whereby Serbian sacrifices are unacknowledged.

With regard to memorialisation, there is no monument to the Retreat in Serbian territory. There are various First World War monuments and memorials such as the monument to 1300 corporals in Kragujevac, several monuments in Belgrade's New Cemetery that commemorate the First World War, a monument in the centre of Kraljevo, nicknamed *Milutin* as a symbol of the Serbian soldier of the First World War, the equivalent of the French *poilu*, and there is a street in Belgrade called *Ulica Albanske*

138 *Golgota Srbije* [Serbian Golgotha] Stanislav Krakov, Artistik Film, 1940.

139 The film *King Peter I* has since been made into a television series broadcast by the state-run Radio Television Serbia (RTS). *Kralj Petar Prvi*, Zillion Film, 2018.

140 *Zaspanka za vojnike* [Soldiers' Lullaby], Predrag Antonijević, Avala Film, Film Danas, Komuna, 2018.

141 This was depicted in the documentary *Cinema Komunista* by Mila Turajlić in 2010.

142 Dragan Velikić, *Islednik* [Investigator] (Beograd: Laguna, 2015), 48.

Spomenice, Albanian Commemorative Medal Street, but there is no actual, physical *lieu de mémoire* in Serbia commemorating the Retreat. There seem to have been tentative plans immediately after the war, for a monument to be erected somewhere along the road to the Adriatic Sea through Albania, but these were abandoned.¹⁴³ The unofficial memorial appears to be the ossuary on the island of Vido, in Corfu, Greece.

The Retreat as an event has a number of iconic episodes, tragic and heroic. Most echo a refrain that can be heard throughout the Serbian narrative. The themes are recognisable: pursuit by a far stronger enemy, initial setbacks yet ultimate triumph, inability or unwillingness of the Allies to help, resulting in suffering, deaths, sacrifices, and worldwide attention (“the war that made Serbia famous”). The attention of the world is important for the perception of the Retreat by Serbs too. Foreign eyewitnesses who are seen to espouse the Serbian cause are celebrated. Some participated in the Retreat, and many wrote about their experiences. These include Archibald Reiss,¹⁴⁴ Flora Sandes,¹⁴⁵ doctors and nurses with Scottish Women’s Hospitals,¹⁴⁶ and other medical missions. The presence and support of foreigners have multiple functions: they validate the Serbian struggle — foreigners are objective and can therefore be trusted, acting as ambassadors of the Serbian cause. In today’s Serbia, foreign supporters are still valued, while those who are critical face open hostility.¹⁴⁷ How they are viewed by others, particularly other Europeans, remains relevant for Serbs. Although examining the prospects of the Serbian EU future

143 *Srbi na Krfu [Serbs in Corfu]*, RTS, 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gMd758zbnY> (accessed May 12, 2019).

144 R. Archibald Reiss, *Infringements of the Rules and Laws of war committed by the Austro-Bulgaro-Germans; Letters of a Criminologist on the Serbian Macedonian Front*. (S.l.: Forgotten Books 2012; Originally published in 1919).

145 Flora Sandes, *An English Woman-Sergeant in the Serbian Army* (Kansas University reprint of Hodder and Stoughton original published in 1916).

146 Scottish Women’s Hospitals Website <https://www.scottishwomenshospitals.co.uk> (accessed May 12, 2019), *Elsie Inglis and the Scottish Women’s Hospitals*, 2018 <https://www100.theapsgroup.scot/elsie-inglis/24/> (accessed May 12, 2019).

147 Herta Müller, Nobel Prize Laureate for Literature, visited Serbia in 2017 and gave her view of the wars of the 1990s. Michael Martens, “Herta Müller made Serbia Look in the Mirror”, *Balkan Insight*, November 1, 2017 <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/11/01/herta-müller-made-serbia-look-in-the-mirror-10-31-2017/> (accessed October 10, 2018).

is outside the scope of this research, there is some merit in questioning a possible link between Serbia's need for acceptance and approval by Europe and of Europe, and the Retreat as part of the Serbian national identity marker. In an ambitious project finalised in 2017, in the House of European History in Brussels,¹⁴⁸ the history of Europe is told through exhibits from around the continent, illustrating events that have shaped it, from the myth of Europa and the bull, up to the Brexit vote and beyond, into the uncertainty of the future. Can we envisage how Serbs would wish to feature in that house, should they ever get there as a member-state?¹⁴⁹ Can Serbia understand its past — and any past — as something that can be viewed through different perspectives, something which is not absolute and immovable, something that should not serve political agendas, or will Serbs always cling to their known and fixed master narrative, indulging in “struggles of competitive victimhood” as Berthold Molden describes a feature of a grand historical narrative?¹⁵⁰ How can a nation be weaned off such a diet?

One of the best-known Serbian authors, Borislav Pekić (1930 – 1992) wrote in *How to Quiet a Vampire*: “We have to look straight-ahead. If we were supposed to look behind us, we would have had eyes on the back of our head. We have to kiss the ground of our children, not the ground of our forefathers. Our honour does not depend on where we come from but on where we're going.”¹⁵¹

This quote, seemingly incompatible with the general Serbian relationship with the past, was featured on the shop window of a bookshop in Belgrade city centre for many years.¹⁵² Its popularity is evident on social media

148 House of European History <https://historia-europa.ep.eu/en/mission-vision> (accessed May 12, 2018).

149 There are, in fact, at least two Serbian exhibits in the HEH, the first Serbian Constitution from 1835 and the 1852 edition of the Serbian German Latin Dictionary by Vuk Karadžić (visit to the museum 10 February 2019).

150 Molden, 2016, 125.

151 Borislav Pekić, *Kako upokojiti vampira* [*How to quiet a vampire*] (Belgrade: Laguna, 2012). From the translation by Stephen M. Dickey and Bogdan Rakić.

152 The quote was moved inside the bookshop in November 2018.

and possibly demonstrates some degree of self-awareness of at least a portion of the Serbian population. Could this be taken as an encouraging sign or is this just a voice in the wilderness? Through the example of the remembrance of the Retreat, the research will examine the way Serbs look back at seminal events in their history, as well as how and why they refuse to look at other important events from their past. The study confronts the counterproductive nature of the *Serbian national identity narrative* by presenting evidence on how the feeding of this narrative rejects all critical reflection, harms rather than heals, and ultimately prevents progress.

Conclusion Chapter I

To understand the present, we need to look at the past. Luc Huyse, Belgian sociologist, said that, “Everything passes except the past”. It is in this spirit that we examine the attraction of the Great War, and the appeal of it in Serbia more specifically. We have chosen to investigate the 1915 Serbian Army Retreat across Albania as a seminal event in the First World War, the war that the Serbs consider as “the war that made Serbia famous”. Controversially, the Great War is linked to the sense of the Serbian identity, much like the mythical Kosovo battle from the 14th century. Interconnectedness between history, memory, and identity is explored through the *Serbian national identity narrative*. In the First World War, Serbia proportionally lost more population than any other combatant country, a fact which defines how Serbs see themselves — heroic victims of Europe and the world. Because so many Serbs lost their grandfathers and great-grandfathers in the Great War, they take this part of their country’s history *personally*. Serbia’s victory alongside the Entente was instrumental in the establishment of Yugoslavia, an ambitious multi-ethnic project which failed, first as a monarchy and then as a socialist federation. Serbia’s role in the break-up of Yugoslavia in the 1990s in a series of violent conflicts, has not been appropriately acknowledged or dealt with by the Serbs. The centenary commemorations of the Great War have been used to evoke Serbia as a victorious nation in the Great War, to

be celebrated as the *real* Serbia. This Great War nostalgia is rooted in the refusal to deal with the legacy of the conflicts of the 1990s and Serbia's responsibility for triggering them. The study identifies a tactic we have termed *historical frame switching*, used by the Serbian government — and supported by the media — whereby political obstacles are presented through various historical contexts depicting Serbia as wronged by the Great Powers. This instrumentalisation of the past — the sacralised Great War — ultimately serves the present government and keeps Serbia frozen in time through the cohesive power of *shared injustice*.

In the next chapter, we shall examine the concepts of memory, identity, and history and how they might help us explain the case of Serbia.

II

Literature Review: Memory, Identity, History, Serbia

Introduction

In his introduction to *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*, John Gillis seems exasperated with today's practice of remembering the past: "everyone is obsessed with recording, preserving, and remembering".¹⁵³ Gillis is describing a phenomenon known as *memory boom* — a surge of interest in the past primarily by people who are not historians. The general public have been increasingly drawn to heritage centres, memorials, monuments, living history museums, and other forms of representations of past events, as well as to their own family histories and ancestry searches. This interest in the past, particularly in war, as pointed out by Jay Winter,¹⁵⁴ has been matched by a growing need to memorialise historical events, or to remember those who participated in them. The Balkans, often diagnosed as suffering from *a surfeit of history* cannot get enough of being reminded of the past. In an article in the *Balkanist* from August 2017, Ana Milošević writes about "memory

153 John R. Gillis, ed., *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 7.

154 Jay Winter, *Remembering War. The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century*. (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006), 6.

mania” in the Balkans as a substitute for the process of coming to terms with the past, with memorials used to paper over the cracks of recent history, or to present the past in a particular way. Milošević suggests that “memory and memorialization have become the dominant way to speak about the past (let’s not be pretentious and say history)”.¹⁵⁵ Past wars and battlefield tourism have long been popular and the so-called *dark tourism* or *thanatourism* has been on the rise in recent years.¹⁵⁶ Battle re-enactments are growing in popularity.¹⁵⁷ In turn, academics and researchers have unsurprisingly become captivated by the phenomenon and the memory fervour has translated into a substantial body of research on this topic, present study included. Eelco Runia even speaks of “infected historians” amid the growing popularity of commemorations, and a tension between the trauma of the past and the need to deal with it.¹⁵⁸ The point of origin of the memory surge can undoubtedly be connected to the end of the Cold War.¹⁵⁹ A seemingly stable and immovable international order, where two ideologically opposed sides defined the roles and purposes in that order since 1946, was suddenly upended in 1989. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the subsequent redrawing of Europe’s map, and of national allegiances — as well as the Balkan wars of the 1990s of specific interest for this study — took everyone by surprise. Such tremendous changes in the world they were living in necessarily brought into question people’s understanding of their place in the newly transformed environment and by extension their identity. If they were no longer citizens of a country defined by, among other things, its ideological opposition to another, then *who* were they? In the same vein, in the case of the former Yugoslavia, if the socialist *brotherhood and unity* motto was no longer the principle to live by, what

155 Ana Milošević, “Placing All Bets on Memorials: Memory Mania Goes Balkans”, *Balkanist*, 21 August 2017 <https://balkanist.net/placing-all-bets-on-memorials-memory-mania-goes-balkans/> (accessed March 20, 2018).

156 Delphine Lauwers, “Battlefields as tourist attractions, Britons travelling to the Ypres Salient since 1919”, working paper *Transatlantic tourism workshop*, (October 2011), 3.

157 At the *To End All Wars?* (TEAW?) conference, Ypres, 22-25 August 2018, Jay Winter reported that there had been 256 re-enactments in the previous 12 months.

158 Eelco Runia, “Burying the dead, creating the past”. *History and Theory* 46 (October 2007), 315.

159 Cindy Minarova-Banjac, “Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion” *Centre for East-West Cultural and Economic Studies*, (research paper no. 16, 2018), 4.

was the new principle and the narrative it was based on? If the stories we have lived by are no longer resonating, what is the next master narrative? And more importantly, who will write it?

The political upheaval in Europe that saw the end of the Cold War brought on the need for people “to choose or create new political identities”.¹⁶⁰ Considering John Gillis’s view that memory and identity have an interdependent relationship and that “we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities”,¹⁶¹ it is apparent that these concepts — Gillis calls them social and political constructs — are not just fluid but completely unstable. Yet, memory and identity feature prominently as a part of any nation’s historical foundation: how the history of a country is remembered is part of the self-image of the country and its people:¹⁶² the way the community of people *imagine* themselves to be. This imagined identity has been dissected by Benedict Anderson who used the term “emotional legitimacy”¹⁶³ to describe the popularity of the nation — essentially an invention. According to Cindy Minarova-Banjac, since “narratives of the past are used to legitimise national identities”, they have a role in influencing domestic and foreign policy.¹⁶⁴ Narratives of the past matter. *National memory* is in fact necessary, according to Anthony Smith: “the concept of the nation cannot be sustained without a suitable past and a believable future”.¹⁶⁵ Gillis goes on to say that “identities and memories are not things we think *about* but things we think *with*”.¹⁶⁶ In other words, identity and memory are part of a belief system determining a nation’s set of values, what they believe to be true or false, and right or wrong.

160 Minarova Banjac, 2018, 5.

161 Gillis, 1996, 3.

162 Minarova Banjac, 2018, 9.

163 Anderson, 1991, 6.

164 Minarova Banjac, 2018, 3.

165 Anthony Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal” in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin, eds. *Myths and Nationhood*. (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 36.

166 Gillis, 1996, 5.

However, *memory boom* is more than just a by-product of the end of the Cold War. For Aleida Assmann the memory boom is about reclaiming “the past as an indispensable part of the present”, as identities and allegiances shift in a “post-individualist age”,¹⁶⁷ in an evaluation process of deciding where we belong. For Jay Winter, *memory boom* is multifaceted. It comprises the sense of a “duty to remember” but mutating memory is also “taking on a life of its own”¹⁶⁸ where he sees the risk of “total collapse of history into memory”.¹⁶⁹ Tzvetan Todorov calls it a “cult of memory”, growing in Europe, particularly in France.¹⁷⁰ Pierre Nora, seen as having greatly contributed to, if not actually triggered the memory boom in France and elsewhere with his in-depth journey through France’s sites of memory,¹⁷¹ felt that in contrast to history, memory was self-serving as it “only accommodates those facts that serve it”.¹⁷² Nora believed that the memory boom would “hasten the death of the nation state”.¹⁷³ Looking at Europe in the second decade of the 21st century, this prediction has most certainly turned out wrong. The nation state — with its master narratives, its national symbols, its myths, and its *memories* — has never looked more alive. While the reasons for this revival are outside the scope of this research, the questions to be explored next are divided into five clusters, first briefly introduced, then treated in depth:

1. Memory, remembrance, and forgetting. The theoretical framework for understanding memory in this research is primarily based on the work of Jay Winter and his interpretation of Maurice Halbwachs’s analysis of *collective memory* in conjunction with the ideas developed by Aleida

167 Aleida Assmann “Reframing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past”, in Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (eds.), *Performing the Past. Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe*, (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 39.

168 Winter, 2006, 283.

169 Winter, 2006, 284.

170 Tzvetan Todorov, *Les Abus de la Mémoire* (Paris: Arléa, 2015), 50.

171 Pierre Nora, ed. *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1997). The first volume, *La République*, was published in 1984, followed by *Nation* in three volumes, in 1986. *Les France* in three volumes was published in 1992.

172 Nora, 1989, 8.

173 Winter, 2006, 284.

Assmann, Avishai Margalit, and others. The terms *popular memory*, *collective memory*, and *national memory* are often used interchangeably, yet have different points of departure even if they have overlapping features. According to Jay Winter, when we describe groups of people who gather to recollect past events in public, we are talking about *collective remembrance*, not *collective memory*. But there is also collective forgetting which plays an important part in a nation's history and identity. Ernest Renan first rationalised the role of forgetting in his treatise on what constitutes a nation,¹⁷⁴ Avishai Margalit set out to define an ethics of memory and endeavoured to deconstruct the relationship between forgetting and forgiveness, while Paul Connerton¹⁷⁵ categorised the types of forgetting.

2. National identity. National memory, overlying in parts with national historical narrative, closely follows another social construct — national identity. David Lowenthal links it to the concept of “having a heritage and thinking it unique”,¹⁷⁶ underscoring the difference in relation to *the other*, while Anthony Smith delves into the complexity of the functions of national identity — it fulfils many purposes.¹⁷⁷ For Chris Lorentz, the way national identity is constructed is clear — “by negating other nations and other groups within the nation”.¹⁷⁸ The feeling of belonging to a nation on the basis of (constructed) similarity may be *imagined* — as Anderson described it in *Imagined Communities*,¹⁷⁹ or *invented* — as Hobsbawm advanced in *The Invention of Tradition*.¹⁸⁰

174 Ernest Renan, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?* (1882) http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/renan_ernest/qu_est_ce_une_nation/renan_quest_ce_une_nation.pdf (accessed March 15, 2017).

175 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) and “Seven types of forgetting” (*Memory Studies* 1(1) 2008: 59-71).

176 David Lowenthal, “Identity, Heritage and History” in Gillis, *Commemorations*, 1996, 47.

177 Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History. Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge. Polity Press, 2000).

178 Chris Lorenz, “Unstuck in time. Or: the sudden presence of the past”, in Tilmans, van Vree and Winter, 2010, 78.

179 Anderson, 1991.

180 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

3. **Usable pasts.**¹⁸¹ The interpretation of the term depends on the context, meaning history as a model or inspiration, or as history instrumentalised. Taking *usable past* to denote general national historical awareness, a kind of perspective of the past which serves as an exemplary and usable narrative, prone to instrumentalisation, leads us to inquire into how national mythic pasts get constructed, then remembered, and then *repurposed*. Popular history and myths are used regularly for legitimising political actions. These *usable pasts* can turn out to be the Golden Age or the Dark Age of a nation, glorious victories or disastrous defeats, depending on the circumstance.

Through the examples of Kosovo, Masada and Joan of Arc, as analysed by Paul Cohen, we look at the impact of such myths on the collective psyche of a nation.

4. **Memorialisation.** Remembrance of the First World War constitutes the wider context of this study, with the 1915 Retreat across Albania as Serbia's central event of the war its focus. More generally and more globally, the First World War has shaped the way we mourn, remember, and commemorate the dead in armed conflicts. The practice of memorialising the unknown soldier to symbolise all those who died in the war and who could not be found was established in its wake. In examining the study of remembrance of the First World War by Jay Winter, we look at the ways the remembering is manifested, and mediated. Through memorial functions and conventions, we examine the question of the ownership of memory of events such as the First World War.

5. **Serbia.** Finally, the present research will look at the case of Serbia as “the true laboratory for research into rapid changes of memory” as described by Dubravka Stojanović in her series of lucid essays, *Populism the*

181 The term “usable past” appears in J.P. Stern, “Germans and the German Past” (*London Review of Books*, Vol. 11, no. 24. 21 December 1989): 7-9. <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v11/n24/jp-stern/germans-and-the-german-past> (accessed January 2, 2019)

Serbian way.¹⁸² For Stojanović, memory is “one of the populist symptoms”, and in the case of Serbian public opinion, has been used as a tool for creating all the necessary conditions for war.¹⁸³ This leads us to examine the prevalence of the largely nationalistic discourse which supports the references to historical events in Serbian public life, media and education. Historical events are used to explain contemporary ones. The Kosovo battle served that purpose many times in Serbia, and its matrix has been transferred to the First World War as a parallel “sacrificial narrative,” according to Nevena Daković.¹⁸⁴ The examination of this concept explains why the World War I centenary commemorations made front-page news in Serbia for the wrong reasons, and why the past in Serbia appears to be more uncertain than the future.¹⁸⁵

1. Memory, Remembrance and Forgetting

“Nations do not remember, people do.”¹⁸⁶

In her celebrated Harry Potter book series, J.K. Rowling created horrific creatures called *dementors*.¹⁸⁷ Dementors are dark and hooded figures without visible faces who guard Azkaban, the notorious prison for convicted wizards and witches. When they attack, dementors radiate chill and dread, sucking out all the happy memories from their victims who become enveloped in crushing sorrow and despair which paralyses them. The only way that dementors can be repelled is for the wizard or the witch to remember the happiest memory they have and to summon it vividly in their mind. This memory, together with a special magic spell will produce a *patronum*, a kind of guardian angel that will chase away

182 Dubravka Stojanović, *Populism the Serbian Way* (Belgrade: Peščanik, 2017).

183 Stojanović, 2017, 10.

184 Nevena Daković, “The Serbian mythomoteur as sacrificial narrative” *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* 4(1) (2018): 140-145.

185 Stojanović, 2017, 10.

186 Jay Winter has used this sentence in different forms in several of his works. The form quoted here was noted at the *To End All Wars?* (TEAW?) conference, Ypres, 22-25 August 2018.

187 J.K. Rowling, *The Prisoner of Azkaban* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 1999).

the dementors. The idea is both imaginative and rational, even if it all takes place in a fantasy novel. We think of memory as power — as long as we remember good things from the past, they have not gone, they live inside us and they will give us strength when we need it. All we need to do is to *remember* and we will be saved.

Memory has value while forgetting is associated with a lack of caring.¹⁸⁸ Loss of memory indicates sickness or failure. Personal memories can be lost through disease, group memories are erased as punishment, or deleted for political reasons, to change the way the past is remembered. Long before Stalin took to having official photographs altered, removing his freshly disappeared enemies from pictures as if they had never existed,¹⁸⁹ it was common practice in Ancient Rome to remove the depictions of those who had fallen from grace. *Bad emperors*, those who had been deposed, or others who had conspired against the ruling emperor, would be condemned to a *damnatio memoriae*,¹⁹⁰ destroying *any* memory of them. This resulted in an *abolitio memoriae* — they were to be removed from public remembrance — from monuments, reliefs or portraits anywhere in public spaces, including from the coins with their likenesses.¹⁹¹

Memory is everywhere. We depend upon it for making our way in the world, establishing relationships and planning for the future. Experience would not exist without memory. Memory is personal but it can also be shared. Memory is “individual, unreproducible” according to Susan Sontag¹⁹² and yet it can be disputed, and it usually is. Apart from the debate if *memory* is the term that should be used at all,¹⁹³ there are also

188 “Memory is partly constitutive of the notion of care”, in Margalit, 2004, 28.

189 Robert Conquest, “Inside Stalin’s Darkroom”, *Hoover Digest*, 30 April 1998 <https://www.hoover.org/research/inside-stalins-darkroom> (accessed May 15, 2018).

190 This is a modern term, dating from 17th Century.

191 Eric R. Varner, *Mutilation and Transformation: Damnatio Memoriae and Roman Imperial Portraiture* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 2.

192 Sontag, 2004, 76.

193 Aleida Assmann “Reframing memory. Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past” in Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (eds.). *Performing the Past. Memory, History and Identity in Modern Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010), 35. Assmann complains that “memory discourse lacks academic vigour”.

arguments why memory should be studied in relation to a group, to a *collectivity*, rather than in relation to an individual. In the preface to *The Social Frameworks of Memory*, Maurice Halbwachs explains that memory should always be considered in society because this is where these memories are made and recalled.¹⁹⁴ Looking at memory individually misses the point. For Halbwachs, it is the existence of the “social frameworks for memory”¹⁹⁵ — one of his key terms — that *makes* memory a memory. Halbwachs uses the term “collective” to complement the term “memory”. He does not deny the existence of individual consciousness or individual memory, but the memories that seemingly belong just to us, only make sense in relation to other people in the group.¹⁹⁶ When Halbwachs takes the example of family memories,¹⁹⁷ he maintains that if we considered them individually, they would appear as a series of images, without the family context that gives them full meaning. Collective memory is greater than the sum of its parts. The images of an event from our past are collections of details and fragments, not just of that event but of many other events in the same context. It is actually a *collage*¹⁹⁸ that we are seeing, although we are deluding ourselves that it’s a snapshot, which Halbwachs calls “a reconstructed picture”.¹⁹⁹ In *The Reconstruction of the Past*, Halbwachs dwells on how recalling the past produces “an altered version” — remembering *accurately* is an illusion.²⁰⁰ Although the community elders have a role to play, to tell us of the past we do not know, they too will be experiencing “an altered version” of the past, and past times will be remembered as better and more colourful.²⁰¹ For Halbwachs, this is “retrospective mirage” when older people remember the past and conclude that things used to be better and brighter. As the poet Jacques Prévert expressed this sentiment: “*la vie était plus belle, et le*

194 Halbwachs, 1992, 43.

195 Halbwachs 1992, 38.

196 Halbwachs, 1992, 53.

197 Halbwachs, 1992, 55.

198 “Memory is a product of a multitude of impulses drawn together in form of a collage”, Winter, 2006, 4.

199 Halbwachs, 1992, 60.

200 Halbwachs, 1992, 47.

201 Halbwachs, 1992, 48.

soleil plus brûlant qu'aujourd'hui".²⁰² The concept of "retrospective mirage" plays a role in summoning emotions when it comes to describing past events. It also underlines the volatility of memory, amplified by the role of the group — we do not all remember the same things in the same way.

When speaking about groups of people remembering events, nations *remembering* their pasts, the term habitually used was the one coined by Maurice Halbwachs, *collective memory*. However, *memory* as a term, just like memory as an illusion of perfect recall, projects more power than it has. For Jay Winter, *memory* is "unstable, plastic, synthetic, and repeatedly reshaped".²⁰³ Winter has clarified his rationale for preferring the term *remembrance* to the term *memory*, specifically the term *collective remembrance* as opposed to *collective memory* when referring to groups of people who "act in public to conjure up the past".²⁰⁴ Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, in their introduction to the collection of essays entitled *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, used the term "public recollection"²⁰⁵ to define collective remembrance. In his later work, Winter makes further clarifications when he differentiates globally recognised events such as the assassination of J. F. Kennedy, or the events of 11 September 2001, where people appear to remember them with great precision and have *collective memory* about them, from the events that are only relevant for certain groups of people, such as *Anzac Day* on 25 April, solely meaningful for Australians and New Zealanders.²⁰⁶ The term *collective* does not necessarily indicate parallels of experience, only the focus of the remembrance, especially in the case of global events. Winter is opposed to using the term *collective memory* for nations by saying that "national collectives never created a unitary, undifferentiated, and enduring narrative called collective memory".²⁰⁷ Through this reasoning,

202 Jacques Prévert, « Les feuilles mortes », *Soleil de nuit* <https://www.eternels-eclairs.fr/poemes-prevert.php> (accessed January 22, 2019).

203 Winter, 2006, 4.

204 Winter, 2006, 5.

205 Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6.

206 Winter, 2006, 5.

207 Winter, 2006, 198.

Winter upholds Halbwachs's plurality of memory. Different versions and different voices make up *collective remembrance*. In what has become Winter's *profession de foi*, he reiterates that "nations do not remember; groups of people do."²⁰⁸ Winter insists on the *plurality* of remembrances as well as on the *actions* of remembrance, on memorial practices that groups of people carry out. It is the shared and public nature of the practice that embodies the collective remembrance of an event.

Turning now to the term *national memory*, although used extensively, it is also problematic because it links the personal quality of memory with the broad principle of a nation. Referring back to Halbwachs's exploration of family memories, they can be shared or *collective* because family members live together and know each other, and we can say that the memory, or memories, belong to all of them. In the case of a much larger group, such as a nation, the question is how can we have shared memories with people we don't know? Gillis pins down this incongruity when he says that "national memory is shared by people who have never seen or heard of one another, yet who regard themselves as having a common history."²⁰⁹ Furthermore, as Aleida Assmann has pointed out, this *national memory* it is not actually *memory* at all. The past that *we share* with our fellow citizens is something we have had to learn, we do not *remember* it at all, in fact, the past has had to be memorised.²¹⁰ Assmann agrees with Winter that "institutions and larger social groups, such as nations, states, the church, or a business firm do not *have* a memory, they *make* one for themselves."²¹¹ We could then also understand *memory* as an education endeavour, mediated by an arsenal of artefacts, museums, monuments, commemorations, memorial performances. By seeing the past represented in this way, we learn it and *remember* it. But this is only one aspect of collective remembrance of a nation, or *national memory*, these terms used with all the reservations already expressed. For Aleida Assmann, the

208 Winter, 2006, 198.

209 Gillis, 1996, 8.

210 Assmann, in Tilmans, van Vree and Winter, 2010, 38.

211 Assmann, in Tilmans, van Vree and Winter, 2010, 42.

term *collective memory* is as an umbrella term for different “formats of memory.”²¹² Subsequently, Assmann substituted *collective memory* with three distinct terms: *social memory*, *political memory*, and *cultural memory*.²¹³ *Social memory* encompasses the past accrued in a society which changes with generations, reconstructed with each new generation, and just like individual memory, it is embodied, it needs no mediation. *Political memory* is relevant for the development of national identities, determines how memories are represented in private and public spaces, as well as how they are constructed or altered for political reasons. Political memory is embedded in the national identity narrative, it is “anchored” in it, as Assmann put it, and requires mediation through monuments, commemorations, so it can be passed on to the new generation.²¹⁴ *Cultural memory*, consists of “storing information deemed vital for the constitution and continuation of a specific group” and Assmann divides it into the active part of cultural memory, “canon”, and the passive part, “archive”. While canon has been selected as representative cultural memory, what is *worth remembering* and passing on to the following generations, archive is not part of common knowledge or general awareness, although it is also being stored. Assmann’s categorisation of distinct memories within *collective memory* is moored in Halbwachs’s “social frameworks of memory” as all of the “formats of memory” are contingent on groups and their interactions and activities.

We have seen that memory is as much about social learning as it is about remembering. As Winter and Sivan restate in *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, societies do not learn, only individuals in societies do.²¹⁵ For them an individual engages in social learning by assimilating *scripts* about themselves and their relationships with the environment. By enlarging this notion, we could say that social learning is also about memorising expectations that people have of themselves and each other

212 Aleida Assmann, “Transformation between History and Memory”, *Social research* (Vol 75: No 1: Spring 2008), 55.

213 Assmann, in Tilmans, van Vree and Winter, 2010, 41.

214 Assmann, in Tilmans, van Vree and Winter, 2010, 43.

215 Winter and Sivan, 2000, 16.

on the basis of narratives. In the case of nations, these narratives as the vessels of shared *memories* — social, political, cultural — carry the lessons that we have absorbed over time. Could national memory be viewed as an *assortment* of history lessons? *The Best of?* Much of what is frequently called *national memory* is a selection of significant events from a nation's past that largely overlap with the national identity narrative.²¹⁶ National memory includes national forgetting which is as indispensable for a nation as remembering. In his speech from 1882, *Qu'est-ce qu'une nation*, Ernest Renan sees forgetting as a constitutive part of nation forming. He looks back at the history of France and brings up numerous "faits de violence" that *had to have been forgotten* so that France could exist in its current form: "*tout citoyen français doit avoir oublié*",²¹⁷ as Benedict Anderson notes. For Anderson, Renan uses this turn of phrase to indicate forgetting as a "prime contemporary civic duty".²¹⁸ As Anderson observes, there was nothing particularly French in the way that parts of national history were forgotten, it was a common occurrence in other nations too. Nor does Anderson believe that all of the forgetting was designed to shape the past in a particular way — some forgetting just happened.²¹⁹ Forgetting is a fact born out of pragmatism — the further back we go in history, the more things there are to forget. And as Renan maintains, a nation is made up of people who have things in common and who have also forgotten some of them.²²⁰ For Anderson too, amnesia is part of the biographical narrative of every nation.²²¹ Without forgetting, there is no reinvention possible, no changing of consciousness. This is reflected in many cultures. In Chinese mythology, Old Lady Meng makes the soup that will cause forgetting, necessary to forget the past life and be reborn.²²² In ancient Greek mythology, the river Lethe caused oblivion,

216 Sontag remarked that "collective memory is not remembering but a stipulating: that this is important, and *this* is the story about how it happened", Sontag, 2004, 76.

217 Renan, 1882, 38.

218 Anderson, 1991, 200.

219 Anderson, 1991, 201.

220 Renan, 1882, 38.

221 Anderson, 1991, 204.

222 Minarova-Banjac, 2018, 23.

essential for the soul to be reincarnated.²²³ Forgetting is normal, necessary, and can even be desirable. In differentiating the reasons for forgetting, Connerton links *repressive erasure* to authoritarian regimes, such as Stalin's deletion of former comrades from pictures, while *prescriptive forgetting* is done in political attempts to enforce reconciliation, such as in 403 B.C.E. Athens, when citizens were "forbidden to remember all the crimes and wrongdoing"²²⁴ in the previous period to ensure resolution, or as in the Treaty of Westphalia, when warring sides were instructed that "all that has pass'd on the one side, and the other, as well before as during the War, (...) shall be entirely abolish'd in such a manner that all that might be demanded of, or pretended to, by each other on that behalf, shall be bury'd in eternal Oblivion."²²⁵ *Forgetting as annulment* comprises two contrasting sides of the forgetting rationale, one denoting omission of those parts of history or genealogy that are considered unimportant (male lineage is often considered more important than female), and the other representing the accumulation of information in, for instance, archives, which because it has been stored, is forgotten.²²⁶ *Forgetting as humiliated silence* relates to matters from the past that are not spoken about, not forgotten, but not acknowledged as remembered. Connerton gives the example of 10 million war invalids from the main combatant countries after the First World War who were never remembered, acknowledged, or memorialized. While those who were "safely dead" were remembered, the invalids were condemned to be forgotten and ignored, particularly those whose faces had been so badly hurt that they were deformed.²²⁷ Connerton's critics²²⁸ may be right that factors involved in forgetting of any type are too complex, or too dependent on other influences and

223 Minarova-Banjac, 2018, 24.

224 Connerton, 2008, 62.

225 Treaty of Westphalia, II. 24 October 1648 <https://www.marxists.org/history/capitalism/un/treaty-westphalia.htm> (accessed 20 January, 2019).

226 Connerton, 2008, 65. This would parallel Aleida Assmann's understanding of archive as part of *cultural memory*.

227 Connerton, 2008, 69. See also, Winter on *gueules cassées* in Winter and Sivan, 1999, "The men with the broken faces", 48-54.

228 Scott Timcke, "Is All Reification Forgetting?: On Connerton's Types of Forgetting", *tripleC* (11(2) 2013), 375.

considerations to be simplified in a categorization of this kind. However, Connerton's taxonomy helps us identify these influences when we look at the way societies remember and forget, or rather, to emulate Winter's dictum, the many ways that individuals, or groups of people remember and forget in a society. Connerton demonstrates that forgetting is inherent in remembering since by selecting what is to be discarded, we are left with memory.²²⁹ The next question is whether it is at all possible have an authentic relationship with memory.

In his book *The Ethics of Memory*, Avishai Margalit builds on Halbwachs's frameworks of memory by examining the duty of remembering the past, and the moral dimensions of remembering and forgetting. In his reassessment of the relationship between remembering and caring, Margalit concludes that the relationship is conditional rather than contingent. If one cares *and* remembers, then remembering is essential.²³⁰ Margalit further engages with Heidegger's concept of caring as a fundamental characteristic of being human — *Sorge* — pointed towards the future, which Margalit turns towards the past: "When we care about another, we find it **natural** to expect the other to be one with whom we share a common past and common memories."²³¹ [emphasis mine]. Margalit does warn that this kind of caring can turn *ethnocentric*. So, he distinguishes the ties between people, denoting them as "thick relations" and "thin relations".²³² Margalit considers that the former are ties to family members, one's nation, or an association, and that they are guided by ethics, while the latter, ties to other human beings, or human beings by categories (all women, all men) are ties directed by morality. Margalit turns to the concept of common memory as a collection of *individual* memories of the same event, distinguishing it from the concept of *shared* memory, which he considers to be a plurality of perspectives of the same event, with shared memory depending on communication.²³³ Since remembering

229 Lowenthal, in Gillis, 1996, 171.

230 Margalit, 2004, 30.

231 Margalit, 2004, 35.

232 Margalit, 2004, 37-38.

233 Margalit, 2004, 48-51.

and forgetting is involuntary, Margalit argues in favour of a “community of memory” which would share the work of memory — “mnemonic labour”.²³⁴ This would extend through generations passing the shared memories to the following ones. At the same time, he acknowledges that for individuals to remember is to *know* while for a community to *remember* is more akin to *believe*. Since an event was remembered through “the division of diachronic labor”, and there being no one alive who remembers it today, the event becomes a memory of a memory of an event.²³⁵ Although it would be *natural* to think of communities such as “families, clans, tribes, religious communities and nations” as communities of memory, Margalit is in favour of a universal ethical community which would have a duty to remember “striking examples of radical evil and crimes against humanity”,²³⁶ to prevent “radical evil forces” from controlling collective memory and rewriting the past.²³⁷ Preserving the memory of the past *as is* would be the duty of the communities of memory, they would be the *we* who remember because *we* care.

Margalit’s vision of an ethics of memory is completed with his evaluation of forgiving and forgetting.²³⁸ Margalit connects the two through an examination of forgiveness as a concept in the Judeo-Christian tradition. He looks for coherence in the complex relationship between the two, with forgetting being involuntary, and forgiveness voluntary, he pleads for the primacy of forgiveness as a moral and ethical duty. By prioritising forgiveness, Margalit believes that forgetting is resolved: “forgetting an emotion in the sense of not reliving it when memory of the event comes to mind”.²³⁹ Margalit’s argument in favour of forgiveness resonates strongly with political problems of today, where memory of past perceived injustices and injuries contribute to preventing people from leading a normal life: in Israel and Palestine, in Serbia and Kosovo, in Cyprus,

234 Margalit, 2004, 58.

235 Margalit, 2004, 59.

236 Margalit, 2004, 78.

237 Margalit, 2004, 83.

238 Margalit, 2004, 183.

239 Margalit, 2004, 208.

among Greeks and Turks, and many others. For Minarova-Banjac in “Collective Memory and Forgetting: A Theoretical Discussion”, forgetting can be liberating, “for individuals and communities who seek to separate themselves from old traditions and memories that continue to impact current politics.”²⁴⁰ However, liberation has to be chosen, it cannot come by itself. In the context of a nation, forgiveness and forgetting of “ancient grievances”²⁴¹ can be seen as a betrayal of ancestors. Because of memory’s essential role in identity, would giving up that memory necessarily mean forsaking one’s identity?

Identity, more precisely, national identity, is our next subject of exploration. National identity is probably the first tool used in the construction of populist rhetoric, closely followed by the invocation of the danger of *losing it*. National identity, as a sense of belonging to a group, represents the essence of “thick relations”, these strong, yet *coincidental* bonds that are in resurgence across the world.

2. National Identity as a Search for Meaning

«Si je savais une chose utile à ma nation qui fût ruineuse à une autre, je ne la proposerais pas à mon prince, parce que je suis homme avant d’être Français (ou bien) parce que je suis nécessairement homme et que je ne suis Français que par hasard.»²⁴²

French philosopher and writer Montesquieu (1689 – 1755) was born 41 years after the Treaty of Westphalia, which counts as the birth of the nation state and state sovereignty.²⁴³ Nevertheless, Montesquieu clearly felt that his “thick relations”, as Margalit would term them, were encompassing the people of the world, rather than just the people of

240 Minarova-Banjac, 2018, 21.

241 Sontag thought that “too much remembering (of ancient grievances: Serbs, Irish) embitters”, Sontag, 2004, 103.

242 Montesquieu, *Cahiers : 1716 – 1755* (Paris : Grasset, 1941), 344.

243 Smith, 2000, 28.

his nation state, France, which he considered to have been born in by pure coincidence — “*que par hasard*”. If we apply Margalit’s principles, Montesquieu felt that he owed both moral and ethical duties to everyone, not just to his coincidental compatriots. His identity, as he intuited it, was far broader than the boundaries of his country, for he was a true citizen of the world. This is not just gleaned from his famous quote, but also on the basis of his broader work, especially his subversively entertaining *Lettres Persanes* where he played with imagining what an 18th-century Persian traveller could say about the mores of the French on his visit to France.²⁴⁴ In this too Montesquieu was ahead of his time because he was able to conceive of *another* identity — regardless of the fact that his purpose was to satirise French society by using the voice of another as a tool. In letter no. 30 of the *Lettres Persanes*, he relates the amusement of the Persian traveller upon hearing the reaction of the confused Frenchmen to him about being what he is — a Persian: “*Ah! Ah! Monsieur est Persan? C’est une chose bien extraordinaire! Comment peut-on être Persan?*”²⁴⁵ In other words, how is it even possible to be something else, *other* than what we are? Here Montesquieu tackles *othering*²⁴⁶ *avant la lettre*, of those who may be different in dress, customs, and language and yet are people just like us. Montesquieu’s principles clearly meant that his nationality was not his choice but that his conduct was. We could say that he had weighed the identities’ order of values and chose his humanity over his identity as a Frenchman.

Several centuries later, what has been so elegantly phrased by an 18th-century philosopher remains largely unresolved in the world today. The subject of national belonging determining the priorities of action with regard to narrow interests, as opposed to more general interests of humanity, is contentious and affecting every aspect of life, from personal

244 Montesquieu, *Lettres Persanes* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1964).

245 Montesquieu, 1964, 65.

246 john a powell, “Us vs them: the sinister techniques of ‘Othering’ and how to avoid them”, *The Guardian*, 8 November 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/08/us-vs-them-the-sinister-techniques-of-othering-and-how-to-avoid-them> (accessed 20 January, 2019).

freedom to climate change. In fact, one could say that the narrow interests of nation states with their “phenomena” as Eric Hobsbawm termed them, are winning. Identity seems to counter individuality and freedom of choice. Amartya Sen, in his book *Identity and Violence — The Illusion of Destiny*,²⁴⁷ describes identity as “singular affiliation” which reduces a human being to just one identity, while, Sen argues, each individual belongs to several groups, and we have to recognise “that identities are robustly plural, and that the importance of one identity need not obliterate the importance of others.”²⁴⁸ Sen disputes the assumed priority of community-based identity upheld by what he calls “communitarian thinking”. The communitarian worldview has been growing in popularity promoting the conduct based on “the dominant and compelling role of social identity.”²⁴⁹ National identity is community-based identity and is a form of social identity, as in being a member of a club, distinct from another club. As a textbook on political psychology informs us, everyone classifies themselves and everyone else into groups: *in-groups* are the groups we belong to, and *out-groups* are those we do not belong to.²⁵⁰ One of the classic authors in this field, Henri Tajfel defined social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his [her] knowledge of his [her] membership in a social group (groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership”.²⁵¹ The difference with regard to national identity vs. generic political identity or another type of membership is that political identity or membership of a sports club is a matter of choice, while national identity is a matter of chance. Just like Montesquieu, we *happen* to have been born *as something* — to be a holder of a passport of a certain country. And just like Montesquieu, we could decide to rise above it, to choose differently, based on a reasoned explanation, which is that *chance* is not a good basis for deciding on a course of action. In some respects, it is the opposite of

247 Sen, 2006.

248 Sen, 2006, 19.

249 Sen, 2006, 33.

250 Martha L. Cottam, Beth Dietz-Uhler, Elena Mastors, Thomas Preston, *Introduction to Political Psychology* (New York and Hove: Psychology Press, 2010), 47.

251 Quoted in Cottam, Dietz-Uhler, Mastors, Preston, 2010, 48.

choice. Yet, this is what people in general **choose** to do. Many people, in fact, consider their nationality as their most defining feature.

The evaluation exercise between in-groups and out-groups of different nations has been going on since *ethnies* and nations were *imagined, invented, and constructed*. And one of the most disturbing ideas that can be presented to a nationalist — who we define here as a proponent of the belief that a person’s national belonging is their dominant, or even their only identity, and as such directs their conduct — would be that their national identity is *imagined, invented, and constructed*, i.e. that it is not *natural*. In *Inventing Traditions*, describing the role that historians play in solidifying invented and constructed traditions, especially in relation to nations, Hobsbawm considers nationalism and all its surrounding “phenomena” as being based on “exercises in social engineering”.²⁵² To Hobsbawm, not only are nations and national symbols and national languages designed, but they are also recent, and he ironically notes that while all of modern nations claim to be ancient and natural they are all, in fact, recent and constructed.²⁵³ For Richard Handler, the whole concept of *identity* is questionable, just like tradition or culture, and yet the concept persists in usage more freely and attracts less scrutiny than the others.²⁵⁴ Handler discerns three aspects of identity: personal, collective, and a third which represents a correlation between the two, where the individual and the collective integrate. Yet he finds that the term *identity* is extensively used in keeping with “a globally hegemonic nationalist ideology”.²⁵⁵ In other words, we use identity more frequently in its collective, national aspect than any other. As Handler explains, the dominant aspect of identity is rooted in the idea that “nations are imagined as **natural** objects or things in the real world”²⁵⁶ [emphasis mine]. And further, “nationalists believe profoundly in the uniqueness of their cultural identity. They also believe that the boundaries they construct to define that identity are

252 Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, 13.

253 Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, 14.

254 Richard Handler, “Is identity a useful cross-cultural concept?” in Gillis, 1996, 27.

255 Handler, in Gillis, 1996, 28.

256 Handler, in Gillis, 1996, 29.

naturally given and not a symbolic construction of their own devising.”²⁵⁷ Anderson tackles this idea of the nation as being *natural*, such as national ties being experienced as natural ties, stressing the lack of choice as a factor in making the nation of a higher value: “In everything natural there is always something unchosen.”²⁵⁸ It appears that Montesquieu, for whom the pure chance of having been born a Frenchman meant that he would not place the value of that identity higher than that of belonging to humanity, was an exception rather than the rule.

In his essay “Against Identity”,²⁵⁹ Leon Wieseltier examines a number of reasons why identity should be closely scrutinised and generally mistrusted. For Wieseltier, identity is a mask, a sham, and a slogan, rather than substance. It hides rather than reveals, it has replaced individuality. In his view it is an affiliation which is “a surrogate for experience”. It is used to advertise, or to pretend. Wieseltier speaks against identity also because it is accidental, and therefore not achieved, and as he put it: “Circumstance is a poor reason to love.”²⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it appears that chance and perceived *naturalness* of community-based identity is appealing. Anderson uncovers another layer of attraction to the coincidental and *natural* ties that come with having been — accidentally — born as belonging to a certain nation: “precisely because such ties are not chosen, they have about them a halo of **disinterestedness**.”²⁶¹ [emphasis mine] Anderson introduces the idea of fatality into the equation: yes, we were born as such by chance, and we follow the destiny of the nation even if it means that we have to die for it.²⁶² As Anderson views it, “the idea of ultimate sacrifice comes only with an idea of purity, through fatality.”²⁶³

257 Handler, in Gillis, 1996, 30.

258 Anderson, 1991, 143.

259 Leon Wieseltier, “Against Identity”, *The New Republic*, 27 November 1994 <https://newrepublic.com/article/92857/against-identity> (accessed April 18, 2016).

260 Wieseltier, 1994.

261 Anderson, 1991, 143.

262 Language and religion are crucial for constructing national belonging, but the examination of their role is outside the scope of the thesis.

263 Anderson, 1991, 144.

This idea of nation as destiny to be followed blindly — just because *it is* — is problematic to deconstruct. Belonging to it is an accident, yet it controls people's lives — and deaths — unless they *choose* to opt out of the bind. Anderson rationalises the logic, if we can call it that, behind the “ultimate sacrifice” one would make for one's country, by saying that it is perceived as carrying “moral grandeur which dying for the Labour party, the American Medical Association, or perhaps even Amnesty International cannot rival, for these are bodies that one can join or leave at easy will.” We know that this is true without immediately understanding why. Earlier in his study Anderson also asks a rhetorical question: “Who will willingly die for Comecon or the EEC?”²⁶⁴ — rather than being a question of choice, his point is also that people do not have *natural ties* with bureaucratic bodies that they feel with nations. He adds that although this “aura of fatality” surrounds the concept of belonging to a nation or, as he puts it, “nationalness”, it is “fatality embedded in history.”²⁶⁵ In other words, we should understand that this elevates “nationalness” to the level of destiny. Having been placed in a nation for a reason unknown to us, by something far more powerful than we are, and because we want to be part of something greater, or superior, like history, we accept this mission impossible. Would it be stretching Anderson's hypothesis too far to say that many people are willing to throw their lot in with the nation they got attached to by the accident of birth because they believe that history has meaning and direction which gives purpose to the nation, and to them as its agents? This would represent an ultimately Hegelian belief in the Spirit of History — “whatever [Man] does, he is the creature within

264 Anderson, 1991, 53. In 1989, Jacques Delors said “You cannot fall in love with the Single Market”. Jacques Delors, address given to the European Parliament 17 January 1989 https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2003/8/22/b9c06b95-db97-4774-a700-e8aea5172233/publishable_en.pdf (accessed January 20, 2019).

265 Anderson, 1991, 145.

which the Spirit works.”²⁶⁶ If history has direction, and being a member of a particular nation ensures our participation in history, this gives our existence purpose and value. And this value is to be found in identity. Aleida Assmann explains how adopting the “we” of the group means identifying with the constructed identity, which is defined in the political psychology theory as a “common-identity group.”²⁶⁷ Assmann adds that to be *included* in the in-group we need to know its past, i.e. learn its history.²⁶⁸ This brings us back to *memory* of the common past, which as previously mentioned, Assmann exposes as having being learnt, not remembered. National identity is *inborn* yet coincidental, imbued with *memory*, which is actually absorbed information.

Anthony Smith’s exploration of national identity is motivated by a multitude of contradictory aspects and inconsistencies in the concept of national identity: “In the name of *national identity* people have allegedly been willing to surrender their own liberties and curtail those of others. They have been prepared to trample on the civil and religious rights of ethnic, racial and religious minorities whom the nation could not absorb.”²⁶⁹ This represents only the beginning of Smith’s charge sheet, the rest being “confusion, instability, strife, and terror”. Although Smith also lists beneficial effects of nationalism, such as preservation of cultures, encouragement to challenge dictatorships, and others, they tend to ring hollow in the face of the 21st-century revival of populism and rise of the extreme right. Nationalism as an aggressive assertion of national identity is seen as essentially destructive.

266 Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Reason in History, a general Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, translated by Robert S. Hartman (A Liberal Arts Press Book, The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc. 1953) <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hi/introduction.htm> (accessed March 15, 2019); also see Anderson, 1991, 144. Anderson points out that “Marxist interpretations of history are felt (rather than intellectuated) as representations of ineluctable necessity”, adding that “revolutionary movements also benefited from the appearance of disinterestedness”.

267 Cottam, Dietz-Uhler, Mastors, Preston, 2010, 66.

268 Assmann, in Tilmans, van Vree and Winter, 2010, 37.

269 Smith, 1991, 17.

Following the end of the Cold War, after history and memory had to be re-evaluated, identity followed suit, as people from recently transformed countries asked themselves the question: “If we are no longer this, then who are we?”. David Lowenthal, calls this change “the growth of concern about identity” which he sees as having spread throughout the world.²⁷⁰ He sees cultures that had hitherto not been interested in their *heritage* have adopted the Western concept of identity. Lowenthal has little positive to say about the trappings of national identity and its toxic relationship to the past. For Lowenthal, national identity is characterised by the belief in exceptionality, in being superior, and in having inimitable history and heritage: “*our* past is unlike anyone else’s. Its uniqueness vaunts our own superiority.”²⁷¹ It is a reaffirmation exercise which is devoid of curiosity since people are not interested in learning about other cultures and their heritage. The memory boom mentioned earlier was mostly about local and national interests, the Bretons were interested in Bretons, the French were interested in the French, the British in the British and so on. There is no cross-pollination or enrichment through *communication with otherness* in the revival of memory, history, and identity. Lowenthal considers this an indictment of national self-importance: “Other collectivities each have their own special identities, valued for their unique attributes; but they are all similarly deficient in being **unlike** us. Our identity and its expression in our heritage are **real, authentic**, unselfconscious; those of others — to the extent that we know them at all — strike us as partial, pastiche, **contrived**.”²⁷² [emphasis mine] For Lowenthal, there is no doubt that the unearned pride of national belonging encourages division, isolation, and ignorance.

There are many reasoned and rational arguments against communitarian thinking and nationalism in general. The power exerted by national identity and national belonging is a subject of continuous enquiry with researchers attempting to understand the allure of nationalism

270 Lowenthal, in Gillis, 1996, 45.

271 Lowenthal, in Gillis, 1996, 47.

272 Lowenthal, in Gillis, 1996, 48.

through case studies and investigations of national pasts. One such project is Michael Ignatieff's examination of "new nationalism" as he calls it in his book, *Blood and Belonging*.²⁷³ Ignatieff notes that there is no understandable reason why national identity has such pull, nor why nationalism would necessarily lead to the use of violence. He makes a distinction between civic nationalism vs ethnic nationalism, the former being "necessarily democratic", with people-based sovereignty, regardless of people's ethnicity, race etc. The latter is the nationalism that concerns us, belief that "an individual's deepest attachments are inherited, not chosen."²⁷⁴ Ignatieff explains the rise of ethnic nationalism in the wake of the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet bloc as a reaction to uncertainty of the new political and economic situation in many countries in Eastern Europe. Without any practice of democratic and peaceful conflict resolution for over 40 years, when ethnic tensions arose and communities felt at risk, the response to the question "who to trust" was provided by ethnic nationalism: "only trust those of your own blood".²⁷⁵ In his example of Serbs and Croats, Ignatieff is of the opinion that we should shun easy explanations given so often about the animosity between Serbs and Croats, diagnosed as being "so rooted in history that they were bound to explode in nationalist violence." Ignatieff is convinced that the people who had lived together peacefully for many decades had to be "transformed from neighbours into enemies". For a start, when a country is threatened by civil strife the fear is overwhelming: "when people are sufficiently afraid, they will do anything".²⁷⁶ Ignatieff drives to the heart of ethnic nationalism by analysing the emotional reasons of its appeal. He points to the manipulative process to make the ethnic conflict a *casus belli* — engineered by the "surviving communist elites", starting with Serbia, which exploited "nationalist emotions in order to cling to power".²⁷⁷ This process will be explored further in part 5 of the chapter.

273 Michael Ignatieff, *Blood and Belonging. Journeys into New Nationalism* (London: Vintage, 1994).

274 Ignatieff, 1994, 5.

275 Ignatieff, 1994, 6.

276 Ignatieff, 1994, 16.

277 Ignatieff, 1994, 17.

We have seen so far how national identity is perceived as chance, destiny, fate, belonging, emotional attachment. In his article “Parameters of a national biography”,²⁷⁸ Felix Berenskoetter examines the concept of the nation state as rooted in a narrative both serving a meaningful past and a meaningful future. This narrative is supposed to supply a national community with a master narrative, “which guides and legitimizes courses of action and provides ontological security”. As Berenskoetter explains, there is no unique narrative that directs actions and gives them meaning. The master narrative runs in parallel with several others that may be derived from it without challenging it. For him the maintenance of such a narrative or “a network of narratives, is a form of **governance**”.²⁷⁹ [emphasis mine] In grossly simplified terms, people are ruled by being told stories. The next part of the chapter will examine the relevance of such stories giving meaning to national belonging.

3. Usable Pasts and Their Functions

“If the conflicts of the present seemed intractable, the past offered a screen on which desires for unity and continuity, that is, identity, could be projected.”²⁸⁰

Knowing and understanding the past is essential because it largely determines how people see themselves in the present.²⁸¹ Stories from the past are influenced by the present circumstances with political framing dependant on the opportunism of politicians. For Norman Davies, instrumentalisation of history for political reasons is nothing new.²⁸² Historians, as opposed to politicians, are held to much higher

278 Felix Berenskoetter, “Parameters of a national biography”. *European Journal of International Relations* (Vol. 20(1) (2014): 262-288).

279 Berenskoetter, 2014, 279.

280 Gillis, 1996, 9.

281 Minarova Banjac, 2018, 9.

282 Norman Davies, *Europe East and West* (London: Pimlico, 2007), 249.

standards but Davies believes that “complete objectivity is unattainable”.²⁸³ Nevertheless, a historian’s task is “to distinguish clearly between uncontested facts and contestable opinions.”²⁸⁴ In his book, *Europe East and West*, Davies gives examples of fellow historians who had political affiliations and held strong political opinions while writing and teaching history. Having been present at the historical event itself is no guarantee of objectivity either — as Donald Kagan observed,²⁸⁵ both Thucydides’s account of the Peloponnesian War, and Churchill’s account of the Second World War have to be taken with some reservations as both were participants in those wars. Historians have to recognise their own bias but “the search for absolute truth can never end.”²⁸⁶

People who are not historians might not be so concerned about the absolute truth and rarely question the *truths* in popular history. For many, what they believe happened in the past is a filter through which they look at present reality. The “we” that Aleida Assmann was concerned with, that “we” extends beyond here and now, and includes *our* ancestors and the *remembered* stories of events they have reportedly been through. Myths and tales of uncertain historical value that belong to the so-called *popular history* that connect to the present carry more weight than professional history. The complexity of myth as a concept also lies in the assertion that “myths need not be believed to retain their value and function successfully.”²⁸⁷ For Anthony Smith, shared “common myths and historical memories” are part of the conditions for the existence of the nation and national identity.²⁸⁸ Smith accepts the concept of *mythomoteur* — a constitutive political myth as one of the factors that influence the establishment of a nation.²⁸⁹ This type of myth can belong

283 Davies, 2007, 251.

284 Davies, 2007, 252.

285 Donald Kagan, *The Peloponnesian War* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), XXIV.

286 Davies, 2007, 251-252.

287 Agita Misāne and Aija Priedīte “National Mythology in the history of ideas in Latvia: A view from religious studies”, in Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin, eds. *Myths and Nationhood* (London: Hurst & Company, 1997), 160.

288 Smith, 1991, 14.

289 Smith, 2000, 71.

to the remote past, such as the 1389 Kosovo Battle for Serbs, or have their origin in more recent events, such as the First World War for Flemish nationalists.²⁹⁰ In her anthropological discussion on the definition of myth, Joanna Overing maintains that the term itself is loaded, carrying the bias of the Ancient Greek viewpoint opposing myth — *muthos* as absurd fiction, to *logos* as reasoned discourse.²⁹¹ Yet, myths have their internal rationale that should not be underestimated, which is entwined with shared history and identity — imagined, invented, and constructed. Since people and nations are guided by myths, they have to be analysed and interpreted rather than rejected. George Schöpflin categorises myths into different groups: “myths of territory”, “myths of redemption and suffering”, “myths of unjust treatment”, “myths of election and civilizing missions”, “myths of military valour”, “myths of rebirth and renewal” closely connected to the “myths of foundation”, “myths of ethnogenesis and antiquity”, and “myths of kinship and shared descent”.²⁹² Even if they exist in different versions, or have contradictory elements, myths represent the *truths* that make sense to their audience. The myths are familiar and the truths self-evident, made all the more so by frequent repetitions in oral traditions, through printed narratives, all the way to modern screen adaptations. Since one of the functions of the myth is to make the world understandable for the individual in the group, the shared narrative has a unifying purpose to provide everyone with a set of values and symbols to distinguish them from other groups. Susan-Mary Grant demonstrated this concept in her deconstruction of the myth of American nationhood.²⁹³ America needed myths “for national stability”.²⁹⁴ Contrary to *popular history* the participation in both the Revolution and the Civil

290 Bruno de Wever, “The Flemish Movement and Flemish Nationalism: Instruments, Historiography and Debates”, *Studies on National Movements 1* (2013), 62-64; Bruno De Wever, “The First World War as Mythomoteur of Anti-Belgian Flemish Nationalism”, lecture at the TEAW? Conference, August 2018, Ypres.

291 Joanna Overing, “The role of myth: an anthropological perspective, or ‘the reality of the really made-up’” in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 2.

292 George Schöpflin, “The functions of myth and a taxonomy of myths”, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 28-34.

293 Susan-Mary Grant, “Making History: Myth and the Construction of American Nationhood”, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 88-106.

294 Grant, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 95.

war was “haphazard”,²⁹⁵ while the actions of the British government that incited the Revolution are downplayed so that American exceptionalism is vaunted as the driving force of the establishment of the American Republic.²⁹⁶ George Washington had to become a mythical heroic figure, for everyone to believe that the true struggle was about a new nation being born and not about a disgruntled colony’s taxes.²⁹⁷ National myths are efficient communication tools,²⁹⁸ also because everyone in the group is familiar with the mythological narrative and “fragmentary references are enough”.²⁹⁹ Insiders do not need more. Historians, as much as they try, can never effectively dismantle inaccurate accounts from popular memory precisely because myths stick to nations like barnacles. Is it a historian’s task to debunk the myths and set the misguided right? For Davies, myths are “part of the mental framework of any age”³⁰⁰ and historians must study them, examine them for meaning and values, but dismissing them would “mutilate the past in a totally unacceptable way”.³⁰¹

Myths are perfect *usable pasts* and the way they are deployed depends on the current concerns of national leaders, they are adaptable according to the situation, and they can be mined for usable content.³⁰² One of the most widespread myths that recurs as a usable past is the ancient myth of the *Golden Age*.³⁰³ The golden age that the Greek poet Hesiod (cca. 750 – 650 B.C.E.) imagined in his poem, “Works and Days” describes a time when food was plentiful and people lived in blissful peace, alongside Gods. It ended with the arrival of Zeus who overthrew Chronos and ushered in the Silver Age.³⁰⁴ But Hesiod’s concept continued to thrive and became a symbol of an idyllic time that is gone but not forgotten.

295 Grant, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 93.

296 Grant, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 92.

297 Grant, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 93.

298 Schöpflin, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 24.

299 Misāne and Priedīte, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 159.

300 Davies, 2007, 263.

301 Davies, 2007, 264.

302 Anthony Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal”, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 38.

303 Smith, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 40.

304 H. C. Baldry “Who Invented the Golden Age?”, *The Classical Quarterly* Vol. 2, No. 1/2 (Jan. – Apr. 1952), pp. 83-92.

For Renaissance Europe, the main reference for the golden age was Pericles's Athens and Imperial Rome.³⁰⁵ Throughout European cultural development, particularly during Romanticism, *new* ancient civilisations were being discovered and studied, becoming attractive through certain aspects of those cultures. As Anthony Smith explains, at the beginning of the 20th century "the net of *antiquity* had been extended to all pre-medieval civilizations".³⁰⁶ Gradually, economic progress, modernisation, social changes and increased automatization of daily life led to the disappearance of *traditional* ways of life. Significant social changes tend to cause yearning for the past and *simpler days*. The present does not look good in comparison with the collage of an imaginary past. Regardless of what the past was really like, "retrospective mirage" means that it is remembered as better than it was, particularly in times of uncertainty. Similar themes can be found in the concept of golden age across the world such as, integrity, piety, creativity, prosperity, authority.³⁰⁷ It could be said that at any point, an appropriate golden age theme lies dormant, ready to be resurrected in times of upheaval, almost as some type of golden age feature *à la carte*. Whenever necessary, the mirror of the golden age can be held up to the people with a message that this is who they really are, rousing them to *remember* the past, to rediscover their *authentic self*, recover what is lost.³⁰⁸

On 7 November 1941, Stalin made a speech at the anniversary of the October Revolution, held as Nazi Germany troops, tanks, and aircraft were hurtling towards Moscow sowing death and destruction. To inspire the nation to resist the Nazi invaders, Stalin invoked the heroes of Russia's past, those who had repelled foreign invaders: "Let the manly images of our great ancestors — Alexander Nevsky, Dimitry Donskoy, Kuzma Minin, Dimitry Pozharsky, Alexander Suvorov and Mikhail Kutuzov —

305 Smith, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 39.

306 Smith, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 40.

307 Smith, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 48.

308 It is no coincidence that two populist slogans in the 21st century refer to the 'loss' that can be regained: "Make America Great **Again**" (US) and "Take **Back** Control" (UK) [emphasis mine].

inspire you in this war! May the victorious banner of the great Lenin be your lodestar!”³⁰⁹ Alongside Alexander Nevsky, a prince of Kievan Rus’ from the 13th century, Prince Dimitry Donskoy of the 14th century, Kuzma Minin and Dimitry Pozharsky from the 17th century, Field Marshal Alexander Suvorov from the 18th century and Field Marshal Mikhail Kutuzov from the 19th century, one almost feels that “the great Lenin” is the interloper. Plenty of irony is also to be found in the fact that all the historical role models are religious and aristocratic figures being extolled by the leader of the first communist country. As Margalit points out, we need to differentiate here “between the illusion of a collective memory and illusions *within* the collective memory.”³¹⁰ In other words, just because of Stalin’s references, we should not be drawing conclusions about *collective memory*. Nevertheless, these “illusions *within*” had been reinforced by Sergey Eisenstein’s 1938 film *Alexander Nevsky* which would have been fresh in Russian minds in 1941.³¹¹ This is a political use of the past *par excellence*. Relying on Schöpflin’s taxonomy of myths, we can see that this example assembles many of them: *myths of territory, military valour, rebirth and renewal, foundation*, as well as *kinship and shared descent*. Through the historical references, familiar to all, Stalin was establishing *continuity*, affirming that the heroes of the past were really the same people he was addressing, defending the same country for the same values, and that they would triumph *again* in the present war just as they have triumphed in the past.

Golden age functions are multiple — establishing continuity with the present, reinforcing the legitimacy of current leaders, offering the prospect of “imminent status reversal”, returning to the glorious days of the past, and reminding the people of “past greatness” and “inner worth”.³¹² One other important function that Smith explores is that the

309 J.V. Stalin, “Speech at the Red Army Parade on the Red Square, Moscow”, 7 November 1941 <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1941/11/07.htm> (accessed January 18, 2019).

310 Margalit, 2002, 99.

311 Stalin supported the making of the film, see Cohen, 2014, 169.

312 Smith, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 50.

golden age represents “a quest for authenticity”, where the ultimate goal of the golden age is reaching an archetype of the authentic self.³¹³ By using the golden age, the political elite can project the *imagined, invented, and constructed true self* as the objective for the nation. The concept of a nation’s *true self*, used as a goal to which *the-now-in-trouble-wayward-nation* must return, is the bread and butter of nationalist and populist discourse and one of the most divisive functions of the golden age.³¹⁴ The *authentic self* is imagined as having been at its peak in the course of the chosen golden age. *Returning* to that model for inspiration is therefore encouraged when hard times arise, both as motivation for reversal of the situation and as a distraction in times of political conflict.

Historical defeats and tragedies provide suitable and usable models and may cast even longer shadows on popular memory than the golden age. Cohen examines the Kosovo Battle, an account of which was given in the introduction, which is considered by the Serbs as representing the start of the Ottoman domination in the Balkans. Although the battle of Kosovo may have been more of a draw, and the nominally Serbian armies consisted of a variety of mixed ethnic groups, including Albanians, it was the story of the Serbian defeat against the Muslim invaders that was preserved by the Orthodox Church as the main vessel of the Serbian communal memory under the Ottoman occupation. Consequently, the Kosovo story became infused with Christian symbolism and was transmitted as such.³¹⁵ The myth opposes the two sides very strongly — *us vs. them* — the heroes and believers who are Serbs, against the Turks — who are the *other*, the unchristian enemy. As various Albanian and other non-Christian populations migrated in and out of Kosovo — also under pressure from the expanding Serbian nation state, the *other* gradually became Albanian.

313 Smith, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 48.

314 An obvious contemporary example of the ‘authentic self’ mirage is related to the Brexit narrative, directly connected to the imagined golden age of the British Raj, see Pankaj Mishra “The Malign Incompetence of the British Ruling Class”, *The New York Times*, 17 January 2019 <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/17/opinion/sunday/brexit-ireland-empire.html> (accessed January 20, 2019).

315 Cohen, 2014, 34-38.

Slobodan Milošević used the cult of Kosovo as the *mythomoteur* of Serbian nationalism to strengthen the support of the Serbian population and the Serbian intellectual elite for his divisive strategy which quickly led to a disintegration of the multi-ethnic Yugoslavia in civil wars. The Kosovo narrative of a choice between heavenly and earthly kingdom, defence of ancestral lands, and not being a “Vuk Branković”, i.e. a traitor, is still used by the current regime to bolster legitimacy and frame the political debate in the face of acute political tensions with the former Serbian province. Using Shöpflin’s taxonomy of myth,³¹⁶ we can see that all his categories of myths are represented in the Kosovo cult which makes it remarkably resistant to reality.

The story of the ancient Jewish fort of Masada and its defenders who committed mass suicide so as not to be overcome by Roman troops became part of the Jewish national consciousness almost two thousand years after the event. Flavius Josephus’s *The Jewish War*³¹⁷ is the only known source of the story. The *Sicarii*, a group of Jewish insurgents against Rome, controlled the Masada fort in the eastern part of the Judean Desert, from where they carried out raids against Romans but also against other Jews, killing them and looting their provisions.³¹⁸ As the Roman troops were about to take the fortification, ten men put everyone to death, then one man killed the rest and finally himself. This is how 960 people died, either killed by their fellow Sicarii or by suicide. According to the account, a handful of survivors had managed to hide and were able to tell the Romans what happened. *The Jewish War*, including the Masada story, lay forgotten for many centuries and resurfaced as the first Zionists and settlers in Palestine became interested in the early Jewish history, after the modern Hebrew translation was published in 1923. At the time, harsh new life in Palestine awaited the Jews who had emigrated from Eastern Europe or Germany, with about 30% of all settlers leaving again, many

316 Myths of territory, redemption and suffering, unjust treatment, election and civilizing millions, military valour, rebirth and renewal, foundation, ethnogenesis and antiquity, kinship and shared descent, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 28-34.

317 Cohen, 2014, 34

318 Cohen, 2014, 36.

returning to their original country.³¹⁹ Yitzhak Lamdan, originally from the Ukraine, published the poem *Masada* in 1927 evoking the defiance of Jews against their history and fate, and using the narrative to parallel the situation of Jewish settlers in Palestine, with Masada as a metaphor for Palestine. Lamdan's poem became popular through its articulation of the settlers' situation giving sense to their suffering. The meaning of the myth and its resonance changed as circumstances of Jews in Palestine changed. In the 1930s, with the rise of Arab nationalism, when Jewish settlers felt threatened, they took to focusing particularly on the more encouraging line "never again shall Masada fall".³²⁰ The rise of Nazism in Europe and the subsequent horrors of the Holocaust, and consequently the existential threats facing Israel ensured the persistence of the Masada myth. Over time, the myth underwent significant changes, with the Sicarii becoming freedom fighters, rather than insurgents who had killed fellow Jews for provisions. The myth carried on that they had died weapons in hand, not by their own hand, but fighting the Romans.³²¹ The story from the past was adapted according to the needs of the present. Although the Masada myth no longer has a hold over the Jewish national consciousness as it used to, it remains important as a site of memory³²² and a story that every Israeli knows.

Paul Cohen also examines the story of Jeanne d'Arc, which dates back to the Hundred Years' War. During the period of English military dominance, in 1420, the French were forced to accept an English king, and then the regent. These were hard times for France, full of political instability and raiding soldiers in the countryside, both English and French. It was at this time that a 13-year-old young girl from Domrémy in Lorraine, Jeanne, started hearing voices, which she understood to be the archangel Michael, who over the next few years gave her instructions to lead French armies into battle to return the king of France to the French throne. Jeanne obeyed

319 Cohen, 2014, 43.

320 Cohen, 2014, 47.

321 Cohen, 2014, 54.

322 *Masada museum* <https://levyfoundation.org/masada-museum/> (accessed January 20, 2019).

the voices, gradually acquired a following, was given an army to lead which lifted the siege of the city of Orléans. She even ensured that Charles VII was reinstated as the king of France in Reims. After her successes, her status as a God-sent maiden from a popular prophecy that was circulating at the time, was established. However, she was eventually captured and charged with treason and witchcraft. Jeanne d'Arc was tried in Rouen and burnt at the stake. Once the English were defeated, the proceedings that had excommunicated her and found her guilty of "crimes of divine treason" were nullified. The story of Jeanne d'Arc was revived when Napoleon became interested in her image as a symbol of French unity. She was declared a saint in 1920.³²³

In France, during the Second World War, both the Vichy government and the Resistance considered Jeanne d'Arc a symbol of their respective causes. The collaborationist government appropriated the image of Jeanne to use in support of Maréchal Pétain, equating her ideals with his, with both being praised as saviours of France.³²⁴ Although Jeanne had been a virgin who led an army dressed in men's clothes, it was common to see Vichy propaganda showing her in a dress, patriotic and maternal.³²⁵ For this purpose, her image was demilitarised and de-androgenised, she was portrayed surrounded by children. At the same time, General De Gaulle as the leader of the Free French in exile used the imagery of Jeanne in his radio messages. Jeanne was a symbol of the resistance, a woman who helped liberate France from the enemy in the 15th century. However, her story and the message it conveyed were no longer needed after the Normandy landings.³²⁶ Although the image of Jeanne d'Arc is "visually omnipresent in today's France" as Cohen put it, it ceased to be relevant as a symbol, except when it featured in the anti-immigration propaganda of the *Front national*.³²⁷ Still, in May every year, *les fêtes johanniques*, an

323 Cohen, 2014, 113-127.

324 Cohen, 2014, 131-132.

325 Cohen, 2014, 132-133.

326 Cohen, 2014, 141. Since the invader in the original story was from England, the myth no longer fitted.

327 Cohen, 2014, 146.

annual festival in her honour, are held in Reims and in Orléans. In 2018, Marine le Pen, the leader of the latest iteration of the National Front, the *Rassemblement national*, expressed her support for a young Franco-Beninese woman who had been selected to represent Jeanne d'Arc at the festival in Orléans.³²⁸ We can observe that the practice of instrumentalising the story of Jeanne d'Arc for political purposes is not quite over.

The three stories have elements in common; there are historical facts supporting part of the narrative with historical uncertainty. All three stories were revived several centuries after the events had taken place, and used for political purposes in different times. Moreover, the resurrected stories were recycled with some parts edited, *forgotten*, or expunged. The Kosovo battle was not truly crucial and the Serbian Army was not all Serbian,³²⁹ the Masada defenders were actually terrorists who had killed fellow Jews, and Jeanne d'Arc was captured by the Burgundians who had sided with the English and she was tried by a French clerical court. Told in this way, the stories are not *useful*. In order to be usable, they have to be adapted over and over again. Repeating them over the years in their adapted forms has ensured that they run deep in the popular historical consciousness, with revisions being resisted and rejected. Representations of the *useful* Kosovo narrative among Serbs are strong, still impacting on lasting political settlement in the region, Masada's defenders are remembered as *Jewish Rebels* in the Masada museum, and Joan of Arc is present in art and imagery throughout France, and can be invoked, if an opportunity arises.

328 The young woman had received abuse on social media, "Ce sont des valeurs de patriotisme, des valeurs d'engagement, des valeurs de foi. La jeune fille choisie répond évidemment à tous les critères et ceci n'a rien à voir avec la couleur de la peau." *Valeurs actuelles*, 25 February 2018 <https://www.valeursactuelles.com/societe/marine-le-pen-defend-la-jeanne-darc-2018-93532> (accessed May 20, 2018). This could be interpreted as Marine le Pen further distancing herself from the racist and anti-Semitic rhetoric of her father who had led *le Front National* prior to her taking it over, renaming and rebranding it.

329 From Milošević's speech in 1989: "Today, it is difficult to say what is historically true in the Kosovo Battle and what is legend. Today, this does not matter anymore."

4. Memorialisation and its Discontents

“Moi, mon colon, celle que j’ préfère
C’est la guerre de quatorz’-dix-huit”³³⁰

When the French singer-songwriter Georges Brassens’s song “La guerre de 14 – 18” came out in 1961, he came under criticism for seemingly mocking those who had served in the First World War.³³¹ It was, in fact, an ironic song which seemed to *praise* the First World War as the author’s *favourite war*, going on to list all the others, from those described by Homer, to the Spartan wars, the Napoleonic wars, the 1870 war, and to the Second World War, as not being quite up to the level of the 14 – 18 war. Of course, it was an anti-war song, as he briefly explained to a television audience 17 years later.³³² The song was alluding to the Algerian war — which the French government had never called a war — that was ongoing at the time and would end a year later: A verse in the song, “*Guerres saintes, guerres sournoises, qui n’osent pas dire leurs noms*”, was a clear reference to the war in Algeria.³³³ This was satire at its purest that some of his listeners got wrong. As Brassens reiterates in his television interview, the First World War was a *popular war* also because so many people had served in it.³³⁴ His song satirises the popularity of the First World War as the *good war* — France had won, which was not the case in 1870, or in 1940. In 1961, France was losing in Algeria but not talking about it and not calling it a war. Of course, this is the point. The French *love* the Great War — just like the Serbs. Even though the First World War is also the terrible war that cost many millions of lives and remains the most visible war in public

330 George Brassens “La guerre de 14 – 18”, *YouTube*, 1961, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l2F5qaHzkj0> (accessed May 15, 2018); Winter, *Remembering War*, 2006, 43.

331 “Brassens la guerre da 14 – 18”, *lhistgeobox*, 1 January 2014 <http://lhistgeobox.blogspot.com/2014/01/brassens-la-guerre-de-14-18.html> (accessed January 20, 2019).

332 « Georges Brassens parle de sa chanson sur la guerre de 14-18 », *Institut national de l’audiovisuel*, 18 December 1978 <https://www.ina.fr/video/I04076281> (accessed January 15, 2019).

333 The French government called the Algerian War *opération de sécurité et de maintien de l’ordre*. The word *war* was not used.

334 Brassens recalls an anecdote from his town of Sète where people would say to each other: “*T’as pas fait la guerre de 14? Dépêche-toi de la faire!*”

spaces — having resulted in a vast number of war graves, monuments, and memorials.³³⁵

The 1914 – 1918 war became known as the Great War and would become the First World War only after it was exceeded in the horror and casualties by the following one. The Great War transformed the international order in Europe, exploded four empires, and created a traumatic burden of emptiness in the communities around Europe. With around 40 million casualties, 20 million dead and around 21 million wounded,³³⁶ there were more dead and more left mourning than ever before. Already in the course of the war, as new weapons added to the dehumanisation of warfare, soldiers on all sides became sceptical as to the ultimate goal of the continued killings. This resulted in a concerted effort of military and civilian authorities to use the unparalleled lists of casualties for propaganda purposes, and this requirement changed the way the dead were *treated*, as G. Kurt Piehler explains in his essay “The War Dead and the Gold Star: American Commemoration of the First World War”.³³⁷ Until the Great War, soldiers killed in battle were buried near the battlefields without much ceremony. One other important innovation of the war was that names of soldiers started to matter. In many previous wars, the names of generals mattered more than those of ordinary soldiers — but that changed with the Great War.³³⁸ It was ironic that the soldiers of the Great War became almost more important *after* they died, their great numbers necessitating the establishment of war graves commissions in almost all the combatant countries.³³⁹ Already during the war, special war graves commissions were established with regulations issued on the retrieval

335 There are 13,739 registered First World War monuments in France according to *36000 cicatrices: Les monuments aux morts de la Grande guerre*. (Paris: Editions du patrimoine, 2014), 9.

336 “World War I Casualties”, *Repères, Partneriat Educatif Grundtvig 2009 –2011* <https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/reperes112018.pdf> (accessed March 15, 2019).

337 Kurt G. Piehler, “The War Dead and the Gold Star: American Commemoration of the First World War”, in Gillis, 1996, 168.

338 Jacques Le Goff, *Histoire et mémoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 161; Thomas W. Laqueur, *The Work of the Dead — A Cultural History of Mortal Remains* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2015), 389.

339 Piehler, in Gillis, 1996, 168.

of bodies by families.³⁴⁰ After the war, articles 225 and 226 of the Treaty of Versailles ensured that the graves of the fallen combatants would be respected, memorials erected, bodies returned to home countries whenever possible,³⁴¹ and recognised government-appointed associations to deal with graves and memorials. In other words, it was the governments that had full control of the bodies of the fallen soldiers. France did not authorise removal of bodies by families until 1920,³⁴² although illegal recovery of bodies and reburials were not uncommon.³⁴³ In Britain, the Imperial War Graves Commission was founded in 1917 and was in charge of building military cemeteries and maintaining them.³⁴⁴ The British government had decided that all those fallen in France would remain in the official cemeteries, regardless of what the families wanted.³⁴⁵ German military cemeteries often had no individual graves and the dead were memorialised collectively.³⁴⁶ As Piehler observes, “the war dead were still being pressed into service by their governments”.³⁴⁷ Those left mourning often needed to find their own way to deal with losing their loved ones.

In his seminal study, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*, Jay Winter explores how “the communities of the bereaved”³⁴⁸ were learning to come to terms with their loss. With governments unable to answer the question why so many people had to die, it was up to the bereaved to search for the meaning of the Great War through their mourning practices which took many forms.³⁴⁹ Although war memorials always carried a political message,³⁵⁰ they were specifically built and used as *sites of mourning*, for

340 Jean-Pascal Soudagne, *L'histoire incroyable du Soldat inconnu* (Rennes: Editions Ouest-France, 2008), 31-36.

341 Treaty of Versailles, 1919, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000002-0043.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2017).

342 Soudagne, 2008, 49.

343 Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 26.

344 George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 82.

345 Piehler, in Gillis, 1996, 168.

346 Piehler, in Gillis, 1996, 169.

347 Piehler, in Gillis, 1996, 168.

348 Winter, 2014, 6.

349 Winter, 2014, 78.

350 Winter, 2014, 82.

the bereaved to remember those fallen in the war. The memorials served a purpose, both collective and individual. Looking at the memorials today, it is possible to lose sight of the individual aspect. As Winter put it, many memorials may have changed their meaning in the intervening years,³⁵¹ but that does not mean that we should forget that they had served the bereaved. In “Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War”,³⁵² Winter uses the term “fictive kinships” to describe how people established relationships united by the war to carry out the “work of remembrance.” In most combatant countries, these were associations like the Red Cross, veterans’ associations and various religious communities that helped bereaved families deal with the weight of their loss. The war left millions of widows and orphans in its wake, as well as 10 million mutilated veterans. Apart from the administrative and practical help these associations were able to give to the families, what mattered most was that through their communication and presence they were acknowledging the existence of that emptiness, that loss that had been created by the death of son, brother, or father, which the official institutions were not able to do. The fictive kinship groups gave their support to the bereaved not only before official commemorations but also continued after the commemorations were over. As Winter points out, the fictive kinships as “agents of remembrance” and the establishment commemorations would come together on 11 November “but it was not their origin, nor their center of gravity”. These “agents of remembrance” worked between the private and public spheres of remembrance, “between families, civil society, and the state.”³⁵³ The groups that are formed through the activities of remembrance are “collectives” that always depend on the individuals’ initiatives. For Winter, this is “small-scale collective memory” which gradually dissipated as people who were “agents of remembrance” grew older and died. In comparison to the official ceremonies of the Great War,

351 Winter, 2014, 79.

352 Jay Winter “Forms of kinship and remembrance in the aftermath of the Great War”, in Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan, eds. *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 40-60.

353 Winter, in Winter and Sivan, 1999, 59.

these groups were personally invested in the “work of remembrance”.³⁵⁴ While Winter’s examination of the remembrance of the Great War mostly relates to Western Europe, it is important to note that the “fictive kinship groups” existed elsewhere and, as we shall see later in the research, some have survived many decades after the war, while others only began their work of remembrance spurred on by the memory boom and the centenary commemorations.

The building of war memorials after the Great War is a significant phenomenon in the sphere of collective remembrance.³⁵⁵ The memorials represented the official way of symbolising loss and of demonstrating the *responsibility* of the government to remember the fallen and to provide the space for the bereaved to mourn.³⁵⁶ Winter makes the point that alongside their ritual function, war memorials always had clear political meaning.³⁵⁷ Today, when there are no bereaved, “political symbolism... is all we can see”.³⁵⁸ The efforts to find the names of all the soldiers who had fallen in the war were widespread and the names were subsequently inscribed on the memorials. For Britain, two of the most significant memorials are the Menin Gate in Ypres and the Thiepval memorial at the Somme. In his work *Fallen Soldiers – Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, George Mosse sees the war memorials as the expressions of “the cult of the fallen”, which in turn has to be linked to the self-image of the nation,³⁵⁹ where those who had died for the nation are *put to work* so that paradoxically the dead make the cult of the nation “come alive”.³⁶⁰ For Mosse, “construction of a war memorial must be put on the same plane as the building of a church”,³⁶¹ as he recognises nationalism as “civic religion”.³⁶²

354 Winter, in Winter and Sivan, 1999, 59-60; Winter, 2006, 136.

355 Le Goff, 1988, 161.

356 Winter, 2014, 93.

357 Winter, 2014, 82.

358 Winter, 2014, 93.

359 Mosse, 1990, 105.

360 Mosse, 1990, 80.

361 Mosse, 1990, 105.

362 Mosse, 1990, 224.

Another way that the Great War changed remembrance and memorials was the tomb of the unknown soldier. As Jacques Le Goff put it, “*cherchant à repousser les limites de la mémoire associée à l’anonymat, proclamant sur le cadavre sans nom la cohésion de la nation dans la mémoire commune.*”³⁶³ The main reason for this new concept was the impossibility of finding and identifying thousands of soldiers owing to the unprecedented use of artillery in the Great War.³⁶⁴ On 1 July 1916, the day known in history as the first day of the Somme which saw 60,000 British casualties, was also the day the Entente artillery fired 1.5 million shells towards enemy positions, around 30 shells per one square kilometre.³⁶⁵ Such a war not only killed men, it obliterated them. The tomb of the unknown soldier was invented out of a necessity to create a memorial that would be “remembering everyone by remembering no one in particular”³⁶⁶ and be a *replacement* for the bodies that were never found or never identified. The idea seemed to have occurred at about the same time in France and in Britain, although the French believe that it came first from François Simon, president of the association *Le souvenir français*³⁶⁷ in 1916, when it became evident that many French soldiers would never have a resting place. Following extensive Assembly debates as well as wide-ranging discussions in the newspapers as to the possible location of burial of the French unknown soldier, the law was passed in October 1919 to erect “*un monument national commémoratif des héros de la Grande Guerre, tombés au champ d’honneur.*”³⁶⁸ The law still failed to specify where the monument would be, but the decision was made quickly after the British announced that they would be burying the unknown British soldier from a French battlefield in Westminster Abbey.³⁶⁹ The French unknown soldier was chosen at a ceremony in Verdun, after this the casket was taken to Paris on 11 November 1920. The French unknown soldier was then buried under

363 Le Goff, 1988, 161.

364 Soudagne, 2008, 21-23.

365 Soudagne, 2008, 19.

366 Gillis, 1996, 11.

367 Soudagne, 2008, 53.

368 Soudagne, 2008, 59.

369 Soudagne, 2008, 60.

l'Arc de Triomphe. The day before, after being carried from Calais to Dover on the Royal Navy Destroyer *Verdun*, the British unknown soldier was taken to London, along with several sacks of French soil, as noted by Thomas Laqueur in his detailed study *The Work of the Dead. The Cultural History of Mortal Remains*.³⁷⁰ As Laqueur observes, the soil was thus transformed “from ordinary to sacred.” Another innovation regarding the commemoration of the fallen, was the *Cenotaph*, the empty tomb in Whitehall to memorialise those who were buried elsewhere. According to Laqueur, originally Lloyd George’s idea to have a catafalque built for the Victory Parade in July 1919 was not particularly liked by anyone. Sir Edward Lutyens designed it as a temporary monument and no one realised that it would become a symbol. Once it was installed, it was universally embraced by members of the public who started spontaneously to leave wreaths around it.³⁷¹ The Cenotaph was designed as a simple monument without any national or Christian symbols, reminiscent of ancient Greece. The Cenotaph became a powerful memorial very quickly, as Jay Winter put it, “It says so much because it says so little.”³⁷² It was decided to make it a permanent monument and the granite version replacing the plaster one was officially inaugurated on 11 November 1920. On that day, the procession of well over a million people following the unknown soldier to Westminster Abbey passed by the Cenotaph where it stopped for a few minutes, after which it continued to Westminster Abbey where the unknown soldier was laid to rest.³⁷³

The practice of burying an unknown soldier to represent all those who fell in the Great War spread to most of the combatant countries, except for Russia. Italy buried its unknown soldier at the foot of the Capitol in 1921, the US buried its unknown soldier in 1922 at the Arlington military cemetery, Belgium in 1922 at the foot of the *Colonne du Congrès* in Brussels. The same year, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Greece and the Kingdom of

370 Laqueur, 2015, 481.

371 Laqueur, 2015, 482.

372 Winter, 2014, 104.

373 Laqueur, 2014, 481-483.

Serbs, Croats and Slovenes followed suit,³⁷⁴ while Bulgaria, Romania and Austria did so in 1923. A German unknown soldier was memorialised at Tannenberg in 1926.³⁷⁵ Originally, Canada, Australia and New Zealand accepted that the unknown soldier in Westminster Abbey also represented their dead.³⁷⁶ However, Australia decided to bring back one of their unknown soldiers and inter him at the Canberra War Memorial in 1993.³⁷⁷ Canada brought back their unknown soldier to Ottawa in 2000,³⁷⁸ and New Zealand to Wellington in 2004.³⁷⁹

As in Western Europe, communities in south-east Europe faced vast losses and grief in the wake of the war. The Balkans had started with the conflicts two years before the rest of Europe, with the Balkan wars in 1912 and 1913, while the wider region including Hungary and Romania did not settle until 1920, and Greece and Turkey until 1922. The Great War itself was different from the Western Front. There was trench warfare and mobile warfare, but also occupation, retreat, insurgents' operations, rebellion against the occupation, reprisals. The dead in south-east Europe also included many civilians who had died in atrocities and in epidemics. Typhus epidemics, especially in Romania and Serbia, took many lives. Fallen soldiers were far more readily commemorated and "civilian casualties remained relegated to the margin of public awareness," says Olga Manojlović Pintar in "Bereavement and Mourning in South-east Europe".³⁸⁰ Those fallen *for* their country seemed more valuable by comparison. Civilian victims were rarely commemorated, and usually more so when they were victims of war crimes, than if they had died of

374 This case will be addressed in chapter IV.

375 Laqueur, 2015, 483.

376 Winter, 2014, 26.

377 "Tomb of the Unknown Australian Soldier", *The Australian War Memorial* <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/visitor-information/features/hall-of-memory/tomb> (accessed January 15, 2019).

378 "Tomb of the Unknown Soldier", *Veterans Affairs Canada* <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/national-inventory-canadian-memorials/details/9367> (accessed January 20, 2019).

379 "Tomb of the Unknown Warrior", *Ministry for Culture and Heritage* <https://mch.govt.nz/pukeahu/park/national-war-memorial/tomb> (accessed January 20, 2019).

380 Olga Manojlović Pintar, "Bereavement and Mourning (South-east Europe)" *International Encyclopaedia of the First World War*, 8 October 2014, 2. https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/bereavement_and_mourning_south_east_europe (accessed January 4, 2017, 3/10).

typhus or malnutrition, says Danilo Šarenac in “Commemoration, Cult of the Fallen”.³⁸¹ The focus of the grief was on the fallen soldiers.³⁸² The pain of losing fathers, brothers, and sons was compounded by the fact that so many soldiers lost their lives outside their countries and their bodies were either never found or were buried far away from home. This was even more painful in relation to Christian Orthodox beliefs that without a body and a proper burial, the souls of the dead would not be able to pass to the hereafter.³⁸³ Because family members were not able to carry out traditional burial rites, new practices of mourning and remembering had to be created to mark the interrupted and disappeared lives of their loved ones. Manojlović Pintar notes that decorated wooden crosses were erected in churchyards in Romania to symbolise those fallen who could not be buried. In Serbia, one to two-meter-high stone tablets, were erected by the roadside, close to dead soldiers’ homes. The fallen soldier’s life was inscribed on these stone markers to be read by passers-by.³⁸⁴ It was an effective way to ensure they would not be forgotten — they still existed because they were remembered and their place in this world was marked. The stone *stelae* had the shape of the cross, or the picture of the soldier painted on them. The name *krajputaši* — meaning “roadsiders” — was given to them in the 1960s.³⁸⁵ They can still be found in Serbia today.³⁸⁶

Spontaneous initiatives to build local monuments to honour the fallen soldiers came from their communities. Local initiative committees were set up to communicate with state authorities for building permission and designs. Such monuments were not only built with funds raised

381 Danilo Šarenac, “Commemoration, Cult of the Fallen (South-east Europe)”, *International Encyclopedia of the First World War – 1914-1918 online*. 8 October 2014, 5. https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/commemoration_cult_of_the_fallen_south_east_europe (accessed December 8, 2016), 5/12.

382 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 3-4/10.

383 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 4/10.

384 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 4/10. Inscription on a *krajputaš* from the village of Vrnčani from 1929 said that the fallen soldier “most loved God, church and army,” in Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 130.

385 The same form of monument was chosen in 2014 to commemorate Serbian soldiers who had died in the Netherlands during the Great War, as will be discussed in chapter V.

386 One such “*krajputaš*” was chosen to be on the front page of the publication “Serbia Remembers First World War”, see Jovo Simišić, *Serbia Remembers 100 years –The First World War: 1914-1918*. (Belgrad: National Tourism Organisation of Serbia, 2013).

by the community, but the community also maintained them.³⁸⁷ These private initiatives were ahead of state-sponsored monuments — all Serbian villages had lost fathers, brothers, and sons and they were commemorated close to their homes.³⁸⁸ The state tried to catch up with large-scale monuments and ceremonies that always had national and patriotic character — but they were far away from the grief of the small communities that had lost their members. Veterans' associations played a vital role in supporting their members, particularly when the state did not. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes boasted many different associations. In Serbia alone, there were associations of reserve officers and soldiers, holders of the Albanian memorial medal, French reserve officers in Yugoslavia, associations of holders of different medals, war volunteers, war invalids, veteran defenders of Belgrade, students, soldiers and others.³⁸⁹ After the Second World War, there would be only one veterans' association, *SUBNOR, Union of veterans' associations of people's liberation wars*, which also included WWI veterans. SUBNOR was in charge of looking after monuments, especially WWII monuments, but also supported some memorialisation projects from WWI.³⁹⁰

The new Yugoslav state, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had within its new borders former enemies who were now fellow citizens. The newly unified country lost around 1.9 million people in total; 900,000 of whom were soldiers. As Serbia had most casualties in relation to its population in comparison to other belligerent states, any commemoration of the Serbian dead reiterated Serbian national sacrifices for the new country which “presented an obstacle to fully embracing the new Yugoslav identity”.³⁹¹ Those who had fought on the other side were often presented as having fought unwillingly which was not necessarily true.³⁹² Although efforts were generally made to have all the citizens participate

387 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 4/10.

388 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 4/10.

389 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 329-330. NB: SUBNOR today relates to wars 1941-1945, 1992, 1999.

390 Lazarevac ossuary church in 1964.

391 Šarenac, 2014, 2/12.

392 Šarenac, 2014, 3/12.

in ceremonies, the fact is that the commemorations of the fallen soldiers from the losing side were not included in the official ceremonies, while their monuments were more often erected in cemeteries rather than in town squares.³⁹³ According to Ljiljana Dobrovšak,³⁹⁴ the fallen on the losing side in the new kingdom were still memorialised with the same type of monuments: war cemeteries, monuments, gravestones, cenotaphs, ossuaries, and plaques although far fewer were erected with the support of the new state than in Serbia, and with less enthusiasm.³⁹⁵ One of the reasons that war memorials were built more frequently in cemeteries was that the (Belgrade-based) Ministry of Education's art department had to approve the designs for grander monuments and plaques which made the process slow and bureaucratic.³⁹⁶

In 1922, the new law on regulating military cemeteries at home and abroad required the remains in military cemeteries to be placed in ossuaries. To encourage what was seen as a more practical solution, the state began subsidising the construction of ossuaries.³⁹⁷ The efforts to centralise commemorations resulted in the establishment of an association of non-commissioned officers and soldiers in 1919, which included Serbs who had fought in the war as well as Croats and Slovenes who had deserted from the Austro-Hungarian Army. New Yugoslav NCOs were also able to join which made the association more Yugoslav.³⁹⁸ This association was involved in a number of monument-building initiatives, including monuments holding in their ossuaries remains of soldiers of different faiths and from different sides. Šarenac points out that a unique

393 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 4/10.

394 Ljiljana Dobrovšak, "Mjesta sjećanja na Prvi svjetski rat u Hrvatskoj – Ratni spomenici" ["WWI Sites of Memory in Croatia – War memorials"], *The End of the Great War Conference* (November 2018), 399-426.

395 Dobrovšak, 2018, 406.

396 Dobrovšak, 2018, 408. A number of memorials that were built in Croatia *during* the war, such as "memorial lime trees", "memorial shields", "memorial coat of arms", were removed once Croatia became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, as they had been built to honour the emperor, the Austro-Hungarian State and the Austro-Hungarian Army, Dobrovšak, 2018, 405.

397 Šarenac, 2014, 4/12.

398 Šarenac, 2014, 4/12.

monument was built in Čačak, Serbia, in 1934 by the Auxiliary Female Branch of the *Fédération Interalliée des Ancien Combattants* (FIDAC). This “memorial of Four Faiths” — with Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish and Muslim symbols — holds the remains of 918 soldiers, 262 of whom had fought on the side of the Central Powers.³⁹⁹ It is an extraordinary instance of taking the memory of the Great War and gifting it to everyone who had lost a loved one, regardless of their side or religion. However, in most countries in South-east Europe “memories were wrapped in national colours”⁴⁰⁰ and the dead were “national martyrs”.⁴⁰¹

The trends and conventions of burying the soldiers in the West, and the memorialisation of their service and sacrifice, were also dominant in South-east Europe, including Serbia. Soldiers were buried in military cemeteries, not divided by rank, while the search to find the names of all those who died was relentless, the tomb of the unknown soldier was built to represent all those who were not found, there were processions, minutes of silence, inscription of names of fallen soldiers — these all became a traditional way to commemorate all wars.

In the final part of the chapter, we consider how the return of history — initially the First World War history — into the Serbian public arena marked the beginning of the end of the Yugoslav state. The rediscovered memories of the First World War facilitated the rise of nationalism in the 1990s, and beyond.

5. The Case of Serbia

“Serbs are so fascinated by their history that if you ask them ‘What time is it?’, you risk getting the answer: “Well, in 1389, it was the time of the great battle against the Turks at Kosovo Polje which

399 Šarenac, 2014, 4/12.

400 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 5/10.

401 Šarenac, 2014, 2/12.

resulted in our defeat and subjugation by them for the next five hundred years until finally in 1878 we got our revenge and again became a sovereign nation. A nation able to fight like lions in the First World War against the Germans, a war in which our country suffered greater proportional losses than any other. Alas, in 1941 it was the time in which the Germans got their revenge by occupying us. But we fought them again, plucky little Serb nation that we are, even though the Croats joined the Nazis and killed 700,000 of us in the Jasenovac concentration camp. But they lost in 1945 and so a year later, as the Yugoslavs, it was time to crush the Kosovar Albanian uprising. And now it's ten past three."⁴⁰²

In May 1996, at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, the first trial for the crimes committed in the wars of Yugoslav succession was getting under way. It was the first war crimes trial in Europe after Nuremberg. There was much publicity for the trial, although the accused Duško Tadić was not a *big fish* by any means. Nevertheless, after horrendous pictures of starved prisoners had surfaced from the Omarska camp,⁴⁰³ where he had been a guard, the world wanted to see justice done. The *President Kennedylaan*, the long six-lane avenue in the Hague, where the Tribunal was located, was besieged by reporters. An enormous satellite dish appeared overnight, as did several kiosks with global news brands: CNN, BBC, ITN. Most magnificently, a large red marquee housing a press centre was installed in front of the seat of the ICTY, as if to confirm that indeed the circus had come to town. They all came to see what they expected would be a fast-paced courtroom drama, with eloquent pleadings and dramatic testimonies.⁴⁰⁴ The first to appear was an expert witness, Dr James Gow, a political scientist who was to

402 Tim Marshall, *Shadowplay Behind the Lines and Under Fire. The Inside Story of Europe's Last War*. (London: Elliott and Thompson, 2019), 24.

403 "The International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia charges 21 Serbs with atrocities committed inside and outside the Omarska death camp", *ICTY Press release*, 13 February 1995 <http://www.icty.org/en/press/international-tribunal-former-yugoslavia-charges-21-serbs-atrocities-committed-inside-and> (accessed January 20, 2019).

404 Author's own memories as staff of the ICTY 1994 – 2003.

testify on the *subject matter jurisdiction*, essentially to give an overview of the political situation in the former Yugoslavia, its history, and its contextual specificities. Before long, the expectations of courtroom drama were dashed: Dr Gow gave detailed testimony over five days and was asked questions that were meant to establish Bosnian Serbian aggression in 1991, and the Bosnian Serb leaders' activities in Bosnia in 1992, but when asked about the history of the region, his answers inevitably went back to the 14th century, through the finer points of 1878, the Balkan Wars, the First World War, and finally the Second World War, before getting to the 1990s. At one point, even the accused seemed to have had enough of history and took his headphones off.⁴⁰⁵ Reporters from international news services followed suit. The red marquee and the kiosks were gone within days.

In her essay "Value changes in the interpretations of history in Serbia",⁴⁰⁶ Dubravka Stojanović quotes a sentence by Richard Holbrooke, the Clinton administration's chief negotiator for the Balkans who brokered the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995, which ended the catastrophe that had engulfed the region since 1991. Holbrooke reportedly began one of his negotiation rounds with the admonition: "Serbs, gentlemen, just without history and similar crap".⁴⁰⁷ Holbrooke knew that if he let 1914 or 1918 into the discussions, let alone 1941, he would not get very far. Stojanović's explanation on how Serbian society was *primed* for war in the years following Tito's death demonstrates that history was purposefully misused to achieve a national awakening, creating an environment where extremist nationalistic ideas that would have been beyond the pale previously, were swiftly welcomed and allowed to thrive. In *Populism the Serbian Way*, Stojanović analyses Serbian society, politics, and history, with special attention to the Serbian relationship with history. Through her

405 All hearings were simultaneously interpreted from and into English, French and Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian so the accused would have been receiving interpretation from English into B/C/S, see Prosecutor vs. Duško Tadić, IT-94-1-T, 7 May 1996 <http://www.icty.org/x/cases/tadic/trans/en/960507IT.htm> (accessed January 20, 2019) page 100 of the English transcript.

406 Stojanović, 2017, 153.

407 Quoted in Stojanović, 2017, 153.

nine essays she examines different aspects of Serbian society, what led to the wars of the 1990s, how they are taught in schools, and discussed in the public arena today. For Stojanović, what occurred in Serbia in the 1980s and eventually steered Yugoslavia into war, was deliberately caused through a series of representations of *historical* episodes, accompanied by “para-historical explanations” presented as justification for aggressive action. Using the Serbian example, Stojanović exposes the danger in allowing populist attitudes to take hold in society, and explains that populism is paradoxically a system which poses as being anti-system: “it annuls institutions, tramples over laws, alters collective memory, constructs a new identity for a nation, and pokes its nose into the private affairs of its citizens.”⁴⁰⁸ Stojanović specifically diagnoses memory as a symptom of populism, because historical awareness is necessary for the “construction of national identity, which is the obsession of every populism, particularly of the right-wing kind”.⁴⁰⁹

After Tito’s death in 1980, the fabric of Yugoslav socialism was beginning to wear thin because of its unsustainable economic situation, inherent political weaknesses, and overall stagnation. As frozen political elites, after years of the inertness of a one-party system, had no other ideas except “After Tito — Tito”,⁴¹⁰ there was some loosening of cultural and artistic life. Stojanović pinpoints two cultural instances in the mid-1980s, when Serbian “implosion of history” started to occur.⁴¹¹ In 1983, the Yugoslav Drama Theatre in Belgrade staged the play *Battle of Kolubara* based on a WWI epic novel⁴¹² from the 1970s that had achieved great success when it was published. The play depicted an episode from the novel, a famous 1914 battle where the Serbian Army was victorious.⁴¹³ The play became a sensation with audiences almost delirious with excitement: “during

408 Stojanović, 2017, 9.

409 Stojanović, 2017, 10.

410 “I posle Tita – Tito” was the slogan used by his political successors, popularised in the media, educational institutions, etc.

411 Stojanović, 2017, 142.

412 Ćosić, 1972. Ćosić became a champion of Serbian nationalism and the first president of the so-called ‘rump Yugoslavia’, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, 1992 – 1993.

413 Dobrica Ćosić, *Kolubarska bitka* [*The Kolubara Battle*], Belgrade, Yugoslav Drama Theatre, 1983.

the play it appeared as though the battle was ongoing and the audience was participating in it. People were standing up, shouting “Charge!” cheering and crying.”⁴¹⁴ In 1985, a short novel, *A Book About Milutin*⁴¹⁵ was published, telling the story in the first person singular about a Serbian peasant who has been through the main events in Serbian history, from the Balkan wars, through the Albanian retreat and the civil war into the Second World War, and ending up in a communist prison. He bears it in a heroic, fatalistic manner, making several light-hearted observations about life, death, and destiny, which makes his own story all the more tragic. In addressing the reader in a familiar and good-natured way, he embodies the Serbian national identity narrative: Serbs as tragic heroes, victims, betrayed by friends and allies, freedom-loving, rebellious, and always suffering. The novel outsold all others, despite its limited literary value.⁴¹⁶ As the Serbs have a special relationship with the First World War, it was this war that ignited the initial “implosion of history”, while the Second World War took centre stage in the grooming of the nation for the wars of the 1990s.

In the late 1980s, seemingly out of nowhere, government-sponsored historians started appearing on television every night lecturing about “real or invented details”⁴¹⁷ of the Ustasha⁴¹⁸ crimes against Serbs in the Second World War.⁴¹⁹ The term *Croat* was being heard as often as *Ustasha*, the two deliberately confused in discourse to remind the Serbian public that what happened in the past could still happen in the present. This was subsequently done to the term *Turks* to describe *Bosniaks* before the

414 Stojanović, 2017, 142.

415 Danko Popović, *Knjiga o Milutinu* [*The Book about Milutin*] (Beograd: Književne novine, 1986)

416 Stojanović, 2017, 143.

417 Stojanović, 2017, 153.

418 Nazi-puppet government in charge of the “Independent State of Croatia” 1941 – 1945.

419 Documented in a report “Political Propaganda and the Plan to Create a State for All Serbs: Consequences of Using the Media for Ultra Nationalist End”, prepared by expert witness Renaud de la Brosse at the request of the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. The report can be found at https://www.icty.org/x/cases/slobodan_milosevic/prosexp/bcs/rep-srb-b.htm (accessed March 31, 2020)

war in Bosnia.⁴²⁰ The *imagined, invented, and constructed* identities were being played against each other as they were being used to define each other. The past was hijacking the present in broad daylight, with people mesmerised by horror stories of brutal murders of Serbs in 1941.⁴²¹ One could call it a form of historical/hysterical hypnosis, as if the Pied Piper of Hamelin was luring Serbs to perdition by playing a song about past sufferings. However, the Serbs should not be absolved of responsibility, as Stojanović cautions us,⁴²² because they *consciously* abandoned agency and responsibility for their conduct. The political context was such that they were being presented with *spiked memories*, and they took them as history without asking any questions. In the late 1980s, and more forcefully in the early 1990s, “historical injustices” against Serbs were brought out as something that had to be *righted* urgently, creating an atmosphere of uncertainty and hostility.⁴²³ Victims of past wars and of war crimes have to be remembered and memorialised, but this distorted *history* was not about the victims at all. It was about preparing the terrain for the reconfiguration of the Yugoslav State, by any means necessary, so the former communist elites that had converted to Serbian nationalism would stay in power, under the pretence of being the nation’s saviours.⁴²⁴ While alarmed at the tenor of the Serbian nationalist discourse, the former communist elites in other parts of Yugoslavia were also finding it a useful historical exercise for their own interests to remind their audiences of their own grievances — and so it began. The historical primers were creating a new reality — one where conflicts from the past were being presented as an on-going present experience. As Stojanović put it, history “became a kind of experimental science ... it was assigned a task of producing new reality ... The recomposed and reworked past had the task of producing

420 Stojanović, 2017, 153. According to La Brosse’s report from 2003, Milošević was controlling the media from around 1986 – 1987 imposing a nationalist agenda. See also “The War of Words: Expert Report on Propaganda Released”, *Coalition for International Justice (CIJ)* <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/war-words-expert-report-propaganda-released> (accessed March 31, 2020).

421 Judah, 2003, 42.

422 Stojanović, 2017, 159.

423 Stojanović, 2017, 153.

424 Stojanović, 2017, 154.

a new future.”⁴²⁵ Para-historical assertions presented a “conflict concept of history” so that the real conflict became a logical outcome of historical animosities, where Serbian aggression was alchemically transformed into a necessary action to *prevent new genocide*.⁴²⁶ The value system had to be adapted where national emotions were the *primum movens* and thus became the litmus test of identity. If you were not moved to tears by the play *Battle of Kolubara* or by the tragic story of Milutin,⁴²⁷ then you were not a good Serb — you were a traitor. This takes us far away from Montesquieu’s priority values and from Margalit’s ethics of memory.

The “new, mythical narrative”⁴²⁸ was put together from various pieces of historical facts in such a way so as to “reconstruct a new national and historical consciousness which was a blend of delusion of grandeur, and self-pity, of national arrogance, and self-victimization.”⁴²⁹ Most alarmingly, this new histrionic mash-up was being taught in schools, with the subject of history becoming a conduit to learning *how to be Serbian*.⁴³⁰ Following the years of socialist rule, which had erased or displaced unsuitable history, the new historical priorities were presented as a “return to oneself”, which is what Smith means when he describes a search for the authentic self as part of the myth of the golden age.⁴³¹ This rediscovery of the *true self* comprised *remembering* about the *other*, the antagonist, which required “not just a shift in interpretation, but also a change of facts”.⁴³² This new “mythical narrative”, comprising key elements from the Serbian perception of history, such as hero-worship, cult of death, and sacrifice, also contained the Serbian people themselves as “the main protagonist of history”.⁴³³ Anderson’s “aura of fatality”⁴³⁴ may be applied to the period

425 Stojanović, 2017, 154.

426 Stojanović, 2017, 154.

427 “Milutin” will reappear as a monument in Kraljevo in chapter IV.

428 La Brosse’s report on propaganda lists “myths and history” as ingredients of propaganda used by Milošević’s media in the late 1980s and 1990s.

429 Stojanović, 2017, 156.

430 Stojanović, 2017, 156.

431 Anthony Smith, “The ‘Golden Age’ and National Renewal”, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 1997, 40.

432 Stojanović, 2017, 157.

433 Stojanović, 2017, 157.

434 Anderson, 1991, 145.

of the *implosion of history*, because they were being fed mutated memory, Serbs felt they were inhabited by the *Spirit of History*, that they were doing what they were supposed to do. Stojanović explains that “the people’ were essentialized as a ‘unique being’, almost like a biological community, an organism with clearly defined traits that deny any individuality, particularity, or pluralism.”⁴³⁵ In the late 1980s and the early 1990s under the Milošević regime, Serbs as a nation made a “crucial discovery” of their “choiceless identity” to use Amartya Sen’s term.⁴³⁶ This *rediscovered* identity was embraced and followed — all the way to war. For Stojanović, this “essentialist concept of the nation” continues in Serbia today.⁴³⁷

In her essay “Narrative on WWI as the energy drink of Serbian nationalism”,⁴³⁸ Stojanović reflects on the emotive reception of Christopher Clark’s book *The Sleepwalkers* in Serbia in 2013. The Serbian government had introduced Armistice Day as an official holiday at the end of 2011 and it was celebrated for the first time in 2012. The Serbian government was looking forward to the centenary commemorations of the WWI. As Foreign Minister Dačić stated in 2013, it was the war “that made Serbia famous”.⁴³⁹ Serbs could sing along heartily with Georges Brassens saying that the war of 1914 – 1918 was their favourite war too: even though the nation had suffered, it had emerged victorious and heroic, with considerable international attention. The centenary commemorations were an opportunity to *remind* the world, as well as Serbs themselves, that those brave soldiers from 100 years ago, were the true face of Serbia, not the terrible images on their screens in the 1990s. The arrival of Clark’s book caused genuine panic that he was coming to spoil the party because his book was reputed to depict Serbs as the culprits for the outbreak of

435 Stojanović, 2017, 157.

436 Sen, 2006, 36-39.

437 Stojanović, 2017, 157.

438 Stojanović, 2017, 139.

439 “Nama je svaki odlazak na Krf opelo” [“We hold a memorial service every time we come to Corfu”]. *B92*, September 26, 2013. http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2013&mm=09&dd=26&nav_category=11&nav_id=758324 (accessed September 30, 2013).

the First World War.⁴⁴⁰ As Stojanović observes, almost as in in 1914, but with different means, mobilisation of all available forces was carried out to counter the heresy of Serbia as the guilty party.⁴⁴¹ As a result, separate events were held in Bosnia, one by Serbian officials from Serbia and Republika Srpska⁴⁴² and the other by Federation⁴⁴³ officials. It was clear that the confrontation lines were still in place and that there would be no consensus, or even an understanding that events could have multiple perspectives. As Stojanović put it: “history was misused in order to express contemporary problems, to voice the burning issues of today using the language of the past and render them emotionally charged.”⁴⁴⁴ People were choosing the past over the present. Although serious historiographic works related to the First World War were published in the 1980s, and subsequently, they are no match for memory.

The First World War is a perfect *usable* past for the Serbian government because it contains the main characteristics of the Serbian *mythomoteur*. Stojanović identifies a number of mythical aspects, among them death. The number of Serbian casualties in the First World War are presented almost triumphantly — it is celebrated as martyrdom which “becomes an obligation for survivors”.⁴⁴⁵ Stojanović considers it a “death cult”. The way this is presented in the media and history textbooks, it seems that there is no other way to live for the country you were born in but to die for it. As Stojanović explains, the relationship with death establishes “a value system that is closer to epic poetry than to modern standards by which life is the ultimate value”.⁴⁴⁶ In this sense, the “death cult” connects with Anderson’s “aura of fatality”⁴⁴⁷ and Mosse’s *cult of the war dead* and “cult of the nation”.⁴⁴⁸ It is also closely related to the “heroic code” whereby the

440 Stojanović, 2017, 139.

441 Stojanović, 2017, 139-140.

442 Serbian entity in Bosnia.

443 Bosnian and Croatian entities.

444 Stojanović, 2017, 140.

445 Stojanović, 2017, 144.

446 Stojanović, 2017, 145.

447 Anderson, 1991, 145.

448 Mosse, 1990, 105, 224.

highest act that anyone can do for their country is to die, which is more valued than anything else. At the same time, the First World War has a wealth of episodes that can be harvested for mythical content, one such being that a French general had said that *the Serbian infantry was advancing so fast during the breakthrough of the Salonika front that French cavalry could not keep up*.⁴⁴⁹ This is a ludicrous statement that has been repeated throughout the years of the centenary commemorations, but more alarmingly was also included in a history textbook for 14-year-olds.⁴⁵⁰

In “Culture Wars: Serbian History Textbooks and the Construction of National Identity”,⁴⁵¹ Keith Crawford examines the dominant values of patriotism and collectivism in history textbooks in 1990s, and their changes since the downfall of the Milošević regime. During the Milošević years, pupils were presented with a past where Serbs were always surrounded by hostile nations, non-Serbs who usually collaborated with the enemy in wars. There was outright propaganda about Serbia as a nation in danger, having to retaliate against its enemies.⁴⁵² While some of the most egregious nationalistic passages were taken out after 2000, Crawford points out that “a strong sense of patriotic and nationalist fervour remains an important element in the new history textbooks in Serbia where chapters on Serbian national and international history are kept separate from world history”.⁴⁵³ Crawford gives the example of the way WWI is presented in a history textbook for 17 and 18-year-olds. The language is emotional and resonates with patriotic pride when talking about the success of the Serbian Army and heroism of its soldiers, and full of disgust when talking about atrocities against civilians.⁴⁵⁴ There

449 Stojanović, 2017, 147. This claim is repeated in the “Decisive Breakthrough” on Serbia.com <http://www.serbia.com/about-serbia/serbia-history/world-war-one/decisive-breakthrough/> (accessed May 11, 2020).

450 Stojanović, 2017, 147.

451 Keith Crawford, “Culture Wars: Serbian History Textbooks and the Construction of National Identity”, *International Journal of Historical Learning, Teaching and Research* (Volume 3 Number 2 July 2003): 43- 52.

452 Crawford, 2003, 49.

453 Crawford, 2003, 50.

454 Crawford, 2003, 51.

is no detachment or demonstration of what history is, or that it should be approached on the basis of facts. Emotions are presented as facts and Crawford concludes that these “emotive descriptions” continue to dominate the Serbian relationship to their past.

We have looked at how the subject of the Retreat is presented in the most recent history textbooks for 17-and-18-year-olds, *History* by Djordje Djurić and Momčilo Pavlović, published in 2010, and *History IV* by Mira Radojević, from 2018.⁴⁵⁵ The 2010 history textbook gives an overview of the situation in Serbia in 1915 with considerable emphasis on the suffering and sacrifice of the Serbian people and on the superiority of the enemy. The latter is mentioned three times on one page.⁴⁵⁶ Special mentions are given to Major Gavrilović and his legendary defence of Belgrade speech from 1915, and to Field Marshall Mackensen who led the attack on Serbia. Mackensen is lauded for paying his respects to Serbian courage and erecting a monument to those fallen in the defence of Belgrade.⁴⁵⁷ The necessity for the Retreat is partly explained, and while there are some important moments, which are described, it is not always clear why certain things happened, for instance, why the Serbian Army had to destroy heavy artillery as they were retreating, or why the “local Albanian gangs” were attacking Serbian refugees.⁴⁵⁸ After the recovery in Corfu helped by the Allies, the Serbian Army is transported to Salonika “resurrected”.⁴⁵⁹ Later in the text, equally no explanation is given as to why the Salonika Front “did not move for two years”.⁴⁶⁰ In the 2018 history textbook, there are even fewer facts and more emotion. The Retreat is “unequalled suffering” but not much is given in the way of cause and effect.⁴⁶¹ Once the Serbian Army arrived on the Albanian coast, Italians

455 Djordje Djurić and Momčilo Pavlović, *Istorija* [History] (Beograd: Zavod za udžbenike, 2010); Mira Radojević, *Istorija IV* [History IV] (Beograd: Klett, 2018).

456 Djurić and Pavlović, 2010, 94.

457 Both will feature later in the thesis, chapter IV.

458 Djurić and Pavlović, 2010, 96.

459 Djurić and Pavlović, 2010, 97.

460 Djurić and Pavlović, 2010, 97.

461 Radojević, 2018, 114.

“delayed offering their help”.⁴⁶² No explanation is given, only that the French took over the evacuation.⁴⁶³ The quotes from survivors of the Retreat given in the textbook are literary and poignant but do not offer more insight. While the events described in the two textbooks are not *wrong*, their presentation does not provide a historical overview of an arguably extraordinary event. The overall impression is that of a Greek tragedy — and sure enough the 1915 Retreat does have all the elements of one. But these are history textbooks, where history should not come second to *epos*.

In “Resistant pasts versus mnemonic hegemony: On the power relations of collective memory”,⁴⁶⁴ Berthold Molden looks at the way interactions between *hegemonic master narratives*, *defiant counter-memories*, and *silent majorities*, govern the politics of history and memory in societies. Molden considers how “grand historical narratives” on which nation’s identities are based can be taken apart, systems dismantled as victims become perpetrators and vice versa, as they engage in “struggles of competitive victimhood”.⁴⁶⁵ Molden examines the concept of “mnemonic hegemony” where a political regime imposes a certain version of past events. As Molden notes, there is never just one version of what happened and there are always different groups within society who have their own narratives, even though they may be subjugated.⁴⁶⁶ The *mnemonic hegemony* portrays the present as the only possible outcome of the past, silencing dissident versions because they are undermining the legitimacy of the ruling order. These mnemonic power relations can be overturned and the new memory culture established, although not necessarily encompassing all those who had challenged it or succeeded in overturning it.⁴⁶⁷ Molden links the uncertainty of “the dominant political order that imposes memory” to

462 Radojević, 2018, 114.

463 This is incidentally contradicted by the research published from the material reportedly found in the Italian military archives, as discussed in chapter III.

464 Berthold Molden, “Resistant pasts versus mnemonic hegemony: On the power relations of collective memory”, *Memory Studies* (2016, Vol.9 no. 12): 125-142.

465 Molden, 2016, 126.

466 Molden, 2016, 130.

467 Molden, 2016, 131.

the likelihood of the “significant changes in mnemonic power relations”.⁴⁶⁸ The case of Serbia presents a situation where the *mythomoteur* has such a hold on the national psyche that whoever manages to best embody it acquires mnemonic power. This means holding the ultimate historical authority without allowing anyone to challenge the narrative. Despite the fact that the holders of the hegemonic narrative have changed in Serbia several times in the past 100 years, its sacrificial core has stayed the same.

In “The Serbian mythomoteur as sacrificial narrative”,⁴⁶⁹ Nevena Daković notes that the Serbian *mythomoteur* of Kosovo comprising “martyrdom, victimization, injustice, suffering, heavenly kingdom and death”, meaning “victory in defeat through ultimate sacrifice in death”⁴⁷⁰ represents the way Serbs think about world and their relationship with it. This is what Gillis meant when he said that “identities and memories are not things we think *about* but things we think *with*”.⁴⁷¹ Kosovo as the main Serbian myth was revived in the 1999 NATO air strikes: the air war began because of Kosovo, adding “another layer of sentiment to the sacrificial narrative”. Serbia — or the regime acting for Serbia — again embraced “sacrifice, martyrdom and victimization substantiating the sense of narcissistic ethical superiority based upon [an] ethnical one”.⁴⁷² Daković finds that the First World War centenary events offered an opportunity to reconceptualise the myth of sacrifice placing it in a European context with a different focus turned towards “the sacrifice through hardships of life and not to the sacrifice by dying or death”.⁴⁷³ Daković examines several examples of films and plays that have the First World War as a theme where death does not appear uniformly as martyrdom but could be accidental, meaningless, or an individual act rather than “a collective sacrifice”.⁴⁷⁴ There is no doubt that the First World War centenary events have replaced the Kosovo myth as

468 Molden, 2016, 131.

469 Nevena Daković, “The Serbian mythomoteur as sacrificial narrative”, *Frontiers of Narrative Studies* (4,1, 2018): 140-145.

470 Daković, 2018, 140.

471 Gillis, 1994, 5.

472 Daković, 2018, 141.

473 Daković, 2018, 142.

474 Daković, 2018, 144.

mythomoteur although the cult of death and sacrifice remain robust, as we shall see in the examples of the way the Albanian retreat and associated events from the First World War are remembered. One of the significant observations in Daković's article was the way Serbia's President Vučić has been constructing his own image in keeping with the sacrificial narrative. "It is the myth of constant personal suffering and sacrifice that asserts the welfare of the nation ... President Vučić gets up at 5 o'clock: in fact he hardly sleeps at all; he is ready to do anything and to ask/beg/plea to anyone if it is for the wellbeing of the nation."⁴⁷⁵ This was further accentuated when, at the central commemoration of the end of the First World War, on 11 November 2018 in Paris, ostensibly because of a protocol error by the French hosts, Vučić was positioned sitting among the *second-rank* nations,⁴⁷⁶ instead of being seated among the main countries, France, Germany, US, and Britain. To add insult to injury, the president of Kosovo, Hashim Thaçi, found himself seated among the latter. The front pages of all newspapers in Serbia were aghast: "The Last Slap in Paris",⁴⁷⁷ "Paris is no longer the City of Lights"⁴⁷⁸ while Serbia's humiliation was spelled out and lamented in all the editorials. Vučić's official reaction was that he had a very difficult time, particularly watching the Kosovo president sitting where the Serbian president should have been, but that he contained his disappointment and hurt, and did what he had to do for Serbia.⁴⁷⁹ It is the continuation of the sacrificial narrative this time applied in respect of unfortunate seating arrangements.

475 Daković, 2018, 144.

476 President Vučić was seated next to the President of Austria to much amusement of regional satirists who thought that neither would have found it very pleasant.

477 Miloš Ković, "Poslednji šamar u Parizu" ["The Last Slap in Paris"], *Politika*, 7 December 2018 <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/417157/Pogledi/Poslednji-samar-u-Parizu> (accessed December 15, 2018).

478 Boško Jakšić, "Pariz više nije grad svetlosti" ["Paris is no longer the City of Lights"], *Politika*, 11 November 2018 <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/415519/Pariz-vise-nije-Grad-svetlosti> (accessed November 12, 2018).

479 "Šta je neko mislio kada je Tačija stavio iza Putina" ["What were they thinking when they put Thaçi behind Putin"], *B92*, 11 November 2018 https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2018&mm=11&dd=11&nav_category=11&nav_id=1468110 (accessed November 15, 2018).

Serbian *mythemes* are dominated by the death cult which is linked to the heroic cult. *Serbian exceptionalism* consists of heroism, despising death, having exceptional aptitude, and the ability to continuously suffer, including sacrificing oneself for others, for which they receive no gratitude. Milutin's story includes him reminiscing about liberating other parts of Yugoslavia in 1918, without knowing where they were, only knowing he was supposed to do it.⁴⁸⁰ This ties in with the myth of injustice,⁴⁸¹ the implication being that Serbs, noble and naive, were stabbed in the back.⁴⁸² This is certainly reminiscent of Germany's injustice myth — *Dolchstoss* — leading to the desire for retaliation — which brings us to another possible interpretation as to why the Serbian establishment so vehemently opposed Clark's book and viewed it as *historical revisionism*. If Serbia was at least partly responsible for the First World War, its record regarding that war would be tainted. The First World War could then not be the perfect repository of a usable past nor could it be used for *historical frame switching* which we will discuss further. Moreover, the wars of the 1990s might no longer be seen as an *aberration*, but could be interpreted as a continuation of Serbian nationalist aggression; Clark said as much in his introduction to *The Sleepwalkers*.⁴⁸³ This leads us to suggest that if the Serbs cannot face different interpretations of what happened in 1914, the chances that they would want to hear other versions of what happened in the 1990s are slim.

Conclusion Chapter II

In order to investigate the motivations behind the Serbian handling of the past and the lack thereof, we focus on the concepts of memory, history, and identity, and how they resonate in the Serbian context. The concept of memory is disputed even though the personal experience of it

480 Stojanović, 2017, 147.

481 Stojanović observes that the feeling of injustice is “the strongest glue of a nation” in Stojanović, “The Mythical War”, *Peščanik*, 5 July 2014.

482 Stojanović, 2017, 148.

483 Clark, 2013, xxvi.

seems absolute. Maurice Halbwachs was able to clarify this contradiction by explaining how our subjective understanding of the past works conjointly with other people's recollections. The collective collage will always be more complete than the individual picture, but it will still be a "retrospective mirage". Halbwachs observes the lack of reliable individual experience of the past and qualifies "social frameworks of memory" as the most stable structures of the remembered past. For Jay Winter, it is the plurality of remembrance that matters, kept alive by groups of people who come together to remember past events. All nations remember and forget, which is necessary for their foundation, as demonstrated by Ernest Renan. Jay Winter makes the important distinction that people are those who remember and forget, not nations. People, grouped as nations, depend on the remembrance of their past, to differentiate themselves from others through their *remembered* history. People, carriers of national identity, imagine, invent and construct their past. This is done by selecting relevant historical events that are mediated through many aspects of public life. Any parts of historical past considered harmful for the reputation of the nation may be discarded. These constructed pasts, including myths, contribute to the production of a "choiceless identity", or national belonging. This coincidental identity is thus considered an achievement in itself, leading to *dying for one's country* as a way of *being*.

The Great War, commemorated for its great *sacrifice* has structured the way we remember the dead in wars. The importance of the names of those who have fallen on the battlefield and the rituals of remembrance all have their origins in the aftermath of the Great War. We have looked at the Great War remembrance tropes both in Western Europe and in the South-east Europe finding similarities and variations in memorialisation. Serbia's connection to the First World War has been reinforced through the centenary commemorative events. This is illustrative of the merging of the heroic narrative with the suffering of the Serbian Army and civilians in the Retreat to produce the "sacrificial narrative". This is the dominant narrative of today's Serbia, used to reframe reality and oppose any attempt to reassess past events because any alternative views of the past are

considered threatening to the *status quo*. This frozen mythical sacrifice has a crucial role in maintaining the dominant narrative of victimhood. It ties in with what Serbs believe about themselves and their past with faith acting as a *blinker* in their present.

In the next chapter, we examine the events of Serbia's *favourite war* that led to the Serbian Army Retreat of 1915. The Retreat and its impact continue to live in the Serbian national consciousness 100 years later without showing any signs of abating. The story of the Retreat and the related images help explain the longevity of the narrative.

III

The Serbian Retreat of 1915

Introduction

The Retreat of the Serbian Army and civilians across Albania and Montenegro took place in November and December 1915, following the invasion of Serbia from three different opponents: the German Army, the Austro-Hungarian Army and the Bulgarian Army. The premise of the study, as already outlined, is that the Retreat, the central event of the First World War for Serbia, elicits an emotional reaction among the Serbs to this day, exemplifying the Serbian attitude to the past. The *Serbian national identity narrative*, as we have interpreted it, rests on different strands of the internalised Serbian historical experience. The Retreat holds these strands together — threat from more powerful enemies, desperate flight towards safety, misguided reliance on allies experienced as betrayal, the Golgotha — suffering of the nation, survival through *superhuman* perseverance and courage, resurrection of the Serbian Army on friendly soil, followed by the apotheosis of the liberation of the country. The Retreat involved grandfathers and great-grandfathers in living memory, which makes the remembering personal. Distance from *the event* is impossible, and the pronoun used is *we* rather than *they*. *We fought* is used regularly to describe the events. Asked about the Retreat, most Serbs will describe the moments

and sentiments from paintings, photographs, poems, or songs. Many will undoubtedly recount the story of the Retreat as they have seen it in photographs, read about it in literature,⁴⁸⁴ heard in veterans' testimonies,⁴⁸⁵ and most importantly through family lore. The Retreat *lives* in Serbs as a selection of *scenes*, or *moments* — a veritable “collage” of “reconstructed pictures” as Halbwachs would define them: the crossing of the frozen Vizier's Bridge, the hostility of the locals in Albania, the *white death* in the Albanian mountains, hungry soldiers eating raw horse's flesh, the bleak arrival in Corfu, the dead being buried in the *blue tomb* — all of these represent *the truths* of the Retreat. Many of those emotionally charged scenes from the Retreat did happen but do not tell the whole story. The Retreat can also be interpreted as a military disaster.⁴⁸⁶ How else do we explain the absence of a memorial? But for the majority of Serbs, these moments, these scenes, *are* the historical account of the Retreat.

To support this argument, and to understand the remembrance of the Retreat in subsequent chapters, we shall now examine the events that led to the Retreat and its consequences. We shall also refer to and contextualise those historically and emotionally important *moments* that have made the Retreat not only into a myth but into a *mythomoteur*, to be equalled only by the Kosovo cult. However, before we get to 1915, we must go back a little further, to the creation of the Kingdom of Serbia, and then to the beginning of the First World War, which ushered the series of events that unfolded resulting in the Retreat.

484 Dobrica Ćosić, *Vreme smrti [A Time of Death]* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1972.); Danko Popović, *Knjiga o Milutinu [The Book about Milutin]* (Belgrade: Književne novine, 1986).

485 Antonije Djurić, ed. *Solunci govore [Salonika veterans speak]* (Belgrade: Prosveta, 2008).

486 A 2016 novel by Dragan Velikić, *The Investigator* views the Retreat as a catastrophe.

1. The Making of the Kingdom of Serbia

“In Serbia proper the struggle for independence preceded the intellectual development of the nation.”⁴⁸⁷

From the mid-15th century when the Ottomans embarked on the occupation of Serbian lands, the Serbian *sanjak* — province — endured in a diminished state, subordinate to the Sultan for over four centuries. Serbs, like the other subjugated nations under the Ottomans, depended on the mercy of great powers.

Serbia’s wars of liberation against Ottoman rule began with the First Serbian Rising of 1804,⁴⁸⁸ which first started as an uprising against the violence of the four *dahijas* — janissaries ruling the province who were, in fact, apostates from the Porte rule. Originally, the uprising was not against Ottoman rule *per se*. The uprising was led by Djordje Petrović or *Karadjordje*, Black George, (1762 – 1817) a former *Freikorps* soldier and pig merchant who gathered capable troops and insurgents to fight *dahija* abuse and restore the Porte’s rule. After the rebel’s initial successes, the rebellion developed into a liberation war against Turkish rule, dubbed the *Serbian Revolution* by Leopold Ranke.⁴⁸⁹ After the Belgrade *pašaluk* (district) was liberated, the rebels proclaimed an independent Serbia on 31 March 1807. The event was only marginally interesting for the Great Powers, at that time in the grip of the Napoleonic wars. Russia’s support seemed promising but tentative. After Napoleon attacked Russia in 1812, Russia needed a quick peace deal with the Ottoman Empire and the previous promise of Russian help to the Serbian insurgents evaporated. After more Ottoman troops arrived from neighbouring Bosnia to quash

487 Report of the International Commission to Inquire into the Causes and Conduct of the Balkan Wars (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1914), 22.

488 In Serbia today, 15 February is celebrated as Serbian Statehood Day, in remembrance of the First Serbian Rising and the Candelmas Constitution.

489 Leopold Ranke. *The History of Serbia and the Servian Revolution* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853); originally published in German *Die Serbische Revolution*, Hamburg, 1829, subsequent editions 1844, 1879.

the rebellion, Karadjordje and his closest associates were forced to flee across the Sava River to the Habsburg Empire and eventually to Russia. The briefly independent state disintegrated. As violence returned with the Ottoman rule, the Second Rising was started in 1815 by Miloš Obrenović (1780 – 1860), another pig merchant who was eventually more successful in negotiating Serbia's autonomy from Ottoman rule. As historian Stevan K. Pavlowitch pointed out, Miloš Obrenović used different methods to Karadjordje: he manipulated, bribed and cajoled the Turks into giving Serbia more freedom and more privileges over time.⁴⁹⁰ The return of Karadjordje from Russia in 1817 threatened the game Miloš was playing as well as his leadership position.⁴⁹¹ He had the legendary First Rising leader killed in his sleep.⁴⁹²

Slowly and patiently, Miloš Obrenović worked on appearing to be a faithful subject of the Porte, while managing to achieve small gains. He knew how to deal with them because his mentality and temperament were close to that of the Turks. According to Pavlowitch, he was “an unreformed Turkish pasha” who “respected the Sultan’s authority, and cheated it as much as he could get away with.”⁴⁹³ Meanwhile, the situation in Europe developed in Serbia’s favour after the Ottoman Empire’s defeat in the war with Russia. The peace agreement of 1829 confirmed Serbia’s autonomy and the return of some Karadjordje-gained areas in 1830. Through two decrees, in 1830 and 1833, the Sultan used a new statute to grant Serbia internal autonomy and a hereditary title to Prince Miloš Obrenović while limiting his powers by introducing a council to rule with him. The Sultan also granted Prince Miloš the right to keep order in Serbia, which translated into the right to have an army.⁴⁹⁴ In 1835, Serbia adopted its first constitution, the so-called *Sretenjski ustav*, named after

490 Stevan K. Pavlowitch, *Serbia: The History Behind the Name*, 2002, 37.

491 Karadjordje and Miloš Obrenović were the founders of the two Serbian royal houses, the Karadjordjević and the Obrenović.

492 Čorović, *Istorija Srba* [History of the Serbs] (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1989), 459.

493 Pavlowitch, 2002, 35-36.

494 Djordje Stanić, Zoran Kilibarda and Jan Marček, *Obuka Srpske Vojske* [Serbian Army Training] (Beograd: Vojnoizdavački zavod, 2007), 52.

the Christian holiday of Candelmas, separating the executive, judiciary, and legislative powers.⁴⁹⁵ Serbia was now a self-governed entity under the Ottoman Empire with a population of about 700,000 covering 38,000 square km.⁴⁹⁶ It would take another half a century of deals, another constitution, wars with the Ottomans, and a series of negotiations with the Great Powers before the Principality of Serbia became an independent state at the Berlin Congress in 1878, gaining an additional 11,000 square km and 400,000 more people.⁴⁹⁷

Even though Prince Milan Obrenović (1872 – 1889), Miloš Obrenović's grand-nephew, achieved Serbian sovereignty during his rule, he was disliked. Known for excessive drinking, gambling, and public quarrels with his wife Queen Natalija, he was also suspected of taking bribes from Austria.⁴⁹⁸ After one scandal too many, specifically in relation to the railway concessions collapse and Milan's incompetent handling of the wars with Bulgaria, he faced open opposition.

One of Milan's last achievements as a sovereign was to acquire the status of Kingdom for Serbia in 1882. This came at a price: he had signed a secret treaty with Austria in 1881 which supported this upgrade in status in exchange for guarantees that Serbia would not engage in anti-Habsburg activities or sign any treaty without Austrian approval.⁴⁹⁹ Vienna's approach was motivated by the large numbers of Serbs in the Empire⁵⁰⁰ who campaigned for their rights, status, and language as well as for a South Slav country, in cooperation with Croats and Slovenes.

495 *Ustav Knjaževstva Srbije* [Constitution of the Principality of Serbia] 15 February 1835, *Pro juris* [http://projuris.org/RETROLEX/Ustav%20Knezevine%20Srbije_Sretenjski%20ustav%20\(1835\).pdf](http://projuris.org/RETROLEX/Ustav%20Knezevine%20Srbije_Sretenjski%20ustav%20(1835).pdf) (accessed March 15, 2017).

496 Pavlowitch, 2002, 33.

497 Pavlowitch, 2002, 65.

498 Rebecca West, *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 541.

499 Ćorović, 1989, 560.

500 By 1910 Orthodox Serbs were the largest national group in the Empire, 43.49%, Dušan T. Bataković, *Srbija i Balkan. Albanija, Bugarska, Grčka 1914-1918. [Serbia and The Balkans. Albania, Bulgaria, Greece 1914-1918]* (Beograd, Novi Sad: RTS, Prometej, 2016). 18.



The situation in Eastern Europe following the Berlin Congress, 1878. Serbia's capital was Kragujevac between 1818 and 1841. Belgrade, its furthest northern border city, became the capital in 1841. Serbian gains are marked in yellow. (Map courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, University of Texas in Austin.)⁵⁰¹

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was aware of having to keep Serbia close to protect its interests by making the most of the pro-Vienna orientation of the Obrenović king. King Milan was known to be an *Austrian man* while his wife Queen Natalija, who was half-Russian, opposed his rapprochement with Vienna and veered towards Russia.⁵⁰² The royal marriage mirrored the main rivalries — the Austro-Hungarian Empire had designs on the Balkans, and Russia was still its main competitor in the region. Following the abdication of King Milan in favour of his underage son Aleksandar, the country briefly turned to the Russian Empire for strategic support. At first popular, having taken power before he was meant to, Aleksandar proved a fickle king who abolished the more liberal 1888 Constitution and revived the more authoritarian one of 1869. It appeared that after his disappointment with the Russian Tsar, who stopped supporting

501 Map from "An Historical Atlas" by Robert H. Labberton, E. Elaxton and Co., 1884.

502 Ćorović, 1989, 529.

his marriage,⁵⁰³ the strategic orientation of Serbia again turned towards Vienna. King Aleksandar offered a number of favours to Austria placing him on a collision course with a group of Serbian army officers.

The years between 1878 and 1903 were considered disastrous for Serbia with wars, defeats (in the war against Bulgaria), rebellions, internal crises and no shortage of court scandals.⁵⁰⁴ When a group of officers felt they could no longer tolerate what they perceived to be Serbia's humiliation at the hands of an unstable king who was compromising Serbian hard-won independence through his closeness with Vienna, they formed a secret association led by Captain Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis (1876 – 1917). The plot was carried out in the night of 28 to 29 May (old style) – 10 to 11 June 1903, when King Aleksandar was killed together with his wife Queen Draga. The officers' coup changed the course of the country – and possibly European history.

This event horrified Europe, especially because of its needless brutality.⁵⁰⁵ Most European powers were shocked to such an extent that they cut off diplomatic relations with Serbia. The blockade would last until most of the conspirators – but not all⁵⁰⁶ – were retired in 1906.⁵⁰⁷ Despite this event leading to a change of dynasty in Serbia, a general sense of relief and of a new beginning in Serbia,⁵⁰⁸ royal Europe came to hold a predominantly negative view of Serbian social and political life.⁵⁰⁹ The view that Serbs were a “regicide nation” would still be held by Franz Ferdinand⁵¹⁰ a decade later.⁵¹¹ The officers' coup appeared unusual at first

503 Ćorović, 1989, 545. Queen Draga was unpopular and the subject of countless rumours.

504 Ćorović, 1989, 547.

505 The king and the queen were shot, before the conspirators mutilated their naked bodies and threw them out of the palace window.

506 Apis was seriously wounded in the coup and possibly avoided retirement as he was out of public view.

507 Dušan Bataković, “Storm over Serbia. The Rivalry between Civilian and Military Authorities (1911–1914)”, *Balkanica* XLIV (2013), 308.

508 Ćorović, 1989, 547; Radmila Pejić, “Herbert Vivian in Serbia. A British Traveller in Late Nineteenth Century Serbia,” *Balkanica* XLIV (2013), 278.

509 Clark, 2013, 16.

510 Archduke Franz Ferdinand (1863 – 1914) was heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne.

511 Mitrović, 2011, 145.

as they handed over power to the politicians demanding a provisional government.⁵¹² However, many of them believed that their work was not finished and wanted to be politically involved in the running of the country. The simmering conflict between the Serbian civilian and military authorities would not be resolved by the arrival on the Serbian throne of Petar Karadjordjević (1844 – 1921).⁵¹³ In fact, the clashes and intrigues between the civilian and military authorities would continue to impact Serbian politics for over a decade as the conspirators attempted to exert more influence in the running of the country. Many of the junior officers among the conspirators continued to hold posts, including Apis.⁵¹⁴ Some would go on to establish the *Unification or Death* association in 1911, better known as the *Black Hand*,⁵¹⁵ triggered by the Austro-Hungarian Annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908. Under pressure from the Great Powers, the Serbian government had to accept the annexation. This caused much resentment among the officers who perceived the acceptance as an abandonment of Serbs in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁵¹⁶ Above all, these officers believed they were the keepers of the Serbian nationalist flame, to be kept alive wherever Serbs lived.

The new king, Petar Karadjordjević (1844 – 1921), was the grandson of the legendary Karadjordje, a student at St-Cyr, a graduate of the Metz Military School, a veteran of the Franco-Prussian War 1870 – 1871 and of the Bosnian rebellions against the Turks 1876 – 1878. He was also a translator of John Stuart Mill's *Essay On Liberty* into Serbian and a believer in parliamentary democracy, having spent four decades in exile in France and Switzerland. While he had not participated in the conspiracy to bring him to the Serbian throne, he would remain indebted to the conspirators,⁵¹⁷

512 David MacKenzie, *Apis The Congenial Conspirator* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 48.

513 He was elected by the Assembly on 2 June 1903.

514 Mackenzie, 1989, 54.

515 Bataković, 2016, 20.

516 Bataković, 2016, 124.

517 The conspirators were pardoned by the Assembly.

which would greatly influence the dynamics of the Karadjordjević rule.⁵¹⁸ Nevertheless, despite the gruesome royal killings, the arrival of a king who proclaimed his intention to be a truly constitutional Serbian ruler gave Serbia a renewed sense of purpose and enhanced civic life.⁵¹⁹

The new dynasty's political champion was Prime Minister Nikola Pašić (1845 – 1926) of the Radical party. There was no shortage of views on Pašić: "he appeared to be a wandering prophet, but his political decisions showed him up as a vague ditherer,"⁵²⁰ and he was reportedly such a Russophile that it was said, "he washed his face in St Petersburg."⁵²¹ A remarkable political fighter, having survived prison and a death sentence under the previous regime,⁵²² he was a man "whose words and deeds never coincided,"⁵²³ according to the Austrian envoy in Belgrade at the time. His ability to remain calm was legendary⁵²⁴ as were his seemingly contradictory pronouncements: "We are doomed, we shall not perish,"⁵²⁵ he is thought to have said in 1914. It was widely assumed that Radoje Domanović's satirical short story from 1901, "The Leader", about a man who turned out to be blind but not before leading a lost tribe of people to their demise was portraying Pašić, "the false Moses".⁵²⁶ Yet he was a skilled politician who took on the Austro-Hungarian Empire and a host of internal enemies among whom were Apis and his men. Pašić was committed to enlarging Serbia's territory and to unifying as many Serbs as possible in one state, but not by using the methods of the *Black Hand*. This conflict between him and the plotting officers would play a key role in the Sarajevo assassination and subsequent events.

518 King Petar ended up paying the senior conspirators off to retire, Petar I Karadjordjević, *Ratni dnevnik 1915 – 1916. [War Diary 1915 – 1916]* (Topola – Oplenac: Zadužbina Kralja Petra I, 2003), 19.

519 Clark, 2013, 14.

520 Simo C. Ćirković, *Oganj i nada. Srbija u Prvom svetskom ratu. [Fire and Hope. Serbia in First World War.]* (Beograd: Dereta, 2014), 11.

521 Ćirković, 2014, 15.

522 Lyon, 2015, 31.

523 Mackenzie, 1989, 56.

524 Carlo Sforza, *Nikola Pašić* (Beograd: Kosmos, 1937), 207.

525 "Spasa nam nema propasti nećemo."

526 Gerhard Gesemann, *Bežanija – Iz jednog srpskog dnevnika 1915. i 1916. godine [original: Die Flucht. Aus einem serbischen Tagebuch 1915 und 1916.]* (Beograd: Equilibrium, 2014), 21.

The Ottoman Empire had been increasingly showing signs of weakness when, at the Berlin Congress in 1878, the Austro-Hungarian Empire's designs on the Ottoman Balkan territories were furthered as Bosnia and Herzegovina was placed under Austro-Hungarian tutelage. This was a great disappointment for Serbia. Serbs had hoped that Bosnia and Herzegovina, with an important Serbian population, would have a chance to unite with Serbia. The Austro-Hungarian Empire had other plans — their foreign expansion strategy was focused on the Balkans because they had nowhere else to go.⁵²⁷ Their greatest ally, Germany, turned into their greatest threat since the defeat at Königgrätz in 1866. Meanwhile, when it seemed that the territories of the Ottoman Empire would soon be going on a political auction of sorts; Austro-Hungarian officials saw great potential for acquiring territory, stabilising internal conflicts and providing a *mission civilisatrice* to *backward Ottoman subjects*. They envisaged profitable railway concessions through the Balkans and to this end encouraged internecine sources of conflict in the region. The geopolitical situation meant that by supporting Bulgaria against Serbia over the fate of the Macedonian territory, supporting Albanian claims against Serbia and encouraging the Kingdom of Montenegro with a view to driving a wedge between them and Serbia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire would profit through the old *divide and rule* strategy.⁵²⁸ The Empire's Foreign Minister, Alois Lexa von Aehrenthal (1854 – 1912) was interested in seeing the numbers of Slavs in the Empire increase and come under Hungarian rule which, he hoped, could reignite their interest in the Empire.⁵²⁹ The *Young Turks'* revolution in July 1908 provided an excellent pretext for the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which von Aehrenthal engineered.⁵³⁰ The annexation may have been a logical step for the Austro-Hungarian foreign policy because they wanted to “educate Bosnia and Herzegovina for political life”⁵³¹ but it provoked a European crisis. The Great Powers were not consulted and Vienna did not have a mandate for the annexation. Serbia experienced

527 Mitrović, 2011, 83.

528 Mitrović, 2011, 99-101.

529 Mitrović, 2011, 92.

530 Ćirković, 2014, 9.

531 Ćorović, 1989, 555.

it as a profoundly anti-Serbian act⁵³² and hoped for the Great Powers' intervention. Serbia eventually accepted the annexation following an ultimatum, Austro-Hungarian mobilisation, and an offer of economic incentives.⁵³³

Despite Serbia's overwhelmingly agriculture-based economy — 87% — and its lack of industry, the Kingdom was seen as attractive to the Serbs in the neighbouring empires and generally South Slavs in the Balkans.⁵³⁴ Serbia was rooted in the traditional institution of *zadruga* (family-based farming commune): “The *opanak* [Serbian leather peasant shoe also worn by most soldiers] was the guardian of all values, pillar of devotion to home and country”⁵³⁵ but it was not for nothing that Serbia's only established industry was military.⁵³⁶ The Serbs' struggle for an independent state had lasted several centuries — Serbs embodied what other small nations in large empires could be too: masters of their own land. They could be seen as the *Piedmont of the Balkans* and play a role in the unification of the South Slavs.⁵³⁷ The neighbouring empires did not really want to encourage Serbia — it had been the first country to rebel successfully against the Ottoman Empire and was now enjoying a renaissance of sorts, particularly after the “emancipation from Austria” in 1903.⁵³⁸ This attraction would only rise after Serbia's success in the two Balkan wars, alongside Vienna's hostility.

Serbia was considered the greatest winner of the two bloody regional conflicts in 1912 and 1913. In the First Balkan War, following an initial alliance between Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, “each with a national mission before it”,⁵³⁹ large areas of Ottoman Empire territories were

532 Ćorović, 1989, 558.

533 Mitrović, 2011, 129.

534 Bataković, 2016, 14.

535 Ćirković, 2014, 11.

536 Ćirković, 2014, 10.

537 The newspaper issued by the association *Unification or Death* was called *Pijemont* (Piedmont). The idea of Serbia as Piedmont dates back to around 1860, see David MacKenzie, “Serbia as Piedmont and the Yugoslav Idea, 1804-1914” (*East European Quarterly*, XXVIII, No. 2. June 1994), 161.

538 Report, 1914, 41.

539 Report, 1914, 49.

liberated relatively quickly and incorporated into the three anti-Ottoman coalition countries. The Second Balkan War saw Greece and Serbia unite against Bulgaria, following a Bulgarian attack at the end of June 1913, resulting in a territorial redistribution. A quick and successful Serbian campaign ended in a Bulgarian capitulation less than six weeks later.⁵⁴⁰ The contentious territory of “Old Serbia”⁵⁴¹ and surrounding areas were then divided between the victors, Serbia and Greece. Serbia’s territory before the Balkan Wars covered 54,000 square km with more than 3 million inhabitants, and in 1914 Serbian territory covered 87,300 square km with just over 4.5 million people.⁵⁴² The Balkan Wars demonstrated Serbian military capability and readiness to fight. In the two Balkan Wars Serbia mobilised impressive numbers of troops. Estimates vary greatly, from 356,500,⁵⁴³ or 402,200,⁵⁴⁴ to 550,000 troops.⁵⁴⁵ While the First Balkan War could primarily be seen as a war of liberation from Turkish rule,⁵⁴⁶ systematic atrocities were committed by the warring sides. At the same time, the Great Powers were conveniently using the proxy wars to test their weapons: “[The outcome of the war] had been hailed on the stock exchanges of the European capitals as a victory for *Schneider-Creusot* and *Vickers-Armstrong* over *Krupp* and *Škoda*.”⁵⁴⁷ The French General Herr used his free time to visit the Adrianople positions to check on the performance of the Serbian, i.e. French howitzers.⁵⁴⁸ Subsequently, the Second Balkan War laid bare the deep-seated enmities in the region resulting in land-grabbing, as liberation was used as a pretext for

540 Frédéric Le Moal, *La Serbie: du martyre à la victoire 1914 – 1918* (Paris : SOTECA 14-18, 2008), 26.

541 “Stara Srbija” or “Old Serbia” was the term used in the 19th century to denote the territories of the Serbian Medieval Empire which included Macedonia and Kosovo although the term is not considered stable.

542 Andrej Mitrović, *Serbia’s Great War, 1914 – 1918* (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2007), 55.

543 Nedok, 2006, 15.

544 Ćorović, 1989, 567.

545 Bataković, 2016, 15.

546 Report, 1914, 71.

547 Vladimir Dedijer, *The Road to Sarajevo* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1967), 18; French and British weapons manufacturers seemed to have gained an edge on the German and Austro-Hungarian firms.

548 Danilo Šarenac, *Top, vojnik i sećanje: Prvi svetski rati i Srbija 1914 – 2009* [*Cannon, Soldier and Remembrance: First World War and Serbia 1914 – 2009*] (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2014), 67.

conquest.⁵⁴⁹ Young Serbian socialist Dimitrije Tucović (1881 – 1914) was horrified by the crimes committed and diagnosed what he had seen as the implementation of a deliberate policy: “These crimes were not acts of individuals or a result of personal inclination but a part of the “national” policy of Balkan states. The Serbian Army exterminated Albanians in Old Serbia and Albania, the Bulgarian Army exterminated Turks [...] while the Greek Army exterminated Turks and Albanians [...] with a criminal conviction that they were carrying out a “national act”, that by removing these innocent people from the face of the earth they were getting rid of the enemy who would otherwise become a problem in the future.”⁵⁵⁰ The 1914 Carnegie Commission report⁵⁵¹ on the causes and conduct of Balkan Wars attempted to record the most egregious exactions committed, and tried to explain why they had happened. The report was published as the horrors described were about to be surpassed. Mass executions, rapes, pillaging and burning of villages by the Serbian, Greek and Bulgarian troops in 1912 and 1913 were setting the scene for what lay ahead.

2. Serbia on the Eve of the Great War

“Austria has declared war on us. Our cause is a just one. God will help us.”⁵⁵²

The role of the *Black Hand*, or rather the *Unification or Death* association, and the role of the Serbian government in the Sarajevo assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand on 28 June 1914, to this day remain hotly debated. The association led by Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis, supported the pro-Yugoslav groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina while Gavrilo Princip

549 Report, 1914, 50.

550 Dimitrije Tucović, “Krvna osveta soldateske” [“Bloody revenge of the *soldateska*”], Letter from 22 October 1913. *Radničke novine* 223. *Soldateska* is an unruly mob of troops.

551 The Commission was set up by the Carnegie Foundation for International Peace which selected experts, academics, journalists, and Nobel Prize winners to investigate the causes and the conduct of the Balkan wars.

552 Nikola Pašić upon receiving the telegram of the declaration of war while at lunch in a restaurant in Niš, in Mitrović, 2007, 52.

was a member of a broad movement established after the annexation,⁵⁵³ which came to be known later as *Mlada Bosna* — Young Bosnia.⁵⁵⁴ This was predominantly a cultural movement working towards the unification of all South Slavs. A group of young men among them grew closer to the members of another association called *Narodna odbrana* (National Defence),⁵⁵⁵ who helped them acquire training, explosives and weapons from people close to Apis. Apis, by now a colonel, chief of Serbian military intelligence since 1913, was involved in intrigues in the army and the court in his efforts to support the opposition in the upcoming elections against Prime Minister Pašić. Considering the rumbling civilian-military conflict in Serbia since the coup in 1903, predominantly linked to the so-called *priority question*,⁵⁵⁶ it is difficult to untangle the overlapping operations and intentions of those who were aware of the Sarajevo plans or the reasons behind hiding them.⁵⁵⁷ There was certainly complicity between Apis's group and the Sarajevo conspirators, "although their motives were by no means identical."⁵⁵⁸ While there are indications that some in the Serbian government may have suspected that there was a plot to assassinate the Archduke, and may have even launched an investigation and tried to warn Vienna, it seems that if any warnings were given they were too vague.⁵⁵⁹ In the words of Edward Grey: "Probably there is not, and never was, any one person who knew all there was to know."⁵⁶⁰

Strategically speaking there was no reason for the Serbian government under Pašić to provoke the Austro-Hungarian Empire into a war that Serbia was not ready to fight. Serbia's priorities lay elsewhere — Serbia's gains in the Balkan wars made it necessary for a political and diplomatic stabilisation of the kingdom which proved difficult. The new territories

553 Bataković, 2016, 118-120.

554 Lyon, 2015, 27.

555 Lyon, 2015, 45.

556 Whether civilian or military officials would have precedence or *priority* in Macedonia, Mackenzie, 1989,105; Clark, 2013, 46.

557 Bataković, 2016, 21-24.

558 Dedijer, quoted in Lyon, 2015, 60.

559 Dedijer, 1967, 395.

560 Quoted in Dedijer, 1967, 18.

gained in the Second Balkan war, particularly the “Old Serbia” territories of great historical significance for the Serbian historical identity – and thus for the legitimacy of the ambitious kingdom – were populated not only by Serbs but also by Macedonians, Albanians and Turks, many of whom were Muslim. The *stabilisation* of the region included Serbian troops’ often brutal treatment of the Muslim population.⁵⁶¹



Kingdom of Serbia, 1914.⁵⁶²

561 Lyon, 2015, 76.

562 Map of the Kingdom of Serbia in 1914, NZ History, New Zealand History online <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/map-kingdom-serbia-1914> (accessed September 25, 2019).

One of the Serbian government's objectives was access to the sea which had been achieved in military operations. However, the Serbian Army was forced to retreat in the wake of the establishment of Albania, organised by Vienna — which did not want to see its southern neighbour gain maritime access⁵⁶³ — and reluctantly supported by Rome.⁵⁶⁴ The *Balkan question* was becoming increasingly complex.

Once the shots were fired on 28 June 1914, killing the Archduke and his wife, and after the conspirators were apprehended, Serbia put all its diplomatic efforts into proving its good will to Vienna. However, the reprisals against Serbs in Austro-Hungarian territories, anti-Serbian demonstrations and attacks on Serbian businesses in the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina ensued as the, “policy of pre-emptive repression inside Hapsburg Bosnia” was implemented by Vienna.⁵⁶⁵ In a flurry of diplomatic activity in July 1914, as the Entente powers were urging restraint on all sides, the Austro-Hungarian government sought Berlin's support for war against Serbia and received it from Bethmann-Hollweg,⁵⁶⁶ even before the von Wiesner investigation report⁵⁶⁷ was received from Sarajevo stating there was no proof to link the assassination to the Serbian government.⁵⁶⁸ The opportunity for war against Serbia had to be taken.⁵⁶⁹ Agitation for a South Slav State free from Vienna was perceived to be an “existential threat” to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁵⁷⁰ Ten days after the report, on 23 July, the Serbian government was given 48 hours to respond to the strongly-worded ultimatum demanding satisfaction. While most of the demands could be met, the demand under point seven was encroaching on Serbian sovereignty — to open a judicial inquiry

563 C.E.J. Fryer, *The Destruction of Serbia in 1915* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 99.

564 Lyon, 2015, 47.

565 Max Hastings, *Catastrophe: Europe Goes to War 1914* (London: William Collins, 2013), 147.

566 Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg (1856 – 1921) German chancellor 1909 – 1917.

567 Friedrich von Wisener, Austro-Hungarian official charged with compiling the reports on the investigation into the assassination of Franz Ferdinand and his wife Sophie Chotek.

568 Mitrović, 2007, 6.

569 Geoffrey Wawro, *A Mad Catastrophe* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 111.

570 Lyon, 2015, 47.

which would include Austro-Hungarian investigators.⁵⁷¹ The conciliatory response was carefully worded and delivered personally by Pašić to the Austro-Hungarian legation in Belgrade five minutes before the deadline. As the staff of the legation had already evacuated its building at 1830 hours by going across the Sava River to Zemun, into Austro-Hungarian territory, it was clear that the Serbian response would be *a priori* rejected. The Austro-Hungarian Empire declared war against Serbia on 28 July 1914 to punish it.⁵⁷² Montenegro, the only ally that Serbia had signed a treaty with, declared its support immediately. Serbia and Montenegro established a joint military command early on in the war.⁵⁷³ Although Serbia had longed to “tie [their] small boat more tightly to the large Entente ship,”⁵⁷⁴ Serbia had no other treaties except with Greece and that was only in the event of an attack by Bulgaria. Russia voiced its support for Serbia, followed by the French and the British. There was every expectation that Serbia would be overwhelmed by the Austro-Hungarian attack. This would not be surprising in view of the disparity of size: Serbia was a small state facing 52 million Habsburg subjects.⁵⁷⁵ The world expected to see an Austro-Hungarian triumph as Austria imposed the Great War onto Europe to “punish — indeed, destroy — Serbia.”⁵⁷⁶

In his official proclamation, Regent Aleksandar (1888 – 1934), a graduate of St Petersburg Military Academy, victorious veteran of the Balkan Wars, made regent on 24 June 1914, accused Austria of invading Serbian Bosnia and Herzegovina, 30 years before and called upon the nation: “defend Serbian homesteads, the Serbian tribe, with all [our] might”.⁵⁷⁷ Meanwhile, the anti-Serbian propaganda from Vienna, repressive measures against Serbs in the Empire as well the atmosphere encouraging violence against

571 West, 1982, 580.

572 Christopher Catherwood, *The Battles of World War I: Everything You Need to Know* (London: Allison and Busby, 2014), 75.

573 Bataković, 2016, 31.

574 Savo Skoko, *Vojvoda Radomir Putnik [Field Marshall Radomir Putnik]* (Belgrade: BIGZ, 1984), 18.

575 Pavlowitch, 2002, 94.

576 Tim Judah, *History, Myth and the Destruction of Yugoslavia* (London and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 98; *Hastings*, 2013, 140.

577 Quoted in Bataković, 2016, 30.

Serbs and their property, had the opposite effect of what was expected. As Serbian businesses and homes were targeted by angry mobs, in Zagreb even more than in Sarajevo,⁵⁷⁸ the authorities did little to stop the excesses. Vienna encouraged such actions, thereby motivating the Serbs of Bosnia to join the defence of Serbia as volunteers.⁵⁷⁹ In July 1914, 532,000 Serbian reservists were mobilised, including 10,000 officers.⁵⁸⁰ By August 1915, there were over 570,000 mobilised citizens. By the autumn of 1915, with volunteers from other Yugoslav regions including the Austro-Hungarian Empire, there were 707,000 mobilised men and it is estimated that approximately less than half of that number were “meeting the demands of warfare of the time”.⁵⁸¹

3. 1914 — War, Defence, Atrocities

“It was in the east that the killing began when Conrad ‘s Austro-Hungarian Army launched its campaign of vengeance against Serbia.”⁵⁸²

The Austro-Hungarian Empire started the war with considerable confidence. Its forces “were supposedly some of the finest and best equipped in Europe”⁵⁸³ but Conrad von Hötzendorf (1852 – 1925) chief of the general staff of the Austro-Hungarian Army was still not taking any chances. Despite a far greater need for troops on the eastern front, Conrad “committed 19 divisions to fight Serbia’s 11, sent 30 to meet 50 Russian formations in Galicia”.⁵⁸⁴ Until 1914, the last war the Austro-Hungarian Empire fought, and lost, was in 1866 against Prussia, while Serbs had much more recent and more successful experience. From around 1883,⁵⁸⁵

578 Lyon, 2015, 20.

579 Pavlowitch, 2002, 94.

580 Nedok, 2006, 15.

581 Mitrović, 2007, 60.

582 Hastings, 2013, 138.

583 Catherwood, 2014, 76.

584 Hastings, 2013, 140.

585 Lyon, 2015, 78.

the Serbian Army was an army with mandatory conscription consisting of three bans, or levies: the 1st ban from 21 to 30 years of age were active troops, the 2nd ban constituting reservists from 30 to 38 years of age and the 3rd ban from 39 to 45 years of age constituting the territorial troops. In the event of war, 20-year-olds and those between 45 and 55 were automatically recruited to reinforce the territorial army, also known as the troops of the last defence.⁵⁸⁶ While all the bans were supposed to be issued with weapons, only the troops of the first ban were also issued with equipment and uniforms.⁵⁸⁷ The other bans were mostly expected to provide their own clothing and footwear, which explains why there were so many soldiers wearing leather peasant shoes. Despite these differences, they were recognisably combatants.⁵⁸⁸

Serbian soldiers were on their home ground and once the war became inevitable, they were ready to defend their homesteads. This gave the Serbian Army the kind of *élan vital* the French Plan XVII⁵⁸⁹ was relying on. Not only was there “classless comradeship among Serb soldiers, who acknowledged few distinctions of rank: a private might salute an officer, then shake hands with him if they knew each other at home, in a fashion implausible in any other warring army” but the Serbs “were not merely fiercely nationalistic; they also knew the business of soldiering” (...) “they liked fighting and were good at it”.⁵⁹⁰ Although US Ambassador Charles Vopicka thought they “looked like bands of tramps”, they were ready to fight and continue their successes from the Balkan Wars.⁵⁹¹ In his memoirs, Major Svetomir Sveta Djukić recalls how important the officers’ attitude

586 François Cochet et Rémy Porte, *Dictionnaire de la Grande guerre 1914 – 1918* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2008), 957.

587 Lyon, 2015, 78.

588 Nigel Thomas and Dušan Babac, *Armies in the Balkans 1914 – 1918* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2001); Serbian translation used *Armije na Balkanu 1914 – 1918* (Beograd: Evoluta, 2006), 10.

589 Plan XVII was WWI French military strategy authored by Maréchal Foch and based on the doctrine of the offensive embodied by *élan vital*, a special type of *esprit de combat* which would overcome all obstacles by sheer will to fight.

590 Hastings, 2013, 141-142.

591 Lyon, 2015, 89.

and bearing were for men's morale in describing how he always walked upright under fire, without showing any fear.⁵⁹²

Despite his lack of popularity and his unfortunate demise,⁵⁹³ King Milan played an essential role in the reform of the Serbian Army. During his tenure as commander in chief of the Serbian Army between 1898 and 1900 — during his son's reign — Milan modernised the army and built-up the officer corps.⁵⁹⁴ "Milan developed well-trained cadre battalions. Junior lieutenants fresh from the academy led companies and relatively young officers commanded battalions and regiments. [...] Highly selective because of a large applicant pool, the [military] academy attracted much of Serbia's ablest youth."⁵⁹⁵

By 1914, the Serbian general staff was not only well-trained and capable, but most of its officers had experienced intense combat in 1912 – 1913, including Regent Aleksandar who was victorious in commanding the First Army at the battle of Kumanovo in October 1912. In 1914, the chief of Serbian general staff since 1903 was Field Marshall Radomir Putnik (1847 – 1917), veteran of the Balkan Wars, who had served several terms as Minister of War. He was close to the ruling Radical party of Prime Minister Pašić,⁵⁹⁶ although sympathetic to the *Black Hand* officers. Field Marshall Putnik was taking the waters in Bad Gleichenberg when war was declared. He was then allowed to go back to Serbia and take the leadership of the Serbian Army, after the Budapest police who had initially detained him, received instructions to release him from Conrad von Hötzendorf. It appears that it was thought preferable to let Putnik go home than have another, younger and French-trained chief of staff take his place.⁵⁹⁷ This would turn out to be an expensive cavalier error. Putnik's

592 Svetomir Sveta Djukić, *Memoari knjiga I, Balkanski ratovi [Memoirs volume I, Balkan Wars]* (Beograd: Narodna odbrana, 2013), 96.

593 He was exiled following his son Aleksandar's marriage and died in Vienna in 1901.

594 Stanić, Kilibarda, Marček, 2007, 56.

595 MacKenzie, 1989, 28.

596 Le Moal, 2008, 25.

597 Skoko, 1984, 33.

generals were also exceptionally competent and all had extensive combat experience. General Živojin Mišić (1855 – 1921), veteran of Serbo-Turkish wars and Serbo-Bulgarian war was considered close to the Obrenović dynasty, possibly erroneously, and fell out of favour in 1903. However, as Putnik was aware of his ability he brought Mišić out of retirement for the Balkan Wars. It was thanks to General Mišić's advice to advance, against the orders of Putnik's general staff that the Bregalnica battle was won in 1913.⁵⁹⁸ General Petar Bojović (1858 – 1945) led the First Army, General Stepa Stepanović (1856 – 1929) commanded the Second Army, General Pavle Jurišić-Šturm (1848 – 1922), originally a Lusatian Serb from Prussia who came to Serbia to fight the Ottomans, commanded the Third Army. The armies were positioned respectively in the east of Serbia, in the centre and in the west as the general staff expected the attack to come from the north, from the Danube and the Sava River as well as along the Morava River.⁵⁹⁹

As soon as war was declared, the government was evacuated from Belgrade, the exposed capital, to Niš, 240 km south of Belgrade. The war started with the shelling of Belgrade from across the Sava River, with the Second Austro-Hungarian Army attacking from the north-west. The Austro-Hungarian Army was led by *Feldzeugmeister* (General) Oskar von Potiorek⁶⁰⁰ (1853 – 1933) with well-rested and well-equipped units. The Austro-Hungarian attacks started on 12 August 1914 with Potiorek's intention to celebrate the Emperor Franz Joseph's birthday on 18 August in Belgrade. His eagerness to defeat the Serbs and "erase the shame of Sarajevo once and for all,"⁶⁰¹ would prove detrimental to his plans, and yet there was much at stake. The defeat of Serbia was considered essential for "moral, political and propaganda purposes,"⁶⁰² as well as to create a corridor to Salonika and Turkey. It was also hoped that a quick

598 David Jordan, *The Balkans, Italy and Africa 1914 – 1918* (London: Amber Books, 2012), 42.

599 Le Moal, 2008, 47.

600 Potiorek, Military Governor of Bosnia and Herzegovina, was in charge of Franz Ferdinand's security in Sarajevo.

601 Lyon, 2015, 116.

602 Mitrović, 2007, 68.

victory over Serbia would encourage undecided countries such as Italy, Bulgaria or Romania to join the Central Powers.⁶⁰³ The town of Šabac was one of the first to fall. Prior to taking it, the Austro-Hungarian Army destroyed telegraph lines, but not telephone lines,⁶⁰⁴ for reasons unknown. This would later prove to be a decisive oversight. The direction of the Austro-Hungarian attack was towards Mačva and Pocerina (Mount Cer Valley) and it followed the start of the concentration of Austro-Hungarian Fifth and Sixth Armies in Srem and Banat facing 400,000 Serbian, 45,000 Montenegrin troops and an indeterminate number of *komitadjis* – guerrilla fighters. The attack was launched before the concentration of forces was complete and Potiorek ordered it amid confusion about whether the Second Army would also engage or not.⁶⁰⁵ The main Austro-Hungarian offensive came across the Drina River, which proved a difficult route.⁶⁰⁶ The Fifth Austro-Hungarian Army attacked the Serbian Third Army which began to retreat, with the Second Serbian Army coming to their support through a forced march in the night of 15 and 16 August which allowed them to reach the village of Tekeriš. Serbian reconnaissance units discovered the lines of attack used by the Austro-Hungarian army; Putnik – whose knowledge of Serbian topography was outstanding,⁶⁰⁷ – subsequently turned the Serbian Army “ninety degrees and launched a night attack on the enemy”⁶⁰⁸ setting the scene for the Battle of Mount Cer, the first Allied victory in the war on 17 August. Austro-Hungarian troops began to withdraw with Serbian forces forcing another battle at Jadar on 21 August. Serbian forces managed to remain in contact with the general staff and kept sending regular reports as telephones continued to function. Putnik’s ability to change the plan in accordance with the evolving situation, his well-organised defence and perfectly executed manoeuvres proved too much for Potiorek’s tactics.⁶⁰⁹ Potiorek’s troops

603 Jordan, 2008, 20.

604 Lyon, 2015, 120.

605 Lyon, 2015, 117.

606 Lyon, 2015, 124.

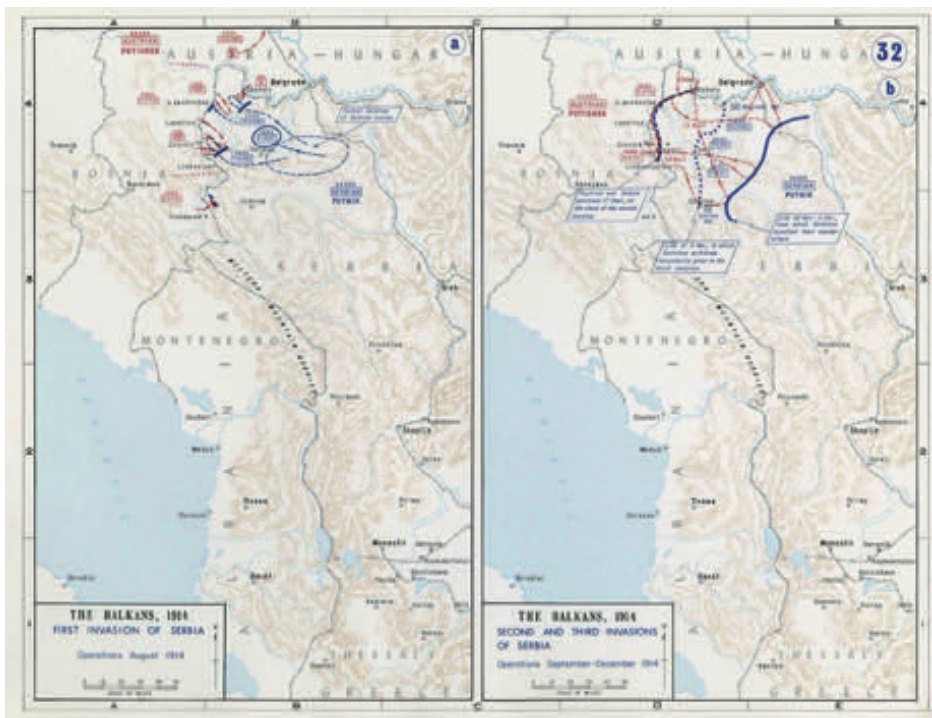
607 Svetomir Djukić, *Memoari 2 – Prvi svetski rat [Memoirs volume 2 – First World War]* (Beograd: Narodna odbrana, 2013), 45.

608 Catherwood, 2014, 76.

609 Jordan, 2008, 24.

were defeated and had to retreat across the Drina River less than two weeks after the initial attack.⁶¹⁰

The First Serbian Campaign resulted in 37,000 Austro-Hungarian casualties, with 7,000 killed, while Serbian losses were around 3,000 dead and 15,000 wounded.⁶¹¹ However, a far greater toll was on the civilian population when 3,500 civilians were killed in Serbia in the first two weeks of the Austrian campaign.⁶¹²



The First, Second and Third invasions of Serbia, August – December 1914. (Maps courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History).⁶¹³

610 Hastings, 2013, 151.

611 Jordan, 2008, 28.

612 Hastings, 2013, 149.

613 Campaign Atlas to The Great War, Department of History, West Point <https://westpoint.edu/academics/academic-departments/history/world-war-one> (accessed May 1, 2018).

Other losses in the Serbian Army came from not only combat but also from desertion. Because of food and equipment shortage, ten percent of the losses among Serbian troops were from soldiers refusing to go to the front.⁶¹⁴ Despite strict measures taken by the commanders, this problem remained. Under pressure from Russia and France, and following a transfer of several Austro-Hungarian units to Belgium, in particular the transfer of mortars previously used to bomb Belgrade from across the Sava River,⁶¹⁵ Serbia was pushed by its allies to launch an offensive into the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Several battles took place in the Drina River valley, including the Serbian offensive into Austria-Hungary and the Austro-Hungarian offensive into the Mačva region in north-western Serbia and encompassed several battles. The Serbian offensive started on 4 September, as did the Battle of the Marne.⁶¹⁶ Serbian troops crossed the Sava River and took Zemun, while more Serbian and Montenegrin troops advanced into Bosnia engaging Austro-Hungarian troops for several more weeks.⁶¹⁷ The occupation of Zemun was an additional humiliation for Potiorek following his defeat in the battle of Cer.

The overall result was embarrassing for Potiorek whose explanation was that the absence of the Second Army and the lack of munitions caused the defeats.⁶¹⁸ Potiorek additionally blamed the high command for “limiting his independence.”⁶¹⁹ Despite Conrad’s opposition, Potiorek, who enjoyed the Emperor’s personal support, was subsequently allowed to conduct operations without the approval of the high command in the subsequent offensives.⁶²⁰ The next Austro-Hungarian offensive began on 8 September with the invasion of Mačva. Several battles took place in September,

614 Lyon, 2015, 152.

615 Russia and France were keen for Serbia to keep Austro-Hungarian troops busy in the Balkans.

616 Lyon, 2015, 153-154.

617 Hastings, 2013, 155.

618 The Second Army and munitions bound for the Russian front had not been actually transported there.

619 Lyon, 2015, 160.

620 Jordan, 2008, 32; Lyon, 2015, 160.

culminating in the battle at Mačkov Kamen, starting on 19 September, and considered the bloodiest battle in the Balkans during 1914. Casualties and exhaustion on both sides resulted in troops digging trenches to continue engagements while allowing for sufficient rest; although the Austro-Hungarian side enjoyed the advantage of receiving replenishment of ammunition, which Serbian troops did not.⁶²¹ The fighting in Mačva continued with varying results leading Potiorek to believe that his final offensive would at last be successful.

The general Austro-Hungarian offensive started on 6 November 1914, with the Fifth and Sixth Armies crossing the Drina River, and consisting of 285,000 troops and 600 cannon. The Serbian Army consisted of around 200,000 troops and 298 cannon.⁶²² Despite offering considerable resistance, the Serbian Third Army withdrew towards Valjevo with the Serbian First Army retreating next. First, Second and Third Armies had to move into defensive positions around Valjevo, which eventually had to be abandoned with Serbian forces taking positions around the Kolubara River, after they were demoralised by the retreat, cold weather, lack of clothing and lack of ammunition.⁶²³ Austro-Hungarian troops crossed the Kolubara River on 17 and 18 November. Pašić's messages to the Allies grew in desperation. France was the only country that answered the plea and sent ammunition.⁶²⁴ Meanwhile, the Serbian front had been pushed back 120 km, moving from Belgrade to the western Morava River valley, which became almost impossible to hold by the Serbs, and equally hard to hold by the Austro-Hungarians. Putnik may have anticipated that eventually the Austro-Hungarian supply lines would become overextended,⁶²⁵ which proved to be correct when Potiorek, eager to carry out an encirclement of the Serbian Army, divided his forces on 19 November, sending his Fifth Army to Belgrade while leaving the Sixth Army to finish off the

621 Lyon, 2015, 174-182.

622 Lyon, 2015, 2015, 191.

623 Jordan, 2008, 34.

624 Mitrović, 2007, 71.

625 Jordan, 2008, 34.

bulk of the Serbian forces.⁶²⁶ Desertions of Serbian troops continued with disastrous consequences.⁶²⁷ Potiorek was delighted to be taking Belgrade at last, which the Fifth Army managed to do on 2 December. The news was welcomed in Vienna although Belgrade had, in fact, been abandoned by the Serbian Army. General Mišić, who had in the meantime taken over command of the First Serbian Army, when General Petar Bojović fell ill, decided to withdraw in depth from the advancing Sixth Army, against Putnik's wishes. They had a long and heated telephone conversation where Mišić even offered his resignation if his temporary withdrawal was not accepted.⁶²⁸ It was the most critical moment of 1914, when even Putnik reportedly considered concluding a separate peace,⁶²⁹ which was decisively rejected by Pašić.⁶³⁰ On 2 December, the long-awaited munitions from France arrived.⁶³¹ Following his tactical retreat, which displeased Putnik, General Mišić allowed his troops rest and recuperation after taking improved defensive positions around Mount Rudnik, 100 km south of Belgrade.⁶³² This operational rest allowed the troops to regain strength needed for the counterattack. Mišić's strategy was to surprise the enemy without allowing him to recover and to keep attacking.⁶³³ The First Army attacked the concentrated forces of the Austro-Hungarian Sixth Army. Immediately after, the Second, Third and Užice Armies also attacked. The battle of Kolubara, as it came to be known, was a defeat for Potiorek's troops. During the evening of 3 December, on the day the Austro-Hungarians troops held a triumphant military parade in Belgrade, the Austro-Hungarian Army was in disarray everywhere else in Serbian territory.⁶³⁴ By 8 December, the Austro-Hungarians were retreating as fast

626 Le Moal, 2008, 50.

627 Lyon, 2015, 195.

628 Skoko, 1984, 184. This scene would become iconic in the subsequent retelling of the battle, most memorably in Dobrica Ćosić's *A Time of Death* (1972 – 1979), part of which was adapted in 1983 as a play *The Kolubara Battle*, mentioned in chapter II.

629 Lyon, 2015, 193.

630 Mitrović, 2007, 70.

631 Henry Barby, *Avec L'Armée Serbe De l'Ultimatum Autrichien à l'Invasion de la Serbie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1918), 320.

632 Le Moal, 2008, 51.

633 Skoko, 1984, 190.

634 Le Moal, 2008, 52.

as they could. They held on to Belgrade for just two weeks, evacuating it without much of a struggle on 15 December. Upon completion of successful operations Mišić sent a telegram to the king: “There remain no Austrian soldiers on Serbian soil except prisoners”.⁶³⁵ According to Max Hastings, Austria-Hungary had 273,804 casualties from the 450,000 men deployed.⁶³⁶ Soon after the Kolubara battle, Potiorek retired from active service.

The advance of the Austro-Hungarian Army in their offensives during 1914, brought atrocities in its wake.⁶³⁷ The territories invaded were not densely populated and were mostly inhabited by elderly people and children because much of the population had retreated with the army. The Austro-Hungarian troops perpetrated large scale and systematic killing and torture of the civilian population.⁶³⁸ Among other contemporaries,⁶³⁹ Henry Barby (1874 – 1935), a French journalist attached to the Serbian general staff throughout the conflict, and John Reed (1887 – 1920), an American journalist who travelled to Serbia in 1915, in their writings described atrocities committed by the Austro-Hungarian troops.

Rodolphe Archibald Reiss (1875 – 1929) was a German-Swiss forensic expert, and a professor at Lausanne University who came to Serbia following an invitation from the Serbian government to investigate allegations of war crimes committed by invading troops in Serbia. Although sceptical at first, he accepted the invitation and arrived in Serbia in the autumn of 1914. His first investigations were carried out in September, October and November. He submitted his report to the Serbian government in the spring of 1915 and published it in 1916, while he also

635 Hastings, 2013, 512; Catherwood, 2014, 77.

636 The Serbian Army made 323 officers, 42,215 non-commissioned officers and soldiers prisoner; 43 banners, 142 artillery pieces, 71 machine guns, 60,000 rifles, 2 aircraft, 3,500 vehicles with munitions and materiel, 4,000 horses, 52 field bakeries, 45 kitchens were taken, and much else. Potiorek’s losses were 28,000 dead, 120,000 wounded and 76,000 prisoners, while the Serbs had 22,000 dead, 92,000 wounded and 19,000 taken prisoner, in Hastings, 2013, 513.

637 Wawro, 2015, 163-165.

638 Mitrović, 2007, 73-74.

639 Le Moal, 2008, 58.

published pamphlets with his findings and sent reports to the *Gazette de Lausanne*. Dr Reiss's investigations were as professional and complete as the circumstances allowed despite his growing sympathies for the Serbs.⁶⁴⁰ He examined ammunition outlawed by the rules and conventions of war, and interviewed prisoners of war and eyewitnesses.

The publication of Dr Reiss's first report in relation to Serbian war victims, *Report upon the atrocities committed by the Austro-Hungarian Army during the first invasion of Serbia* contains comprehensive and detailed reports of Dr Reiss's investigations of explosive and dum-dum bullet casualties, bombardments and destructions, massacres of prisoners and the wounded, rape of women and girls, massacres of civilians, pillage and destruction of dwellings and property.⁶⁴¹ Austro-Hungarian documents subsequently confirmed the atrocities recorded by Reiss.⁶⁴² One of the Austrian prisoners of war explained to Dr Reiss: "We were ordered, and the order was read out to us to kill and burn all we should meet in the course of the campaign and to destroy everything Serbian."⁶⁴³ Dr Reiss found consistent evidence of churches having been burnt with civilians inside, including the elderly, women and children, of public hanging of civilians, and of mass graves. When speaking with eyewitnesses and survivors, Dr Reiss verified the names, the locations, the wounds, and noted all relevant details. He also found photographs of atrocities produced as postcards for publicising the terror. The cards were meant as propaganda to showcase the Austro-Hungarian policy against *francs-tireurs*.⁶⁴⁴ This was also used to instil fear in the Serbian population in the Austro-Hungarian Empire because they were deemed "unreliable",

640 This is particularly evident in his subsequent report, *Infringements of the Rules and Laws of war committed by the Austro-Bulgaro-Germans; Letters of a Criminologist on the Serbian Macedonian Front*. (s.l. Forgotten Books, 2012; Originally published in 1919). Dr Reiss went on to join the Serbian Army and made Belgrade his home until his death in 1929.

641 Rodolphe Archibald Reiss, *Report upon the atrocities committed by the Austro-Hungarian Army during the first invasion of Serbia* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & co Ltd, 1916).

642 Alexander Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914 – 1918* (London: Penguin, 2014), 142.

643 Reiss, 1916, 38.

644 Hastings, 2013, 148.

possibly subversive and thus a threat to be eliminated.⁶⁴⁵ Colonel Hunter of the British Medical Mission noted, “the campaign was stated to be not a war but an execution”.⁶⁴⁶

The presence of irregulars, *komitadjis*, was considered a justification for atrocities committed by Austro-Hungarian troops. There were cases of Croatian troops tricked by Serbian troops pretending to surrender and then being fired at, or other Austro-Hungarian troops hearing Croatian language possibly spoken by Serbian soldiers and becoming confused as to where the enemy was.⁶⁴⁷ General Adolf von Rhemen’s⁶⁴⁸ justification was that the Serbs were “a culturally backward people.”⁶⁴⁹ Apart from the racial argument, the Austro-Hungarian Army leadership justified the atrocities in the spirit of *Kriegsnotwehrrecht* — martial law of self-defence.⁶⁵⁰

Serbia’s victories in 1914 were not decisive but made the Allies look more favourably on the Balkan front, because it embarrassed one of the Central Powers that was expected to overwhelm the small Balkan State. These successes brought Serbia to the attention of Europe if not the world. “Gallant little Serbia” was lauded by Allied countries very much like “plucky little Belgium” was earlier in the war.⁶⁵¹ Following the failed Austro-Hungarian offensives, the Central Powers seemed to falter with their operational plans regarding Serbia. In preparation for the next offensive against Serbia in 1915, the German general staff would be able to draw on the defeat of Austro-Hungarian troops and on intelligence

645 Mitrović, 2007, 74; Watson, 2014, 145.

646 William Hunter, “The Serbian Epidemics of Typhus and Relapsing Fever in 1915: Their Origin, Course, and Preventive Measures employed for their Arrest” (London: Section of Epidemiology and State Medicine, 1919), 37.

647 Wawro, 2015, 163-164.

648 Commander of the XIII Corps part of the Fifth Army.

649 Quoted in Wawro, 2015, 164.

650 “The Right of Defence in a War Emergency” as translated and explained in Watson, 2014, 145; Hastings, 2013, 147.

651 In his examination of the theoretical explanations of the use of the past, Todor Kuljić points out that the description of Serbia as “gallant” must have been a surprise for the British who had been used to the characterisation of Serbs as the “regicide nation”, but since the British interests changed in the region in 1914, the pragmatic invention of the “positive stereotypes” was required, see Todor Kuljić, *Kultura sećanja [Memorial culture]* (Beograd: Čigoja, 2006), 126.

reports. Serbia's victories became a double-edged sword: this made the Allies more willing to support Serbia and Serbian war aims. This also made it imperative for the Germans to take the lead in the subsequent offensive.

4. 1915 — Typhus Epidemic and Foreign Aid

“Their war, far from being won had scarcely started.”⁶⁵²

Serbia's battlefield successes were greeted in Entente Europe with a mixture of surprise and curiosity which attracted a number of foreign medical missions, as well as foreign adventurers, journalists, agents, researchers, many of whom wrote about the Serbs and the Serbian war effort with much sympathy. Apart from Reed, Reiss and Barby, numerous others came to Serbia to see a country at war and in need. Among the Americans who visited Serbia, was J.D. Rockefeller Jr., (1874 – 1960), a financier and benefactor whose foundation collected funds for assisting non-combatants in Europe, and authored a comprehensive report on the situation in Serbia.⁶⁵³ Paul Fortier Jones (1883 – 1940), a journalist and adventurer authored *With Serbia into Exile: An American's Adventures with the Army that Cannot Die* (1916), a skilfully drawn sketch of Serbs at war. Among the British, there was Henry Wickham-Steed (1871 – 1956), a British journalist and foreign correspondent for *The Times*, R.W. Seton-Watson (1879 – 1951), a British historian and political activist, Sir Arthur Evans (1851 – 1941), a British archaeologist; Sir Thomas Lipton (1848 – 1931), a famous tea merchant and yachtsman who put his yacht in the service of the Red Cross, earning the honour of becoming an honorary citizen of Niš.⁶⁵⁴ Among the French, apart from Henry Barby, a correspondent for *Le Journal*, there was also Victor Bérard (1864 – 1931), a French historian

652 Hastings, 2013, 155.

653 “Destitution and Disease in Serbia” (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1915).

654 “Honorary Citizens of the City of Niš”, *City of Niš* <http://www.ni.rs/international-cooperation/honorary-citizens-of-the-city-of-nis/?pismo=lat> (accessed March 15, 2018).

and foreign policy expert, author of *La Serbie: la Serbie et son histoire, les victoires serbes, le peuple serbe*, August Boppe (1862 – 1921), a French diplomat who accompanied the Serbian government into exile, while Gabriele D’Annunzio (1863 – 1938), an Italian poet and journalist wrote his *Ode alla nazione serba (Ode to the Serbian Nation)* in November 1915 as the Serbian Army, government and civilians began to retreat after further attacks by the Central Powers.⁶⁵⁵ These influential foreigners interested in and impassioned by Serbia’s plight all contributed to the visibility of Serbia at the time of its greatest need. *Serbia Day* was organised in Paris at the end of March 1915 with collections amounting to half-a-million francs in one month.⁶⁵⁶

In the first six months of the war Serbia was ravaged by violence, and then disease followed. Several foreign medical missions had already worked in the region during the Balkan wars. For some, it was a cause they espoused again with determination and courage once the typhus epidemic struck, and a cholera epidemic threatened the country. Serbia’s casualties were “163,557 of its 250,000 combatants, 2,110 being officers. A total of 69,022 men had died on the battlefield of wounds or disease”.⁶⁵⁷ These large numbers of sick and wounded in late 1914 stretched an already weak and insufficient military medical service. Poor roads and lack of transport exacerbated the problem. The toll on the civilian population, the army and the officers was already considerable when the typhus epidemic broke out.

The Serbian Army took up to 40,000 prisoners of war in December 1914 and illness began to spread soon after. They were mostly relapsing fever and *typhus exanthematicus*, better known as spotted typhus. The epidemic started in Valjevo where 3,000 wounded and sick prisoners were found by the returning Serbian Army, in the worst sanitary conditions possible. Many of the 40,000 prisoners had to be moved and were therefore sent to

655 Ratomir Damjanović, ed., *Raspeće Srbije. Strani autori o Srbima i Srbiji u Velikom ratu – Savremenici, učesnici, svedoci* [The Crucifixion of Serbia. Foreign authors about the Serbs and Serbia in the Great War – Contemporaries, Participants, Witnesses] (Beograd: Itaka, 2014)

656 Mitrović, 2007, 105.

657 Mitrović, 2007, 102.

different parts of Serbia as farmhands which helped spread the infection.⁶⁵⁸ The *British Military Sanitary Mission* to Serbia arrived in March 1915, after the Serbian government had requested British help. The epidemics spread in the most dramatic fashion, mostly because of poor sanitary conditions in hospitals, lack of disinfecting and delousing facilities and limited knowledge that infected lice were spreading the disease. Between January and March 1915, there were almost 500,000 cases of typhus and by the time foreign medical missions arrived, the typhus mortality rate had risen to 40% in several hospitals.⁶⁵⁹ Lack of nursing staff prompted the Serbian government to request Red Cross help and the call was answered by the Scottish Women's Hospitals, the Red Cross, Stobart Field Hospital, Lady Paget's mission and many others. It is estimated that around 3,000 doctors and other medical staff worked in Serbia from 1914, many of whom were women. They included the first women doctors in Britain: Dr Elsie Inglis (1864 – 1917), Dr Alice Hutchinson (1874 – 1953), Dr Isabel Emslie (1887 – 1960), Dr Mary Philips (1875 – 1956), Dr Katherine Stuart MacPhail (1887 – 1974) and numerous nurses, orderlies and volunteers, some even with minimal medical background.⁶⁶⁰ The extraordinary presence of so many women volunteers on or very close to the front was unprecedented.⁶⁶¹

The containment and eventual cessation of the epidemics was largely owing to the actions of foreign medical missions, more specifically the British medical mission which made the Serbian military adopt preventative measures: temporary stoppage of all railway passenger traffic, refusal of army leave, disinfection, quarantine measures, improved sanitation and sewage management, immunisations against typhus and the anticipated wave of cholera. Propaganda and education about lice in leaflets and newspapers was also an important weapon in fighting

658 Hunter, 1919, 41.

659 Hunter, 1919, 43.

660 Anne Powell, *Women in the War Zone. Hospital Service in the First World War* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: History Press) 2013, 388-401.

661 These British women are still remembered in Serbia today as will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

the epidemic.⁶⁶² In medical history, the Serbian typhus epidemic had the most sudden occurrence and the most rapid decline, having lasted for six months with a peak of two months.⁶⁶³

It was an amazing victory over a “mysterious” enemy called typhus. And Serbia enjoyed a brief respite from it during the summer of 1915, although cholera was threatening in some areas. Even so, Austro-Hungarian aircraft continued to intermittently bomb towns while their artillery occasionally shelled Belgrade. According to Hans Zinsser, who came to Serbia as a member of the American Red Cross, typhus “was holding the border”.⁶⁶⁴ Germans, who were unimpressed with the Austro-Hungarian performance were attempting to discourage another offensive against Serbia arguing that the war against Serbia “plays quite a subordinate role, which demands only the most absolutely necessary defensive measures” insisting that the Serbs should be attacked only after the Russians were beaten.⁶⁶⁵

In the spring of 1915, the second battle of Ypres took place, a German U-boat struck the *Lusitania* and the Gallipoli campaign began. As Russia was driven out of Poland and Galicia, the Allies were keen to lure Bulgaria into the Entente camp but were at first not able to convince the Serbs to abandon territorial gains from the Second Balkan War. One of the offers from the Allies to Bulgaria was to remain neutral, which was sufficiently attractive to keep Bulgaria out of the war for a while. Possibilities of military alliances were intricately linked to land negotiation. Jovan M. Jovanović, Serbian politician and diplomat at the time, observed that Sofia, Bucharest, Tirana and Athens were simply *bazaars* where territorial conditions and concessions were up for grabs.⁶⁶⁶ The government in

662 Hunter, 1919, 54.

663 Hunter, 1919, 75.

664 Hans Zinsser, *Rats, Lice and History. Chronicle of Pestilence and Plagues* (New York: Black Dog & Leventhal Publishers, Inc. 1963, first published 1934), 298.

665 Hastings, 2013, 140.

666 Quoted in Mira Radojević and Ljubodrag Dimić, *Srbija u Velikom ratu 1914 – 1918. Kratka istorija. [Serbia in the Great War 1914 – 1918. A Short History]* (Belgrade: SKZ, 2014), 172.

Sofia considered all the options. The Bulgarian King Ferdinand was pro-German and anti-Serbian: “The purpose of my life is the destruction of Serbia”, he is reported to have stated.⁶⁶⁷ The Bulgarian decision followed a diplomatic quandary involving Allied openings to Greece, which was also neutral, with Bulgarians reasoning that any offers to Greece were likely to come at Bulgarian expense. Furthermore, the increasing probability of Romania joining the Entente and Russia’s defeats were pushing Bulgaria in the direction of the Central Powers. Pašić found himself forced to accept the deal whereby Serbia would give Macedonia to Bulgaria as an incentive for that country to join the Entente and attack Turkey. Macedonia was thus conditionally given up with the proviso that post-war Serbia would extend into Croatia including the port of Fiume as well as being an active and independent participant at a post-war conference.⁶⁶⁸ Despite this agreement to cede Macedonia to Bulgaria on 1 September 1915, Bulgaria continued to seek better conditions to enter the war on the side of the Central Powers.

5. Triple Offensive Against Serbia

“The mission of Generalfeldmarschall von Mackensen is to defeat the Serbian Army wherever he finds it and to open and secure land communications between Hungary and Bulgaria as quickly as possible.”⁶⁶⁹

The Serbian government was aware of the Bulgarian intentions and struggled to prepare against a renewed attack from the Central Powers. Additional concerns existed in relation to Albania. Pašić’s government had reached an agreement with Essad Pasha Toptani, an ally made at the time of the Second Balkan War, and thanks to whom, Serbia occupied

667 Quoted in Misha Glenny, *The Balkans 1804 – 1999. Nationalism, War and the Great Powers* (London: Granta Books, 1999), 333.

668 Le Moal, 2002, 84.

669 Order for the offensive, quoted in Richard L. DiNardo, *Invasion – The Conquest of Serbia, 1915* (Santa Barbara – Denver: Praeger, 2015), 36.

strategic points in Albania in order to prevent continuous incursions into the *Old Serbia* region by Albanian irregulars as well as to save Essad Pasha from his opponents.⁶⁷⁰ The partial invasion of Albania by 20,000 Serbian troops in May 1915, represented a violation of the 1913 London Treaty and earned Serbia a reprimand from the Allies because of Italian territorial interests in Albania. The Entente was not interested in alienating Italy at that time when it had just joined the war on their side. The London Treaty, promising Italy parts of Dalmatia and much else, was signed in secret.⁶⁷¹ Nevertheless, the Essad Pasha connection would turn out to be strategically crucial for what would happen to the retreating Serbian Army in the second part of 1915. Essad Pasha had been saved by Serbs while he was encircled in Drač/Durazzo, and Serbian troops who remained in Albania helped him stay in control of the central part of Albania, while the northern part was held by rival clans. While these Serbian troops would be missed once the Central Powers attacked, they were able to prepare at least enough provisions that would prove vital in the retreat through this part of Albania.⁶⁷²

Meanwhile, German agents in Serbia sent thorough reports on diseases, morale and equipment of the Serbian troops. The Serbian economy was devastated, weaponry was lacking and debts to the Entente rising, which complicated the already difficult issue of potential territorial concessions to Bulgaria and Italy.⁶⁷³ Erich von Falkenhayn (1861 – 1922), Moltke the Younger's bolder and more ambitious successor as the German chief of staff, was hoping for a separate peace with Russia in the wake of the success of the Austro-Hungarian and German Gorlice-Tarnow offensive. Falkenhayn and Conrad decided that the autumn of 1915 was a good time to pursue victory in the Balkans while waiting for a *dénouement* on the Eastern Front with a reasoning that the control of the overland supply

670 Bataković, 2016, 162; 175.

671 The Treaty of London 26 April 1915 [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_London_\(1915\)](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_London_(1915)) (accessed March 28, 2017)

672 Bataković, 2016, 233.

673 Radojević and Dimić, 2001, 157.

route to Turkey would put further pressure on Russia.⁶⁷⁴ Because of the three failed Austro-Hungarian offensives and based on the reports by German agents, Falkenhayn wanted to wait “until he was sure Bulgaria would help”.⁶⁷⁵

The success of the Central Powers at Gorlice-Tarnow and the Entente failure at Gallipoli helped Sofia make up its mind.⁶⁷⁶ Bulgaria also made it clear that their accession was conditional on the Germans having the command in the autumn 1915 attack on Serbia.⁶⁷⁷ The Bulgarian decision also changed Germany’s mind about dealing with Russia before Serbia. The secret agreement between the Central Powers and Bulgaria was signed on 6 September 1915 with Turkey joining it a few days later. In anticipation of the expected offensive, Putnik and his general staff planned a pre-emptive attack on Bulgaria with Allied troops who would land in Salonika and with additional Greek troops as agreed by the pro-Serbian Greek Prime Minister Eleftherios Venizelos (1864 – 1936). However, the Entente vetoed the plan, with first London and then Paris feeling unenthusiastic about attacking Bulgaria and committing a significant number of troops in the south-east of Europe.⁶⁷⁸ Pašić, unwilling to give the go ahead to Putnik without the agreement of the Allies,⁶⁷⁹ incurred the wrath of the *Black Hand*, still a strong faction in the officer corps.⁶⁸⁰ Apis had wanted to invade Bulgaria in the summer of 1915, but Pašić refused.⁶⁸¹ Shortly afterwards, Apis was dismissed as chief of military intelligence. Although the Entente envoys in Bulgaria had clear indications that Sofia was shifting towards Germany⁶⁸² and that they were unlikely to change this,⁶⁸³ the Entente still misread the Bulgarian strategy and failed to recognise the

674 DiNardo, 2015, 26.

675 David Stevenson, 1914 – 1918. *The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 155.

676 DiNardo, 2015, 31.

677 Jordan, 2008, 45-46; DiNardo, 2015, 34.

678 Le Moal, 2002, 84-85.

679 Radojević and Dimić, 2014, 170.

680 Le Moal, 2002, 86.

681 Dedijer, 1967, 396.

682 DiNardo, 2015, 35.

683 Mackenzie, 1989, 155.

consequence of the Bulgarian mobilisation on 10 September 1915.⁶⁸⁴ On 24 September 1915, Sir Edward Grey promised support to Serbia, but it turned out that he meant this “in a political and not in a military sense”.⁶⁸⁵

Despite objections from the Allies, the Serbian general staff was forced to deploy part of their troops facing the Bulgarian border in anticipation of the attack. As the threat against Serbia became more explicit, French and British troops were brought from the unsuccessful Dardanelles operation to Salonika. Venizelos had asked for 150,000 troops from the Entente⁶⁸⁶ and obtained the backing of the Greek parliament to support Serbia on 4 October but faced strong opposition from the pro-German King Constantine. Venizelos was forced to resign the next day with Greece remaining neutral despite the treaty with Serbia.⁶⁸⁷ On the same day, the first troops from the Entente landed in Salonika — the French 156th Division and the British 10th Division.⁶⁸⁸ In the meantime, on 27 September, Putnik issued a general order for all young men who would have been conscripted the following year, as well as all draft-eligible men, to report to their command posts to counter the risk of reprisals by the advancing enemy troops.⁶⁸⁹ The army was to take with them young men born in 1897 and 1898. Putnik believed that 150,000 Allied troops would be coming to Serbia’s rescue which possibly explains his tactic in the coming weeks of using up reserves to replenish his front-line troops as they continued to fight while retreating.⁶⁹⁰

The German Field Marshall August von Mackensen (1849 – 1945), fresh from his victory in Galicia and Russian Poland, commanded six German, six Austro-Hungarian and four Bulgarian divisions with the intention of

684 Fortier Jones, 1916, 106.

685 Krippner, Monica. *The quality of mercy: women at war, Serbia 1915 – 1918* (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1980), 111.

686 Bataković, 2016, 58.

687 Le Moal, 2002, 85.

688 Skoko, 1984, 234.

689 General staff order no. 21969, 27 September 1915

690 Skoko, 1984, 260-161.

having a ratio of two to one in relation to Serbian forces.⁶⁹¹ Mackensen was, in fact, explicitly named as the commander of the offensive in the agreement of 6 September, and considered as the best choice, partly no doubt because of his recent victories and partly owing to his knowledge of the region, having been posted to the Balkans in the 1880s and having written about the war between Serbia and Bulgaria.⁶⁹² Preparations for the offensive were thorough, based on Austro-Hungarian failed offensives and intelligence reports. The troops assembled in southern Hungary in September 1915, received intensive training, both theoretical – on the specificities of Serbian tactics – and practical, including firing practice and endurance drills.⁶⁹³

Serbia was attacked on 6 October 1915, by around 500,000 troops from the Central Powers,⁶⁹⁴ with an estimate of 800,000 – almost certainly an exaggeration,⁶⁹⁵ although a figure of 300,000⁶⁹⁶ is also given. The main advantage of the Central Powers was the artillery, with at their disposal 1,200 cannon, and around 10 German and Austro-Hungarian air squadrons as well as a fleet of river boats from the Austro-Hungarian Danube Flotilla.⁶⁹⁷ The Serbian Army was significantly weaker in manpower, with “soldiers who were either newly mobilised recruits, or drawn from a 1,000-kilometre front,”⁶⁹⁸ and in equipment, armed with 232,000 rifles and 685 cannon. The forces pitched against the Serbian Army were led by experienced commanders from the three armies, their forces positioned to restrict movement of the opponent as much as possible. The main thrust of the invading forces was towards the centre of Serbia while one part of the Bulgarian forces was used to cut off Serbian communications in the Vardar River valley.⁶⁹⁹

691 DiNardo, 2015, 34.

692 DiNardo, 2015, 39-40.

693 DiNardo, 2015, 53-55.

694 Skoko, 1984, 228.

695 Mitrović, 2007, 144.

696 Di Nardo, 2015, 39. This figure is mostly based on German sources.

697 Di Nardo, 2015, 39.

698 Mitrović, 2007, 144.

699 Le Moal, 2002, 88.

The Serbian 1st Army was commanded by Field Marshall Mišić (he had earned his new rank with the Kolubara Battle victory) and positioned in the north towards Bosnia, the 3rd Army was led by General Pavle Jurišić Šturm and positioned on the northern border. The 2nd Army was led by Field Marshall Stepa Stepanović (who had earned his new rank with the Cer Battle victory) and positioned on the eastern border of Serbia. There were additional troops known as the Defence of Belgrade Troops commanded by General Mihailo Živković. The western front was held by the Timok Army led by General Ilija Gojković, while the Troops of the New Regions were led by General Damjan Popović with his headquarters in Skoplje. The Serbian Army's commander-in-chief was Prince Regent Aleksandar, with Field Marshall Radomir Putnik as chief of staff. The Montenegrin Army, with a total strength of around 53,000 troops and 159 cannon, was the only ally of the Serbian Army that could provide direct support.⁷⁰⁰ The total strength of the Serbian Army at this point is disputed with figures varying between 190,000 to 220,000,⁷⁰¹ 200,000,⁷⁰² 300,000⁷⁰³ and 420,000.⁷⁰⁴ The most probable estimate of the total strength of the Serbian Army on all the fronts was around 250,000 troops and 685 cannon.⁷⁰⁵

The attack began with a heavy bombardment of Belgrade on 6 and 7 October, with 50,000 shells fired at the city in the first two days, with 30,000 falling on Belgrade on the first day. The Central Powers' troops entered Belgrade on 9 October, following desperate fighting by the Defence of Belgrade troops. There was strong resistance on all the fronts and the invading troops advanced more slowly than planned and incurred heavy losses.⁷⁰⁶ Meanwhile, the French General Maurice Sarrail, (1856 – 1929) arrived in Salonika on 12 October to take command of the Entente troops, a fraction of what the Serbs had asked for — around

700 Skoko, 1984, 238.

701 Di Nardo, 2015, 39.

702 Le Moal, 2008, 88.

703 Mitrović, 2007, 144.

704 Nedok, 2006, 39.

705 Skoko, 1984, 236.

706 Mitrović, 2007, 145.

20,000.⁷⁰⁷ Amid general strategic indecisiveness and disagreements between Paris and London on what to do next in the Balkans, and with the added complication of Greek neutrality, General Sarrail advanced with several regiments 140 km north of Salonika two days later in an attempt to link up with Serbian troops. The Entente was hoping that the operation would encourage Greece to join the war on their side. This could have happened had Germany attacked Salonika to prevent the operation. However, Falkenhayn realised this and desisted.⁷⁰⁸ Moreover, this was unnecessary when the town of Velež on the Vardar River fell to the Bulgarians and the Serbs and the Allies found themselves cut off from each other. Sarrail attempted to break through between the Vardar and Cerna rivers while Serbian troops attempted to regain the Kačanik Gorge that fall on 26 October, in order to retake Skoplje. Although they had limited success, they lacked additional Allied troops. General Gallieni (1849 – 1916), the French Defence Minister, ordered Sarrail to abandon the operation.⁷⁰⁹

With the Serbian temporary capital of Niš threatened, the government was forced to evacuate, together with foreign diplomats, to the new temporary capital of Kraljevo on 20 October. Prime Minister Pašić made his departure from Niš as late as 29 October. Fortier Jones was retreating with the army, and noted: “One day six limousines came by, filled with men in silk hats and frock coats. It was the cabinet fleeing from the Bulgarians before Nish”.⁷¹⁰

707 Krippner, 1980, 110.

708 Strachan, 2006, 154.

709 Le Moal, 2002, 90.

710 Fortier Jones, 1916, 97.



The cartoon by Bernard Partridge for *Punch*, issued on 27 October 1915, represents Serbia being attacked by Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire as Bulgaria attacks from the rear. The cartoon was subsequently made into this postcard as part of a WWI propaganda effort and into a poster for *Kosovo Day* on 28 June 1916.⁷¹¹ (From the *Punch* archive, courtesy of Topfoto Agency.)

Niš fell to the Bulgarians on 5 November. Kraljevo was a short stop where more refugees created chaos. Foreign envoys retreating with the Serbian government had to destroy their legations' archives and throw seals and stamps into the Morava River⁷¹² before leaving for Mitrovica towards the plain of Kosovo. As the Serbian Army retreated, civilians joined in the

711 Šarenac, 2017, 254.

712 Le Moal, 2002, 91.

retreat with the mass of refugees moving south.⁷¹³ Although war minister Colonel Radivoje Bojović had issued instructions to the general staff on 29 September and they in turn ordered the commands not to order the evacuation of civilians unless it was necessary for military reasons, the army was not able to stop large-scale evacuations.⁷¹⁴ The atrocities of the 1914 invasions by Austro-Hungarian troops were the main reason why so many civilians were fleeing in the direction of Kosovo. Columns of civilians were making the already narrow and cramped roads even more crowded adding to the atmosphere of panic.

Field Marshall Mackensen, accompanied by his capable Chief of Staff Hans von Seeckt (1866 – 1936), possibly in the spirit of a von Schlieffen-inspired obsession with the model of the ancient battle of Cannae,⁷¹⁵ was focused on the encirclement of the Serbian troops. With this in mind, the movements of the German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian troops copied this concept. Mackensen thought that at some point the Serbs would defend a town of special logistical relevance which would allow his troops to carry out the encirclement. However, this did not happen as Serbian troops kept retreating.⁷¹⁶ Mackensen's intention was to force a surrender and cause a near annihilation of the Serbian Army which would represent a significant blow to the Entente. Despite clear indications that the Entente would not be coming to help Serbia in any significant numbers, Regent Aleksandar issued an order which contained complete fiction saying that the Allies were sending "whole armies".⁷¹⁷

Serbian troops began to arrive in Kosovo in mid-November 1915. There was a sombre symbolism in thousands of soldiers and civilians finding themselves in Kosovo at that point; it was a place of supreme significance

713 Mitrović, 2007, 146.

714 General staff Order no. 22108, Živanović, 29 September 1915.

715 General Fieldmarshal Count Alfred von Schlieffen, *Cannae* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: The command and general staff school press, 1931).

716 Skoko, 1984, 265.

717 Quoted in Skoko, 1984, 270.

for the Serbs.⁷¹⁸ On 28 June 1389, the medieval Serbian Kingdom was defeated in the myth-laden battle of Kosovo by the greatly superior Ottoman enemy. Kosovo was regained in the Second Balkan War in 1913 as part of the gains of the *Old Serbia* region. Less than two years after Kosovo returned to Serbia, Serbia began losing its people, its army, its territory — everything. Fortier Jones observes in his account: “When the refugees looked at the mountains ahead and heard the guns behind, they realized finally that Serbia was lost, abandoned to the three strong invaders, betrayed by the three strong allies. This was the general sentiment”.⁷¹⁹ For all of them, as for all the other refugees in Kosovo in the second half of November 1915, the way out did not look promising: the Prokletije Mountains, the *cursed* mountains stretching into Montenegro and Albania.

6. Decision, Order, Retreat, and Consequences

“If Serbia had simply been occupied and had laboured under extreme conditions, there would be little more to say on the subject. But this was not the case. In an extraordinary development, the Serbian government, the army, its high command, deputies, government officials, King Peter, the Prince Regent Alexander and thousands of civilians began a historic retreat through Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania. The ageing King Peter, who had yielded his royal duties to his second son Alexander in 1914, was hauled on carts into exile. Generals were carried in sedan chairs. As if to exult in the idea that Serbia would soon be resurrected, the soldiers also carried with them the casket and remains of Stefan Prvovenčani, the so-called ‘First-Crowned’ Nemanjić monarch who had died 700 years before.”⁷²⁰

718 Sforza, 1937, 208-209.

719 Fortier Jones, 1916, 256.

720 Judah, 1997, 99.

The last chance for a link-up between the newly established *l'Armée d'Orient* led by General Sarrail and the Serbian troops, who were attempting a counter-offensive to regain Skoplje, failed on 18 November. The Serbs were isolated on the Kosovo plain, where they arrived through a series of tactical retreats as they were increasingly pressured by enemy forces in preparation for the inevitable. The only question was what that inevitable would be. There were three possibilities: capitulation and separate peace, a final, honourable and desperate battle to annihilation, or further retreat. While there were indications that Germany was interested in a separate peace with some evidence of Pašić negotiating with the Germans with unclear motives — either to save Serbia or demonstrate leverage to the Entente;⁷²¹ the Austro-Hungarian stance was in favour of the complete destruction of Serbia as a state. Pašić had sent enough desperate messages to the Entente from Niš in October, such as, reportedly, “She whom you have sustained for 14 months gravely ill; prompt aid can ameliorate situation. Telegraph immediately friends Paris”,⁷²² to know that the time for another decisive battle had passed. All hope of Allied help in Kosovo had to be abandoned. Only Field Marshall Mišić, an adherent of *the doctrine of the offensive*, was still in favour of a counter-attack and would be trying to convince his fellow commanders that there was still hope for success, even after the order for the retreat was given.⁷²³ Several meetings were held, chaired by Field Marshall Stepanović, where the commanders seriously considered only two alternatives, retreat and counter-attack, while the third one, capitulation, was not an option, neither for the army nor for the government. Mišić’s proposal of mounting a counter-attack failed to prevail.⁷²⁴

721 Dedijer, 1967, 426-427; Ćirković, 2014, 127.

722 Quoted in John Clinton Adams, *Flight in Winter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942), 80. This is a rare account of the Retreat in English, written as a popular and vivid narrative, but is not a scholarly work.

723 Kosta Todorović, (ed.), *Kroz Albaniju 1915 – 1916 spomen-knjiga* [*Through Albania 1915 – 1916 memorial book*] (Belgrade: Prosveta, 1968), 56.

724 Skoko, 1984, 280. Mišić’s attempts to convince the general staff of the offensive option have also become stuff of legend.

Prince Regent Aleksandar had sent a telegram to King Constantine of Greece⁷²⁵ asking for help, in accordance with the 1913 Treaty between Serbia and Greece, which would come into force in the case of a Bulgarian attack.⁷²⁶ However, it was clear that Greece would not be tricked out of neutrality regardless of the efforts of Prime Minister Venizelos and despite a previous British offer of Cyprus to Greece if it abandoned its neutrality and joined the Entente.⁷²⁷ Following the forced resignation of the pro-Serbian Prime Minister Venizelos, the government of the new Prime Minister Alexandros Zaimis (1855 – 1936) refused the offer and maintained Greek neutrality.⁷²⁸

The fighting lasted for 50 days before the Serbian general staff issued the retreat order, when the Central Powers began closing in on the troops and the civilians in Kosovo,⁷²⁹ and the cold weather was starting. Chaos and confusion reigned, conflicting reports and rumours were rife, in addition to the shortage of food that turned from acute to chronic. There were many desertions as disheartened Serbian soldiers turned back to go home. When many sold their weapons to the local population, units shrunk drastically.⁷³⁰ The general situation of the Serbian Army was dire: it is estimated that the manpower per unit was reduced to about one quarter of the normal strength, and even less in some cases. The constant retreating, the loss of territory and lack of food — there were supplies left for only a few more days — all this combined had a major demoralising effect on the troops. More than anything else, the sobering realisation that the Allies would not come to help represented the ultimate disillusionment. There was little ammunition, in particular artillery ammunition while the uniforms and footwear of most soldiers were in tatters.⁷³¹ It was clear that the army was no longer able to fight effectively. The High Command made

725 King Constantine's wife was Emperor Wilhelm II's sister.

726 Aleksandra M. Pećinar, *Srpsko-grčki diplomatski i saveznički odnosi (1912-1918) [Serbian-Greek Diplomatic and Allied Relations 1912 – 1918]* (Belgrade: Odbrana, 2016), 130.

727 Pećinar, 2016, 130.

728 Pećinar, 2016, 130-131.

729 Skoko, 1984, 278.

730 Skoko, 1984, 280.

731 Todorović, 1968, 50.

the decision to retreat through Montenegro and Albania on 23 November, while the actual order reflecting the decision, was issued two days later.

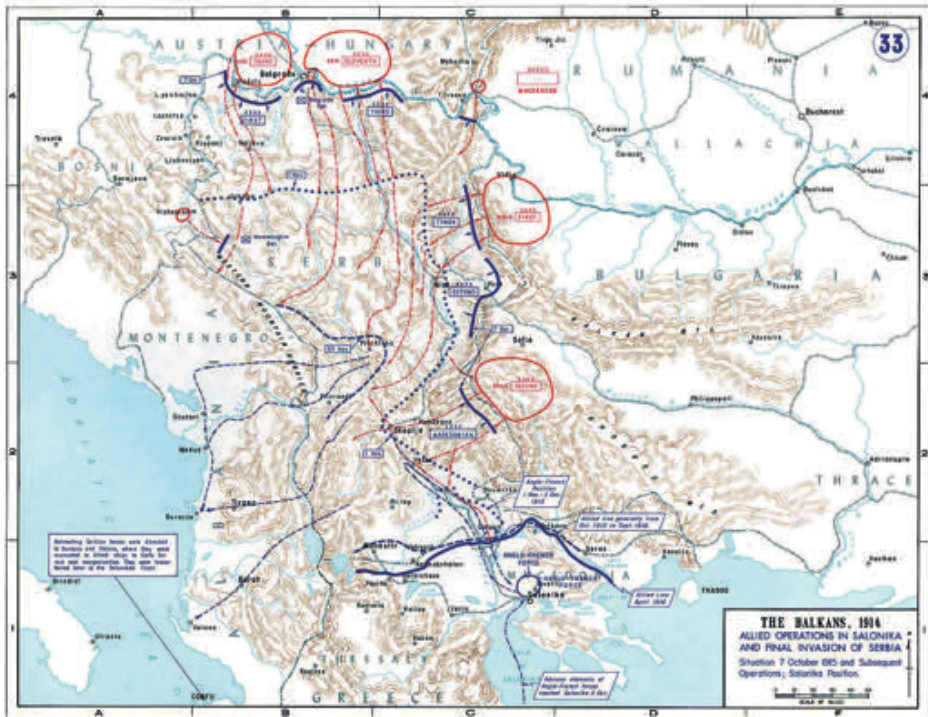
The order of the High Command to the commanders of all armies on 25 November 1915, no. 42942 said: "In view of the current situation, further retreat of our army has to be carried out through Montenegro and northern Albania to the Adriatic Sea (...). Along this line, our army is to reorganise, get food supplies, clothing, footwear, weapons and ammunition as well as any other materiel. Our further operations will depend on the state of our army, as well as on the general political and military situation in relation to our Allies ...".⁷³² The order clearly indicated that the army and the state were in mortal danger. Furthermore, the order instructed the commanders to retreat along the following lines: from Mitrovica to Prizren, then crossing Montenegro via Peć, Andrijevica and Podgorica and to Scutari (Skadar) and then St Giovanni-di-Medua (Medova). This route would be used by the Second and Third Armies and by the troops of the Defence of Belgrade. The First Army would protect the rear and then follow through a different route. Diplomats and medical missions were to also follow this route. The second route would go from Prizren to Ljum Kula and Scutari following the Drim River, this would be taken by the Troops of the New Regions.

The Regent, Pašić, Putnik, the government, and the general staff would be taking this route in separate groups. The third route would be the most southern going from Prizren and Tirana to Elbassan and on to Drač. This route would be used by the Timok Army, which was also given the order to link up with the Allied troops from Salonika, if possible. King Petar and his soldiers also took this route.⁷³³ The order gave detailed instructions as to which parts of the forces would be protecting the rear along which line, where the mustering stations would be located, and which communication lines were to be held. Further instructions were given in relation to weapons, what to take and what to bury in different

732 Quoted in Todorović, 1968, 51.

733 Todorović, 1968, 51; Le Moal, 2002, 92.

concealed locations after removing sights and firing pins. The cattle were to be taken and whatever else could not be taken or buried, was to be destroyed.⁷³⁴



“Allied operations in Salonika and final invasion of Serbia, 7 October 1915”; the map above shows the directions of the invasion from the Central Powers and the direction of the retreat through Montenegro and Albania (Map courtesy of the United States Military Academy Department of History).⁷³⁵

In view of the unusual nature of the order, to retreat beyond the country’s borders, the High Command issued a special explanatory directive no. 24971 on the same day: “The moment has come when, due to circumstances, we have to retreat through Montenegro and Albania. The morale and the discipline of our army have weakened and the faith in the salvation of the country has been lost. The state of the army is unfavourable. As we

734 Todorović, 1968, 52.

735 *Campaign Atlas to The Great War*, Department of History, United States Military Academy, West Point.

retreat through Albania and Montenegro to the Adriatic coast, it is to be feared that even greater demoralisation and disarray would ensue, as well as surrendering to the enemy in large numbers. In order to prevent this from happening, it is necessary to explain to the soldiers the purpose of our retreat and to convince them of the need to retreat. Capitulation would be by far the worst solution because we would lose the state, and our allies would abandon us completely and we would have no one to take care of us, to supply us with funds, weapons and everything we need, or to represent our interests. We would be completely lost. The only way out of this difficult situation is the retreat to the Adriatic coast. There, our army will reorganise, get food supplies, weapons and ammunition, clothing and everything else the Allies are sending to us. We will again become a factor to be reckoned with. **The state has not lost its being, the state still exists, although on foreign soil, as long as we have our ruler, our government and our army, regardless of its strength.** [emphasis mine] The readiness of our Allies to help us to the end and their limitless strength will break our common enemy in the end. Our Fatherland will again be free and greater. Convince all that this retreat is a state necessity, salvation for the state and that in these dark days our salvation lies in resolution, patience and ultimate sacrifice of all of us, with the faith in the final triumph of our Allies which is why we have to persevere to the end."⁷³⁶

Putnik's order and subsequent explanatory directive testify to the pragmatic nature of the decision-making — the retreat was considered essential for the survival of the army and the state. The Allies were requested to deposit food supplies and military equipment along the route⁷³⁷ and order no. 42942 stated that the mustering stations would be filled. Regardless of the unusual nature of the order and the explanatory directive, the details of the routes to be taken by the armies, and the instructions to ensure defensive actions where necessary still gave the impression of the degree of control in the High Command. The firm

736 Quoted in Todorović, 1968, 52.

737 Mitrović, 2007, 149.

intention of the Serbian government was to rebuild the Serbian Army immediately upon arrival.⁷³⁸

By this time, Field Marshall Putnik was severely ill with asthma and had to be carried by his soldiers in a sedan chair made from a sentry-box. Putnik, whose health has been in decline since before the war but whose mental strength kept him going, seemed to take a turn for the worse after the directive.⁷³⁹ The army was not alone in leaving, in fact, evacuation was to be complete: the government, the deputies, government officials, the archives, the treasury, and the casket of the first Nemanjić monarch, saluted by soldiers along the route, would accompany it. The convoy with Serbia's gold reserves was sent to Greece, and just managed to escape before the Second Bulgarian Army arrived. As the situation became more critical, in the second half of November 1915, there were refugees everywhere, with seemingly everyone trying to leave. Men, women, children, diplomats, all social classes, members of political parties, foreign journalists, actors, singers, university professors, Austro-Hungarian prisoners, and even criminals, when jails and asylums were opened. "Many thousands of Austro-Hungarian prisoners also retreated with their enemies after their repatriations were refused by Vienna.⁷⁴⁰ One of the officers of the Serbian Army, Major Svetomir Djukić, described these prisoners in his memoirs: "Austrian and Hungarian prisoners arrived. Barefooted, dressed in tatters, exhausted, no one is guarding them and no one needs them. No one understands why they have not escaped to join their side."⁷⁴¹

The High Command's order, despite the explanatory directive that followed, caused much confusion among the rank and file. Some 90% of the Serbian Army were old-fashioned peasants whose main motivation and fighting spirit came from defending their homesteads and the land; whose

738 Radojević and Dimić, 2014, 184.

739 Skoko, 1984, 280.

740 Krippner, 1980, 114.

741 Djukić, 2015, 167.

patriotism, rather than an abstract concept, was a pragmatic attribute, linked to their very livelihood. They found it difficult to understand how a state could exist *outside* the state borders. An army without a country was an absurd notion that they could not comprehend. There were many who decided to turn back but a sufficient number remained with their units.⁷⁴² The decision of the High Command went against everything that ordinary soldiers knew about the world. Dragutin Janković, a 25-year-old soldier who survived the Retreat remembered overhearing two officers while retreating across Albania with one saying: “Hey, we’ll end up like Napoleon in Russia”, and the other one retorting: “Worse, he was taking his army home, god knows where we’re going”.⁷⁴³

After the order of 25 November 1915, considerable discussion took place among the top military leadership about the possibility of a counter-offensive, but in view of the reports about the state of the army, the idea was abandoned with the decision on 2 December.⁷⁴⁴ Heavy weapons, artillery pieces and cannon that could not be taken or buried had to be destroyed and thrown into the river. These emotional scenes were described in a number of memoirs of the Retreat: artillery crews were kissing and hugging their cannon before destroying them and pushing them into the river, some having hauled them along the length of Serbia, after using them in the celebrated victories of 1912, 1913, 1914. “Gunnery, celebrated fighters, with tears in their eyes embraced the barrels of their favourite weapons, that they had carried and pushed to the positions with their own hands countless times with utmost effort and which they now had to destroy with their own hands.”⁷⁴⁵ The cannon represented the state and the state was being demolished.

742 Todorović, 1968, 54.

743 Quoted in Nedeljko Bogdanović, ed., *Dok su Solunci još govorili* [When Salonika veterans still spoke] *Zapisi* [collected by] Vladeta R. Košutić (Beograd: Čigoja Štampa,) 2011, 5.

744 Mitrović, 2007, 150.

745 Todorović, 1968, 54. This is another scene that is *remembered* from the Retreat. In his 2014 work, Danilo Šarenac explains how the process of purchasing cannon by the Serbian State had been followed by the general public between 1904 and 1906, and the subsequent victories were linked to the cannon: Šarenac, 2014, 115.

Upon the realization that the Serbian Army would be retreating through Montenegro and Albania, the Austro-Hungarian High Command attacked Montenegro to make the retreat harder and possibly destroy the stragglers. It was at this moment that *Serdar* Janko Vukotić, the overall commander of the Montenegrin Army and the commander of its Sandžak wing, undertook large-scale operations in order to protect the passage for the Serbian Army.⁷⁴⁶ The invasion of Montenegro by Austro-Hungarian troops was slowed down. While one part of the Montenegrin Army under Vukotić continued to fight, part of the army in the west of Montenegro collapsed. Montenegro capitulated in confusion on 25 January 1916, with King Nikola leaving through Scutari for Italy and then France.

The retreat of the Serbian Army began with approximately 220,000 troops⁷⁴⁷ crossing the border into Albania and Montenegro. It is estimated that there were approximately 200,000 civilian refugees.⁷⁴⁸ Roads became impassable with so many people as bad weather turned them to mud causing carts and other vehicles to get stuck. Military units had difficulty remaining together. Eyewitnesses describe scenes of Biblical proportions with masses of people moving towards the mountains, as the weather grew colder and skies darker. Food became scarce and prices inflated as desperate refugees exchanged anything they had for food. Many soldiers bartered their weapons. As the Serbian troops moved deeper into Albania, a country torn by different armed factions, Essad Pasha Toptani's troops provided protection where he was in control and his gendarmes gave support to retreating Serbian troops. However, in isolated places and as the columns moved to Catholic territories in the north, where Essad Pasha's authority did not hold sway, attacks by Albanian irregulars became commonplace. Essad Pasha's gendarmes even engaged in clashes with their countrymen to protect the retreating Serbs.⁷⁴⁹

746 Radojević and Dimić, 2014, 184.

747 Nedok, 2006, 39.

748 Dušan Bataković, "Essad Pasha Toptani and Serbian government", *Serbs and the Albanians in the 20th Century*, Andrej Mitrović, ed. (Academic Conferences LXI, The Department of Historical Sciences No. 20, 1991), 70.

749 Bataković, 2016, 189.



“Serbian Army Retreating across the River Morava, 1915” (photograph by Sampson Tchernoff, courtesy of the Serbian National Library).⁷⁵⁰

The route through Albania that was the shortest and the easiest was the one already known to Serbian troops from 1912, and was the main reason the High Command took it.⁷⁵¹ However, it was also the most dangerous — previous Serbian Army invasions into Albania left many locals ready to take their revenge.⁷⁵² Conventional Serbian retellings of the Retreat never mention *why* local Albanians were attacking Serbian refugees, civilians and soldiers alike. While Albanian attacks on the retreating Serbs form an important part of the narrative, previous Serbian occupations of Albania are rarely mentioned.⁷⁵³ This makes the attacks seem random and unprovoked.⁷⁵⁴

750 Sampson Tchernoff, *The Five Years War, the Serbs in 1912 – 1916*.

751 Fryer, 1997, 99.

752 Judah, 1997, 100.

753 The article by Čedomir Antić, “A port and a railway: The history of a maritime county as a study of Balkan colonialism 1912 – 1913”, *The History of the 20th Century* (August 2017: 29-38), justifies the aspirations of Serbia to acquire maritime access and a railway route to the Adriatic by comparing Serbian “colonial” ambitions with Britain’s, France’s and Italy’s. Antić avoids the issue of crimes having been committed against the local population, although he quotes the most famous critic of the conduct of the Serbian Army in Albania in 1912, Dimitrije Tucović, without mentioning the crimes that Tucović described.

754 The subject is rarely addressed in Serbia while the Serbian occupation(s) of Albania is/are not taught in schools. There is a blog entry “All Serbian occupations of Albania!” where the blogger gives an overview of the Serbian invasions of Albania, and remarks: “I can’t exactly remember this from school” <http://misha.blog.rs/blog/misha/kosovo/2014/08/07/sve-srpske-okupacije-albanije> (accessed August 8, 2016); also, see “Pridrži Srbiju” [“Hold on to Serbia”], *Peščanik*, 21 March 2008 <https://pescanik.net/pridrzi-srbiju/> (accessed May 2, 2020).

Because Montenegro was Serbia's war ally, and still only partly occupied by Austro-Hungary in December 1915, it provided a friendlier territory for retreating troops and civilians. Nevertheless, the isolated settlements where families felt threatened by the approaching mass of refugees did not necessarily offer succour to desperate people passing through their lands.⁷⁵⁵ Milovan Djilas, who later became a prominent communist leader and subsequently an even more prominent dissident, remembered how his family did not do much to help the refugees asking for food.⁷⁵⁶

Although the High Command order had given a list of mustering stations, most were empty.⁷⁵⁷ Time was too short after the decision was made and even if the eventuality of the retreat through Montenegro and Albania had been more seriously considered two months prior to the Retreat, practical preparations were not made. Additional factors, apart from the hesitation of the Allies on whether and how to help, exacerbated the already terrible situation: cold weather, poor communications, inhospitable terrain, a predominantly hostile local population.⁷⁵⁸ The High Command's plan was improvised and had many flaws that could not be fixed. In addition to the difficulties of the retreat, many units not only fought Bulgarians while retreating, but also Albanian irregulars. The suspected Albanian attackers who were caught, were killed mercilessly.⁷⁵⁹

As the weather turned icy, shelters were difficult to find and hamlets across the mountains did not offer refuge. Walking was hard, with intermittent snow, ice, or mud if there was a thaw. Falling asleep in the snow meant certain death. Serbian troops ordered to retreat by following the routes through Montenegro had their departure times and positions staggered to prevent more chaos on the muddy, clogged paths. However,

755 Gesemann, 2014, 121.

756 Quoted in Šarenac, 2017, 244.

757 Djukić, 2015, 164.

758 Todorović, 1968, 57.

759 Djukić, 2015, 146-147. Djukić describes the gruesome murders of unarmed Albanians although it is unclear if he witnessed it or heard about it. His comment is "Civilisation has advanced but some people's instinct has remained savage." Op. cit. 147.

the retreating civilians who joined the retreat made crossing of dangerous passes even more difficult.⁷⁶⁰ Since no one was charged with protecting them, they had to fend for themselves. The staff of Scottish Women's Hospitals, who had taken basic supplies with them, were looked after by the Serbian Military Medical Service. The army was dependent on the mustering stations that either did not deliver or delivered only a fraction of the food required, yet this was still something, even if instead of 9,000 loaves of bread, only 1,107 were to be had.⁷⁶¹ Commanding officers asked for food throughout the journey but to little avail. The units designated to follow the Albanian routes, which were geographically shorter, but far more difficult, also had to face Albanian irregulars. Having left Prizren on 29 November, almost immediately they had to fight their way through, especially around *Vezirov most* (Vizier's bridge), where scores of Serbian soldiers were killed in clashes with the local population. Again, the designated mustering stations were empty.⁷⁶² When a unit in such a weakened state was ambushed, the commander would often decide to negotiate with the local irregulars and they were allowed to march on in exchange for a considerable amount of equipment and a number of horses and oxen.⁷⁶³

As an illustration of the poor food supplies, it is worth noting that a commander quoted having received 1 to 1.5 kg of flour per soldier and 1-2 kg of corn per head of cattle over a period of two weeks.⁷⁶⁴ Different units took between 19 and 67 days to arrive on the Albanian coast.

Although Regent Aleksandar was suffering from appendicitis while in Kosovo, he was unwilling to delay his departure for the Adriatic coast and rode on in great pain. He and his officers were among the first to arrive in Scutari after a two-day journey on 1 December. The Pašić government took four days, arriving in Scutari one day before the prince regent. The High

760 Todorović, 1968, 60.

761 Todorović, 1968, 61.

762 Todorović, 1968, 64.

763 Todorović, 1968, 65.

764 Todorović, 1968, 66.

Command took eleven days from Prizren to Scutari, because they were slowed down by the gravely ill Field Marshall Putnik who was carried by his soldiers. Shortly after his arrival, Putnik resigned as chief of staff and was evacuated first to Italy, and then to Nice.⁷⁶⁵ He was replaced by General Petar Bojović, commander of the Troops of New Regions. King Petar was also evacuated soon after. Adams sums it up in his romanticised account of the Retreat: “Peter and Putnik, personifications of Serbia’s rise, symbols now of her ruin, two broken old men, were the first to leave Albania”.⁷⁶⁶



“From Ipek to Andrievitsa, 1915” (photograph by Sampson Tchernoff, courtesy of the Serbian National Library).⁷⁶⁷

Throughout the journey across Montenegro and Albania tens of thousands died, soldiers and civilians. According to official statistics from 1919, 77,455 soldiers died and 77,278 soldiers went missing.⁷⁶⁸ Out of 70,000 prisoners of war who departed from Niš in October 1915, it is estimated that only 23,000 made it through the Retreat and were evacuated from

765 Putnik died in Nice in 1917. His remains were transported back to Serbia in 1926 where he was given a state funeral.

766 Adams, 1942, 202.

767 Tchernoff, 1916.

768 Nedok, 2006, 42.

the Albanian coast.⁷⁶⁹ The worst fate befell approximately 43,000 young boys who became conscripts in March 1916, when they were taken by the army to join the Retreat so that the enemy would not capture, kill or imprison them. The plan was to make a new Serbian army with these young men.⁷⁷⁰ Approximately 36,000 young men died during the Retreat. Official statistics state that only 7,192 young men landed in Bizerte on 26 May 1916, after passing through Tirana and then having to march to the Albanian coast to Durazzo and Valona. Branislav Nušić, a Serbian playwright whose only son died in the war, retreated with the army and other refugees and wrote a memoir of the experience entitled *Nineteen Fifteen: Tragedy of a Nation*, where he also speaks about meeting these young boys on the Retreat: “These were all children, young as morning dew, bare-cheeked, just taken from their mothers and from their homes straight to the road of suffering and hardship. There were around 40,000 children who were taken following the order, so that enemy would not get them, because these were the children who would become recruits in March of the following year ... I had no idea that these children had been sentenced to death.”⁷⁷¹ It is estimated that 220,000 civilian refugees set off for the Adriatic coast and only about 60,000 survived.⁷⁷²

7. “Serbian Golgotha” — Testimonies

“At a distance from the events we have survived, from the suffering we have endured, Serbia and its fate seem to me ever more like that of the Titanic. Serbia also took a long time to be built — from the Orašac Rising to date — and one day Serbia took off towards the horizon of world events, healthy, strong and proud [...] And in the middle of the most confident voyage, Serbia comes upon an underwater iceberg, gets a tough and unexpected flank hit and —

769 Paolo Giordani, *Za srpsku vojsku* [original: *Per l'esercito serbo*] (Belgrade: Medija centar Odbrana, 2015 – reprint from 1917), 100.

770 Nedok, 2006, 42.

771 Branislav Nušić, *Devetstoptnaesta* [*Nineteen fifteen*], (Belgrade: Prosveta, 2006), 246-248.

772 Bataković, 1991, 70.

sinks. In a few days, it sank to the bottom of the ocean — a whole country and a whole nation.”⁷⁷³

In his memoir of the Retreat, Camille Ferri-Pisani (1885 – 1954), war correspondent, writes: “*Rien au monde ne ressemble moins à une retraite qu’une autre retraite*”.⁷⁷⁴ There are numerous sources that tell the story of the Retreat from different angles. Many participants wrote memoirs, veterans recorded their stories of survival, foreign journalists, medical staff, and military envoys published their experiences. For Jan and Cora Gordon, who came to Serbia with the Royal Free Hospital unit, it was an adventure.⁷⁷⁵ Lt.Col. de Ripert d’Alauzier (1894 – 1985), French military envoy, describes the Retreat and its aftermath in precise military terms with fine literary flair;⁷⁷⁶ while August Boppe (1862 – 1921), French diplomat, authored a brief account with sensitivity to Serbian history, making his thin volume popular in Serbia.⁷⁷⁷ Rear-Admiral Troubridge (1862 – 1926), British military envoy kept a diary which offers another perspective on the evacuation from the Albanian coast.⁷⁷⁸ The photographs of Sampson Tchernoff (1887 – 1929)⁷⁷⁹ and Rista Marjanović (1885 – 1969)⁷⁸⁰ gave lasting images of the event, fixing the narrative almost exclusively in the snow-covered mountains where convoys of soldiers advanced. But there were other aspects of the Retreat, less epic and more personal. From autobiographical novels⁷⁸¹ and recorded testimonies⁷⁸² one acquires

773 Nušić, 2006, 53.

774 Camille Ferri-Pisani, *Un drame serbe* (Paris: Perri et Cie, 1916), 159.

775 Jan and Cora Gordon, *Two vagabonds in Serbia and Montenegro* (London: Penguin Books, 1939).

776 De Ripert d’Alauzier, *Un drame historique* (Paris: Payot, 1923)

777 Auguste Boppe, *A la suite du gouvernement serbe de Nich à Corfou* (Paris: Bossard, 1917).

778 Rear-Admiral Troubridge’s Serbian Journal was published as part of C.E.J. Fryer, *The Destruction of Serbia in 1915* (New York: East European Monographs, Columbia University Press, 1997). The diary is kept in the archive of the Imperial War Museum, London.

779 Sampson Tchernoff, *La guerre de cinq ans: Les Serbes en 1912-1916 (s.l. : 1916 (?))* <http://velikirat.nb.rs/items/show/6219> (accessed March 25, 2017).

780 *Ratni album Riste Marjanovića 1912 – 1915* [Rista Marjanović’s War Album] (Gornji Milanovac: Dečje Novine, 1987).

781 E.g. Rastko Petrović, *Dan šesti* [Sixth Day] (Beograd: Nolit, 1961).

782 Antonije Djurić, *Solunci govore* [Salonika veterans speak] (Beograd: Prosveta, 1978); Antonije Djurić, *Žene Solunci govore* [Women Salonika veterans speak] (Beograd: Euro-Giunti, 2014); Nedeljko Bogdanović, ed. *Dok su Solunci još govorili, zapisi Vladete R. Košutića* [While Salonika veterans still spoke] (Beograd: Čigoja, 2011).

additional awareness of the state of mind of those who were not involved in the decision-making but endured the consequences. They all provide their own *truths* about the Retreat.

In his poignant memoir, Branislav Nušić describes vividly the confusion among the refugees in Skopje, with endless rumours circulating, uncertainty and anxiety rising. These were desperate refugees who despite everything they saw around them still believed in the arrival of the Entente troops. So utterly convinced were they that the Allies were on their way that they decorated the Skopje railway station to greet the Allied troops with welcoming signs and bunting.⁷⁸³ Soon, the mood darkened as more news arrived about the advancing German armies and the fall of one Serbian town after another. Thousands were boarding trains to Salonika: “[...] I don’t want to hear anyone’s advice”, says one refugee, “The National Bank went to Salonika yesterday and I am following the National Bank. So there!”.⁷⁸⁴ Contrary to later narratives, it was clear that no one cared about the ordinary people, those escaping their homes in fear of the enemy, the destitute, the sick, and the old. Among the scenes of despair, government officials and their families were given priority for seats on the last two departing trains — one bound for Salonika, the other for Kosovo. Those who managed to catch the Salonika one — officials and those privileged by the government, would be saved. Those who boarded the Kosovo train, were unaware that their Golgotha was just beginning.⁷⁸⁵

In Kosovo, where thousands had gathered, Nušić witnessed a soldier arrested for desertion and sentenced for execution. Soldiers who fought with bravery and determination in 1914, could not bear the exodus they saw all around them.⁷⁸⁶ Rumours of suicide, made veteran soldiers feel despair and shame: “Retreat, retreat without order, without a plan, without an intention, without an objective; the retreat that the whole

783 Nušić, 2006, 25-37.

784 Nušić, 2006, 64.

785 Nušić, 2006, 74-75.

786 Nušić, 2006, 96.

world is watching, the retreat of the army and the people [...]."⁷⁸⁷ Nušić also revealed how powerful the cult of Kosovo was, when amid the widespread hopelessness, he whispered to himself the narrative poem of the Kosovo battle with images of Serbian knights advancing against their enemies, to regain hope.⁷⁸⁸ Nevertheless, as the situation worsened, the refugees had to leave the towns and retreat into the mountains. "The deeper one goes into the mountains, the road is getting steeper, and harder, the stones are bare and a narrow path has been cut through and beneath it gapes the abyss."⁷⁸⁹



"Walking from Gramada to Albania, 1915" (photograph by Sampson Tchernoff, courtesy of the Serbian National Library).⁷⁹⁰

Old King Petar was also retreating with his people. King Petar's war diary 1915 – 1916 gives yet another view of the retreat. In his critical and often emotional and embittered observations, King Petar notes food shortages,⁷⁹¹

787 Nušić, 2006, 109.

788 Nušić, 2006, 141-142.

789 Nušić, 2006, 380.

790 Tchernoff, 1916.

791 Karadjordjević, 2003, 160.

the desperation of Field Marshal Stepa Stepanović,⁷⁹² the misery of the refugees,⁷⁹³ looting by Serbian soldiers,⁷⁹⁴ corpses along the way.⁷⁹⁵ He despairs of the desertions: “Everyone is complaining of escapes. Yesterday and last night 1,000 deserted!” he noted on 21 November 1915.⁷⁹⁶ Angry and disillusioned, a man with grudges, and particularly resentful against the Allies, who to his mind sacrificed Serbia while making false promises: “If only they had not promised,” he lamented.⁷⁹⁷ He witnessed soldiers selling rifles for bread⁷⁹⁸ and walking shoeless. King Petar arrived outside Tirana on 5 December, where he was met by the Serbian ally Essad Pasha. From there he was taken to Valona, Brindisi and then to Salonika.

In the Albanian mountains, when their footwear disintegrated, many soldiers and refugees could no longer walk because their feet froze. Henry Barby, who accompanied the High Command, described the horrors he saw along the road: *“Les cadavres! ... En voici un: ses pieds gelés dans ses ‘opantsi’ qui ne sont plus qu’un bloc de glace. Ses mains gonflées sont énormes. Résigné, il attend la fin ... Voici, plus loin, un pauvre vieux, une toile de tente sur les épaules. Il me montre ses pieds de glace. Il me parle. Je ne le comprends pas. Bien que je sache mon geste inutile, je lui tends un biscuit. Ce n’est pas ce qu’il veut. Sa main, avec une peine infinie, se lève lentement, son doigt tendu m’indique ce qu’il desire. Je regarde et comprends! Il me demande de l’achever d’une balle de revolver!”* Je passe en hate. Voici d’autres morts, d’autres agonisants ... en voici d’autres encore ...”⁷⁹⁹ Barby, retreating with a group of French doctors and officers, also witnessed half-naked soldiers exchanging their last pieces of clothing against barely edible cornbread from local Albanians.⁸⁰⁰

792 “Stepa despairs”, Karadjordjević, 2003, 161.

793 Karadjordjević, 2003, 165.

794 Karadjordjević, 2003, 173.

795 Karadjordjević, 2003, 177.

796 Karadjordjević, 2003, 167.

797 Karadjordjević, 2003, 169.

798 Karadjordjević, 2003, 182-183.

799 Henry Barby, *L’Épopée Serbe : L’agonie d’un peuple* (Paris : Librairie Militaire Berger-Levrault, 1916), 103.

800 Barby, 1916, 121.

The foreign missions in Serbia were numerous in 1915 — Russian, English, French, Danish, Dutch, Scottish, Greek, and American. During the organisation of the retreat of the medical missions there were considerable diplomatic and logistical difficulties. Many retreated with the Serbian Army while foreign missions were mostly evacuated through St Giovanni-di-Medua on the Albanian coast and taken to Bari from where they were repatriated.⁸⁰¹

However, many resisted being evacuated in the face of the coming disaster: “We are doctors and nurses — under no circumstance could you induce us to abandon the wounded in our hospitals. We were not sent out here to retreat upon the first approach of danger.”⁸⁰² Two-hundred foreign medical staff who chose to remain to look after their patients and save the medical equipment were made prisoners of war by the invading troops and eventually repatriated.⁸⁰³



“Lost in the snow! 1915” (photograph by Sampson Tchernoff, courtesy of the Serbian National Library).⁸⁰⁴

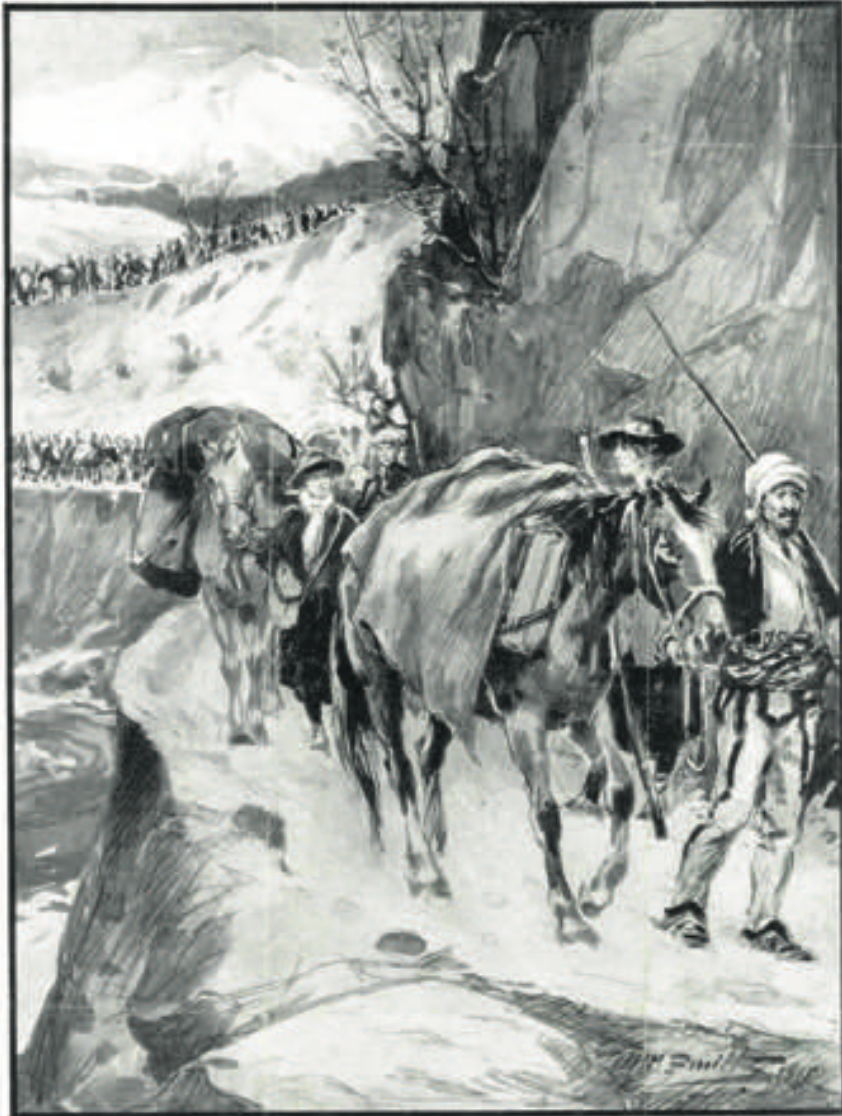
801 Nedok, 2006, 36.

802 Krippner, 1980, 106.

803 Nedok, 2006, 30.

804 Tchernoff, 1916.

ON THE MARCH THROUGH MONTENEGRO
DRAWN BY A MAN WHO WAS IN THE GREAT RETREAT



Copyright in the United States and Canada. Shows the Women's Hospital Unit, which arrived in London last week after a year's work in Serbia, last a team of pack animals and mules on their way to the front, as drawn by Mr. William Smith, the artist. The scene is of the pass between the two armies—the retreat of the British and the advance of the Germans. The pack animals are the only ones that can get through. For much of the way the road is a narrow, rocky path, and a cliff of snow and ice is the only protection down which a number of horses fell and the rest were lost.

William Smith, drawing of a four-day long passage between Ipek and Andrijevica. A Scottish Women's Hospital unit convoy is led by an Albanian guide. (Courtesy of Alan Cumming.)

Dr Elsie Inglis, the founder of the Scottish Women's Hospitals, made sure her patients would be taken care of and set up nursing stations in different locations before she was taken prisoner, and after a period of hardship managed to be sent back home.⁸⁰⁵

Another staff member from the Scottish Women's Hospitals, William Smith, a painter from Aberdeen, who was a secretary to the 1st Serbian Unit of the Scottish Women's Hospital, managed to leave⁸⁰⁶ and described the departure: "The road was a moving mass of transport of all kinds — motor-wagons, bullock wagons, horse-wagons, men, women and children, all intent on escape ... This procession had been passing continuously for days, stretching from one end of Serbia to the other, and one realised that this was something more than an army in retreat; it was passing of a whole nation into exile, a people leaving a lost country".⁸⁰⁷ Smith published articles on the "Great Retreat" in *The Graphic*⁸⁰⁸ and *The Sphere*⁸⁰⁹ along with his sketches and photographs, describing "a most exciting and strenuous time on their way to the sea coast."⁸¹⁰

Flora Sandes (1876 – 1956) served as a nurse in Serbia in 1914 and went back to England to recover after surviving typhus in the great Serbian epidemic in February 1915. She returned in November of that year to rejoin the Valjevo hospital as a Red Cross nurse just as the Serbian Army started retreating. Upon arriving in Salonika and being told that it was impossible to get to the Serbian Army to help, she decided against all odds to join a military hospital at Prilep where she was warmly received, and subsequently joined an ambulance unit. After the order for withdrawal arrived, she was offered the opportunity to leave through Greece. Sandes refused and, after some creative administrative procedures, she was made a private in the Serbian Army. The divisional commander, Colonel

805 Krippner, 1980, 160-162.

806 Men of military age were encouraged to leave, Krippner, 1980, 109.

807 Quoted in Krippner, 1990, 112.

808 William Smith, "The Serbian Retreat", *Supplement to the Graphic*, 1 January 1916.

809 William Smith, "A Journey Through the Albanian Wilds", *The Sphere*, 1 January 1916.

810 Smith, *The Graphic*, 1916, 5.

Vasić confirmed the appointment by reasoning that her “presence will ... encourage the soldiers since you will represent our ally, England”.⁸¹¹ Her regiment gave Sandes a mare, Diana, to ride. The crossing was as hard as had been promised upon her joining. Apart from fighting Bulgarians and hostile locals, crossing Mt Čukus and overnighing there — the journey was an adventure for the intrepid Sandes.⁸¹² She made it through with her fellow soldiers, and so did her violin.

Fortier Jones, an American who also joined the Retreat was full of admiration for the women belonging to different medical missions: “[they] stood it better than the Serbian refugees and fully as well as the Serbian Army. [...] They saw things that generations of their sisters at home live and die without the slightest knowledge of — the madness of starvation, the passion to live at all cost, the swift decay of all civilized characteristics in freezing, starving men. They understand now better than any biologist, any economist, could have taught them the struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest.”⁸¹³

Mable St Clair Stobart⁸¹⁴ (1862 – 1954) went to Serbia in February 1915, to lead the Third Serbian Relief Fund Hospital Unit. As the Central Powers forces were massing on Serbia’s borders, St Clair Stobart was put in command of a unit that would join the flying-field hospital accompanying the Serbian Army to the front. Her column ended up joining the Retreat after she took with her medical equipment and staff without consulting Sir Ralph Paget, commissioner in charge of relief for Serbia, which subsequently resulted in animosity towards her in London.⁸¹⁵ Nevertheless, St Clair Stobart led her unit through all the hardships of the retreat, with her account echoing all the others: unbearable cold, barely

811 Powell, 2013, 176.

812 Flora Sandes, *An English Woman-Sergeant in the Serbian Army* (Kansas University reprint of Hodder and Stoughton original published in 1916), 142.

813 Fortier Jones, 1916, 207.

814 Mabel St Clair Stobart, *The Flaming Sword in Serbia and Elsewhere* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916); “The Crushing of Serbia”, *Forum* (March 1918).

815 Powell, 2013, 182.

passable tracks instead of roads, day after day of misery for refugees. “Men by the hundreds lay dead; dead from the cold and hunger; and no one could stop to bury them. But worse still, men lay dying from cold and hunger and no one could stay to tend them”.⁸¹⁶

Major Thomson, a doctor with the French medical mission described scenes from hell having witnessed men desperate with hunger tearing flesh from dead horses lying by the roadside. The hunger was “stronger than disgust”. Many died from having eaten raw horse meat.⁸¹⁷ Dragiša Vasić, a veteran from the Balkan Wars and the Kolubara Battle, in his memoir of the Retreat says: “Whatever was known about death was different from how we died there. On a narrow mountain path, which meandered above the abyss ... was a skeleton ... he kept asking his own corpse to continue walking ... Albania was both nightmare and reality ... People died believing in some awful end of the universe because death was the law there. Albania was the Serbian Good Friday, the Mont Blanc of our suffering”.⁸¹⁸



“Serbian soldier eating the flesh off a dead horse, 1915” (photograph by Sampson Tchernoff, courtesy of the Serbian National Library).⁸¹⁹

816 St Clair Stobart, 1916, 245.

817 Louis-L. Thomson, *La Retraite de Serbie (octobre-décembre 1915)* (Paris: Librairie Hachette et Cie, 1916), 128.

818 Quoted in Radojević and Dimić, 2013, 187.

819 Tchernoff, 1916.

Gerhard Gesemann (1888 – 1948) was a German slavist living and working in Belgrade when the war broke out and who found himself retreating with other civilians in 1915. In his diary, he described desperation, hunger, and exhaustion of thousands of civilians on their way from Podgorica to Scutari waiting to cross to the other side of the lake. Gesemann was so desperate to leave that he jumped on the wooden pontoon already transporting hundreds of people.⁸²⁰

After arriving in Durazzo having endured extreme hardship, he spent a number of weeks among several-thousand civilians who were also hoping to sail away as the Austro-Hungarian Army began closing in. Gesemann recorded tragic stories of people he met on the way: “Another man who was sitting by the church and crying, had carried his three-year-old daughter across the mountains. Her mother died just before the collapse of the country. He said that in the last few days he was spending his remaining money on the food for the child but that he set aside the last twenty dinars for a gun.”⁸²¹ Gesemann was eventually transported to Brindisi from where he reached Switzerland and then Germany.

It is clear that many thousands of people, soldiers and civilians had the experience of the Retreat that justify it being called *Golgotha*. But government officials, a number with their families, foreign medical and military missions, officers on horseback, did not experience it the same way as civilians and soldiers-stragglers on foot.⁸²² Yet, what is *remembered* a century later is a simplified version devoid of desertions, betrayals, officials’ privileges, and cowardice. The necessarily *human* aspects of an extraordinary event fall by the wayside, allowing for the script to be dominated by the *superhuman* qualities of Serbian soldiers, as we shall see in chapter IV.

820 Gesemann, 2014, 120.

821 Gesemann, 2014, 164.

822 “Even Albania was not Albania for everyone” according to Milan Ćurčin, quoted in Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 87.

8. Evacuation to Corfu

“Heroism and fortitude are cheap words in the Balkans and the Serbs are prone to excessive usage of both. But the soldiers who attempted to reach the island refuge of Corfu from Kosovo deserve great respect, even in this century of suffering.”⁸²³

Despite German and Austro-Hungarian messages and propaganda claiming that the Serbian Army no longer existed, 139,750 troops from the Serbian Army still remained on 31 December 1915, positioned along the Albanian coast between the Scutari Lake and Durazzo.⁸²⁴ Several thousand more arrived over the following days and weeks, joined by Montenegrin troops who had avoided capture by the invading Austro-Hungarian Army and wanted to join the Serbian Army. The plan of the Serbian government, even before their arrival on the Albanian coast, was to reorganise and reform the army with the help and support from the Allies.⁸²⁵ The original plan was to use the Albanian coast as an area for the recuperation. However, as the Austro-Hungarian troops advanced and the Kingdom of Montenegro capitulated in mid-January 1916, Albania itself was threatened, not least by the proximity of the Austro-Hungarian Navy at Cattaro (Kotor). The existing threat of the Austro-Hungarian attacks, the concentration of thousands of hungry and exhausted soldiers and civilians, as well as the continued hesitation of the Allies over the distribution of aid, meant that the hardships were far from over. The weather contributed to the misery of the troops and the civilians. Nothing was ready for them on the Albanian coast, neither food stores, nor shelters from the rain. As well as the shortage of food there was also a shortage of weapons.⁸²⁶ Although food supplies had been sent by the French and the British to St Giovanni-di-Medua, the sinking of an Italian cargo ship

823 Glenny, 1999, 334.

824 Todorović, 1068, 69.

825 Mitrović, 2007, 152.

826 Mitrović, 2007, 152.

by an Austrian submarine halted further food transports to that port.⁸²⁷ Serbian sources interpreted this as hesitation on the side of the Allies.⁸²⁸

The Serbian Army was positioned in two groups, one larger group in the north around Scutari, and a second in the area around Tirana-Elbassan in the centre of Albania where they had the last skirmishes with the Bulgarians who they repelled. The Allies were ready to help with supplies and evacuation, with the understanding that not helping would benefit the Central Powers.

On 12 December 1915, the French established a military mission mandated to reorganise the Serbian Army and assist it both politically and logistically, by placing General Piarron de Mondésir (1857 – 1943) in charge of the mission.⁸²⁹ Rear-Admiral Troubridge, the British envoy charged with assisting the Serbian Army, “could not co-exist in that position”, as Fryer put it, and the subsequent animosity between the two made matters worse.⁸³⁰

The transport of food, already slow and uncertain, started arriving in the ports of Durazzo and Valona, some 100 and 200 km from the positions where Serbian refugees had arrived. Initially, Mondésir hesitated to take Troubridge’s advice that the Serbs should march further south, so they could be evacuated from the ports of Durazzo and Valona.⁸³¹ After the submarine attack, the French recognised that the port of Medua was too dangerous because of the Austro-Hungarian proximity.⁸³² The recommendation of the Allies, that the Serbian Army should march to those ports, was not well received by the Serbian military leadership. Moreover, travelling south was complicated further by the Italians who

827 Mitrović, 2007, 152.

828 Todorović, 1968, 72.

829 Le Moal, 2008, 97.

830 Fryer, 1997, 118.

831 Troubridge’s journal, entries January 5 – January 8, 1916, in Fryer, 1997, 221-224.

832 Troubridge’s journal, entry January 7, 1916, in Fryer, 1997, 223-224.

feared Serbian territorial claims to Albania,⁸³³ going as far as to prohibit Serbian troops from crossing the Skumbi river, which was necessary to access Valona, under the pretext that Serbian troops were carrying infectious diseases. The Italians demanded from Regent Aleksandar a written statement declaring that Serbia would never claim the territory where the Serbian Army would be positioned.⁸³⁴ There were disagreements between Serbs who wanted to leave Albania as soon as possible from Medua, and the French and the British who wanted them to march further south, another 100 to 200 km, while the Italians were opposed to the Serbian government moving from Scutari to Valona. The disagreements had to be negotiated at the highest level.⁸³⁵ Regent Aleksandar, who was about to be operated on for appendicitis in sub-standard conditions, sent a beseeching telegram to the Russian Tsar, appealing for the survival of the Serbian Army. When the Russian Tsar responded, and intervened with the Allies, the food supply improved.⁸³⁶

The initial refusal of the Serbs to march further south to safer ports, and the subsequent standoff between the Italians and the Allies in relation to the crossing of the Skumbi River may have resulted in the death of another 10,000 Serbian soldiers.⁸³⁷ Apart from the soldiers, there were thousands of civilians, without food or shelter, waiting to be evacuated. Every morning, after waiting throughout the night, several bodies of desperate refugees were found in the Meduan port.⁸³⁸ King Petar, speaking to General de Mondésir, felt that the Allies did not do enough: “Even if Serbia survives, I fear there will be no more Serbs”.⁸³⁹ Mondésir resolved Italian opposition to the Serbs reaching Valona and then convinced Regent Aleksandar, with difficulty, to order his troops to continue by land to Durazzo and Valona. The Serbs left Scutari between 17 and 20 January,

833 Todorović, 1968, 71.

834 Radojević and Dimić, 2013, 188.

835 Le Moal, 2008, 98.

836 Todorović, 1968, 73. This intervention of the Russian Tsar is still remembered 100 years later, see Chapter IV.

837 Le Moal, 2008, 98.

838 Todorović, 1968, 78.

839 Quoted in Mitrović, 2007, 154.

with the Austro-Hungarian Army entering Scutari on the 21st. As the Kingdom of Montenegro capitulated at this time, more refugees streamed into Scutari from the Montenegrin mountains. Montenegrin soldiers were offered places in the Serbian Army.⁸⁴⁰ Remaining civilian refugees were struggling to survive. Immediately before the Austro-Hungarians arrived, two ships left with hundreds of soldiers and refugees. Rear-Admiral Troubridge, also left on one of the ships, leaving the French to take full charge of the Serbian evacuation.⁸⁴¹

The Serbian government was transported to Brindisi on 14 January and then to Corfu four days later.⁸⁴² Regent Aleksandar refused the offer of naval transport and went with his troops to Durazzo by land. As the Austro-Hungarian troops advanced, it became urgent to transport larger numbers of soldiers, once 10,000 sick and wounded had been evacuated to Bizerte. Although Durazzo was used to evacuate 90,000 soldiers and 5,000 civilians, it was decided that the harbour was too small and shallow to evacuate all the troops. This meant that thousands of troops had to continue their journey to the port of Valona to be evacuated.⁸⁴³ The evacuation established between Durazzo and Corfu and between Valona and Corfu lasted for several weeks. 12,000 people were evacuated from Medua, 95,000 from Durazzo, 51,564 from Valona. Among them were 3,500 government officials and 5,000 civilian refugees.⁸⁴⁴ The last troops to board ship were the cavalry units and the remainder of the Serbian Army who left Valona and Albanian soil on 5 April 1916.⁸⁴⁵ 140,000 soldiers were evacuated to Corfu, 10,000 to Bizerte in Tunisia, 1,200 to France and 4,500 to Salonika.⁸⁴⁶ Sources from the Italian Navy gave the following numbers:

840 Todorović, 1968, 82.

841 Adams, 1942, 233. Adams does not view Troubridge's contribution favourably. For his part, Troubridge is highly critical of Mondésir and of Corfu as a destination, having proposed Egypt instead, see Troubridge's journal, entry January 13, 1916, in Fryer, 1997, 226.

842 Mitrović, 2007, 159.

843 Mitrović, 2007, 159.

844 Nedok, 2006, 55.

845 Todorović, 1968, 85; Mitrović, 2007, 160.

846 Nedok, 2006, 55.

11,651 sick or wounded were transported to Brindisi, Lipari, Marseille or Bizerte; 130,841 Serbian soldiers were taken to Corfu and 4,100 to Bizerte.⁸⁴⁷

On 24 January, when Austro-Hungarian troops entered Medua and Alessio, time was pressing to evacuate the Serbs from Albania.⁸⁴⁸ Although the evacuation preparations had started on 29 December 1915, the decision on the destination of the evacuation was not made until 8 January 1916. It was decided to ship the Serbs to Corfu without seeking permission from the Greek government or the Greek King Constantine and French troops landed in Corfu on 11 January.⁸⁴⁹ At this point, the political situation in Greece was complex. Greece was only *de facto* neutral —troops from both sides had occupied different parts of the Greek territory.⁸⁵⁰ Corfu was problematic as a location not only because of the pretence of Greek neutrality, but also because it was a poor island and all the supplies had to be brought from elsewhere.⁸⁵¹ Additionally, many more food supplies had to be brought in for 140,000 new arrivals.⁸⁵² The first landings and sheltering of people were improvised, and made difficult by rainy weather.⁸⁵³ General Mondésir received a new British counterpart in charge of the British Adriatic Mission, General Taylor. Their mandate was to reform the Serbian Army after ensuring their recovery. Serbian troops were weakened by what they had been through and even those who were well were unable to do much.⁸⁵⁴ Many soldiers sick with typhus were quarantined on the small island of Vido across from Corfu. It is estimated that some 5,400 people died on Vido.⁸⁵⁵ When the dead could not be buried

847 Giordani, 2015, 99. Giordani also disputes Italian unwillingness to assist Serbian troops, attributing delays in assistance to logistical issues, see Giordani, 2015, 41.

848 Le Moal, 2008, 101.

849 Mitrović, 2007, 154.

850 Pećinar, 2016, 144.

851 The British were against the evacuation to Corfu because of Greek neutrality. The French then proceeded to transport the first 9,000 Serbian evacuee soldiers to Tunisia. Because of the duration of the sea passage and the associated logistical difficulties, the French decided to occupy Corfu after all and did it without consulting the other allies, Pećinar, 2016, 144.

852 Mitrović, 2007, 160.

853 Troubridge's entry for January 29, 1916: "now I hear the French have nothing ready at Corfu, no tents, no clothes, nothing and the Serbs are dying 50 a day" in Fryer, 1997, 237.

854 Le Moal, 2008, 106.

855 Mitrović, 1997, 160.

because there was no space left on land, they were buried at sea. A total of 11,000 soldiers died with 7,000 buried at sea.⁸⁵⁶

Field hospitals were organised at short notice on Vido and in Corfu, with medical services supplied by French, English and Greek medical missions. Serbian medical teams included 252 Serbian doctors, 150 medical students, 116 pharmacists and 60 veterinarians who had retreated with the army and joined foreign medical teams treating Serbian soldiers.⁸⁵⁷ The sick were also shipped to hospitals in France, Greece, Switzerland, Italy, Britain, and Russia. Although Serbia had lost approximately 400,000 men, an army of around 140,000 - 150,000 remained ready to recover and live to fight another day.

There were also 20,000 civilian refugees in Corfu, and as they and the troops convalesced, Corfu became a temporary Serbian political centre because its political leadership was essentially intact.⁸⁵⁸ King Petar, Regent Aleksandar, most of the Serbian Assembly deputies, most of the political leaders, and army commanders had reached Corfu. Social and political life flourished. Newspapers and magazines were published in Serbian, parliamentary sessions organised, and plays and concerts were held. The French and the British worked together to make sure soldiers recovered fully. Serbian troops received new pale-blue uniforms and French army instructors were put in charge of their training. French rifles were delivered to Corfu while heavy weapons were sent directly to Salonika. The French envoy reassuringly messaged Paris to say Serbian soldiers were much better as “the women of Corfu [were] noticing”.⁸⁵⁹ After four months of recovery, they were ready to join *l'Armée d'Orient*. Regent Aleksandar and the High Command recognised the risk of Serbs being incorporated into the Allied Army to the point of no return, and not having a separate army. Regent Aleksandar requested an independent

856 Judah, 1997, 101.

857 Nedok, 2006, 66.

858 Mitrović, 2007, 161.

859 Le Moal, 2008, 107.

Serbian Army.⁸⁶⁰ After everything that he had seen the Serbs go through, Mondésir seconded the request for Serbs to be under Serbian command and Joffre⁸⁶¹ eventually accepted this.⁸⁶²

9. Renewal of the Serbian Army and the Salonika Front

“We will depart with our Allies from here. The journey is desperately difficult, but the objectives are vast. Albania gave us moral grounding for our future endeavours. At home, we beat our enemies. In Albania, we beat the whole world.”⁸⁶³

Once Serbian troops in Corfu were restored and reorganised, they began transferring to Salonika on 12 April 1916. The last transport was on 30 May. The arrival in Salonika of 125,000 troops embodied the resurrection of the Serbian Army.⁸⁶⁴ In speaking to his troops on the occasion of Easter 1916 in Corfu, Regent Aleksandar highlighted the Christian connection between the Golgotha of Albania and the Resurrection in Corfu: “*Le Christ est ressuscité: Ainsi mon armée elle aussi est maintenant debout après tant d’épreuves ... prête à de nouveaux efforts et à nouveaux triomphes.*”⁸⁶⁵ The images of suffering and resurrection paralleled the experience of the Serbian Army in 1915 and 1916 drawing on the role of the Serbian-Orthodox faith in Serbian patriotism.⁸⁶⁶

After troops left Corfu for Salonika, the government and Regent Aleksandar stayed on to continue their political work and negotiations that would decide the future of Serbia after the victory of the Entente.

860 Mackenzie, 1989, 195.

861 Joseph Joffre (1852-1931), *maréchal de France*.

862 Le Moal, 2008, 108.

863 Field Marshall Putnik in Corfu, March 1916. Quoted in Todorović, 1968, 71.

864 Le Moal, 2008, 108.

865 D’Alauzier, 1923, 198.

866 Le Moal 2008, 113.

Although the regent was invited to stay in Aix-en-Provence as the guest of France, he declined and stayed in Corfu with his government without giving an opportunity to the Great Powers to have influence over what would be a critical time for the future of Serbia and South Slavs in the Balkans. Contrary to Aleksandar, King Nikola of Montenegro⁸⁶⁷ accepted French hospitality in Neuilly and although he officially represented the Montenegrin government, the absence of any real army left him without much influence.⁸⁶⁸ Pašić's main interest lay in the creation of a Greater Serbia, which would encompass most of Croatia and Bosnia, but there were other political interests too. Yugoslav activists in Croatia and Slovenia wanted to use the opportunity of the anticipated break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Serbian political weight to create an independent state that would unite Southern Slavs into Yugoslavia.⁸⁶⁹ Serbian military objectives were already controversial when the statement known as the *Niš Declaration*,⁸⁷⁰ was published by the Serbian National Assembly on 7 December 1914. Pašić's geopolitical ambitions for the future of the Serbian State veered more towards the Greater Serbia than towards Yugoslavia. The main danger to either set of goals was the secret agreement between Italy, France, Britain and Russia, signed in London on 26 April 1915, detailing the conditions under which Italy would be joining the cause of the Entente. The Allies were promising to give Italy large territory from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, including Istria, Dalmatia, parts of what would later be Slovenia, as well as parts of Tyrol and Albania. The treaty also detailed what regions would be given to Serbia, Croatia and Montenegro.⁸⁷¹ Although the Serbian government and political leaders in Croatia and Slovenia knew that Italy had been brought into the Entente in 1915, through a deal involving the territories they had a claim on, the full details of the agreement were not known

867 King Nikola was Regent Aleksandar's grandfather because his daughter, Princess Zorka was King Petar's wife and Aleksandar's mother.

868 Mitrović, 2007, 162.

869 Judah, 1997, 102.

870 *Niška deklaracija* [*Niš declaration*] znaci.net http://www.znaci.net/00001/138_4.pdf (accessed May 20, 2017).

871 The Treaty of London. 1915. [https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_London_\(1915\)](https://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/The_Treaty_of_London_(1915)) (accessed March 10, 2016).

until the Bolshevik government published it in 1918, to demonstrate the hypocrisy of capitalist diplomacy.⁸⁷² The work of the Yugoslav Committee, with its headquarters in London, was concerned with the Great Powers' backroom deals and forecasting the victory of the Entente with the ending of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and resulted in the drafting of the *Corfu Declaration*.⁸⁷³ This declaration would lay the foundation to the future state of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The *Corfu Declaration* boldly stated that Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes were one people with three names, that they were one people in "in blood, in spoken and written language, in the feelings of unity, the continuity and integrity of the territory in which we live together, sharing the existential interests of our national survival and wholesome development of our moral and material life".⁸⁷⁴ It was signed by the President of the Yugoslav Committee, Dr Ante Trumbić (1864 – 1938), a Croat, and Serbian Prime Minister Nikola Pašić, following the conference in Corfu. Trumbić and Pašić would go on to have many clashes, with additional strains being put on the relationship and the future of South Slavs after the secret French government initiative to convince the Austro-Hungarian leadership to agree to a separate peace in order to shorten the war.⁸⁷⁵ It was clear that any deal involving the survival of the Austro-Hungarian Empire was a threat to the sovereignty of the future country of South Slavs.

Before the *Corfu Declaration* could get any traction, the Serbian government and Regent Aleksandar needed to regain full control of their army after the Allies had agreed to the independent Serbian command. It is possible that because of the *Black Hand's* demands, and because the High Command had to take responsibility for the horrific suffering of the army across Albania, that the regent and the Pašić government felt they could no longer tolerate past and potential future conspirators. After the resignation of Field Marshall Putnik, which might have been forced

872 Judah, 1997, 102.

873 *Krfska deklaracija* [Corfu Declaration] znaci.net http://www.znaci.net/00001/138_7.pdf (accessed May 20, 2017)

874 Corfu Declaration, 1917.

875 Le Moal, 2008, 221.

on him, with the regent's cryptic acceptance of the resignation saying that the Field Marshall was "honourable and pure as the sun",⁸⁷⁶ there were speculations that the regent was purging the army officer's corps of *Black Hand* sympathisers. Rumours were rife after Putnik's deputy Živko Pavlović was also dismissed, and Field Marshall Mišić sent to France, ostensibly to recuperate. However, Mišić would later be brought back to Salonika to command the Serbian troops on the Salonika front. Apis and his followers, considered too dangerous to leave be, were subsequently charged with plotting against the regent and the government, then tried and executed following the infamous Salonika trial.⁸⁷⁷ The pretext used was an incident when shots were supposedly fired in the vicinity of the car in which the regent was travelling. This led to the rounding up of suspects — all members of the *Black Hand*. The charges were trumped up, but the French were not interested in the affair and gave their consent for the initial arrests. More than 130 Serbian officers were investigated. Eight officers, two civilians and two volunteers were tried between 2 April and 5 June 1917.⁸⁷⁸ Several were tortured while Apis was promised clemency if he confessed. Apis subsequently wrote a letter to the court outlining his role in the assassination of Franz Ferdinand. It is believed that he exaggerated his role in the plot with the intention of emphasising his patriotism — whatever he had done, he did it for Serbia. The court was not moved, while the military leadership was alarmed that this might have implicated Serbia in *the original sin* of the war — thus proving the Austro-Hungarian attack was justified — and Apis was found guilty of treason. Dozens of officers were also found guilty and imprisoned, while others were retired.

The Salonika trial affair was riddled with intrigue and scheming, fuelled by old grudges partly stemming from Regent Aleksandar's wish to finish with the *Black Hand* once and for all, and partly from resentment that Apis's men had accumulated since 1903. For Major Svetomir Djukić,

876 Quoted in Adams, 1942, 201.

877 Mackenzie, 1989, 241.

878 Bataković, 2016, 450.

who described his frequent clashes with *Black Hand* sympathisers in his memoirs, the group had a nefarious influence. After being passed over for promotion despite multiple superiors' recommendations, Major Djukić included his complaints in a report to the regent: "We [the army] are in a dilemma as to who we should obey. The secret authority or our superiors? This will result in the breakdown of morale and integrity in the army."⁸⁷⁹ There is little doubt that Pašić and the regent agreed that speculation and rumours about what could and should have been done to prevent the 1915 disaster were widespread in the army. After the collapse of Serbia in November 1915 and the Albanian Golgotha they did not want any *praetorian* officers criticising the decisions that had led to the deaths of so many soldiers and civilians. Following the verdict, Apis and two of his followers were executed on 26 June 1917 near Salonika. Apis's last words were said to have been: "Long live Greater Serbia, long live Yugoslavia!"⁸⁸⁰

The reorganised Serbian Army, wearing their new uniforms joined the British, French, and Russian troops in Salonika in preparation for the great breakthrough on the Salonika front. They would also be joined by Greek troops once Greece entered the war on the Entente side in June 1917. After the first victory of the Serbian Army on Serbian soil at the battle of Kajmakčalan on 20 September 1916, the front stabilised. Trench warfare set in after the German and Bulgarian troops checked the advance of the Allies north of Monastir (Bitola), and was to continue for nearly two years.⁸⁸¹

The Salonika front was eventually broken on 15 September 1918, and proved a contributing factor to the victory of the Entente over the Central Powers⁸⁸² after the withdrawal of Russia from the war. Belgrade was

879 Djukić, 2013, 221.

880 Bataković, 2016, 462.

881 Mitrović, 2007, 165.

882 Hindenburg on 3 October 1918: "As a result of the collapse of the Macedonian front and the weakening of our western reserves which this has brought about, and now that it is impossible to make good the very considerable losses which have been incurred in the battles of the last few days, there is, so far as can be foreseen, no longer a prospect of forcing peace on the enemy." Quoted in Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika* (London: faber and faber, 2009), 226.

liberated on 1 November 1918. The Ottoman Empire capitulated on 30 October 1918. The Austro-Hungarian Empire capitulated one day later. Germany agreed to the formal cessation of hostilities on 11 November. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was established on 1 December 1918. The Versailles Treaty was signed on 28 June 1919, exactly five years after the Sarajevo assassination of Franz Ferdinand.

There never was a proper inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the Retreat. According to Danilo Šarenac,⁸⁸³ there were two military investigations during the war specifically to establish why food was not delivered to the recruits. Another investigation initiated after the war by the National Assembly had no outcome.

Conclusion Chapter III

Following the outbreak of the war, the Serbian Army successfully and unexpectedly repelled three Austro-Hungarian offensives in 1914. These victories were the result of the high-calibre general staff and its veteran officers, as well as Serbian peasant-soldiers whose determination outweighed the ruthlessness and power of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Serbia paid a heavy price for the victories when enemy troops raided the countryside and retaliated against the civilian population. The typhus epidemic that followed in the spring of 1915, additionally desolated the army and the country. Once the German-led offensive started in October 1915, with Bulgaria joining on the side of the Central Powers, the fall of Serbia was inevitable. The promised Entente aid never materialised and Serbia was left to its own devices. The Retreat came as a result of the Serbian Army repeatedly avoiding the final showdown with troops under the command of Field Marshall Mackensen. The Serbian Army retreated through Montenegro and Albania in late November 1915, with the intention of making it to the Albanian Adriatic coast and reorganising

883 Šarenac, 2017, 255.

with the help of the Allies. The army was followed by the entire government, the royal household, the parliament and the administration, along with thousands of civilian refugees. The Retreat was a disaster for thousands of troops and civilians who died of starvation, cold, and enemy operations. Thousands of soldiers turned back and deserted, with many imprisoned on the way back. It seemed that all was lost and that Serbia would cease to exist. Although the country was invaded and occupied by the Central Powers, the Serbian Army, the government, the parliament, king and regent were evacuated from the Albanian coast to Corfu with Allied help. Although thousands died upon arrival from disease and exhaustion, more survived and recovered. With the help of the Allies, France in particular, the Serbian Army was reorganised and ready to join armies in Salonika. The courage and fortitude shown in the Retreat by the Serbian soldiers contributed to the Serbian Army having their own command as part of *l'Armée d'Orient*. The Serbian Army thus participated in liberating Serbia with the Allies under its own flag in 1918. Although veering between its own national project and the Yugoslav one, Serbia was instrumental in the founding of the new state of South Slavs. The multi-ethnic kingdom, encompassing three nations that had fought in the war, albeit on opposing sides, was established on the eve of the conferences that would culminate in the Versailles Treaty.

More than 100 years have passed since the *Golgotha* and the end of the First World War, but the Retreat remains a strong presence in Serbian national consciousness. The Retreat represents a defeat turned into a victory, a tragedy with a happy ending. As we have seen, the Retreat is an enthralling story which combines struggle and suffering, the two main tropes of the Serbian collective past woven in a captivating narrative. With this storyline in mind, we now turn to the changeable nature of the perception of the Serbian past with particular attention to the remembrance of the Great War and the Retreat

IV

Serbia's Uncertain Past

Introduction

The First World War and the Retreat as its central part have always had a special meaning for the Serbs. When the one-party state in socialist Yugoslavia began to dissolve in the late 1980s, much of the Serbian intellectual elite became infatuated with the past and how that past was connected to what *being* Serbian meant. Many Serbs then started with determination to equate history with identity — the way ancient Greeks equated character with fate. An important part of that history was related to the Serbian role in the First World War — the victories, the heroes, the tragedy, the Retreat, the Corfu salvation, the liberation of the country. One of the explanations given for the *explosion* of history and memory in the 1980s, was that the general remembrance of the Serbian role in the First World War was suppressed during Tito's years. However, the reality is far more complex.⁸⁸⁴ Immediately after the Second World War, communists imposed a different ideology on the country that used to be the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The ideology's dominant historical narrative was the communist partisans' struggle against the Nazi invaders between 1941 and 1945. The official history was that only communists fought the Nazis — therefore, the communists saved

884 Šarenac, 2014, 242.

the country. Anyone else was a collaborator, a war profiteer, or both. Commemorating partisan, i.e. communist battles, was the new regime's way of gaining historical legitimacy. These commemorations took precedence over any anniversaries from the First World War. While the First World War did not completely disappear from the commemorations calendar, it was greatly reduced in status. Hundreds of Karadjordjević dynasty monuments were destroyed, alongside a large number of First World War monuments.⁸⁸⁵ At the same time, a few commemorations of First World War battles were still held, some dates celebrated and it is not always easy to see the logic behind the decisions on what to memorialise and what to ignore.⁸⁸⁶ There was oppression — particularly between 1945 and 1953⁸⁸⁷ — and there was extensive censorship and self-censorship as various political officials in charge of commemorative naming, or of organising cultural events, favoured communist and partisan themes over others, in order to be seen as enthusiastically communist.⁸⁸⁸ However, in 1964, on the 50th anniversary of the start of the First World War and the first Allied victory which was the Cer battle, the film *March on the Drina*,⁸⁸⁹ produced by *Avala Film*, received second prize at the Yugoslav film festival in Pula.⁸⁹⁰ Various other anniversaries were commemorated with suitable publications with the First World War as subject matter,⁸⁹¹ and the Lazarevac Church dedicated to those fallen in the First World War was consecrated.⁸⁹² The two most important memorials of the First

885 Šarenac, 2014, 242.

886 Šarenac, 2014, 242.

887 The period between 1945 and 1948 was the years of the Soviet-type elimination of the *bourgeoisie*, including *war profiteers* and *collaborators*. After 1948, Tito's break with Stalin resulted in the persecution of suspected *stalinists*. In 1953, after Stalin's death, Yugoslavia started to come out of the worst of the communist repression.

888 Streets, factories, sports centres, even towns were (re)named after communist heroes. Festivals, cultural events, any public manifestation could be used as commemorative showcase of allegiance.

889 *Marš na Drinu* [*March on the Drina*], *Avala Film*, 1964, director Žika Mitrović. <https://vimeo.com/232188594> (accessed May 20, 2019).

890 Šarenac, 2014, 243.

891 In 1968, in the honour of the 50th anniversary of the breakthrough of the Salonika Front, Belgrade publishing house *Prosveta* published a memorial book and a memorial album on the Retreat, edited by Kosta Todorović, the founder and president of the association of recipients of the Albanian commemorative medal, among several other publications.

892 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 333.

World War, the ossuary in Vido and the Salonika military cemetery, were visited by Tito as part of his travels to Greece. The 50th anniversary of the breakthrough of the Salonika front was commemorated in Vido by a state delegation from Yugoslavia in 1968 and a wreath was laid in the *Blue Tomb*.⁸⁹³ While there were certainly fewer commemorations of First World War events, the suppression — an *erasure of history* — was not consistent.⁸⁹⁴ Nevertheless, political changes, particularly violent political changes that Serbia has experienced, have over time created “historical discontinuity and the possibility of appearance of many gaps in collective memory”, as Danilo Šarenac puts it.⁸⁹⁵ This has also had an impact on the way some events have been remembered, misremembered, or swept under the carpet. Because of its deadly impact on the totality of the Serbian population, “the First World War has remained an important factor in Serbian national identity”.⁸⁹⁶ Owing to a variety of factors, some of which we are exploring in this research, the First World War is a familiar narrative frame used to *remind Serbs of who they are*.⁸⁹⁷

Memorialising the events of importance has never been simple or straightforward in Serbia. Serbia fought another three wars in the 20th century after the Versailles Peace Treaty in 1919. As part of a dismembered Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Serbia fought in the Second World War between 1941 and 1945. During the wars of Yugoslav succession⁸⁹⁸ between 1991 and 1995, Serbian-led Yugoslav armed forces and Serbian citizens

893 Šarenac, 2014, 245.

894 The author learnt a great deal about the Retreat in school (1970 – 1980) although the Second World War partisan operations were covered far more extensively. A family friend who was a Salonika veteran took part in ceremonies and travelled extensively for commemorations on state-funded trips.

895 Šarenac, 2014, 18.

896 Šarenac, 2014, 12.

897 Dubravka Stojanović does not believe that historians should describe WWI as a “key point to Serbian identity” as this is a value judgement based on a stereotype. See, “The Mythical War”, *Peščanik*, 5 July 2014 <https://pecscanik.net/the-mythical-war/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

898 Serbian author Dušan Kovačević calls it *The Third Balkan War*; Milovan Djilas (1991 – 1995), Yugoslav author and dissident, characterised this war as *the repeat of the 1941 – 1945 war, but without the partisans*.

participated in armed conflicts in Croatia and Bosnia.⁸⁹⁹ In 1999, following the Serbian-led military and police operations in Kosovo against ethnic Albanians, the NATO Alliance launched air strikes against targets in Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo to “halt the humanitarian catastrophe (...) unfolding in Kosovo”.⁹⁰⁰ In this context, it is hardly surprising that there are unfinished memorials, overlooked events, and revoked heroes in Serbia.⁹⁰¹ In this chapter, we consider street names as weather vanes of historical interpretation, we look at the Great War monuments that were built, or not built, at a number that were not quite finished, and others that were erected and then moved; we examine how First World War commemorations are used as political reset buttons, and review the newspapers that are *teaching* history as if it were happening right now.

1. History vs. Memory: Street Battle for Hearts and Minds

“In Serbia, there are FIVE seasons: spring, summer, autumn, winter, and — war.”⁹⁰²

The succession of historical events from the end of the First World War continued — and continues to the present day, each changing the fate of Serbia. These events arguably are: the unification of the country, first as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, then as the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1919 – 1928), the parliamentary crisis and dictatorship (1928 – 1929), the assassination of King Aleksandar in Marseille (1934), the military coup against the Yugoslav government that had signed a pact with Hitler, followed shortly by the Nazi attack on Yugoslavia (1941),

899 The same way that France was never at war in Algeria, neither was Yugoslavia/Serbia at war in Croatia and Bosnia.

900 “Topic: Kosovo Air campaign”, NATO website https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49602.htm?selectedLocale=en (accessed May 20, 2019).

901 Many streets that bore communist-style “people’s heroes” names were renamed from 1990s onwards.

902 Kovačević, 2017, 65.

capitulation and dismemberment of the country (1941), Nazi occupation (1941 – 1945), liberation and reunification (1945), the Tito years (1945 – 1980),⁹⁰³ the break-up of Yugoslavia and civil war (1991 – 1995), NATO air-strikes following the Serbian military and police force operations in Kosovo (1999), democratic changes in the country and the arrest of Serbian President Slobodan Milošević, followed by his transfer to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (2000),⁹⁰⁴ the assassination of the Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić (2003), and the separation between Serbia and Montenegro (2006), to name but a few. This selection of events reflects turning points for Serbia while each event's consequences also changed the nature of the memorialisation of previous events although not necessarily permanently. Each change of government, a change of dynasty — particularly relevant in the context of the Karadjordjević – Obrenović feud — would influence the way the history preceding it was presented depending on which events the ruling dynasty or regime wished to be remembered as meaningful, i.e. how useful it was in legitimising their rule.⁹⁰⁵ We could rightly say that this is a top-down process: people are told — and taught — what to remember.

One visible way in which historical changes are present in a physical space is *hodonyms* — street names. Street names can be so much more than just addresses — one could consider them historical interpretations embodied in people's immediate surroundings. The development of postal services in Europe in the 18th century led to the naming of streets in urban areas.⁹⁰⁶ While at first the practice had a practical purpose, its secondary purpose evolved over time. According to Maoz Azaryahu, “the use of street names for commemorative purposes is instrumental in

903 The Tito years is a period of 35 years which included a break with Stalin in 1948, liberalisation of the country's borders in the early 60s, beginning of the non-aligned movement etc.

904 Slobodan Milošević died in custody while on trial in 2006.

905 Srdjan Radović, *Beogradski odonimi [Belgrade Odonyms]* (Belgrade: Institute of Ethnography SASA, 2014), 11-12. The author refers to the work of Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin and Maoz Azaryahu.

906 Radović, 2014, 12.

transforming the urban environment into a virtual political setting.”⁹⁰⁷ In Serbia, the battle for hearts and minds appears to be fought by changing street names, quite literally altering the identity of the environment. Between the early 1990s and 2004, hundreds of streets in Belgrade had their names changed.⁹⁰⁸ Street names are the simplest way a city — or those who run it — can honour an event, a prominent person or a place. However, as Azaryahu has established in much of his work, naming streets is a political demonstration of power — “symbolic control of the public domain”.⁹⁰⁹ In Serbia and Belgrade in particular, there are many examples of street names being used to illustrate change, denote respect, or otherwise.⁹¹⁰

After the end of the Cold War, many Eastern European cities threw off the communist-imposed names of streets, avenues, squares, sports centres, and other places. The end of the Cold War played out differently in Serbia — communists were losing influence and power, but they were not Soviet-imposed and the leaders were ready to reinvent themselves through a *national historical reawakening*. So not only did the communist street names have to go, but also the *Yugoslav* ones.⁹¹¹ Overall, more streets changed names in Belgrade than in Bucharest — twice its size — or in East Berlin, a city of comparable size.⁹¹² According to an article from 2008, as many as 500 streets in Belgrade changed their names between 2004 and 2008,⁹¹³ which seems difficult to believe. During the Austro-Hungarian

907 Maoz Azaryahu, “The power of commemorative street names”, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (1996, volume 14), 311.

908 Leah Willingham, “Changing Belgrade Street Names: A Sign of the Times”, *Balkan Insight*, 26 July 2016 <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/changing-belgrade-street-names-a-sign-of-the-times-07-26-2016> (accessed May 20, 2018).

909 Azaryahu, 1996, 313.

910 Between 1945 and 1947, many streets had their names changed to acquire communist-themed identities, and it was felt that some streets should also be named after the Western Allies. Thus a street in Belgrade, until then known as *Cemetery Street* (*Grobljanska ulica* — running along the main cemetery in Belgrade) was renamed *Roosevelt Street*. It still retains this name.

911 Willingham, 2016. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/changing-belgrade-street-names-a-sign-of-the-times-07-26-2016> (accessed May 20, 2018).

912 Radović, 2014, 146.

913 R. V. Bibić, “Za četiri godine 500 novih naziva ulica” [“In four years 500 new street names”], *Danas*, 18 September 2008 <https://www.danas.rs/beograd/za-cetiri-godine-500-novih-naziva-ulica/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

occupation, the Austro-Hungarian military police changed the street names in Belgrade that were “*politisch bedenklich*” — this ended up being only 26 streets.⁹¹⁴ Many street name changes have complicated histories. One of the central streets in Belgrade is called *Ulica Kralja Milana*, *King Milan Street*, after King Milan Obrenović (1868 – 1889).⁹¹⁵ *King Milan Street* was replaced by *Marshall Tito Street* in 1947. In 1992, at the height of Serbian nationalist fervour under Slobodan Milošević, the street was renamed *Ulica Srpskih vladara*, *Serbian Rulers Street*.⁹¹⁶ Before it was renamed, it had been the site of anti-communist and nationalist demonstrations on the 10th anniversary of Tito’s death where demonstrators were calling for its old name to be reinstated — but incorrectly so. They thought that it had been called *King Petar Street*.⁹¹⁷ This is symptomatic of what we could term *commemorative amnesia* where people have forgotten exactly who or what had been commemorated. In this case, they still felt strongly that the then incumbent of that particular street name should be *de-commemorated*. According to Srdjan Radović, the author who researched Belgrade street names in depth, it is likely that the reason it was renamed *Serbian Rulers Street* “was a direct echo of the Zagreb’s *Trg žrtava fašizma*, *Square of Victims of Fascism*, being renamed *Trg hrvatskih velikana*, *Square of Croatian Greats*.”⁹¹⁸ One could almost call it a *commemorative duel* or a *hostile de-commemoration*. It is possible that there were *practical* reasons for street name changes for both cities: The Serbian Assembly’s address was in *Marshall Tito Street* and the Croatian Democratic Union’s⁹¹⁹ headquarters was at the *Square of the Victims of Fascism* and both names — perceived as no longer suitable for the institutions, and obviously used on seals and letterheads — had

914 Tamara Scheer, “The perfect opportunity to shape national symbols? Austro-Hungarian occupation regimes during the First World War in the Adriatic and the Balkans”, *Acta Histriae* 22 (2014/3), 682. Cyrillic alphabet was also banned so all street names were in Latin characters.

915 He ruled as prince from 1868 – 1882 and as king 1882 – 1889.

916 B.D.P. “Stari i novi nazivi ulica” [“Old and new street names”], *Politika*, 21 October 2007 <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/6004/Tema-nedelje/Da-li-se-ponosimo-antifasizmom/Stari-i-novi-nazivi-ulica> (accessed May 20, 2018).

917 Radović, 2014, 125.

918 Radović, 2014, 130. The square was given back its old name, *Square of the Victims of Fascism* in 2000.

919 *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* HDZ, centre-right party.

to go.⁹²⁰ The past that the streets was commemorating no longer fitted the present, so the past had to be *updated* to suit the present circumstances. *Serbian Rulers Street* reverted to its old-old name, *King Milan Street* in 1997.⁹²¹ Although *King Milan Street* is now the official street name, both street names can be found on different parts of the street — both signs are there — one above the other. At the same time, a number of Belgrade street maps have both names, all *three* can be googled, and taxi drivers will take their customers to the right destination no matter which one of the names they are given as the address.⁹²² It is almost as if one can choose the preferred street name according to the historical allegiance, but each will lead to the same place. It is as if these streets in Belgrade — and elsewhere in Serbia — are struggling with their identity.⁹²³

There are also more extreme cases of identity crises where street name changes themselves are memorialised so that name changes are listed on a plaque with *years of tenure* for each name without any further explanation. Reading through the list of names and dates, we can infer the reasons for changing the street name, interpreting them by way of historical events.

920 Radović, 2014, 130. Both names would be immediately recognizable as communist.

921 In 1997, a coalition of democratic opposition parties won the local elections in Belgrade and most larger cities and towns.

922 Random 'trials' in Belgrade, 2014.

923 Ivan Ristić, "Imena ulica u Beogradu – ogledalo naše neopredeljenosti" ["Street names in Belgrade – the mirror of our undecidedness"], s.d. Blog *Novi Polis* <http://www.novipolis.rs/sr/dosije/29039/imena-ulica-u-beogradu---ogledalo-nase-neopredeljenosti.html> (accessed May 20, 2018).



Svetogorska Street, and its previous hodynymic iterations, Belgrade (April 2018).

Considered one of the most renamed streets in Belgrade, the street known today as *Svetogorska*, named after *Sveta Gora*, Serbian for Mount Athos,⁹²⁴ has a long history of other names. The first name of the street was *Dva bela goluba*, *Two White Doves*, probably in reference to a popular Belgrade tavern, located nearby. The name was changed to *Svetogorska Street* after 24 years, for reasons unknown. In 1922, the street changed its name to *Bitoljska Street* after Bitola, formerly known as Monastir, a town in Macedonia, or *Old Serbia*, which used to be Ottoman, then became Serbian in the Balkan Wars, lost during the Bulgarian occupation and then became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In 1930, the street became *George Clemenceau Street*. Clemenceau, the French Prime Minister during the latter part of the Great War who represented France at Versailles, was also instrumental in the establishment of the State of South Slavs. In 1930, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was looking for French political support while it was in the grip of a dictatorship ruled by King Aleksandar. It was also the year when the *Monument of Gratitude to France* was inaugurated⁹²⁵ – when Clemenceau died in November 1929, naming a street in the centre of Belgrade after him would have been a way for officials in Belgrade to honour the French statesman. In 1943, during the Nazi occupation of Belgrade, Clemenceau gave way to

924 Mount Athos UNESCO <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/454> (accessed May 20, 2018).

925 The monument will be discussed later in this chapter.

Svetogorska again, and in 1946, the street was named after Ivo Lola Ribar, a Yugoslav communist from Zagreb, who had been killed in the war. The street became *Svetogorska* again in 1997. There are other streets with complicated name histories, and remarkably there are streets where the *memorial plaques* indicating the years of tenure have an empty space for the next time the street will have its name changed.



Years of tenure of the former street names of the Belgrade, *Dečanska Street* — barely visible on the street name plaque — and the last tenure with an empty space.⁹²⁶

There are streets which carry two names i.e. two street name plaques can be seen, an old — in this case bearing a communist name — and a new one, although it may actually be older, bearing its pre-communist name.⁹²⁷ Such is the case with the longest street in Belgrade which had

⁹²⁶ Photograph by Ristić, Blog Novi polis <http://www.novipolis.rs/sr/dosije/29039/imena-ulica-u-beogradu---ogledalo-nase-neopredeljenosti.html> (accessed May 20, 2018).

⁹²⁷ Radović points out that there were multiple street name changing processes, some streets were given completely new names, others were given older names than the ones they held prior to communist name changes.

several other names before it was called *King Aleksandar Boulevard*, which was renamed *Red Army Boulevard* immediately after the Second World War,⁹²⁸ then renamed *Revolution Boulevard* after the break with Stalin,⁹²⁹ and then it reverted to being *King Aleksandar Boulevard*.⁹³⁰ Interestingly, most Belgraders do not know who is being commemorated with this street name. Many believe that the boulevard was named after King Aleksandar Karadjordjević, the commander in chief of the Serbian Army in the Great War, the King of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and later the King of Yugoslavia, who was assassinated in Marseille in 1934. However, that is not the case; the street was named after King Aleksandar Obrenović, murdered in 1903 by a group of discontented army officers, several of whom would later found the *Black Hand*, which was to play such a controversial role in 1914. This in itself is an oddity, because King Aleksandar Karadjordjević has neither a street nor a monument named after him in Belgrade.⁹³¹ Nevertheless, both him and his father, King Petar, have a monument in Paris.⁹³² King Aleksandar was supposed to have a square named after him, during his time as regent, in honour of his military leadership in the Balkan wars that ended in victory. The First World War postponed the project, which was later altered, and the tragic Yugoslav king is almost ignored in present day Belgrade; although there are plans for a monument.⁹³³ There are different explanations for this, as well as a number of conspiracy theories, and the most persistent one

928 Radović, 2014, 112.

929 A number of Soviet-style street names had their names changed at this time, Radović, 2014, 118.

930 Radović, 2014, 136.

931 Veljko Lalić, "Kralj Aleksandar nema ni ulicu u Beogradu. Za kojom Jugoslavijom onda mi žalimo?" ["King Aleksandar does not even have a street in Belgrade. Which Yugoslavia are we mourning then?"], *Nedeljnik*, 6 December 2017 <https://arhiva.nedeljnik.rs/nedeljnik/portalnews/kralj-aleksandar-nema-ni-ulicu-u-beogradu-za-kojom-jugoslavijom-onda-mi-zalimo/> (accessed May 20, 2018) A monument to King Aleksandar was announced in 2018.

932 *Monument à Alexandre 1^{er} de Yougoslavie et Pierre 1^{er} de Serbie*, Paris, 16th arrondissement. King Peter also has a street in Paris, *Avenue Pierre 1^{er} de Serbie*, also in the 16th.

933 The monument is supposed to be built in the centre of Belgrade, between two former royal palaces and facing the monument of Tsar Nikolay according to the article "Spomenik kralju Aleksandra biće podignut na Terazijama" ("The monument to King Aleksandar will be erected in Terazije") *N1 info*, 16 February 2020 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a569820/Spomenik-kralju-Aleksandru-Karadjordjevicu-bice-podignut-na-Terazijama.html> (accessed February 17, 2020).

is that the communists disliked him because he was a monarch and a Serb, while hardcore Serbian nationalists considered his establishment of Yugoslavia the ultimate treason against the Greater Serbian project.⁹³⁴

What do the ever-changing street names tell us about the relationship with the past that the Serbs have in their everyday surroundings? At the very least, there is a great deal of confusion. Already, *old* and *new* names are confusing terms because the *new* names are actually *old* names, but they are new to all those born during Tito's years. Using one name or another could indicate that one is still wedded to the past — living in the *Revolution Boulevard* — or embracing the present, by using a new name which is actually not new, or it might not indicate anything at all as forgetting street names — that keep changing — could be considered normal. People today may oppose *the latest* name out of principle, not wishing to participate in an “erasure of history”.⁹³⁵ And this is a simplified version of a few examples of the history of Belgrade street names, as most prominent streets had their names changed during the Austro-Hungarian occupation (1915 – 1918), during the Nazi occupation (1941 – 1945), or during the peak in Soviet influence (1946 – 1948). There were also other name changes when various communist leaders fell in or out of favour, or when policies on naming streets after living communist leaders changed.⁹³⁶ With history in competition with memory on the streets of Belgrade, one could revisit the entire history of the country just by looking at street names. The City of Belgrade's official website has registered street

934 Dragana Matović, “Aleksandar planski brisan iz pamćenja naroda” [“Aleksandar was removed from public memory by design”], *Novosti*, 22 June 2018 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/kultura.71.html:734374-Aleksandar-planski-brisan-iz-pamcenja-naroda> (accessed June 28, 2019).

935 Willingham, 2016. <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/changing-belgrade-street-names-a-sign-of-the-times-07-26-2016> (accessed May 20, 2018).

936 In 1953, it was decided that there were too many living communist leaders who had streets named after them and from then on, only dead communist leaders could have streets named after them, with Tito as the notable exception, Radović, 2014, 121.

names changes since 2000, including new names that were given to streets previously without one.⁹³⁷

In 1904, when the new Karadjordjević king was to be crowned, one part of the coronation ceremony passed through the then *Dubrovnik Street* which was subsequently renamed after the new king.⁹³⁸ This street name change marked the change of the dynasties after the murder of King Aleksandar Obrenović and Queen Draga in 1903. However, the four streets in Belgrade named after the Obrenović rulers remained unchanged after the change of dynasty.⁹³⁹ As for the Karadjordjević dynasty, *King Petar Street* had a brief name change during the occupation of Belgrade 1915 – 1918, when it became *Saborna Street*, after the church of the same name. It reverted to being *King Petar Street* after 1918, but was renamed *7th July Street* between 1946 and 1997, after a date from 1941 considered significant by the communist regime.⁹⁴⁰

All the field marshals from the Great War are present in Belgrade with names of large streets and boulevards named after them: Putnik, Stepanović, Mišić, Bojović. General Pavle Jurišić-Šturm ended up with two streets because the first one — in existence since 1935 — was considered too short with only two house numbers, so the second one was added in 2002, without changing the name of the first one.⁹⁴¹ The French First World War generals with Serbian connections⁹⁴² are commemorated as large

937 *Upoznajte Beograd* [Get to know Belgrade], “Stari i novi nazivi ulica” [“Old and new street names”] <http://www.beograd.rs/lat/upoznajte-beograd/1233-nazivi-ulica---stari-i-novi/> (accessed May 20, 2018)

938 Radović, 2014, 78.

939 Radović also notes that many street name changes occurred during the Karadjordjević rule, with the years 1906, 1908 and 1909 particularly marked by mass name changes. Radović, 2014, 78.

940 Soon after the end of the Second World War, 7 July was declared the day of Serbian insurrection because each Socialist Republic had a day of insurrection commemorating an event which had purportedly ignited the communist resistance against the Nazi invaders in 1941. 7 July was no longer celebrated after 2000.

941 Radović, 2014, 148.

942 First World War French officers considered as having most helped the Serbian Army.

streets and avenues, almost equal in size to the Serbian ones.⁹⁴³ Admiral Guépratte and Marshal Franchet d'Espèrey are two French military figures commemorated, but Sarraill and Mondésir are not.⁹⁴⁴ Admiral Guépratte is considered to have saved Serbian soldiers transported to North Africa by sending them to stay in Bizerte, instead of further inland because care and accommodation were superior in Bizerte. A Belgrade tabloid published an article in 2014 giving background about the French admiral after whom a street in Belgrade was named saying he was someone who “had saved Serbs” and was nicknamed “Serbian mother”.⁹⁴⁵ Marshal Franchet d'Espèrey, who “fought on the side of Serbia”, who has streets in both Belgrade and Thessaloniki, was the General in charge of the *l'Armée d'Orient* from 1917, who were responsible for the final breakthrough of the Salonika front and the liberation of Serbia. He was also the subject of a newspaper article.⁹⁴⁶ Other friends of Serbia are also commemorated: Belgrade has *Archibald Reiss Street* after the forensic pathologist who first publicised the atrocities committed by Austro-Hungarian soldiers in Serbia in 1914, and *Flora Sandes Street* — after the extraordinary British woman who was a soldier in the Serbian Army — a relatively recent commemoration from 2009. There is also *Corfu Street*, after the island where the Serbian Army recovered and *Salonika Street*, after the city and the front. The Greek Prime Minister during the Great War, Elephterios

943 Serbia and Greece were the only countries to commemorate living French politicians and military leaders by giving them street names after the First World War.

944 On 15 July 2019, during the visit of the French President Macron to Serbia, the Deputy Mayor of Belgrade announced that General Piarron de Mondésir would also be getting a street in Belgrade. Mondésir Street will be close to the Monument of Gratitude to France, taking one part of the street currently named after the Polish-Lithuanian hero Tadeusz Kościuszko.

945 “Evo zašto su admirala Geprata zvali “Srpska majka” i kako je spasio je 11.417 Srba!” [“Here is why Admiral Guépratte was nicknamed “Serbian Mother” and how he saved 11,417 Serbs!”], *Telegraf*, 31 January 2014 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/931565-evo-zasto-su-admirala-geprata-zvali-srpska-majka-i-kako-je-spasio-11-417-srba-foto> (accessed May 20, 2018).

946 “UPOZNAJTE BEOGRAD: Ulica francuskog maršala rođenog na Dan mladosti, koji je čuvao srpske frontove” [GET TO KNOW BELGRADE: The street named after the French Marshal who was born on Youth Day and who guarded Serbian fronts”], *Telegraf*, 8 September 2012 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/326868-upoznajte-beograd-ulica-francuskog-general-a-rođenog-na-dan-mladosti-koji-je-čuvao-srpske-frontove-foto> (accessed May 20, 2018). Among the many strange headlines, this one requires a closer look: *Youth Day* is 25 May which was celebrated in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as the official day of Tito's birthday, even though Tito's actual birthday was 7 May. It is curious that the tabloid chose a Yugoslav socialist reference for a Serbian-themed article.

Venizelos, is now also commemorated by a street in Belgrade but has to “share” the street with Raymond Poincaré,⁹⁴⁷ the French wartime president, the entire street having been previously named after a Yugoslav communist killed for opposing King Aleksandar’s dictatorship in 1929.⁹⁴⁸

The only explicit commemoration of the Retreat in Belgrade *hodonyms* is the *Albanian Commemorative Medal Street*.



Albanian Memorial Medal Street sign (April 2017).

At the beginning of the street is a plaque explaining the origin of the name with a photo of the medal,⁹⁴⁹ a map of the Retreat, a painting representing a scene from the Retreat and a photograph from the Retreat with explanatory text in Serbian and English. The Albanian Commemorative Medal was established in 1920 by Regent Aleksandar.



Albanian Memorial Medal Street, Belgrade. (April 2017)

947 The street was split in two parts, one part was named after Venizelos and the other after Poincaré.

948 Djuro Djaković (1886 – 1929) was a Bosnian communist. He no longer has a street in Belgrade but does have it elsewhere in Serbia and in *Republika Srpska*, the Serbian entity in Bosnia.

949 Practice for most streets in the Belgrade municipality of *Palilula*.

The text also contains a description of the medal dedicated by the regent “to his wartime comrades”. It was awarded to all members of the Serbian Army who retreated through Albania (the English translation on the plaque calls it a *withdrawal*). The street was given this name in 1968, presumably on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the breakthrough of the Salonika Front and the end of the First World War. Its previous names are also listed on the plaque, it was known as *Albanian Street* between 1924 and 1968, while it is mentioned that it was also called *Tadić Street* between 1923 and 1928, although the plaque does not explain who that was.

There is a place in Belgrade that has not changed its name since it was built: in Belgrade city centre, there is a building called *Albania* that most Belgraders believe is named after the retreat across Albania.⁹⁵⁰ The high-rise — the foundations of which were laid in 1938 — was located on the site of an old tavern which dates back to 1860.⁹⁵¹ The tavern was called *Albania* and was torn down in 1936 along with two buildings next door. The new high-rise took over the name from the tavern.⁹⁵² In 1939, the *Albania* building was the tallest building in the Balkans when it housed a bank. During the Second World War it was used as a bunker for Nazi officers and as such was a target for Allied air raids. In 1944, during the Allied Easter bombing, a bomb hit it but did not explode, although one of its central carrier walls was damaged. After the war, it was a home to shops, offices and became a certified monument in 1983. Today, it is still used as a predominantly administrative building — it houses the agency for investment guarantees as well as different commercial outlets. It is one of the two constructions in Belgrade — the other being the 2012

950 An informal question was asked of several people who were sources of information for the research.

951 Vidoje Golubović, *Mehane i kafane starog Beograda [Taverns and coffee-houses in old Belgrade]* (Belgrade: Laguna, 2019), 115.

952 “Šta radi Albanija u srcu Beograda: Zgrada koja je bila kafana, banka, bunker a ime joj niko nije menjao” [“What is Albania doing in the heart of Belgrade: The building that was a coffee-house, a bank, a bunker, but its name never changed”], *Srbija Danas*, 7 October 2017 <https://www.srbijadanas.com/vesti/beograd/otkud-albanija-u-srcu-beograda-zgrada-koja-je-bila-kafana-bunker-banka-ime-je-ostalo-isto-2017-10-07> (accessed May 20, 2018).

Ada bridge — that lights up in relevant colours in accordance with the occasion, such in the colours of the French and Belgian flags as solidarity for the victims of terrorist attacks in France and Belgium in 2015 and 2016. While the *Albania* building changed its purpose many times, its name remained, even though the reason for the name is far more prosaic than most Belgraders think.

What's in a name? Not that much, according to Serbian street names. Changing street names with the passing of time, political regimes, foreign policy U-turns, or governments, reveals the extent of the volatility of memory in Serbia. In fact, changing the names of geographical locations seems to mock the very concept of remembrance. What starts out as a commemorative intention has an in-built, sell-by date.⁹⁵³ This is what plaques with street names and their years of tenure demonstrate: nothing lasts forever and nothing is sacred. In the same way that the communist leaders removed the names of kings and saints, their names were removed in turn. At some point, all the names may become *politisch bedenklich*. Serbian street name changes are the equivalent of servants whispering *Memento mori* to victorious generals leading triumphs in ancient Rome but in the Serbian version, the whisper is: *Your street too will be removed one day*. Changing names indicates changes of values through the transformations of our environment — we remain in one place, but that place is no longer the same because we now believe in something else. Changing addresses⁹⁵⁴ while remaining in the same place implies a basic lack of stability. It is an attempt to be continually updating the past so that it will fit the present. In trying to alter the past, we are rejecting both memory and history associated with it. Through this misguided eagerness to make our environment *suitable*, we fragilize the present with the implication that one day the present itself might become part of an unwanted past.

953 In Socialist Yugoslavia, a town in each Republic and autonomous province was at one point given a Tito-appendage: Titov Veles (Macedonia), Titova Mitrovica (Kosovo), Titovo Užice (Serbia), Titograd (Montenegro) etc. They were gradually removed during the 1990s.

954 Each time the street name is changed, the ID cards have to be changed at the costs of the citizens.

2. The Unfinished Business of Serbian First World War Monuments

“Our murdered leaders, exiled monarchs and national benefactors, heroes forgotten in illness, humiliated military commanders, scientists who have emigrated, writers, poets, painters who were starved and ruined by poverty ... They look down on us from frescoes, museum portraits, street names, bronze horses, textbook covers, tapestries, T-shirts, tattooed backs, colourful plates, mineral water and slivovitz labels, ‘gold-plated’ glasses and ashtrays, heart-shaped, fairground biscuits ... amazed, astounded by their foolish, irresponsible and, to put it mildly, peculiar descendants.”⁹⁵⁵

If street names have powerful commemorative connotations, monuments embody public remembrance even more — they only carry commemorative meaning. Their sole purpose is to champion the remembrance of a person or an event. The first *artistic* monument in Serbia, dedicated to an Obrenović ruler, was the monument to Prince Mihailo Obrenović (1853 – 1868),⁹⁵⁶ erected on 19 December 1882, the year when Serbia became a kingdom. The monument was to symbolise the liberation of Serbia from the Ottomans, and the names of liberated cities were inscribed on the sides of the monument: *Beograd, Smederevo, Kladovo, Soko, Užice, Šabac*. Following Prince Mihailo Obrenović’s negotiating efforts, the Ottomans handed over these cities to the Serbs, which is why he was not represented *as a warrior* on horseback, but as a statesman.⁹⁵⁷ The prince’s right hand is outstretched as he points towards regions that were yet to be liberated. This future *intent* possibly indicates that the work of liberation was not quite done. Monuments are supposed to come at the end of something — they should indicate finality, not emergence. As Kirk Savage explains

955 Kovačević, 2017, 46.

956 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 255. The monument was erected to honour Prince Mihailo Obrenović posthumously. He was assassinated in 1868.

957 Neda Kovačević has surveyed all Belgrade monuments, of which over 400 are dedicated to famous people. See Neda Kovačević, *Beogradski spomenarnik. Ličnosti u beogradskim spomenicima* [Belgrade memorials. Personalities in Belgrade monuments] Belgrade: self-published, 2016.

in his 1997 work on the way the story of the emancipation of slaves in the US was told through monuments in public spaces, “public monuments were meant to yield resolution and consensus, not to prolong conflict. The impulse behind the public monument was an impulse to mold history into its rightful pattern.”⁹⁵⁸ Savage is saying that monuments tend to indicate what has been *settled* in history. Initiatives to erect the first monuments in Belgrade in 1857, prompted lively public debates about what form the monuments should take, and who would be the most deserving of a monument.⁹⁵⁹ Monuments and public spaces in Serbia continue to generate vigorous discussions to present day, as in 2018 when a proposal was made to *honour* Slobodan Milošević with a monument in Belgrade.⁹⁶⁰ Remembrance in Serbia seems to be very much work in progress with few matters from the past *settled*, let alone by monuments. Is there a “rightful pattern” in Serbia, or is the official version of history constantly being reworked? Using a selection of Serbia’s First World War monuments, we examine the uncertainty of Serbian historical remembrance.

The *Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia*⁹⁶¹ has classified the protected memorials from the First World War in three groups: “cultural monuments of exceptional importance”, “cultural monuments of great importance”, and “cultural monuments of importance”.⁹⁶² The register contains a number but not all the monuments commemorating the First World War. There are only five cultural memorials related to the First World War in the first group, four being ossuaries — at Prnjavor, at Mt. Cer, a memorial complex Mačkov kamen in Crnča, a memorial

958 Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 4.

959 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 93-94.

960 Ivor Roberts, “The west must not abandon the Balkans to Russia’s embrace”, *The Guardian*, 5 April 2018 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/apr/05/slobodan-milosevic-serbia-russia-balkans?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other (accessed April 5, 2018). The proposal seems to have been shelved for now.

961 The word “spomenik”, i.e. monument in Serbian may denote a memorial, sculpture, building etc. It is not necessarily purpose-built but may acquire its status through history. The term was disputed from the outset, but it remained, see Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 94.

962 Visit to the Institute in November 2017, and correspondence 2017 – 2020. *Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia* <http://www.heritage.gov.rs/english/index.php> (accessed April 25, 2017).

ossuary-church in Lazarevac,⁹⁶³ and the mausoleum housing the tomb of the unknown soldier in Avala. It is worth noting that the “cultural monuments of exceptional importance” are all places of final rest of the fallen. The list has a variety of other monuments in descending order of importance, including family houses of military leaders, First World War personalities, purpose-built monuments such as the monument of gratitude to France. There are also churches, artistic monuments, military cemeteries, and ossuaries. A number of the monuments listed may only contain a memorial plaque, such as on the 13th century Monastery of Žiča, in the Municipality of Kraljevo, where one of the monastery buildings bears a plaque remembering the fallen in the First World War.⁹⁶⁴

In 2017, the central register — an extended list of monuments — did not have *all* the memorials and monuments, or memorial plaques in Serbia; there were monuments connected to the First World War without a plaque explaining the connection, that were not on the list. The existing registers go back to the 1970s but were not all properly dated, and the lists had not been updated.⁹⁶⁵ The monuments, including plaques, buildings, memorials, have not all been checked and confirmed as being monuments and memorials of the Great War.⁹⁶⁶ Maintenance of monuments in general, including those from WWI, should be under the responsibility of local authorities, although in reality the practice is different.⁹⁶⁷ The 2018 law on war memorials in Serbia, voted in on the historically meaningful date of 28 June,⁹⁶⁸ did not change the essence of the responsibility for war memorials but has introduced the concept of “the liberating wars of

963 Contrary to what could be expected, even though the Lazarevac ossuary-church dedicated to those fallen in the First World War, started to be built in 1921, it was only completed in socialist Yugoslavia in 1964, on the 50th anniversary of the start of the war, Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 331.

964 The *Institute's* list of WWI monuments.

965 The registers examined during a visit to the *Institute* on 20 November 2017.

966 From interviews with Nenad Lajbenšperger, a historian with the *Institute*.

967 Correspondence with N.L. 2017.

968 “Zakon o ratnim memorijalima: 50/2018-3” [“Law on War Memorials”], *Službeni glasnik*, 29 June 2018. <http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/zakon/2018/50/1/reg> (accessed March 31, 2020).

Serbia”.⁹⁶⁹ Without entering into details of the new legislation, it is relevant to note that the new law, and specifically its terminology, which implies that all Serbia’s wars were “liberating”, has been heavily criticised for imposing a “nationalist monopoly”, and for giving the power of deciding on monuments exclusively to a state-appointed board.⁹⁷⁰ The previously applicable laws on war memorials were focused on preserving the memorials related to the First and Second World Wars, while the new law extends this to the period between the Balkan Wars and the Kosovo War (1912 – 1999).



“Glory to the fallen heroes 1912 – 1918”, Žiča Monastery (April 2015).

969 “oslobadjajući ratovi Srbije”.

970 Marko Milosavljević, “Zakon o ratnim memorijalima u Srbiji: Nacionalistički monopol” [“Law on War Memorials in Serbia: Nationalist monopoly”]. *Dealing with the Past*, issue 11, 2018. http://www.dwp-balkan.org/bh/blog_one.php?cat_id=8&text_id=111 (accessed March 31, 2020).

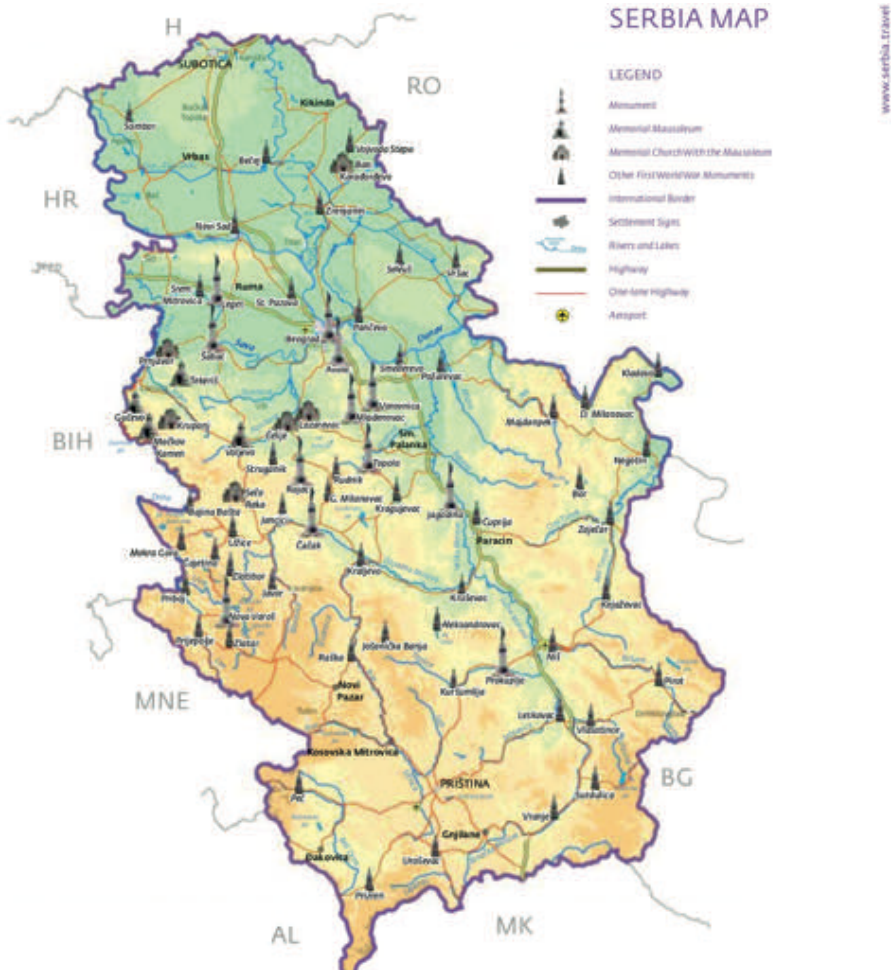
Since the new law has come into force recently, it is difficult to assess how much has changed on a practical level with regard to the maintenance of monuments as responsibilities have not yet shifted.⁹⁷¹ Among the listed protected monuments and memorials, some have a stronger connection to the Retreat than others, and it remains a matter of debate as to why a monument to the soldiers and civilians who participated in the Retreat was never built. There are theories, but no satisfactory explanation.⁹⁷²

We shall further examine a selection of First World War monuments in the territory of Serbia, that in our view exemplify different aspects of Serbian First World War memorialisation. *The Victor* (1928), is a monument to victory in the First World War, originally designed as a monument to the victory in the Balkan Wars, which at the time of its inauguration caused much argument because of its nakedness; the monument of gratitude to France (1930), is a rare example of a monument to another country; the tomb of the Unknown Hero⁹⁷³ (1938), is a typical monument, but in the Serbian case has an uncharacteristic background and location; the monument to the Defenders of Belgrade (1931), is a monument that includes an actual cannon; the monument known as *Milutin* (1931), in Kraljevo is a copy of the previously mentioned monument and is known for controversies regarding its location; the monument to Tsar Nicholas (2014), was a Russian gift; the monument to Gavrilo Princip (2015) is one of the latest arrivals in Belgrade; and the so-called *Watchtower* (year unknown), is a monument that may not be one at all, even though it is still used for commemoration ceremonies.

971 Correspondence with the Institute, April 2020.

972 In the interviews conducted, it has been suggested that the Retreat had been a disaster which no one wanted to memorialise.

973 In Serbian it is *Hero*, rather than *Soldier*: *Spomenik Neznanom junaku – Memorial of the Unknown Hero*.



Map of Serbia with major monuments from the First World War.⁹⁷⁴

The Victor — *Pobednik* is no. 30 overall on the Institute's list and no. 19 in the third category of *cultural monuments of importance*. The celebrated Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović (1883 – 1962), was commissioned to create a grand monument to victory after the Second Balkan War in 1913, that was going to be placed at Belgrade's central square, *Terazije*.⁹⁷⁵ The monument was planned as a fountain celebrating the Serbian victory in

974 Serbia Remembers 100 Years. First World War 1914 – 1918, Belgrade: National Tourism Organisation of Serbia, 2013.

975 Radović, 2014, 79. Radina Vučetić-Mladenović, "Pobeđeni *Pobednik*. Polemika uoči postavljanja Meštrovićevog spomenika" ["The Defeated Victor: The polemic prior to the inauguration of Meštrović's monument"] *"Godišnjak za društvenu istoriju (VI/2, 1999): 110–123.*

the Balkan wars and symbolising the liberation from the five centuries of Ottoman rule. The design for the fountain was a five-metre- high sculpture with elaborate sequences of masks and lions.⁹⁷⁶ The sculptor had been working on it for eight months when the war intervened, so the project could not be completed, and Meštrović, an Austro-Hungarian citizen, left Serbia, although he sent the central figure of the monument to be moulded in Prague.⁹⁷⁷ After the war, the location and the design of the sculpture became the subject of much public debate, with some claiming that it was more suitable for a sports monument, rather than commemorating a military victory. The fact that the sculpture was going to be a naked man without any ethnic symbols became the subject of many public arguments. It was polemicized in the press and divided the city into two camps: progressive intellectuals were in favour of the monument, and the citizens concerned about the morals of *womenfolk*, against it. The monument was criticised by the latter because of its nudity and (by default) its lack of national attire, while the Croatian ethnicity of the sculptor may also have played a part.⁹⁷⁸ Although the sculptor was against the change of location, *The Victor*, now renamed *Vesnik – Messenger*, was nevertheless inaugurated at the highest external wall of the *Kalemegdan* fortress. He was to be looking towards the confluence of the Sava and the Danube — former Austro-Hungarian territory — away from the city. The inauguration was on 7 October 1928, as part of the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the breakthrough of the Salonika Front, and the opening of the *Kalemegdan* fortress park.⁹⁷⁹ *The Victor* or *the Messenger*, is on a 14-metre-tall column, with a postament higher than it would have been in Terazije, raised the monument to over 17 metres. It is a bronze sculpture of a man holding a sword in his right hand and a hawk in his left.

976 Vučetić-Mladenović, 1999, 110.

977 Vučetić-Mladenović, 1999, 110.

978 Vučetić-Mladenović, 1999, 111-112. The polemic was recalled in the media following the controversy regarding the concept for the monument to the assassinated Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjić, see Biljana Srbljanović, “Strela u šupi” [“The arrow in the shed”], *Peščanik*, 23 October 2017 <https://pescanik.net/strela-u-supi/> (accessed May 20, 2018)

979 “Otvaranje parka u Gornjem Gradu” [“Opening of the park in the Upper Fort”] *Politika*, 8 October 1928, 4.

He was made taller not so that he would be seen, but because he would not be seen.⁹⁸⁰



The Victor facing away from Belgrade and Belgraders (April 2017)

According to the historian Radina Vučetić-Mladenović, the fact that *the Victor* was not placed in the main Belgrade square was a defeat of the Belgrade municipality and the modern spirit of the Belgraders.⁹⁸¹ Despite the inauspicious start, and almost *malgré lui*, *the Victor* — since its original name stuck — evolved as a symbol of Belgrade.⁹⁸² *The Victor* was again the focus of attention for Belgraders in relation to its recent removal from

980 Srbljanović, 2017.

981 Vučetić-Mladenović, 1999, 123.

982 A small statue of the *Victor* is awarded as the Serbian Oscar equivalent at the Belgrade Film Festival, FEST.

its location for renovation and cleaning. In the context of the continuing disagreement between the Belgrade authorities and the opposition parties on how best to preserve Belgrade's cultural heritage, the opposition invited Belgraders to take a picture with *the Victor* "as they might never see him again".⁹⁸³ The commotion surrounding the removal and the ensuing political arguments, 91 years after its inauguration, have reignited interest in the monument with media retelling the story of Meštrović's naked sculpture that was exiled from the centre of Belgrade in 1928.

The Monument of Gratitude to France, no. 6 on the Institute's list overall, and no. 1 in the category of *cultural monuments of great importance*, located at the *Kalemegdan* fortress, stands out in every way. A monument to another country is relatively rare, considering that mostly individuals, rather than countries, are honoured in this way.⁹⁸⁴ The initiative to erect a monument to France as a symbol of indebtedness for the support and aid given to Serbia during the war came from the Belgrade Municipal Council in 1921. In 1924, the association of former French students⁹⁸⁵ and the French Friendship Association came up with an ambitious project proposal that attracted substantial financial support. The location chosen was the fortress-park of *Kalemegdan*, at the site that had previously been occupied by the monument to Karadjordje, leader of the *First Serbian Rising*, erected in 1913 and destroyed by the Austro-Hungarian troops in 1915.⁹⁸⁶ In 1928, Kosta Kumanudi,⁹⁸⁷ the Belgrade Mayor and a former French student, made the controversial decision on the location of the monument to France, where it was expected that the monument to Karadjordje would be rebuilt.

983 "Pobednik skinut sa postolja, građani mogli da ga fotografišu" ["The Victor was removed from its pedestal, the citizens were able to photograph him"], *Danas*, 10 October 2019 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/pocelo-uklanjanje-pobednika-uzivo/> (accessed 15 October 2019). The renovated Victor was returned to its place on 14 February 2020, on the eve of the Serbian Statehood Day.

984 Stanislav Sretenović, "Le monument à la France à Belgrade. La mémoire de la Grande Guerre au service de l'action politique et diplomatique", *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 2012/3 (N° 115), 6.

985 These were young recruits sent to France during or after the First World War, with grants from the French government, the so-called *francuski djaci* [French students].

986 Sretenović, 2012, 7.

987 During the Second World War Kumanudi supported Serbian collaboration with the occupying Nazis and was sentenced as a Nazi collaborator after the war.

Stanislav Sretenović explains in his study of the subject: “It is possible to look for the answer in the official ideology which situated Karadjordje’s uprising in the continuity of the French Revolution, except that the French Revolution had produced the Republic and the “Serbian revolution” the national dynasty.”⁹⁸⁸ The project and its location were encouraged and supported by Emile Dard, a historian and French Ambassador to Belgrade since 1927; he was well-connected in Serbian political circles since before the war.⁹⁸⁹

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, established with great hopes and expectations only ten years previously, was not doing well. In 1928, the political situation in the kingdom was deteriorating. Increasingly acrimonious exchanges in the National Assembly resulted in insults and threats which came to a head on 20 June. Following a heated debate in the assembly on the extent of the Serbian sacrifice in the war,⁹⁹⁰ a deputy from Montenegro fired a hand-gun at his political opponents. He killed two Croatian deputies and wounded another two,⁹⁹¹ mortally wounding a fifth, who died from complications two months later.⁹⁹² The subsequent political crisis was followed by the dissolution of parliament and the proclamation of a dictatorship by the king in January 1929. King Aleksandar imposed *direct rule*, implementing administrative changes and changing the name of the country to Yugoslavia. The kingdom was in crisis, being led by a dictator, and needed Republican France, its most trusted wartime ally, to reaffirm its support.

The context for the inauguration of the monument was set for 11 November 1930. The choice of sculptor, Ivan Meštrović, was made by the Association

988 Sretenović, 2012, 8.

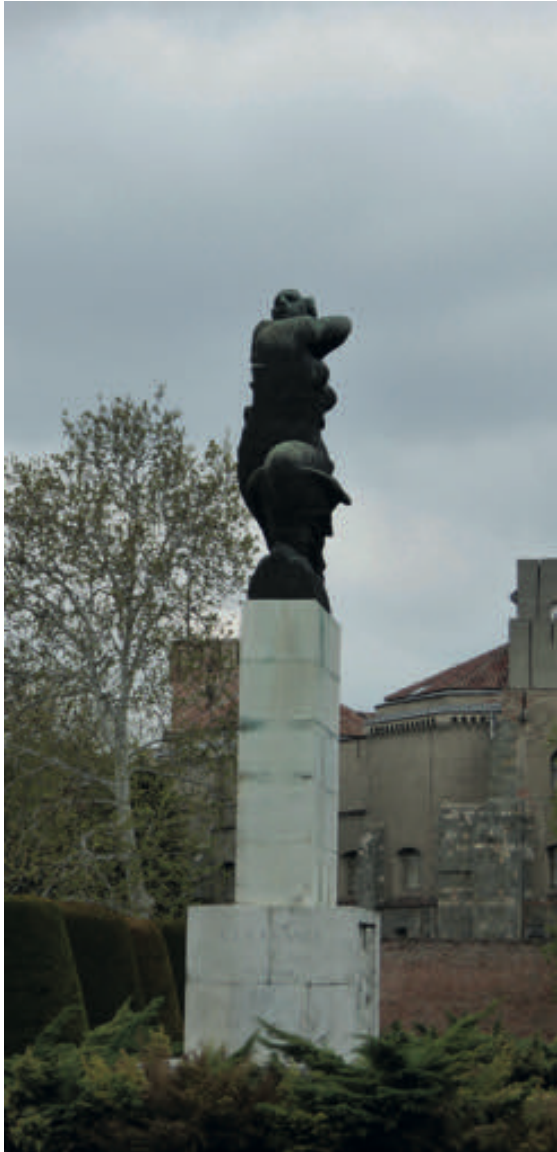
989 Sretenović, 2012, 5.

990 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 325.

991 Latinka Perović, “Ubistvo političkih predstavnika hrvatskog naroda u Narodnoj skupštini 20. juna 1928. godine” [“Assassination of Croatian Deputies in the National Assembly on 20 June 1928”], *YU historija* http://yuhistorija.com/serbian/jug_prva_txt01c2.html (accessed May 20, 2018).

992 The leader of the HSS (Croatian Peasants’ party) Stjepan Radić died as a result of complications two months later.

of the Friends of France and by Dard.⁹⁹³ The monument was to represent the strong and muscular figure of Marianne in movement, with a sword that was either drawn or about to be placed back in its sheath.



The Monument of Gratitude to France (April 2017).
The inscription on the front at the base of the monument reads *A LA FRANCE MCMXXX*

993 Sretenović, 2012, 9.

Dard felt he needed to explain the symbolism of the monument to the Serbian public and we find his statement on the front page of *Politika* on 9 November 1930: “The eyes of France are shining with the fury of battle but they are lifted towards the ideal of peace at the same time. The hand brandishes the murderous sword but is also ready to throw it behind in disdain. It is only like this that France wishes to be represented: ready for defence, ready for reconciliation.”⁹⁹⁴ Further symbolism was shown in the sculpted reliefs on the sides of the monument, on one side the nourishing France giving educational aid to Serbian students, and on the other, the combative France giving military aid, represented in the form of eight French and eight Serbian soldiers on the Salonika front.

As Sretenović points out, the commemoration, as well the initiative for the new building and location for the French legation came at a time when it was important for France to reconfirm its importance in a country where German influence was slowly on the rise. The new and elegant French legation with a view of the *Kalemegdan* park and of the monument, would be completed in 1933.⁹⁹⁵ The inauguration of the monument was held on 11 November 1930, as a grand celebration of Franco-Yugoslav friendship. In order to ensure its Yugoslav, rather than its Serbian character, French representatives, such as Marshal Franchet d’Espèrey and Louis Marin, president of the French *Association of the Friends of Yugoslavia*, who were known as *philoserbes*, were excluded.⁹⁹⁶

The arrival of the representatives of *les Poilus d’Orient* was followed by the official French delegation consisting of politicians, generals, admirals, deputies, senators and academics. The hosts decorated the streets in *tricolores* in different order, with Yugoslav and French flags intermingling, “visually reinforcing the alliance between the two

994 “Pred svečanost otkrivanja spomenika zahvalnosti Francuskoj” [“On the eve of the unveiling of the monument of gratitude to France”], *Politika*, 9 November 1930, 1-2.

995 Sretenović, 2012, 10.

996 Sretenović, 2012, 12. D’Espèrey, who initially expected to lead the French delegation was sent to the coronation of Haile Selassie in Ethiopia instead.

countries.”⁹⁹⁷ Enthusiastic crowds lined the streets cheering the French.⁹⁹⁸ Celebrations extended over three days, with visits to the temporary tomb of the unknown soldier, a night at the theatre with a suitable programme, and a further visit to the tomb of King Petar at the Oplenac Mausoleum.⁹⁹⁹



The back of the monument, in Serbian:

We love France as she has loved us 1914 – 1918 (April 2017).

France’s intention was to show its support for the kingdom, but not to be drawn into the Serbo-Croat conflict, or other internal problems of Yugoslavia. France also did not wish to flaunt its popularity in Belgrade, and the Belgrade diplomatic corps was not invited.¹⁰⁰⁰ The inauguration of the monument was a success, but the continuing friendship between Serbia and France was to be dealt a harsh blow with King Aleksandar’s assassination in Marseille in 1934, on his first visit to France after the war. A monument to the Kings Petar I and Aleksandar was erected in Paris in 1936, and a memorial to King Aleksandar in Marseille in 1938.¹⁰⁰¹

997 Sretenović, 2012, 12.

998 “Dan naše zahvalnosti Francuskoj” [“The day of our gratitude to France”], *Politika*, 12 November, 1930.

999 Sretenović, 2012, 11.

1000 Sretenović, 2012, 14.

1001 See, Matthew Graves, “Memory and Forgetting on the National Periphery: Marseille and the regicide of 1934”, *PORTAL Journal of Multidisciplinary International Studies* (Vol.7, no.1 January 2010) <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/portal/article/view/1291> (accessed May 20, 2018).

The Monument of Gratitude to France was not destroyed in the Second World War during the occupation of Belgrade and after the war was appreciated by the communists as an illustration of *jacobinisme*, according to Sretenović.¹⁰⁰² In 1999, the monument was covered in black as a protest against France's involvement in the NATO air strikes.¹⁰⁰³ Today, apart from being a site where 14 July is commemorated without much pomp,¹⁰⁰⁴ the monument is also used to express disapproval. On 28 April 2017, following the decision of the Colmar Court to set Ramush Haradinaj free, the association of families of those killed and kidnapped in Kosovo and Metohija between 1998 and 2000, once again draped the monument in black.¹⁰⁰⁵ The monument was restored between March and August 2018 to give it back its original appearance. The costs were shared between the Serbian Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Affairs (22 million dinars) and France (200,000 euros).¹⁰⁰⁶ The restoration of the monument was timed to create a suitable backdrop for the main public speeches during the visit of the French President Emmanuel Macron to Serbia. The visit was originally scheduled to take place on 5 December 2018, but had to be postponed because of the *Gilets jaunes* protests in France.¹⁰⁰⁷ The timing of the postponement was unfortunate, because the Serbian press and public were still reeling from what they saw as the Serbian "humiliation" on 11 November 2018. At the central centenary commemoration of the Armistice in Paris, President Vučić of Serbia was not seated with world leaders, which was experienced as a slap in the face

1002 Sretenović, 2012, 15.

1003 "La rénovation du monument de la reconnaissance à la France à Belgrade", *Le Souvenir Français*, 8 juin 2016 <http://le-souvenir-francais.fr/non-classe/la-renovation-du-monument-a-la-reconnaissance-de-france-a-belgrade/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1004 Sretenović, 2012, 15.

1005 "Spomenik zahvalnosti Francuskoj prekriven crnom tkaninom" ["Monument of Gratitude to France covered in black"], *N1 info*, 28 April 2017 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a245265/Spomenik-zahvalnosti-Francuskoj-prekriven-crnom.html> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1006 "Sporazum o obnovi Spomenika zahvalnosti Francuskoj" ["Agreement on the renovation of the Monument of Gratitude to France"], *N1 info*, 13 November 2017 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a341719/Sporazum-o-obnovi-Spomenika-zahvalnosti-Francuskoj.html> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1007 "Vučić: Odložena poseta Makrona, imamo i loše vesti iz Prištine" ["Vučić: Macron's visit postponed and we also have bad news from Priština"] *N1 Info*, 3 December 2018 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a440975/Vucic-Odložena-poseta-Makrona.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

for Serbia. The gist of the editorials can be summarised as: *After we suffered so much during the First World War, here is how they repay us.*¹⁰⁰⁸ The day after the Armistice ceremony in Paris, the Monument of Gratitude to France was vandalised when the text on the pedestal was sprayed with black paint.¹⁰⁰⁹ The situation was exacerbated when the president of Kosovo, a country that Serbia does not recognise, but considers a breakaway province, was seated in a more favourable position. President Macron's visit in the summer of 2019, was meant to atone for several major French sins in Serbian eyes. Aside from the seating arrangement fiasco at the Armistice centenary, France had recognised Kosovo as an independent state, the French court in Colmar had rejected Mr Haradinaj's extradition to Serbia in 2017,¹⁰¹⁰ and President Macron made it clear that Serbia's EU membership would have to wait until the EU had finished carrying out major reforms.¹⁰¹¹ All of this made it imperative that the visit, scheduled immediately after Bastille Day, be seen as a great success. After a series of official meetings and ceremonial duties, including the laying of wreaths at the tomb of Milunka Savić,¹⁰¹² a heroine of the Great War, and at the *Monument of the Defenders of Belgrade*, President Macron was to speak and address the people of Belgrade in front of the Monument of Gratitude to France. To everyone's absolute surprise, he spoke in Serbian, or rather, he read his speech in Serbian. After thanking the gathered crowds and his hosts, he said: "You are showing us that the message written on this monument, *We love France the way she has loved us* still lives, even 100 years later. It is my turn to tell you in the name of my country, France loves you,

1008 Miloš Ković, "Poslednji šamar u Parizu" ["The last slap in Paris"], *Politika*, 7 December 2018 <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/417157/Pogledi/Poslednji-samar-u-Parizu> (accessed May 28, 2019).

1009 "Oskrnavljen spomenik zahvalnosti Francuskoj na Kalemegdanu" ["Monument of gratitude to France in Kalemegdan vandalised"] *Telegraf*, 13 November 2018 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/3007277-oskrnavljen-spomenik-zahvalnosti-francuskoj-na-kalemegdanu-foto> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1010 "Oslobodjen Ramuš Haradinaj" ["Ramuš Haradinaj freed"] *B92*, 27 April 2017 https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=04&dd=27&nav_category=640&nav_id=1254521 (accessed May 20, 2018).

1011 Michael Peel, "Macron warns against hasty EU enlargement", *Financial Times*, 17 May 2018.

1012 "Unuka Milunke Savić sa Makronom" ["Milunka Savić's grand-daughter with Macron"] *N1 Info*, 15 July 2019 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a500053/Unuka-Milunke-Savic-sa-Makronom.html> (accessed July 30, 2019).

the way you have loved her. France knows what she owes to the martyred and brave Serbia in the Great War. What she owes to her soldiers who have fallen so that we may live in freedom. France will never forget the sacrifice of the Serbian people, the horrific suffering, the blood of her sons and daughters, spilled jointly with ours, the tears of mothers, the sobs of fathers, cold, hunger, exile ... enduring will for survival.”¹⁰¹³ The purpose of the speech seemed to be to appease the Serbian public — and the crowds received it well. President Macron’s PR touch could not be faulted. The subject he referred to was what he knew the Serbs cared about more than anything — the past, and not just any past — the Great War past.

The Monument to the Unknown Hero, Mt. Avala (511m), 17 km from Belgrade, is no.3 on the list of *cultural monuments of exceptional importance.*



The Monument to the Unknown Hero, Mt. Avala. (Photo courtesy of Fabian Vendrig, July 2017.)

1013 “Pokušaj da se dirne u srce srpskog naroda: Šta je značio Makronov govor na srpskom, kakav do sada nije zabeležen” [“Attempt to tug at the heartstrings of the Serbian nation: What did Macron’s unprecedented speech in Serbian mean”] *Blic*, 15 July 2019 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/svet/pokusaj-da-dirne-u-srce-srpskog-naroda-sta-je-znacio-makronov-govor-na-srpskom-kakav/sr4k1k9> (accessed July 30, 2019).

Contrary to other countries such as France, Britain, Belgium, and Italy, there was no elaborate procedure to find an unknown soldier — he was already *identified as unknown*, so to speak, by the enemy. There was a grave on Mt. Avala with an inscription in German: *Ein Unbekannter Serbischer Soldat*.¹⁰¹⁴ He had been killed by a grenade in 1915 and buried in its crater. After the war, it was established that he was definitely a Serbian soldier by his uniform, the remnants of his equipment and boots, and the type of bullets that had remained in his hand. His enemies had marked his grave, but no identifying details were found on him. In 1922, on the initiative of a local association, a monument financed by voluntary contributions was erected to symbolise all the soldiers fallen in the war. It was a small memorial fountain in the shape of a pyramid, built at the foot of Mt. Avala, which first housed the tomb of the unknown soldier. After its consecration on 1 June 1922,¹⁰¹⁵ the monument became a site of commemoration and pilgrimage by veterans and delegations.¹⁰¹⁶ The small pyramid was meant to be a *placeholder*, a temporary monument until a grander one could be erected. The same year, a competition was announced for a design that would befit a monument of national importance. Numerous contributions were received but none were assessed as appropriate and the selection was postponed. The monument was originally going to be a *Vidovdan Temple* — referencing the Kosovo battle that took place on *Vidovdan*, St Vitus' Day, 28 June. However, it was soon decided that the mausoleum should be more *Yugoslav* in character, rather than exclusively Serbian. This decision, as Manojlović Pintar puts it, “marked an ideological transition” towards a more inclusive Yugoslav narrative.¹⁰¹⁷ When finance proved difficult, King Aleksandar funded the monument himself. He chose the sculptor and the location. The choice of sculptor again fell on Ivan Meštrović.

1014 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 227. Also, “Spomenik neznanom junaku na Avali” [“Monument to the unknown hero in Avala”], documentary film, *Zastava film*, 2005. YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UR-slyAhjcE> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1015 Tijana Borić, “Avala: From a symbolic topos of Serbia to the monument of Yugoslavia”, *Visual Arts and Music Vol.3* (No. 2, 2017), 81.

1016 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 228.

1017 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 232.

Although the mausoleum too was going to be erected in *Kalemegdan*, the king was adamant that it should be on Avala — the people had already shown their preference by visiting the temporary monument in large numbers. In Allied countries, the tomb of the unknown soldier is usually centrally located in the capital. However, all such locations in Belgrade were linked to important events in Serbian history, and with the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in crisis since the murders in the Assembly in June 1928, and the dictatorship of January 1929, the unknown soldier's monument would have to be Yugoslav, not Serbian.¹⁰¹⁸

What was also unusual about the location on the peak of Mt Avala was that it was already a site of an ancient monument. The *Žrnov* citadel, which may have dated from the Roman times, was also known as *Porča's* town, reportedly named after a Turkish outlaw in Ottoman times.¹⁰¹⁹ The elevation was a perfect position for controlling the access roads to Belgrade and was used as such by the Hungarians and the Ottomans, and it was the site of 12th to 15th century ruined fortifications.¹⁰²⁰ A topos of Avala featured in Serbian epic folk tradition and, as noted by Tijana Borić in her study, Avala had an “important place in the patriotic topography of the Serbian people.”¹⁰²¹ The ambitious plan to place a *Yugoslav* mausoleum of an unknown soldier in such a traditional Serbian landscape meant changing the identity of the site.

In 1934, before building of the mausoleum could begin, the ancient fortress had to be destroyed. On 18 April 1934, the old citadel was demolished in an explosion. *Politika* newspaper reported the day after: “the stones that had been tightly built, grey from the passing of time, strong and hefty, flew like feathers all around Avala. (...) Since yesterday,

1018 Aleksandar Ignjatović, “From Constructed Memory to Imagined National Tradition: The Tomb of the Unknown Yugoslav Soldier (1934 – 1938)”, *The Slavonic and East European Review* (Vol. 88. No 4 October 2010), 627.

1019 Borić, 2017, 76.

1020 Hajna Tucić, *Spomenik Neznamom junaku na Avali* [Monument to the Unknown Soldier in Avala], (leaflet) Cultural Preservation Heritage Institute of Belgrade, 2008 http://beogradskonasledje.rs/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/Spomenik_neznamom_junaku.pdf (accessed May 20, 2018).

1021 Borić, 2017, 76.

Porča's town is no more. In its place there will be a monument to the Unknown Hero, to be erected by His Majesty the King."¹⁰²² The report of this cultural destruction is shocking, and reportedly, many were opposed to the destruction of Porča's town.¹⁰²³ However, as noted by Aleksandar Ignjatović in his study, "the ceremony was aimed at construction, not destruction. The act of demolition reflected the essence of the cult of the Unknown Hero: the nation's mission was to overcome separate South Slav ethnic traditions and identities."¹⁰²⁴ The mountain was a perfect site to incarnate the *imagined natural* environment of the South Slavs, an identity that would transcend the Serbian setting. An extensive programme of forestation of the area was implemented, in order to make it suitably *primordial*. Since the right trees could not be found locally "representing the 'authentic' Yugoslav identity", saplings were imported from Germany.¹⁰²⁵

Ivan Meštrović's design was inspired by Persian royal mausoleums, specifically the Tomb of Cyrus in Pasargadae.¹⁰²⁶ Meštrović's majestic work, made entirely of black granite, is, in fact, an enormous sarcophagus, which rests on a five-tier pedestal, representing five centuries of Ottoman occupation of Serbia. The roof of the mausoleum is seemingly supported¹⁰²⁷ by eight caryatids in national dress from different parts of Yugoslavia,¹⁰²⁸ standing in *contrapposto* pose.

1022 "Stari Porčin grad na Avali srušen je juče uz strašnu detonaciju" ["Old Porča's Town on Avala destroyed yesterday in a terrible blast"], *Politika*, 19 April 1934, 10.

1023 Ignjatović, 2010, 646.

1024 Ignjatović, 2010, 647.

1025 Ignjatović, 2010, 635.

1026 Tucić, 2008, 2.

1027 Ignjatović points out that the caryatids were placed at the end of the construction, Ignjatović, 2010, 642.

1028 From Bosnia, Montenegro, Dalmatia, Croatia, Slovenia, Vojvodina, Serbia and South Serbia.



The Tomb of the Unknown Hero, caryatids (photo courtesy of Fabian Vendrig, July 2017).

The caryatids, imposing yet impassive, all look alike, and are meant to represent the national unity of the kingdom, as well as “national

vitality and determination” according to a documentary on the subject.¹⁰²⁹ Originally, an obelisk engraved with the dates of the (Serbian) victories in WWI was going to be placed at the access to the monument, but this idea was abandoned.¹⁰³⁰ The choice of granite was between quarries in Serbia, Slovenia and Herzegovina. The Jablanica quarry, from Herzegovina, was chosen, not just for quality, but also for ideological reasons.¹⁰³¹

The first stone was laid on 28 June 1934 — St Vitus’ Day — by the king himself. However, King Aleksandar never got to see the completed monument because he was assassinated in Marseille four months later. The monument was inaugurated on 28 June 1938, when, in the presence of the highest officials of the kingdom, the remains of the unknown soldier were reburied under the monument as aircraft from the Yugoslav air force flew over the monument and dropped flowers.¹⁰³²

The mausoleum survived the Second World War in Yugoslavia (1941 – 1945), and NATO air strikes in 1999, that destroyed the nearby television tower, scarring the granite. Previously, during the Tito years, although the monument had lost its “constructed” importance, it remained a site where school groups visited and foreign dignitaries laid their wreaths. The fact that it was an unknown *Serbian* soldier, rather than a Yugoslav one, was not mentioned. The monument returned to the limelight in 1987, when Slobodan Milošević preferred it to Tito’s tomb for a commemorative occasion.¹⁰³³ Today, it is used for a variety of commemorative dates. Apart from a commemoration event on 11 November, recognized as Armistice Day in Serbia since 2012, and on 15 February, Serbian Statehood Day, it was also used on other occasions. On 23 April 2017, the day celebrated

1029 “Spomenik neznanom junaku na Avali” [“Monument to the unknown hero in Avala”], documentary film, *Zastava film*, 2005. YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URslyAhjcE> (accessed May 20, 2018)

1030 Ignjatović, 2010, 647.

1031 Ignjatović, 2010, 648.

1032 “U veličanstveni granitni hram na vrhu Avale položene su juče kosti neznanog junaka” [“The remains of the unknown soldier were laid in the magnificent granite temple yesterday”] *Politika*, 29 June 1938, 5.

1033 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 235.

as the *Serbian Army Day*, the Chief of Staff of the Serbian Army General Diković laid a wreath at the memorial and referred in his speech to the “brave rebels from 1815 who paved a way for the Serbian people”.¹⁰³⁴ The fact that the commemoration was carried out at a monument unconnected to the date known as the *Second Serbian Rising* and that the monument had been deliberately built as Yugoslav, did not bother anyone.

The concept of the tomb of the unknown soldier began with the Great War — in representing no one in particular, it was meant to represent everyone.¹⁰³⁵ The particularity of the Serbian Tomb of the Unknown Hero is that this was not really the case — the tomb could not represent the new kingdom as ostensibly imagined, despite the efforts. The remains of an ancient medieval and Ottoman citadel were demolished to erect a memorial for the soldiers fallen in the *Serbian wars* — the years engraved on the granite are 1912 – 1918, meaning that the monument was also to include those who fell in the Balkan wars.¹⁰³⁶ Yet, the monument was inaugurated as a Yugoslav royal monument with the aspiration of embodying the Yugoslav identity of the kingdom. After the Second World War, the monument’s role was reduced, King Aleksandar’s name was removed, and the flag flown changed. Today, in another regime, under another flag, with King Aleksandar’s inscription restored, the monument is used for commemorations, as we have seen, even for the events that predate its original purpose. Despite its unlikely story, this eighty-plus-year-old memorial, built on a site that goes back to Roman times, housing the tomb of an unknown soldier first buried by his enemies, with initially *constructed* Yugoslav identity, is still fit for Serbian commemorative purposes.

1034 23 April is the date of the Second Serbian Uprising in 1815 and is celebrated as the Serbian Army Day since 2012. L.L. “Diković položio venac na spomenik Neznamom junaku” [“Diković lays a wreath at the Monument to the Unknown Soldier”], *Politika*, 23 April 2017 <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/379036/Drustvo/Dikovica-polozio-venac-na-Spomenik-neznamom-junaku> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1035 Gillis, 1996, 11.

1036 The author was at the mausoleum as a school pupil on at least three commemorative occasions. The dates, which puzzled us as children, were never explained.

Within the **Belgrade New Cemetery (*Novo groblje*) monuments**, jointly listed under the category, *other cultural monuments of importance*, is a **monument to the 1915 Defenders of Belgrade**. These defenders have a mythical status in the Serbian history of the First World War largely owing to the speech given by the legendary commander of the Defence of Belgrade, Major Gavrilović:¹⁰³⁷ “Soldiers! Heroes! The supreme command has erased our regiment from its records. Our regiment has been sacrificed for the honour of Belgrade and the motherland. Therefore, you no longer need to worry about your lives: they no longer exist. So, forward to glory! For king and country! Long live the King, Long live Belgrade!”¹⁰³⁸

The creation of the monument is detailed in Danilo Šarenac’s study *Cannon, Soldier, Remembrance*. In 1923, a committee was formed with a view to having a monument dedicated to the Defenders of Belgrade. The initial idea was to pay tribute to the fallen soldiers by building an orphanage that would take care of war orphans. This was an innovative and practical idea that did not prevail, and a traditional monument was erected in 1931.¹⁰³⁹ The various associations that were involved in the discussions and campaigned for the funds to be collected all had their own initiatives and ideas. Once the *Association of Reserve Officers and Veterans* seized the project, led by the influential Milan Radosavljević who was well-networked in royal circles, it started to take shape.¹⁰⁴⁰ The association’s idea was to have a monument on top of the ossuary in Belgrade’s New Cemetery — the ossuary had been there since 1927 and needed enlargement. The monument would be of a Serbian soldier at whose feet would be a cannon and a bronze eagle. A number of artists were involved in the design and creation of the monument because it

1037 Major Gavrilović’s house in Čačak is no.25 on the Institute’s list. Major Gavrilović survived WWI. Another, modern monument to the Defenders of Belgrade was erected in 1988 near the Danube quay where the river defences were positioned in WWI. The speech, often performed at WWI commemorations, is inscribed on that monument.

1038 Major Dragutin Gavrilović, “U odbranu Beograda” [“In the Defence of Belgrade”], in Branislav Nušić, *Retorika – Nauka o besedništvu [Rhetoric – The Art of Speaking]* (Beograd: Geca Kon, 1938), 510.

1039 Šarenac, 2014, 179.

1040 Šarenac, 2014, 180.

had several parts. In the end, as Šarenac notes, only the sculptor Roman Verhovski was given credit at its inauguration.¹⁰⁴¹ The remains from several military cemeteries in the Belgrade area, as well as the remains of the soldiers who died in the Balkan wars were eventually collected in this ossuary.¹⁰⁴² Overall, it is estimated that the remains of some 5,000 soldiers, mostly killed in 1915, but also in other wars, were placed in the ossuary.¹⁰⁴³ The monument is 18 metres tall, including the 4.20 metre-tall soldier, holding a 9-metre-tall flag.

In every way, this is an oversized portrayal of a defender of Belgrade, young, strong and in full uniform, which was not representative of the 1915 Defenders of Belgrade, many of whom were soldiers of the third ban, older and often wearing only part of a uniform.¹⁰⁴⁴

The symbolism of the monument was described in the invitation of the Association to King Aleksandar, as Šarenac explains: “The highly held flagstaff symbolises the state. The flagstaff grows from a rock, from “the strength of the people”, and the soldier holds it close to his heart. The cross on top of the flag is the symbol of the suffering of the nation in the war.”¹⁰⁴⁵ The cannon at the foot of the base of the monument was an actual *Schneider* mountain cannon which had been the favourite Serbian artillery piece until the Retreat, and its improved version was used at the Salonika front. In this way, the Serbian artillery — and the French cannon — were acknowledged as contributors to victory, although the 1915 battle for Belgrade had been lost. Despite its name and its original commemoration purpose, the monument really celebrates the final 1918 victory.¹⁰⁴⁶

1041 Šarenac, 2014, 181.

1042 Šarenac, 2014, 182.

1043 Šarenac, 2014, 187.

1044 Šarenac, 2014, 187.

1045 Šarenac, 2014, 183.

1046 Šarenac, 2014, 182.



Monument to the Defenders of Belgrade (April 2015).



The Monument to the Defenders of Belgrade, detail (April 2015).

There are other motifs on the monument such as the beaten enemies with broken flag staffs, and the black eagle being defeated by the white eagle. According to Šarenac's research, the artist's intention was to have the black eagle as the largest in Europe, and to show it as defeated but still alive, as a symbol of continuing danger.¹⁰⁴⁷

The ceremony of the consecration of the ossuary and the unveiling of the monument were held on the traditional commemoration date for the Great War, on 11 November 1931, unconnected with the 1915 defence of Belgrade. The event, extensively covered in *Politika*, started with memorial services at the allied cemeteries, then the main ceremony was held at the monument.¹⁰⁴⁸ The ceremony was attended by the king and queen, the prime minister, a large number of officials, diplomats, representatives of various veterans' associations, with the religious ceremony performed by the Patriarch of the Serbian Orthodox Church. Families of the fallen soldiers were also in attendance. Following the memorial service, wreaths

1047 Šarenac, 2014, 185.

1048 "Svečano osvećenje ratničke kosturnice i spomenika braniocima Beograda" ["The ceremony of the consecration of the soldiers' ossuary and the monument to the defenders of Belgrade"] *Politika*, 12 November 1931, 3.

were laid, gun salutes fired, and the national anthem played. Speeches were given by a representative of the Association of Reserve Officers and Veterans, and by the Belgrade mayor.



The Monument to the Defenders of Belgrade, the *Schneider* cannon (April 2015).

The honour of the final speech on that day was granted to Étienne Laurent, chair of the Belgrade branch of the *Poilus d'Orient*: "I believe it is important for a French voice to be heard here today next to the monument to the heroes fallen for the defence of Belgrade. Allow an old warrior to relive his memories and to remember how France, his country, was present in Belgrade as the enemy grenades were falling on both sides of the Sava and the Danube and turning it into rubble. The French sons fought here with you, shoulder to shoulder, just like at the Salonika Front. (...) A young officer, lieutenant Courtier (...) fell on the bank of the Danube in Serbian uniform saying these words: "I am dying for my two countries, France and Serbia."" After the ceremony at the monument a memorial service was held at the Jewish cemetery.¹⁰⁴⁹

Today, the monument to the Defenders is increasingly popular as the First World War commemoration site, and was visited by President Macron on the occasion of his visit to Belgrade in July 2019. The monument was

1049 *Politika* 12 November 1931, 3.

also the site of the main commemorative event on 11 November 2018 with speeches, dramatic and musical performances.¹⁰⁵⁰

On the Institute's list, among the *other cultural monuments with memorials of importance* is the **Kraljevo town square with the monument to Serbian soldiers**. This particular monument is a copy of the monument to the defenders of Belgrade without the cannon and the eagle. This was a relatively common practice to avoid the cost of a new mould.¹⁰⁵¹ The construction of the monument was initiated by the local veterans' association. When the location of the monument in Kraljevo was contested, this resulted in a lack of contributions. The site dispute seemed to have had a commercial aspect: the town centre was used as a market — the market would have to move to the outskirts of the town — and with the space taken by the monument, the tavernkeepers feared that the monument would be robbing them of their best customers — farmers with ready cash after the market closed.¹⁰⁵²

Following the final decision regarding the site, a number of citizens refused to continue with donations so the names of the fallen soldiers were not engraved in its base and the monument was never finished.¹⁰⁵³ Nevertheless, this monument was placed in the Kraljevo town square where it stayed — for a while. The monument survived the Second World War when the square acquired a new name — *Marshall Tito Square*. With the monument presumed incompatible with the new name of the square, on a symbolic date of 1 May 1960, it was moved to the Kraljevo cemetery.

1050 For a complete list of all Armistice Day ceremonies in 2018, see "Obeležen Dan primirja u Prvom svetskom ratu" ["Armistice Day marked"] *Vojska Srbije*, 11 November 2018 http://www.vs.rs/sr_lat/vesti/4BA8BF07E5AF11E8A50F0050568F5424/obelezhen-dan-primirja-u-prvom-svetskom-ratu (accessed November 12, 2018).

1051 Šarenac, 2014, 181.

1052 Vojkan Trifunović, "Ko je 'Milutin'?" ["Who is 'Milutin'?"] *Krug Portal*, s.d. <http://www.krug.rs/kao-da-je-bilo-nekad/725-ko-je-milutin.html> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1053 Šarenac, 2014, 181. In the article "Unfinished monument to fallen soldiers from Kraljevo", *Politika* from 8 October 1937, on page 9, explains that after the town conflict about the location, dissatisfied citizens refuse to contribute the names of soldiers that should be placed on the postament.

Despite many protests, mostly local, it stayed at the cemetery for over twenty years.



The *Milutin* a.k.a *Milojko* monument, in the centre of Kraljevo (April 2015).

Eventually, a referendum was held in Kraljevo to decide whether it should be brought back to the town centre. This was a highly unusual process for the time and the circumstances. The referendum result was a resounding “yes” and the monument was brought back to the town square and re-inaugurated on 29 November 1982.¹⁰⁵⁴ According to Kraljevo locals we interviewed about the matter, the monument was originally nicknamed *Milojko*, a common Serbian name. Nowadays, the monument is commonly and affectionately referred to as *Milutin*, most likely after the hero of the cult novel by Danko Popović, *Book About Milutin* published in 1985. As previously mentioned, the book describes the tragic life of a Serbian peasant who fights in the Balkan wars, the First World War, survives the retreat across Albania, then the Second World War, and ends up dying in a communist prison.¹⁰⁵⁵ The official name of the monument is the *Monument to the Serbian Soldier* and the official name of the square is the *Square of Serbian Soldiers*.¹⁰⁵⁶

The connection between the book and the name of the monument was not confirmed by all Kraljevo sources. The fact that it is a copy of the monument to the Belgrade defenders of 1915, did not appear to be widespread knowledge.

There are many other notable monuments on the Institute’s list, but there are also a few that are not, and yet deserve our attention because they also tell part of the story of Serbia’s WWI monuments. One of the latest arrivals among the monuments in Belgrade is a **monument to Tsar Nicholas II**, unveiled on 16 November 2014.¹⁰⁵⁷ Tsar Nicholas is celebrated for having come to Serbia’s rescue in the wake of the Austro-Hungarian

1054 It is well worth noting the parallel symbolism of the dates, 1 May was International Workers’ Day and 29 November Republic Day in the Socialist Yugoslavia, so neither was connected to the First World War.

1055 Danko Popović, *Knjiga o Milutinu* (Belgrade: Književne novine, 1985).

1056 *Trg srpskih ratnika*.

1057 It was set up on 13 October 2014 but inaugurated on 16 November 2014. See “Spomenik caru Nikolaju postavljen u Devojačkom parku” [“The Monument to Tsar Nicholas placed in the Devojački Park”], *Studio B* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zBGAEfROI8> (accessed May 20, 2018).

declaration of war in 1914, and to have intervened in 1915 with the Allies to provide urgent provisions to stranded Serbian troops on the Albanian coast. Russia paid the highest price for its entry into war: conceivably there would have been no October Revolution without the disastrous participation of Russia in the First World War.¹⁰⁵⁸



The monument to Nicholas II as it was being set up, 13 October 2014.¹⁰⁵⁹

While this is a matter of historical interpretation, the Serbian governments since 2012 have had a strong pro-Russian stance which has been felt in the form of an increasing Russian political and cultural influence. The memorialisation of Tsar Nicholas in 2014 fundamentally reflects the current political interests. The sculpture — over 7-metres-high and around 50 tons in weight — was a gift from the Russian Federation and at its inauguration the Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić said that “Belgrade [was] being

1058 Reportedly, Nikola Pašić’s dying wish in 1926 was for his savings to go towards a monument to Tsar Nicholas II.

1059 Photograph from “Postavljen spomenik caru Nikolaju” [“The monument to Tsar Nicholas in place”], *In4S*, 13 October 2014 <https://www.in4s.net/postavljen-spomenik-caru-nikolaju/?lang=lat> (accessed May 20, 2018).

given another new symbol of an old friendship, a place where citizens would meet, gather and be reminded of the values of common history.”¹⁰⁶⁰ This idealised view of what the purpose of such a monument — or indeed any monument — should be, is naïve, particularly considering the location of the monument on a busy thoroughfare.¹⁰⁶¹ However, the speech echoes the desire to present a justification for present action — closer relationship with Russia — through a perceived repayment of a historical debt.

The location of the monument is more than just a nod to the past since it is on the site where the Russian legation used to be at the time of the Great War¹⁰⁶² — it is a kind of *hommage* to imagined historical continuity. The monument is also located across from the office of the president of Serbia, and close to several other government buildings. In a *Belgrade Television* report on the placing of the monument, the comment was that the Russian Tsar will not only dominate the site, but will also “be carefully watching the highest state institutions”.¹⁰⁶³ The location and the timing of the inauguration of the monument are unlikely to be coincidental. In political terms, the motives for such memorialisation could range from diplomatic to pragmatic: Russia is projecting its soft power in Serbia through the donation of the monument, while Serbia, by accepting the gift and celebrating the occasion, is sending a message to the EU that Brussels is not the only capital that Belgrade is looking towards.

Another recent monument which is not on the Institute’s list is the **monument to Gavrilo Princip**. On 28 June 2015,¹⁰⁶⁴ a statue of Gavrilo Princip was unveiled in Belgrade by the Serbian President Tomislav

1060 “Nikolić otkrio spomenik Caru Nikolaju” [“Nikolić unveils a monument to Tsar Nicholas”] *Blic*, 16 November 2014 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/beograd/nikolic-otkrio-spomenik-caru-nikolaju/vfs0xv8> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1061 Incidentally in *King Milan Street*, whose politics, as mentioned, were pro-Austrian.

1062 *In4S*, 13 October 2014.

1063 “Spomenik caru Nikolaju postavljen u Devojačkom parku” [“The monument to Tsar Nicholas placed in the Devojački park”] *Studio B*, 13 October 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zBGAEfROI8> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1064 “Monument to Gavrilo Princip unveiled in Belgrade”, *B92*, 29 June 2015 https://www.b92.net/eng/news/society.php?yyyy=2015&mm=06&dd=29&nav_id=94588 (accessed April 4, 2018).

Nikolić, and Milorad Dodik, leader of Republika Srpska. The monument is a copy of the monument to Princip inaugurated in East Sarajevo in Republika Srpska the previous year,¹⁰⁶⁵ and was a gift from Republika Srpska to Serbia.



The arrival of the monument to Gavrilo Princip in Belgrade, 26 June 2015.¹⁰⁶⁶

At the unveiling, President Nikolić was unequivocal in his remarks: “Gavrilo Princip was a hero, he was a symbol of an idea of liberation. Others can think whatever they want.”¹⁰⁶⁷ These remarks were followed by others, on a seemingly unrelated subject — Srebrenica. The subject of Srebrenica was on the mind of the commemorating politicians who attended the inauguration of the monument to Princip. Not only did Christopher Clark mention it in his Introduction to *Sleepwalkers*,¹⁰⁶⁸ but

1065 The rival Bosnian Serb commemorations of the beginning of WWI were mentioned in chapter 1.

1066 “Postavljen spomenik Gavrilu Principu u Belgradu” [“The monument to Gavrilo Princip placed in Belgrade”], *N1*, 26 June 2015 <http://rs.n1info.com/Vesti/a72291/Postavljen-spomenik-Gavrilu-Principu-u-Beogradu.html> (accessed June 30, 2016)

1067 Marija Ristić, “Serbia Unveils Monument to Gavrilo Princip”, *Balkan Insight*, 29 June 2015 <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/06/29/serbia-reveals-monument-to-gavrilo-princip/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1068 “Since Srebrenica and the siege of Sarajevo, it has become harder to think of Serbia as the mere object or victim of great power politics and easier to conceive of Serbian nationalism as an historical force in its own right.”, Clark, 2013, xxvi.

a couple of weeks before the unveiling, the United Kingdom announced a resolution on Srebrenica in the UN, on the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of the massacres.¹⁰⁶⁹ Bosnian Serb General Ratko Mladić and a number of other military and civilian leaders were charged with the 1995 Srebrenica mass killings of more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys, tried, and found guilty. However, the ICTY conviction for genocide¹⁰⁷⁰ has been denied by Serbian governments since 2012.¹⁰⁷¹ By using the occasion of the inauguration of the Princip monument to reiterate a public rejection about Srebrenica being a crime of genocide, Nikolić was demonstrating again how a seemingly unrelated commemorative event is used to *frame* a current issue, as if they were related. We consider this to be another instance of *historical frame switching*.¹⁰⁷² Nikolić then continued to list other instances in history where Serbs were *victimised*, implying that the draft resolution on Srebrenica was also an insult to the Serbian victims of the Second World War camps in Croatia. Returning to Princip and his comrades, Nikolić quoted Ivo Andrić, Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1961, who called Princip and his comrades “rebel angels”.¹⁰⁷³ Dodik’s speech reiterated that Princip was a symbol of “the fight for freedom and unity of the Serbian people”, that “we must reject all attacks facing the Serbian people” before returning in his speech to the resolution on Srebrenica.¹⁰⁷⁴

1069 Daria Sito-Sucic, “Britain drafts U.N. resolution on Srebrenica genocide”, *Reuters*, 9 June 2015 <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-bosnia-srebrenica-britain/britain-drafts-u-n-resolution-on-srebrenica-genocide-idUKKBN0OP1I620150609> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1070 *ICTY remembers: The Srebrenica Genocide (1995-2015)* <http://www.icty.org/specials/srebrenica20/index.html> (accessed May 20, 2018)

1071 Iva Martinović, “Ta negirana reč genocid” [“The denied genocide word”], *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 12 July 2019 <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/srebrenica-genocid-srbija-negiranje/30052623.html> (accessed July 31, 2019).

1072 Ivan Čolović termed this phenomenon “parasitic memory”, see Ivan Čolović, “Parazitska sećanja”, [“Parasitic memory”] *Peščanik*, 29 August 2019 <https://pescanik.net/parazitska-secanja/> (accessed May 10, 2020). We use the term *historical frame switching* as more encompassing and aggressive.

1073 A play entitled “Rebel Angels” was staged in Andrićgrad, Republika Srpska on 28 June 2014. At the end of the play, “Princip” is tied to a burning cross which he then carries. “Pobunjeni andjeli” [“Rebel Angels”] *YouTube, Radio Televizija Republike Srpske*, 29 June 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjQu444c6bo> (accessed 30 June 2015).

1074 “Monument to Gavrilo Princip unveiled in Belgrade”, *B92*, 29 June 2015 https://www.b92.net/eng/news/society.php?yyyy=2015&mm=06&dd=29&nav_id=94588 (accessed April 4, 2018).

The unveiling of the monument to Princip turned out to be about the present-day issues that the commemorators felt were the most relevant for Serbia and the Serbs. By specifically addressing the resolution on Srebrenica they were attempting to discredit what they considered an *international anti-Serbian narrative* — Serbs as criminals — and to replace it with the preferred historical characterisation that Serbs “have never been aggressors”,¹⁰⁷⁵ only heroes and victims. Quoting Ivo Andrić in relation to Princip and his group could almost be justified since Andrić had been a member of *Young Bosnia*. But linking them both to the Srebrenica resolution, Nikolić seemed to be channelling an alternative warped universe where Andrić, just like Princip, would have disapproved of the Srebrenica resolution. This brings us again to Berthold Molden’s analysis of a master historical narrative which has its own language, its own geography, its *dramatis personae* — a parallel universe projected as an ideal by the dominant group, with the master narrative as the basis for the hegemonic principle.¹⁰⁷⁶ The hegemonic *standard* informs the principles and policy of the government — in this case, *Serbs are never in the wrong*. It is, of course, significant that the speeches and the rhetoric, uttered many times before and since, are not intended for the world but for the home crowd. The *historical frame switching* is not directed at *the world* because the world is usually uninterested. Nevertheless, the majority of the press headlines around the world agreed on the description of the event: “Serbia unveils monument to Franz Ferdinand assassin”.¹⁰⁷⁷

Another monument which is not on the Institute’s list, or any official list, owing to its disputed authenticity, is the **Kajmakčalan Watchtower**. This structure, a *watchtower*, or an *observation post*, was first seen by the public in 1947 when the fence surrounding the former palace park was

1075 Ristić, 2015.

1076 Molden, 2016, 129.

1077 E.g. “Serbia unveils monument to WWI-triggering assassin Gavrilo Princip”, *The Japan Times*, 29 June 2015 <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/29/world/crime-legal-world/serbia-unveils-monument-wwi-triggering-assassin-gavrilo-princip/#.XUiaVi2B1N1> (accessed May 20, 2018); also, “Gavrilo Princip, assassin who sparked WWI, gets statue in Belgrade”, *Deutsche Welle*, 29 June 2015 <https://www.dw.com/en/gavrilo-princip-assassin-who-sparked-wwi-gets-statue-in-belgrade/a-18546305> (accessed May 20, 2018)

removed. By that time, the park located on the former grounds of the Royal Palace had been renamed the *Pioneers' Park*.¹⁰⁷⁸ The *Watchtower* was not an object of interest, and certainly not considered a monument until a debate was started by a letter to the editor in *Politika* in 1983 claiming that the *Watchtower* was a First World War monument.¹⁰⁷⁹ The claim by Dr Milorad Tešić was that the *Watchtower* was the original observation post from the Salonika front used by Regent Aleksandar, transported to Belgrade and placed in the palace park at his request after the war.¹⁰⁸⁰ Other letters were sent to *Politika* on this subject, mostly arguing that the *watchtower* should be marked as a protected monument. However, despite extended expert research in various archives, including the palace files in the Yugoslav archives, no trace could be found of the *Watchtower*. There was no record of it — not of what it was nor how it came to be in the park. Because the park had been on private property until 1947 when it was nationalised, the *Watchtower* was not a public site of commemoration. The public only became interested in it in 1983, after Tito's death and when Serbian national feelings were awakening, as Šarenac notes in his work.¹⁰⁸¹ The debate regarding the authenticity of the *Watchtower* continued, and although the Belgrade Institute for the protection of monuments initiated a year-long investigation without success, the *watchtower* ended up with a rather unique status: it was marked with a plaque without becoming an official monument. Moreover, additional commemorative elements were placed on the *Watchtower* in the form of bronze bar reliefs representing 14 Serbian and French military leaders in 1990 at a special ceremony. Šarenac suggests that the example of the *Watchtower* illustrates well the “question of historical discontinuity of the Serbian attitude” to the war, whereby a monument in the centre of Belgrade may exist, but no one can really prove where it comes from, thus making it a symbol of all other unknowns about the war “that was so important for the cultural and national identity of the Serbian people”.¹⁰⁸² On Belgrade tourist websites, the information

1078 Šarenac, 2014, 268.

1079 Šarenac, 2014, 269.

1080 Šarenac, 2014, 269.

1081 Šarenac, 2014, 271.

1082 Šarenac, 2014, 269.

on the “monument-observation post” is equally confusing.¹⁰⁸³ The case of the *Watchtower* was resolved with an odd compromise, without it being an officially recognised monument it was still inaugurated with the added bar reliefs. After 1990, another two bronze bar reliefs of Kings Petar and Aleksandar were added in the central part of the series, whereby the reliefs of Marshal d’Espèrey and Field Marshal Putnik had to be moved to the left side of the wall to make space for the belated commemoration of Serbian royals.¹⁰⁸⁴ It is as if the rearranging of Serbian history continues.

First World War monuments in Serbia do not have the grandiosity of *Thiepval* or the *Menin Gate*. They do not furnish village and town squares as they do in France and Belgium with the signposts of the tragedy of war. They are still present and scattered in the landscape of Serbia even though many have been destroyed either in subsequent wars or as a result of the communist attempt at the “erasure of history”. The construction of many of these monuments provoked debates and controversies, while financing inevitably proved problematic if there was no consensus on the location, which appears to have been a frequent hurdle. At the same time, the example of the *Victor* confirms how public pressure concerning the artistic features of the monument wielded sufficient influence on the city authorities to yield to it and turn the *Victor* away from the citizens he was supposed to celebrate as liberated and victorious. Certainly, without the vital work of various veterans’ associations there would have been far fewer monuments. Nevertheless, grander monuments required royal approval and frequently royal funding to succeed. This support was provided because the war monuments were seen as *beneficial* for the king and the state. The tomb of the unknown soldier had the most ambitious objective — to reinvent the identity of a country in crisis and thereby heal it. While not all these monuments were built with such aspirations, the desire of the state and of the bereaved communities was to ensure that remembrance remains tangible and visible. A century later, and

1083 “Osmatračnica sa Kajmakčalana” [“The Kajmakčalan Observation Post”], *Belgrade Beat* <https://belgrade-beat.com/attractions/osmatracnica-sa-kajmakcalana> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1084 Šarenac, 2014, 274.

several regime changes later, the First World War monuments still have a role to play. The war monuments as décor and scenography are natural sets for commemorative events. They usually also have suitable plateaus where groups of people can gather to listen to the speeches of politicians who eagerly take on the mantle of continuity by invoking the sentiments of civic piety. We shall now take a look at the *commemorations boom* in Serbia, focused on the Great War centenary years, and the reasons why such events are central to the political framing tactic of the Serbian government.

3. Centenary Commemorations as a Competitive Sport

“I didn’t think much of the SNS until I saw them paying their respects to the Serbian heroes from the First World War.”¹⁰⁸⁵

The practice of commemoration was established to strengthen the identity of the 19th-century nation states.¹⁰⁸⁶ Commemoration ceremonies are meant to amplify the remembrance of historical events but also to inject them with additional interpretations. In an age of increasing secularisation, the nation state underwent a process of sacralisation, for instance through anthropomorphising the *nation*: the figure of *Marianne*, embodiment of the French nation, paralleled the figure of the Virgin.¹⁰⁸⁷ Commemorations — added to religious ceremonies or even replacing them — reinforce the bond between the state, the people, and the public space through the physical manifestation of the dominant historical narrative. The hegemony of a certain version of the past “is built by prioritizing some memories over others according to the specific power constellation of a given society. There is no *one* history because every historical event

1085 R. K., Belgrade taxi driver, May 2016. SNS is *Serbian Progressive party*, in power in Serbia since 2012.

1086 Gillis, 1996, 6-7.

1087 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 66.

can have different meanings, can be ignored, or interpreted from radically different perspectives,” according to Berthold Molden.¹⁰⁸⁸ In other words, there is always more to commemorations than meets the eye.

It could be said that in the context of this study, *the mother of all commemorations* took place on 28 June 1989, on the occasion of the 600th anniversary of the Kosovo battle, when Slobodan Milošević made the *Gazimestan speech*.¹⁰⁸⁹ The tenor of his speech made other political leaders in Yugoslavia feel increasingly apprehensive, if not threatened. While listing the “sacrifices” the Serbian nation had made for others throughout history, he gave the audience a version of history where the Serbian “ethnic being” had always been “liberating” and never “exploitative”.¹⁰⁹⁰ The cult of Kosovo that was celebrated on that day was used to *remind* the Serbs, as much as everyone else, of the *true* beginning of the Serbian State and the Serbs as people.¹⁰⁹¹ Milošević was resetting history on that day, announcing the replacement of one historical narrative — Yugoslav and socialist — by another, based on national identity and *historical* memory. Only ten years after the incendiary speech, the debacle of his policies was complete. Following the withdrawal of Serbian troops and police from Kosovo, in the wake of the NATO intervention prompted by systematic human rights abuses against Kosovo Albanians, many thousands of Serbian civilians left Kosovo. In 2008, Kosovo declared independence. Serbia had previously fought, aided and abetted the wars in Croatia and Bosnia while never officially being at war. The commemorative event of 28 June 1989, lit the Serbian nationalist fuse which led to a chain reaction. The civil war dismantled Yugoslavia in a conflict that initially lasted from 1991 to 1995, before its final act in 1999. Although Serbia timidly started a nationalist *deprogramming* after the fall of Milošević in 2000, the damage

1088 Molden, 2016, 128.

1089 *Gazimestan* is the location of the Kosovo battle and the memorial erected in 1953.

1090 “Govor Slobodana Miloševića na Gazimestanu 1989. godine” [“Slobodan Milošević’s speech at Gazimestan in 1989”], *Pečat*, 30 June 2011 <http://www.pecat.co.rs/2011/06/govor-slobodana-milosevica-na-gazimestanu-1989-godine/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1091 David, 2014, 475.

of his *Gazimestan* speech is not generally acknowledged.¹⁰⁹² In 1989, the event in *Gazimestan* and Milošević's inflammatory speech were used to justify the restart of history.

Recently, in the Great War centenary years, the commemorative framework in Serbia demonstrates a *continuity* with 1989: the centenary years have been exploited by the political party in power to distract the Serbian electorate from a variety of political and economic issues. Without going into the details of their political programme, a group of former anti-EU and nationalist politicians had seized an opportunity to break away from the original ultra-nationalist Serbian Radical Party (SRS) to form a separate party in 2008, labelling it the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS). The SNS has come to dominate the Serbian political scene in the last ten years, rebranding themselves to come across — at least superficially — as pro-EU with self-professed ambitions to make Serbia a stabilising factor in the region. The centenaries offered the opportunity to divert attention from acute problems to basking in the former glory days, in tune with the Serbian *sacrificial narrative*: Serbia was/is wronged, but Serbia was/is always right. The Great War past was turned into a theme park *go-to* entertainment.¹⁰⁹³ The First World War commemorations were seen as a perfect way to showcase the regime's principles as being in alignment with *people's values*. With the widespread popularity of the Great War, recalling the time when Serbia was respected and victorious, *everything* in connection with the war becomes functional, especially commemorations.

Examining the ways in which historical events are remembered and commemorated, we notice that in Serbia, remembrance is continually affected by other events that succeeded them, thus providing many layers of historical experience. As formulated by Olga Manojlović Pintar in her work *The Archaeology of Memory. Monuments and Identities in Serbia 1918*

1092 With the exception of the independent media such as *Danas*, *Peščanik*, *N1* and some local outlets.

1093 Dubravka Stojanović, "Onward! To World War I", *Peščanik*, 16 December 2013 <https://pescanik.net/onward-to-world-war-i/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

– 1989: “Like a stone that was dropped in the water creating concentric circles which intermingle, historical events leave behind traces that are presented and interpreted in different ways.”¹⁰⁹⁴ That is how today, during the Great War anniversary years, different commemorations of the events of 1915 – 1916 may contain references to communist suppression of memorialisation of the Serbian First World War victories, European Union reluctance to set the accession date for Serbia, as well as the continued anger over the 1999 NATO bombings.¹⁰⁹⁵ The events are separated by nearly a whole century: the Retreat of the Serbian Army across Albania in 1915, and the NATO airstrikes in 1999. The bridge between them is constructed from the narrative of Serbian victimhood.

Serbia’s national calendar sets the commemorative agenda, as state holidays give an overall structure to the year. The calendar of such holidays celebrates the country’s religious allegiance(s), commemorates historical events, and reveals the country’s values and desired identity, if not necessarily the actual identity. The official calendar of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was dominated by WWII communist narrative. In the case of Serbia, the official calendar has undergone changes since the break-up of Yugoslavia, and continues to change. In 2011, Armistice Day was added as an official non-working holiday.¹⁰⁹⁶ In October 2017, Defence Minister Aleksandar Vulin proposed that 4 December — day of ceasefire in the First Balkan War — become “Warrior Day” when all those “who have fought under Serbia’s flag from the liberation wars in the 19th century to the defence of the country from NATO aggression in 1999 would be celebrated”.¹⁰⁹⁷ We can see through this example that the levelling of Serbian historical events is ongoing, whereby the *Serbian*

1094 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 45.

1095 During the 1999 NATO air strikes, the monument of gratitude to France in Belgrade was draped in black; At *Zeitnik* in Thessaloniki, the cemetery guard says “they should honour us not bomb us” as described in chapter V.

1096 The first 11 November in Serbia was commemorated in 2012.

1097 “Možda i mi dobijemo naš “dan branitelja” kao Hrvati” [“Perhaps we shall get our “defenders day” like the Croats”], *B92*, 24 October 2017 https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=10&dd=24&nav_category=11&nav_id=1317535 (accessed May 20, 2018). So far, the idea has not progressed beyond the proposal stage.

national identity narrative is equated to the agenda of the current regime to celebrate all the Serbian war dead *as heroes*. The rhetoric of national belonging thus becomes inextricably linked to commemorations.

In her article “Impression management of a contested past: Serbia’s evolving national calendar”,¹⁰⁹⁸ Lea David outlines how, between 2007 and 2009, a committee worked on reforming the Serbian calendar to include Serbia’s democratic traditions, its just wars, “as well as its victimhood”.¹⁰⁹⁹ David demonstrates how the Serbian national calendar is meant to represent the image that Serbia wishes to project to the world. This aspiration has produced a *commemorative cocktail* of Serbia’s “democratic values”, its “European values”, anti-fascist struggle, *freedom-loving instinct*, with a nod to a nominal respect for religious diversity while insisting on its specific historical references. The state holidays celebrated as non-working days are: New Year’s Day (two days); Serbian Statehood Day on 15 February (two days), commemorating the First Serbian Rising in 1804, as well as the first constitution from 1834, while also being a Christian holiday of Candelmas;¹¹⁰⁰ Workers’ Day is celebrated on 1 and 2 May; and Armistice Day on 11 November.¹¹⁰¹ The religious holidays are considered to be Serbian Orthodox Christmas and Easter, including Good Friday and Easter Monday. However, those who celebrate Christmas and Easter on other days are entitled to have them as non-working holidays, while Muslims are entitled to days off on Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha, and Jews on the first day of Yom Kippur. There are also commemorative dates that are working days, and they relate to the Kosovo Battle, to the various events from 19th century Serbia, to the Balkan wars, to the First World War, to the Second World War; while one day is related to the wars of the 1990s.¹¹⁰² The calendar sets the applicable narrative, and David

1098 Lea David, “Impression management of a contested past: Serbia’s evolving national calendar”, *Memory Studies* (2014, Vol. 7 no.4): 472-483.

1099 David, 2014, 477.

1100 David, 2014, 477.

1101 V. Maričić, “Zašto je 11. novembar državni praznik?” [“Why is 11 November a state holiday?”], *Danas*, 11 November 2018 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/zasto-je-11-novembar-drzavni-praznik/> (accessed June 20, 2019).

1102 David, 2014, 477.

exposes the chosen dates as manipulative: “the master narrative [that] is adjusted to the values of international community” as David says. This officially inclusive, yet carefully constructed calendar contributes to the whitewashing of Serbia’s recent past. *If Serbia recognises Islamic holidays, then Serbia is a modern and tolerant country.* However, the basis of the Serbian national calendar rests on the pillars of the remembrance discourse in Serbia in the centenary years – heroic struggle and suffering. These are revived through commemorative events and their trappings.

As an example of the above, we examine the case of the *ramonda*. In 2012, in the first year when 11 November was officially celebrated and during the build-up to the First World War centenary commemorations, the Serbian daily *Politika* introduced to its readers a new symbol of Armistice Day in Serbia: Natalija’s *ramonda*,¹¹⁰³ a flower symbolising “endurance, courage and ability to rise under difficult circumstances and in harsh times” according to a page dedicated to it on *Serbia.com*.¹¹⁰⁴ The emblem is supposed to be the Serbian equivalent of a poppy, worn on and around Remembrance Day, 11 November. While the poppy, adopted as a symbol of the terrible human cost of the First World War in Britain and the Commonwealth in the aftermath of the war, inspired by actual poppies in the fields at Flanders, and memorialised in John McCrea’s 1915 poem “In Flanders Fields”,¹¹⁰⁵ the *ramonda* is a textbook example of an attempt to *invent a tradition* as per Hobsbawm.¹¹⁰⁶ The *Politika* article wholeheartedly endorses the initiative to use this symbol which comes nearly 100 years after the events it wishes to commemorate. While the poppy emblems in Britain and elsewhere are sold to collect funds for war veterans and their

1103 Milan Galović, “Natalijina ramonda – simbol Dana primirja” [“Natalia’s ramonda – the symbol of Armistice Day”] *Politika*, 10 November 2012 <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/239532/Drustvo/Natalijina-ramonda-simbol-Dana-primirja> (accessed May 15, 2015).

1104 “Natalie’s ramonda, a symbol for Armistice Day in the Great War”, *Serbia.com*, s.d. <http://www.serbia.com/about-serbia/serbia-history/world-war-one/natalies-ramonda/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1105 “The Poppy”, *The Royal British Legion*, s.d. <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk/remembrance/how-we-remember/the-story-of-the-poppy/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1106 Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1983.

families, it is not clear from the article whether the *ramonda* would have a practical as well as a symbolic use.¹¹⁰⁷ While there may be a certain *arriviste* aspect in an attempt to mimic another's emblem,¹¹⁰⁸ the *ramonda* does have all the characteristics of a symbol: it is endemic to Serbia and also grows on Kajmakčalan, the site of the first great victory of the Serbian Army in 1916. Its symbolic pedigree notwithstanding, there is nothing spontaneous about its arrival on the commemorative scene. *Ramonda* was a presidential initiative, coming from President Tomislav Nikolić (2012 – 2017) in his first presidential year, without seemingly any basis in the actual past. We do not know if any soldiers at the time had mentioned seeing it, it does not appear in wartime literature, nor is it connected to the war in any way, except by presidential decree.



Ramonda (Wikimedia commons).¹¹⁰⁹

1107 The ramonda is supposed to be given out for free according to some. However, the author was offered one for the price of 500 RSD (EUR 4.25) on 11 November 2018 in front of the main Belgrade cemetery, where several WWI commemorations were about to take place.

1108 The French symbol is a cornflower and the Belgian one is a daisy. *Flowers of Remembrance*, brochure, *In Flanders Fields museum*, Ypres.

1109 “Natalijina ramonda, čudnovati svet koji se nosi povodom Dana primirja” [“Natalia’s ramonda, strange flower worn on Armistice Day”], *National Geographic Serbia*, 11 November 2017 <https://www.nationalgeographic.rs/reportaze/clanci/11063-natalijina-ramonda-cudnovati-cvet-koji-se-nosio-povodom-dana-primirja.html> (accessed May 20, 2018).

It is difficult not to see the *ramonda* as anything other than a commemorative prop. This impression is emphasised by the news item below the aforementioned *Politika* article, under the sub-headline “If Djoković had had the emblem...” where the article’s author reports on the press conference following a match between Andy Murray, a British tennis player, and Novak Djoković, a Serbian tennis player. The author notes that Murray had a poppy on his lapel and laments the lack of a *ramonda* on Djoković’s lapel. If the announcement regarding the marking of Armistice Day with a *ramonda* had come out earlier, and if someone had managed to get the emblem to Djoković, the press conference could have been the perfect opportunity “for a global promotion of Natalija’s *ramonda* as a Serbian symbol marking Armistice Day.”¹¹¹⁰ One year later, the same author regrets that Prime Minister Ivica Dačić did not wear a *ramonda* when meeting the UK Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg who was wearing a poppy. The author further speculates that had Mr Dačić been wearing a *ramonda*, then perhaps *one of the journalists might have asked him about it* and that would have been a good opportunity “to remind the British public, which proudly upholds its traditions, of the times when [Britain] and Serbia were allies, **particularly now when there are increasing attempts of revisionism of the causes of the war**”.¹¹¹¹ [emphasis mine] The author’s explanation as to why the *ramonda* would be relevant to anyone else but the Serbs, *et encore*, perfectly illustrates the use of commemorations to make a political point: it is the fixing of a master narrative, a varnish on a rickety piece of furniture to make it look better, and in this case, older and more authentic.¹¹¹²

1110 Milan Galović, “Natalijina ramonda – simbol Dana primirja” [“Natalia’s ramonda – the symbol of Armistice Day”] *Politika*, 10 November 2012 <http://www.politika.rs/sr/clanak/239532/Drustvo/Natalijina-ramonda-simbol-Dana-primirja> (accessed May 15, 2015).

1111 “Dan primirja – sećanje na stradanje i pobedu Srbije” [“Armistice Day – Remembrance of Serbia’s suffering and victory”], *Politika*, 4 November 2013 <http://www.politika.co.rs/sr/clanak/274826/Друштво/Дан-примирја-сећање-на-страдање-и-победу-Србије> (accessed May 15, 2015).

1112 The *ramonda* is sporadically worn by newscasters on some TV channels around Armistice Day and by most politicians at commemorations. It has not become *traditional*, yet.

While it may be widely accepted, and to some extent expected for commemorations to be used as political platforms, there was a surprising frequency of commemorative events as reported in the Serbian media already in the run up to the centenary years. We have selected some examples of rampant commemorations that epitomise Serbian politicians' efforts to serve the present by showcasing the past.

President Tomislav Nikolić took up his duties following the April 2012 Serbian presidential elections, and in November of that year he travelled to Greece for the Armistice Day commemorations. Various newspapers covered the first Serbian Armistice Day commemorations and we look at four of them: *Politika*, *Telegraf*, *Blic* in Serbia, and *Nezavisne* in Republika Srpska.¹¹¹³ President Nikolić first laid a wreath at the Serbian military cemetery in Thessaloniki and then travelled to Vido, to lay a wreath at the mausoleum. While there, he recorded his thoughts in the visitors' book: "Soon it will be 100 years that you have fallen asleep so that Serbia would wake up. One day, someone will lay a wreath in Serbia's name and mark 1000 years, and Serbia will still be there."¹¹¹⁴ Nikolić's remarks in his speech in Vido — where the Serbian delegation placed a wreath in the *Blue Tomb* — were directed at thanking the Greek hosts for looking after the Serbian mausoleum, but more importantly "for unequivocally supporting the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Serbia" which was clearly shorthand for Greece not having recognised Kosovo. The article in *Politika* on the same subject notes that the *ramonda* emblem was worn on the lapels of the members of the Serbian delegation.¹¹¹⁵ The *Telegraf* article notes the visit of the president to *Serbian House* in Corfu and his remarks

1113 Serbian daily *Politika* is the oldest newspaper in the Balkans, founded in 1904, and considered a broadsheet, while *Telegraf* and *Blic* are considered tabloids, *Nezavisne* is a Republika Srpska newspaper.

1114 "Nikolić: Vi ste "zaspali", da bi se Srbija probudila" ["You have "fallen asleep" so that Serbia would wake up"], *Nezavisne*, 11 November 2012 <https://www.nezavisne.com/novosti/ex-yu/Nikolic-Vi-ste-zaspali-da-bi-se-Srbija-probudila/166874> (accessed May 20, 2018). Sleeping heroes are a frequent theme in national myths, e.g. Holger the Dane, or the legend of Kaiser Frederick Barbarossa.

1115 "Vi ste zaspali, da bi se Srbija probudila" ["You have "fallen asleep" so that Serbia would wake up"], *Politika*, 11 November 2012 <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/239636/Николић-Ви-сте-заспали-да-би-се-Србија-пробудила> (accessed May 20, 2018).

on the friendship between Serbs and Greeks “that no force can break up”.¹¹¹⁶ The *Blic* newspaper reports on the commemoration ceremony on the same day, held in Belgrade at the New Cemetery, led by the Prime Minister Ivica Dačić who reiterated in his speech that Serbia had had the worst losses in history in the First World War and had won the greatest victory; however, a number of decisions taken after the First World War may not have been the best for Serbia: “This was **one of the main reasons of all subsequent events and inter-ethnic discord in the Yugoslavia of the future.** [emphasis mine] That is why the First World War has to be a great lesson about what to do in peacetime. We are done with winning the war and losing the peace.”¹¹¹⁷ This passage again shows that the main motivation of such speeches at commemorative events is the levelling of history, the manufacture of an alternative narrative — despite great sacrifices, *bad things happened*, but Serbia is blameless, in fact, Serbia is a victim. This speech echoes the general premise of Milošević’s speech on 28 June 1989 — that Serbia had been taken advantage of in the past.¹¹¹⁸ The same article lists all the other commemorative events held on that day: Chief of General Staff Lt. General Diković laid a wreath at the tomb of the unknown soldier at Avala, while the Mayor of Belgrade, Dragan Djilas, was 60 km away laying a wreath at the Lazarevac ossuary.¹¹¹⁹ A likely explanation for such logistical arrangements of commemorative wreath-laying could be that Djilas has a different party affiliation to Dačić, and because the tomb of the unknown soldier was being used, the Belgrade

1116 “Nikolić na ostrvu Vido: Vi ste “zaspali”, da bi se Srbija probudila” [“Nikolić on the island of Vido: You have “fallen asleep” so that Serbia would wake up”], *Telegraf*, 11 November 2012 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/413323-nikolic-vi-ste-zaspali-da-bi-se-srbija-probudila> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1117 “Obeležavanje Dana primirja: Dosta smo pobedjivali u ratu a gubili u miru” [“Marking Armistice Day: We are done with winning the war and losing at peace”], *Blic*, 11 November 2012 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/obelezavanje-dana-primirja-dosta-smo-pobedivali-u-ratu-a-gubili-u-miru/h0hrfcn> (accessed May 20, 2018). This part of the speech mirrors paragraph 7 of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences Memorandum from 1986 <https://www.helsinki.org.rs/serbian/doc/memorandum%20sanu.pdf> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1118 Dačić was the spokesman of the Socialist Party of Serbia (Milošević’s party) in 1992. He has been a minister in every government since 2000.

1119 “Gradonačelnik Djilas odao počast srpskim ratnicima u Prvom svetskom ratu” [“The Mayor Djilas pays his respects to the Serbian soldiers of the First World War”], *Grad Beograd*, 11 November 2012 <http://www.beograd.rs/lat/gradonacelnik-djilas-odao-pocast-srpskim-ratnicima-u-prvom-svetskom-ratu/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

Mayor had to find a suitable commemoration site which was not *occupied* on that day.

In 2013, on the occasion of the 95th anniversary of the breakthrough at the Salonika front, the Serbian Minister of Culture and Information, Ivan Tasovac laid a wreath at the *Zejtinlik* cemetery. On this occasion he spoke of the sacrifice of Serbian soldiers who advanced at such speed in liberating their country **that they were faster than the French cavalry** [emphasis mine].¹¹²⁰ Here we note two elements we shall regularly encounter in the commemorations and the media coverage of the events: supernatural powers of the Serbian Army and the admiration of the foreigners. The latter is palpable in Tasovac's further remarks on the friendship and support of the United States for Serbia, when he recalled that, on 28 July 1918, President Woodrow Wilson ordered the Serbian flag to be flown next to the American flag at the White House. As Tasovac put it, "Serbia fought heroically and suffered for the same principles that the US has been striving for." This speech further highlighted Serbia's *just struggle*, placing it in line with Wilson's democratic principles. Exaggerating the importance of a moment from 100 years ago when Serbia was reportedly celebrated by *the West*, in this case the United States, brings to the fore the aspiration of today's Serbia to be admired and celebrated, and, above all, to be seen as a force of good by the Great Powers.

On 1 October 2014, a team of reporters from the daily *Novosti* newspaper accompanied the Serbian state delegation, led by the Labour minister Aleksandar Vulin, to the top of Mt Nidža in Macedonia, where the Kajmakčalan battle took place in 1916.¹¹²¹ The article's author stresses the fact that this was the first Serbian state delegation visiting Kajmakčalan

1120 "Tasovac: Podvig Solunaca putokaz za nas" ["Tasovac: The feat of the Salonika warriors is our roadsign"], *B92*, 28 September 2013 https://www.b92.net/kultura/vesti.php?nav_category=1087&yyyy=2013&mm=09&dd=28&nav_id=759029 (accessed May 20, 2018).

1121 "Kajmakčalan: Srbi ne umeju i neće da žive bez slobode" ["Kajmakčalan: The Serbs can't and won't live without freedom"], *Novosti*, 1 October 2014 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/reportaze/aktuelno.293.html:512676-Kajmakcalan-Srbi-ne-umeju-i-neze-da-zive-bez-slobode> (accessed May 20, 2018).

in 80 years.¹¹²² The weather and road conditions were described as inhospitable, cold and difficult. The chapel on the top of Kajmakčalan once housed the urn with the heart of Archibald Reiss, in keeping with his last wishes.¹¹²³ Minister Vulin's remarks at the chapel, reported in the same *Novosti* article, refer to the taking of Kajmakčalan as an operation that cannot be explained militarily: "The only way that we can explain this great victory is the desire of Serbs to have freedom (...) Serbs can't and won't live without freedom. (...)." In his speech, the Minister suggests that the power of Serbian soldiers was supernatural, inspired by their *exceptional* love of freedom. This parallels the story of the French cavalry lagging behind the Serbian infantry in 1918. The minister, in fact, implied that this *superpower* lay in the (Serbian) identity of fearless heroes. If we tie this in with President Nikolić's description of immortal heroes who did not really die, but "fell asleep", we are witnessing the myth-making in action. Serbian *exceptionalism*, the strong sense of belonging and attachment to the national group, not only draws its atavistic strength from the glorious past, but is reliant on mystical powers that are considered unique.

In April 2016, Serbian media outlets covered extensively the central event in Corfu and on Vido, on the occasion of the centenary of the landing of Serbian troops.¹¹²⁴ President Nikolić led the Serbian delegation, which included Ministers Vulin, Djordjević, and Tasovac, as well as the Commander of the Guard of the Serbian Army Major General Milomir Todorović, **who was dressed in the uniform of the Serbian officer from the First World War.** The ceremony was also attended by the Mayor of Corfu. Many people, Serbs and Greeks, were present at the commemorative ceremony, a number were dressed in T-shirts bearing Serbian icons and symbols. Others stood on the deck of a ferry and a

1122 There is also a separate mention in an inserted article under the headline "Soft cadets" reporting that out of a group of some twenty police and army cadets who were on a trip to Greece visiting various memorials, only two joined the commemorative climb to Kajmakčalan.

1123 The urn was destroyed in the Second World War.

1124 "Stogodišnjica iskrcavanja srpske vojske na Krf i Vido" ["Centenary of the Serbian Army landing in Corfu and Vido"], RTS, 18 April 2016 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/2286397/stogodisnjica-iskrcavanja-srpske-vojske-na-krf.html> (accessed May 20, 2018).

boat because the main ceremony was held off the island of Vido. The poem “Blue Tomb”¹¹²⁵ was read, and wreaths and flowers were thrown in the sea. The article notes that there was a great deal of emotion among those present. The song “There, Far Away”, the significance of which will be explained in the next chapter, was sung at the end. There were other commemorative events held on Vido and Corfu that day, such as President Nikolić laying wreaths at the stone cross on Vido, and at the mausoleum. There was a visit to Serbian House in Corfu for the opening of the exhibition *Serbs in Corfu 1916 – 1918* and the screening of the premiere of the documentary film *Serbs in Corfu*.¹¹²⁶ While these would usually be considered normal ceremonies for such a centenary, what stands out is the *pageant* aspect of the central commemoration, complete with costumes and special accoutrements. Dressing up the commander of the Serbian Guard is indicative of the ambitions of the commemorating politicians: they wish to be equated with the soldiers of 100 years ago, to be seen as being *the same as them*.¹¹²⁷ This further illustrates the previously argued point that the Great War glorious narrative is reinforced in order to cover up a more recent *unsuitable* past, i.e. the wars of the 1990s.

On 11 November 2016, President Aleksandar Vučić and the UK Foreign Minister Boris Johnson laid the wreaths at the Commonwealth cemetery in Belgrade. There seems to have been no speeches although members of the Irish Guard “provided the tone for the ceremony” with trumpets and bagpipes.¹¹²⁸ It is of note that Johnson’s article in *The Telegraph* in January

1125 “Plava grobnica” [“Blue Tomb”] by Milutin Bojić is a poem written in 1916 about Serbian soldiers being buried at sea off Vido.

1126 *Srbi na Krfu* [*Serbs in Corfu*], *YouTube RTS*, 18 January 2017 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gMd758zbnY> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1127 Serbian indicted war criminal Željko Ražnatović Arkan (1952 – 2000) was regularly photographed wearing a Serbian WWI officer’s uniform.

1128 “Vučić i Džonson položili vence na groblju Komonvelta” [“Vučić and Johnson lay wreaths at the Commonwealth cemetery”], *Politika*, 11 November 2016 <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/367596/Vucic-i-Dzonson-položili-vence-na-groblju-Komonvelta> (accessed May 20, 2018).

2014,¹¹²⁹ as mentioned earlier, was translated, widely reported on and seen as support for Serbia in the face of historical *revisionism*.¹¹³⁰

The commemorations are not limited to key events such as the centenary of the landing in Corfu, the breakthrough at Salonika Front, or the Armistice. Astonishingly, the anniversaries of deaths of a number of military leaders are also commemorated, and not necessarily *round* ones. On 20 January 2017, Chief of General Staff of the Serbian Army, General Diković laid wreaths on the tombs of Field Marshals Mišić (d. 1921), Bojović (d. 1945), and of General Jurišić-Šturm (d. 1922). They all died on different dates in January in different years. The state ceremony was also attended and wreaths laid by an assistant to the minister of Labour, the deputy mayor of Belgrade as well as delegations of various associations of veterans and their descendants.¹¹³¹ On the occasion of the 88th anniversary of the death of Field Marshal Stepa Stepanović, wreaths were laid at the memorial and Stepanović's home in Kumodraž, on the outskirts of Belgrade. The ceremony was attended by the president of the municipality of Voždovac, a member of the City Council and representatives of the Associations of the Descendants of Veterans of Serbia 1912 – 1920.¹¹³² Stepanović was, they said, "our collective ancestor in whose debt we remain".¹¹³³ On 17 May 2017, a state ceremony marked a century since the death of Field Marshal Putnik. The commemoration was led by Minister Vulin, accompanied by

1129 "Germany started the war, but the Left can't bear to say so", *The Telegraph*, 6 January 2014. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10552336/Germany-started-the-Great-War-but-the-Left-cant-bear-to-say-so.html> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1130 "Boris Džonson: Nemci krivi za rat, ne Srbi" ["Johnson: Germans are to blame for the war, not Serbs"], *B92*, 10 January 2014 https://www.b92.net/info/misljenja/index.php?yyyy=2014&mm=01&dd=10&nav_id=798431 (accessed May 20, 2018).

1131 "Obeležena godišnjica smrti vojskovođa" ["Anniversary of deaths of military leaders marked"], *Politika*, 20 January 2017 <http://www.politika.rs/sc/clanak/372479/Obelezena-godisnjica-smrti-vojskovoda> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1132 "Obeležena 88. Godišnjica smrti vojvode Stepe Stepanovića" ["88th anniversary of the death of Field Marshall Stepa Stepanović marked"], *B92*, 27 April 2017 https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=04&dd=27&nav_category=12&nav_id=1254766 (accessed May 20, 2018).

1133 "U rodnoj kući Stepe Stepanovića obeležena godišnjica smrti slavnog vojvode" ["Celebrated Field Marshall's 88th death anniversary marked at Stepa Stepanović's house"], *Voždovac*, 27 April 2017 <https://vozdovac.rs/2017/04/27/u-rodnoj-kuci-stepe-stepanovica-obelezena-88-godisnjica-smrti-slavnog-vojvode/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

representatives of the Ministry of Defence and the Serbian Army, the City of Belgrade, Putnik's descendants and members of associations engaged in *fostering traditions from liberation wars*.¹¹³⁴

The recurrent themes of the commemorations are well-worn: Serbian sacrifices for freedom, debts to allies in the First World War, the admiration of the allies, determination, courage, and endurance of the Serbian soldier. The sheer numbers of commemorative events, most of which are state commemorations involving highly formalised ceremonies, uniformed guards, firing of gun salutes, military bands, do not necessarily mean that they are held so that the Serbian people would not forget. How could they ever forget? References to old allies and friendships, the promises of adhering to the principles and values of *our glorious ancestors* are endlessly repeated. It is indeed a competition among the commemorators to say something original and new. In fact, a minute's silence ritually held at all the memorial services and commemoration ceremonies started as an initiative to remember the dead soldiers on Armistice Day 1919, to be silent in respect of the fallen.¹¹³⁵ The loss of life was so massive that the words were deemed insufficient to express the horror and the tragedy. But the Serbian commemorative events, although they include a minute's silence, are not about the glorious dead. While the commemorators may speak of the fallen, their agenda is related exclusively to the present. The speeches are more than just tales of valour and martyrdom; they are told in such a way to make their audience more beholden. The audience have heard the same stories many times — they are not lessons from the past, they are justifications and alternative interpretations for anything that went *wrong* in Serbian history: Serbs could not have done anything bad in the 1990s because they were brave and selfless in 1915. The silence at

1134 "Vek od smrti vojvode Putnika" ["A century since Field Marshall Putnik's death"], *B92*, 17 May 2017 https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=05&dd=17&nav_category=12&nav_id=1261208 (accessed May 20, 2018).

1135 Owing to the great numbers of dead in Britain at the time, King George V decided on a two-minute silence: "All locomotions should cease, so that in perfect stillness, the thought of everyone may be concentrated on reverent remembrance of the glorious dead", in "Two minute silence", *How we remember*, BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/remembrance/how/silence.shtml> (accessed May 20, 2018).

commemorative ceremonies is never enough because the speeches given are, in fact, *alibis*. Serbs could not have done it because of *who they think they were in 1915*. We could call this an instance of the *imagined identity* reflected in *retrospective mirage* projecting a *constructed reality*.

These commemorative events and ceremonies would not *count*, were it not for the media who report them. The speeches are widely quoted from, emotion emphasised, and the events are described similarly to the way they were featured in the press some 100 years ago. These stories are usually well known, and may contain lesser known anecdotes and tragic details from the Great War. So, in the next part of this chapter, we look at how the Serbian media are trying to make the war even *greater*.

4. Breaking News on History — The Serbian Media and the Centenaries

“17,441 SERBS ARE BURIED HERE. Did you know that 29 CEMETERIES of our soldiers are in this country?”¹¹³⁶

The headlines are long and loud, frequently with generous use of capitals. They shout at the reader while unveiling some *news* from 100 years ago. They are usually about incredible courage, indescribable suffering, unbelievable spirit. They are exclamations, questions, declarations, and assertions that do not expect any opposition, only unconditional acceptance. The way much of Serbian media treat historical events as discoveries, or as breaking news, informing their readers of something urgent and extremely relevant, and linking the event to the *exceptional Serbian character* provides insight into the psyche of the nation: these are things that Serbs like to read. They provide over the counter solace out of the medicine cabinet of *Serbian historical narrative*. The ingredients are

1136 “OVDE LEŽI 17,441 SRBIN: Dali ste znali da ova zemlja krije 29 GROBALJA naših vojnika?”, *Telegraf*, 24 July 2016, <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/2225402-ovde-lezi-17-441-srbin-da-li-ste-znali-da-ova-zemlja-krije-29-grobalja-nasih-vojnika-foto-video> (accessed May 20, 2018).

tried and tested and with each new headline, Serbs can rediscover exactly how *exceptional* they are.

Telegraf's article on the Serbian cemeteries in Greece published on 24 July 2016, promises to take its readers on a journey through all the countries where Serbian soldiers are buried, starting with Greece. The article abounds with pictures of memorials in Greece, explaining their locations and the circumstances of Serbian soldiers being buried there. The article also quotes *in extenso* from the poems inscribed on different memorials. The article includes a 2012 video about Corfu and Vido, showing footage of the memorials with musical accompaniment and no other words except for the final scene where the words appear on the screen: "We will never forget ..." (in English). The article is a lowdown of the memorials in Greece, written in familiar and easy language with the usual details given about the Serbian Army in Corfu. Many such articles have been published in the centenary years, and every news outlet boasts about a series of articles, features, reportages, and video reports on different aspects of the Serbian participation in the Great War. Characteristic elements found in such articles are foreigners who love(d) Serbia, extraordinary Serbian suffering and fortitude, and exceptional courage which causes even the enemy to be awed.

Foreigners close to the Serbs feature as protectors and *honorary* Serbs. "Here is why Admiral Guépratte was called Serbian Mother and how he saved 11,417 Serbs!"¹¹³⁷ The article published in the tabloid *Telegraf* explains why a street in Belgrade was named after Guépratte. It reveals how he made sure that Serbian troops evacuated to North Africa would be well looked after in Bizerte. According to the article he personally intervened so that each Serbian soldier would receive one kilogram of bread per day instead of 600 grams as was the ration for French soldiers.

1137 "Evo zašto su admirala Geprata zvali "Srpska majka" i kako je spasio 11.417 Srba! ["Here is why Admiral Guépratte was nicknamed "Serbian Mother" and how he saved 11,417 Serbs!"], *Telegraf*, 31 January 2014 <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/931565-evo-zasto-su-admirala-geprata-zvali-srpska-majka-i-kako-je-spasio-11-417-srba-foto> (accessed May 20, 2018).

The article explains that “there were many French who the Serbs loved but only one that the Serbs truly adored — Admiral Guépratte”. He was so well-known among the other officers for always being attentive to Serbian needs that he was referred to as “Admiral Guépratte and his Serbs”. The article is illustrated with four photographs and one painting. There are three photographs of Guépratte, two were taken on the ship’s deck with an inserted iconic photo of the Serbian scout widely known in Serbia.¹¹³⁸



One of the illustrations of the *Telegraf* article.¹¹³⁹

This use of Serbian First World War iconography makes no attempt to explain whether the soldier and Guépratte are connected in any way. Their only connection is that they are both symbols, they are shorthand for the Serbian heroic participation in the war and for French paternalistic support. The collection of illustrations in the article, (a painting representing the Retreat, a photograph of a Serbian unit with a flag, possibly in North Africa, and the above-featured collage) is meant to tell a story by itself.

1138 The scout in the photograph was identified as Dragutin Matić, and the photograph was taken by Sampson Tchernoff just before the Retreat. The photograph is widely featured in books, posters, fridge magnets, postcards, and event announcements in relation to WWI.

1139 “Evo zašto su admirala Geprata zvali “Srpska majka” i kako je spasio 11.417 Srba!”, *Telegraf*, 31 January 2014 <http://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/beograd/931565-evo-zasto-su-admirala-geprata-zvali-srpska-majka-i-kako-je-spasio-11-417-srba-foto> (accessed May 20, 2018).

Even if one does not read the article but only the headline while looking at the pictures, even if the pictures are not properly identified — the narrative is complete. It is likely that such articles are assembled in a way that the headline with the illustrations — symbols, photographs, paintings — is all that is required. It is not news, it is barely information — there are no surprises here, despite the tone and exclamation marks. They are constructed *emotive reminders*. The stories are well known and the emotion that they are expected to generate is presumably national pride which is supposed to be comforting: *we survived that so we'll survive anything*. This is another example of *historical frame switching* taking place at the level of daily news.

It is interesting to reflect on the role of the foreigners in the narrative — their support and downright admiration reinforce the narrative. Without them, the narrative would miss external validation. Perhaps this also indicates a certain ambivalence in Serbia's relationship with the world, especially the West. *We say we were/are brave and honourable and the French say it too, so it must be true.*¹¹⁴⁰

On the 100th anniversary of the start of the Albanian retreat, on 25 November 2015, the *Telegraf* published a commemorative article under the headline “SERBS, LET US FLEE ACROSS ALBANIA! Here is how the greatest suffering of the SERBIAN ARMY started, remembered by the whole WORLD”.¹¹⁴¹ The article gives an overall summary of the reasons for the Retreat, the suffering of the soldiers from hunger and cold, and the casualties. The article does not mention desertions, or other aspects of the Retreat that jar with the heroic and the tragic. It also uses familiar iconic pictures. The article includes a survey with only one question: “Was ALBANIAN GOLGOTHA the greatest suffering of the Serbian Army in

1140 This validation is blatant in Macron's speech in Belgrade as previously discussed.

1141 “SRBI, BEŽIMO PREKO ALBANIJE! Evo kako je počelo stradanje SRPSKE VOJSKE koje pamti ceo SVET,” [“Serbs, let us flee across Albania! Here is how the Serbian Army's Golgotha began, remembered by the whole world”] *Telegraf*, 25 November 2015 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/1873892-srbi-bezimo-preko-albanije-evo-kako-je-pocelo-najvece-stradanje-srpske-vojske-koje-pamti-ceo-svet-video> (accessed May 20, 2018).

history?” and the choices are: “Yes”, “No, there were worse [instances of suffering]”, and “This must never be forgotten”. The results seem to be overwhelmingly “yes” at 55.06%, those who answered, “This must never be forgotten” scored 36.55% and those with “No, there were worse” scored 8.39%.¹¹⁴² This does seem to be an unnecessary survey, particularly in view of the moot option, “This must never be forgotten”. But then the Serbian tabloids in particular have been fond of *gimmicky* coverage of war topics in the centenary years as we can see from other examples.

On 28 October 2017, an article published in *Blic* explored another episode from the First World War that shows Serbs as undaunted by the enemy: “Serbian IRON GENERAL smashed the MIGHTY INVADER, and his “classical Serbian” answer to the threat will DELIGHT you”.¹¹⁴³

The article gives a brief account of the moment described in Henry Barby’s memoirs about the siege of Belgrade in 1914, when General Mihailo Živković replied to the Austro-Hungarian ultimatum with a Serbian swearword. It is used to illustrate the *exceptional spirit* of courage and determination. The story is similar to that of Brigadier General McAuliffe’s 1944 response in Bastogne after the German surrender demand,¹¹⁴⁴ and no doubt comparable anecdotes can be found in other contexts and languages. The point of the article is to show a foreigner — war reporter Henry Barby — admiring a Serbian general in a seemingly hopeless situation but undaunted. The article ends with the mention that while the 1914 attacks of Austro-Hungarian troops were unsuccessful, the 1915 Mackensen-led attack succeeded, although Mackensen was so impressed with the Serbian Army that “he had ordered for all the Serbian defenders

1142 Results of the survey <https://www.telegraf.rs/rezultati-ankete/1874680> (accessed May 20, 2018) but no longer available.

1143 “Srpski “GVOZDENI” GENERAL razbio je MOĆNOG OKUPATORA, a njegov “klasični srpski” odgovor na pretnju će vas ODUŠEVITI”, *Blic*, 28 October 2017 <https://www.blic.rs/riznica/istorije/srpski-gvozdeni-general-razbio-je-mocnog-okupatora-a-njegov-klasican-srpski-odgovor/902kmrv> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1144 McAuliffe’s typewritten answer was: “Nuts”.

to be buried". He also had a monument built to them in Topčider¹¹⁴⁵ and said, "We fought such an army that we had only heard about in fairy tales". The supernatural element as a characteristic of the Serbian Army resurfaces here similarly to the taking of Kajmakčalan that could not be "militarily explained". As the comment reportedly comes from an enemy commander, the remark acquires all the more validity. Again, the foreigners, friend and foe alike, are cast in the role of *Serbian admirers*.

On another aspect of the war, an article published by *Novosti* entitled, "How Tsar Nicholas sent the Serbs to save their country"¹¹⁴⁶ describes the fate of thousands of Serbs who had been forcibly mobilised in the Austro-Hungarian Army and subsequently surrendered to the Russians. Serbs volunteered to join the Serbian Army and were supported by Tsar Nicholas. Many of them were transported to the Serbian front via the Danube although some had to go on a longer journey through the Far East and only joined the Serbian Army at the Salonika Front. The article ends with a sinister post scriptum: "FOR A LONG TIME, the authorities in the former Yugoslavia were hiding the truth about the Serbian volunteers from Russia on the Salonika Front and in the Great War. Not much is known about it even today although historians speak about a great many numbers of Serbian volunteers from Russia in the Great War." This example combines the role of Russia, and the malicious role of the "former Yugoslav authorities" that kept the true story "hidden". The article ends there, leaving readers to draw their conclusions — which they do in comments.¹¹⁴⁷ The impression that the article leaves is that not only the Serbs as a people have been *subjected to repression* but *true history* was suppressed as well. The frequent repetition of such stories that are not

1145 A monument in the Topčider park in Belgrade has the dedication in both Serbian and German: *Here lie Serbian heroes*.

1146 M. Lopusina, "Car Nikolaj slao Srbe da spasu otažbinu" ["Tsar Nicholas sent the Serbs to save their homeland", *Novosti*, 18 June 2017 <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/naslovna/reportaze/aktuelno.293.html:671077-Car-Nikolaj-slao-Srbe-da-spasu-otadzbinu> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1147 The comments are mostly outrage about the hidden history, the suffering of Serbs and the ungratefulness of Croats and Slovenes.

sufficiently fact-based but mentioned in passing additionally strengthens the sacrificial narrative.

On 17 April 2016, the commemoration date of the Corfu landings, the Belgrade weekly *Nedeljnik* published an article on “Piarron de Mondésir, the general who saved Serbs”.¹¹⁴⁸ In comparison with the previous examples, this is a well-researched article, written by Biljana Stojić, a historian, giving real insight into the background of the Corfu based operations to assist the Serbian Army and about the French general in charge. While the Serbian tabloids *reveal* news stories about Serbian participation in the First World War, other newspapers, which could be considered broadsheets, such as *Politika* and *Danas*, have published various well-known and less well-known stories from the war. From the start of the centenary commemorations, *Politika* has published over 500 articles on Serbian participation in the war, controversies regarding the causes of the war, the Retreat, and many other topics. They also published a series of original testimonies of veterans as recorded by contemporaries.¹¹⁴⁹ The Belgrade independent newspaper, *Danas*, in cooperation with the British Embassy in Belgrade, dedicated several special issue supplements to “Our Great British Women”, British women doctors and nurses who had served in Serbia in the First World War, several of whom died, were buried in Serbia, and are still remembered today. Apart from Dr Elsie Inglis and Flora Sandes, there were also Elisabeth Ross, Lorana Ferris, Mabel Dearmer and many others. Their stories are told factually and without (much) pathos.

1148 Biljana Stojić, “Pijaron de Mondezir, general koji je spasavao Srbe”, *Nedeljnik*, 17 April 2016 <https://arhiva.nedeljnik.rs/nedeljnik/portalnews/pijaron-de-mondezir-general-koji-je-spasavao-srbe/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1149 For instance, Bora Rajković “Ratni heroj bez medalje” [“War hero without a medal”], *Politika*, 17 July 2015 <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/333425/Србија/Ратни-херој-без-медаље> (accessed March 15, 2017).



Part of the front page of *Danas* special supplement, marking the 100th anniversary of the death of Dr Elizabeth Ross in Kragujevac.¹¹⁵⁰

Articles that *report* on different episodes of the Great War have been a regular feature in all the daily and weekly newspapers during the centenary years. The differences between them are reflected in the tone, the extent of historical detail and the accuracy of the given information. The common denominator of all the stories about the Great War covered in the Serbian press is generally the *extraordinary* nature of the Serbian experience in the First World War, that cannot be compared to any other. This is an *a priori* take on any episode described. There are common elements in the way newspapers — mostly the tabloids — have *covered* the remembrance of the Great War, although the broadsheets have them too. The Serbian point of view, the Serbian suffering, the Serbian courage, are usually presented as *unique*. If foreigners' memoirs or testimony is recalled or presented, then they are always admiring, even if they are enemies. By maintaining this emotional discourse in the media, the possibilities for any kind of a debate are severely limited. Insistence on historical accuracy, or common sense, such as *surely the Serbian infantry could not have been faster than the French cavalry?*¹¹⁵¹ seems futile. Every attempt at debate is seen as *revisionism*. The one noticeable exception is the *Peščanik — Hourglass*

1150 *Danas*, 13 February 2015.

1151 Dubravka Stojanović, "The mythical war", *Peščanik*, 5 July 2014 <https://pescanik.net/the-mythical-war/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

website, independent news and comment outlet which has published numerous debates and aired programmes on the more controversial aspects of the First World War as well as on the commemoration frenzy.¹¹⁵² *Peščanik* is also severely critical of the government, has high quality journalists and writers,¹¹⁵³ including independent journalists from other parts of the former Yugoslavia. In her article “Onward! To World War I”, Dubravka Stojanović diagnoses accurately why the First World War is so beloved by the Serbian government — it is a perfect digression, a *divertissement* that steers attention away from scores of actual issues that Serbs should be worried about, including dealing with a much more recent bloodshed caused by the very populism that is still in power, albeit seemingly on the road to the EU.¹¹⁵⁴

Another example of twisting the past to serve the present is an article in the tabloid *Kurir*, which chose the 97th anniversary of the day that the Serbian flag flew next to the American flag on the White House on 28 July 1918 — the instance already mentioned before — to publish a *breaking news* story: “100 YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP: The day when the Serbian flag was flown all across America and on the White House!”¹¹⁵⁵ The article contains the full translation of President Wilson’s statement at the time: “(..) So valiantly and courageously did [the Serbs] oppose the forces of a country ten times greater in population and resources that it was only after they had thrice driven the Austrians back, and Germany and Bulgaria had come to the aid of Austria that they were compelled to retreat over Albania. While their territory has been devastated and their homes despoiled, the spirit of the Serbian people has not been broken. Though overwhelmed by superior forces, their love of freedom remains

1152 Dubravka Stojanović, “Onward! To World War I”, *Peščanik*, 16 December 2013 <https://pescanik.net/onward-to-world-war-i/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1153 *Peščanik* is an NGO founded in 2006 which started off as a radio programme, and now has TV and radio broadcasts and a website with articles on current affairs. <https://pescanik.net/ot-nama/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1154 Stojanović, 2013. <https://pescanik.net/onward-to-world-war-i/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1155 “100 GODINA PRIJATELJSTVA: Dan kada se zastava Srbije vijorila širom Amerike i na Beloj kući”, *Kurir*, 28 July 2015 <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/politika/1876209/srpska-trobojka-na-beloj-kuci-dan-kada-se-zastava-srbije-vijorila-sirom-amerike> (accessed May 20, 2018).

unabated. Brutal force has left unaffected their firm determination to sacrifice everything for liberty and independence.”¹¹⁵⁶ This is the central paragraph of the original statement — there are four in total — and contains every element of the Serbian Great War master narrative. The article itself does not give any comment regarding President Wilson’s statement, it merely presents it. To interpret this, we need to know that the tabloid in question is staunchly pro-government and regularly features stories that are meant to justify government policy, usually without adhering to ethical standards of reporting. We can therefore presume that the tabloid is *reminding* its readers that, in the light of President Wilson’s sympathies for the Serbian cause, today’s Washington should feel the same. Indeed, on the occasion of the visit in 2018 to Belgrade of Wess Mitchell, Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian affairs, Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić prepared a suitable gift for him.¹¹⁵⁷ It was Mitchell’s first visit to Belgrade and the region after his appointment. Following the remarks on bilateral relations between the two countries and the 100-year anniversary since the end of the First World War, when the two countries were allies, Dačić presented Mitchell with President Wilson’s statement on Kosovo, published in the *New York Times* on 18 June 1918.¹¹⁵⁸ The statement, entitled, “Celebrate Kosovo as a day of Honor”, is ostensibly meant to *educate* the present US Administration, or at least the new appointee of the administration, in relation to the Kosovo issue, by reminding them of the stance of the US President from 100 years ago. The article explains that the *New York Times’* piece which contains Wilson’s statement was presented “with the objective of reviving traditional allied

1156 “The Statement of President Woodrow Wilson in 1918”, *Serbica Americana*, <http://eserbia.org/people/120-the-statement-of-president-woodrow-wilson-in-1918> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1157 “Dačić poklonio Mičelu izjavu Vilsona o Kosovu iz 1918.” [“Dačić’s gift to Mitchell – Wilson’s statement on Kosovo from 1918”], *Danas*, 13 March 2018 <https://www.danas.rs/politika/micel-doputovao-u-beograd-sastao-se-sa-dacicem/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1158 “Celebrate Kosovo as a day of honor. President Wilson pays tribute to the Slavs’ fight for liberty etc.” *The New York Times*, 18 June 1918 <https://www.nytimes.com/1918/06/18/archives/celebrate-kosovo-as-a-day-of-honor-president-wilson-pays-tribute.html> (accessed May 20, 2018).

relations of friendship and further intensifying of cooperation and mutual understanding.”¹¹⁵⁹

The above exemplifies an overspill of Serbian internal understanding and perception of their past into relations with external partners. The articles that we have examined, with *loud* headlines and *breaking news*, are meant for internal consumption, with simplified narratives and predictable outcomes as a reaffirmation of the hegemonic principle of the master narrative — Serbs are heroes and victims. It is highly unlikely that anyone on the outside would be able to understand, let alone take seriously this approach to diplomacy. No amount of digging for historical facts about a country supporting Serbia one hundred years ago, would sway the foreign policy of that country in relation to the current situation and their interests. One is left wondering how the attempt of the Serbian government “to revive traditional allied relations of friendship” was received in reality.¹¹⁶⁰

As for Serbia’s tabloids and other media serialising Great War stories, presented in a reductionist manner, it is debatable whether such perspectives deepen understanding of the Great War and Serbia’s participation in it, or subvert it. The stories, rich in emotions and weak in facts, manipulative in tone, matter for the wrong reasons: they are shackling Serbs to their *imagined, invented and constructed exceptionalism*, a predetermined role of heroic victims, making them look inward without seeing the context of a global conflict where many other events happened. These are recognisable aspects of a “demonic memory regime”, as defined by Jay Winter,¹¹⁶¹ whereby events in history are interpreted as being controlled by forces inherently opposed to the group in question,

1159 “Dačić poklonio Mičelu izjavu Vilsona o Kosovu iz 1918.” [“Dačić’s gift to Mitchell — Wilson’s statement on Kosovo from 1918”], *Danas*, 13 March 2018 <https://www.danas.rs/politika/micel-doputovao-u-beograd-sastao-se-sa-dacicem/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1160 No record of this meeting could be found in US media, only Mr Mitchell’s travel to the region is listed as scheduled on the US Department of State website <https://www.state.gov/public-schedule-march-13-2018/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1161 Jay Winter, *War Beyond Words. Languages of remembrance from the Great War to the present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 123.

thwarting its progress. In the case of Serbia, the struggle consists of preserving the script of heroism coupled with martyrdom. Winter observes that martyrdom forms “part of the grammar of sacrifice”.¹¹⁶² These quintessential *Serbian stories* that have been hyped-up, mostly by Serbian tabloids, appear to be remarkable feats of courage but are in fact told in a way which is demeaning to both the past and the present. A likely explanation for the endless stream of such stories is an attempt at *reassurance* by freezing the emotions of the past and reheating them for the present, serving the suitable “memory regime”. The formula for constructing the headlines, the photographs and the main message of the articles seems to be: *Let us be reminded of our heroic suffering*. The screaming headlines are trying hard to protect this script, immobilising it in time. One is left wondering if the Serbs who revel in these stories are able to understand that the world outside goes on, with no thought spared for the Serbian flag at the White House in 1918, but with fairly specific thoughts about the Serbian role in the wars of the 1990s.

Conclusion Chapter IV

There is an inbuilt contradiction in the way Serbs view their past. Past heroism and suffering are remembered, admired and celebrated — *but* with a caveat: past might not last. Every street name hides another, older and belonging to another reality, considered unsuitable for the present. If something happens today, perhaps there will be a street name change tomorrow. A foreign dignitary may visit the capital, and with the hope of trade deals undoubtedly in the back of their minds, Serbian politicians might proffer a street name to celebrate a joint past endeavour: *General Mondésir Street* appeared in the aftermath of President Macron’s visit in July 2019, and three months later, on the occasion of the Russian Prime Minister Medvedev’s visit, it was announced that a street in Belgrade would be named after a *Red Army* soldier who died

1162 Winter, 2018, 125.

during the liberation of Belgrade in 1944.¹¹⁶³ Changeable street names embody the transient Serbian past. It is remembrance used as currency of unstable value. Monuments have their secrets too. Every monument has a story of contention, bitterness and strife. They are living dilemmas of the Serbian relationship with the past. *We love France...but we have problems with what they did in 1999, or in 2017, 2018 ...* The monuments mostly represent valuable scenography for commemorations. The Serbian First World War monuments are sites of commemoration rather than sites of memory, they are suitable stages for *performing* the current version of the past. The commemorative events are exactly what Felix Berenskoetter meant with “a network of narratives” providing “a form of governance”. The events are subsequently reported in the media accompanied with instructive fables from the Great War where tragedies and heroic acts are recited again and again. The Great War and the Retreat have become a potent allegory for the way Serbs *fare in the world*, where martyrdom features prominently, and ultimately divides.¹¹⁶⁴ In this restricted escapist universe there is not much room for facing the more recent and far less glorious past, and consequently no prospect of reconciliation.¹¹⁶⁵ However, this *isolationist* aspect of the way that Serbs view their changeable past, is not the whole story. In the next chapter, we consider the real *lieux de mémoire* of the Retreat and how people, individuals as well as groups, are recreating *fictive kinships of remembrance*, vacillating between the past and the present, in an unresolved ambivalence about the world of 100 years ago and the world of today.

1163 Nikolay Kravtsov had been given a street at the time, but lost it in 1948, during Tito's conflict with Stalin.

1164 Winter, 2018, 130.

1165 Winter, 2018, 137.

V

The Retreat Remembered and Rediscovered

Introduction

“**H**istory had never seen such a thing, an entire army, the king, the parliament, the government, people, administrative departments ... the whole state left *itself* and went into exile” — so says the introduction to the 2005 Serbian documentary, “Where the Yellow Lemon Tree Blooms”.¹¹⁶⁶ This is generally the Serbian view of the Retreat — it was an exceptional, unique event in the history of Serbia — if not the world — which became legendary almost as soon as it ended. Nevertheless, the official commemoration and memorialisation of the Retreat, and of the other important events from the First World War over the decades that followed it, would be unsystematic and erratic, as well as government and regime dependent. As previously discussed, the interwar years saw the building of several memorials: the *Victor* in Belgrade, the monument to the Defenders of Belgrade, the monument to the Unknown Hero ... but no memorial to the Retreat. Relations with Albania were never sufficiently

1166 “Gde cveta limun žut” [“Where the Yellow Lemon Tree Blooms”], *Košutnjak Film*, 2006.

stable to allow for the building of any memorials *in situ*.¹¹⁶⁷ The ossuary in Vido, to be discussed in this chapter, is often considered as fulfilling the function of the Retreat memorial. Today, it is one of the three main pilgrimage destinations for Serbs seeking to pay their respects to the dead of the Great War, the second being the military cemetery of Thessaloniki, and the third the Kajmakčalan Peak chapel on the Graeco-Macedonian border. Interest in visiting these Serbian *lieux de mémoires* has increased in recent years,¹¹⁶⁸ despite all three sites being outside Serbia. During the Great War centenary years 2014 – 2018, in the context of the general resurgence of interest in memorial culture, much is being remembered and rediscovered — as well as misremembered and reinterpreted — and alongside official commemorative agendas, there are remarkable personal initiatives and projects. There are private citizens' endeavours to pay tribute, commemorate or otherwise memorialise the fallen in the Great War and in the Retreat, consisting of simple or creative acts of remembrance performed by self-appointed and inspired actors of remembrance. Some have attracted public attention and admiration, and will be discussed further. Also in this chapter, we will examine the cultural memory of the Retreat expressed through museum exhibitions. There have been theatre performances, book promotions, films, and conferences, which have attracted genuine interest and generated discussions, and some have been mentioned previously. But most of all, we cannot examine the topic of cultural memory and individual acts of memory without highlighting the Great War songs, which all Serbs know the lyrics to, and the pilgrimages to the sacred sites of the revered Serbian dead, where these songs are sung.

1167 There are around a dozen locations in Albania with derelict cemeteries containing the remains of Serbian soldiers from the Balkan Wars and the First World War, according to the Institute for the Protection of Monuments. There are no memorials or monuments. There is an ossuary in Tiranë with remains of the Serbian soldiers from the First Balkan War.

1168 From sources in Corfu 2017.

1. Musical Storytelling — The Soundtrack of the Retreat

“There, far away, far away from the sea,
This is where my village lies, this is where Serbia be,
There, far away, where the yellow lemon tree blooms,
There was the only way for us, for the Serbian Army to pass.”¹¹⁶⁹

According to the numerous articles published in the Serbian press in May 2013, in the 70th year since Nikola Tesla’s death, the great scientist’s last wish was to have two songs played at his funeral: Schubert’s *Ave Maria*, and the traditional Serbian song from the Great War, *Tamo daleko*, “There Far Away”.¹¹⁷⁰ For Serbs, this was other proof — if more was needed— of Nikola Tesla’s devotion to the old country.¹¹⁷¹ Consequently, when reportedly resurfaced footage of Tesla’s funeral with the accompanying music appeared on a Serbian news site, it quickly spread to others, and then did the rounds of regional social media for a couple of weeks, drawing comments and exchanges between viewers, mostly related to Tesla’s ethnic origin rather than to his scientific legacy.¹¹⁷²

Music is a powerful storyteller. When music is related to a specific historical context, well-known and familiar to all, then it only takes a few chords to produce the (desired) effect: sadness, joy, despair, elation. Music not only rouses emotions that transcend the present to situate us in the past, but it also conveys vivid images that stay in our mind. *Tamo*

1169 *Tamo daleko* (There, Far Away) *YouTube* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SV7YqM71_co (accessed May 20, 2019) This translation by A.T.

1170 S. Šulović, “Nova dokumenta o geniju: Tesla sahranjen uz “Tamo daleko”” [“New documents about the genius: Tesla buried with “There far away””], *Blic*, 20 May 2013 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/nova-dokumenta-o-geniju-tesla-sahranjen-uz-tamo-daleko/5jbnh1j> (accessed May 15, 2019).

1171 Nikola Tesla was born in the Lika region of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in present-day Croatia, and there are occasional heated exchanges between Serbs and Croats as to who he *belongs* to. Be that as it may, there are *Nikola Tesla streets* in *all* the parts of the former Yugoslavia.

1172 Nikola Tesla’s funeral in 1943, *Vimeo* <https://vimeo.com/210453956> (accessed May 15, 2019); also *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSQ1gPBr9kA> (accessed May 15, 2019).

daleko, a song about home, perhaps more than any other song from Serbia's Great War, has this power to mesmerise the audience into joining in, almost as if it was a sacred collective ceremony. This ritual, once started, has to be completed — the song has to be sung to the end by all present. *Tamo daleko* is thought to have originated in Corfu as the Serbian Army was recovering from the ordeal of the Retreat, and where many other troops stationed on the island also adopted it.¹¹⁷³ In his book on the music and songs of Serbia's Great War,¹¹⁷⁴ composer and musicologist Žarko Petrović presents the lyrics for nine different versions, not counting the French, English, Greek, and Czech versions of the song.¹¹⁷⁵ In English, it was known as "Far away over there" and in French "Là-bas au loin". According to Ljubomir Saramandić, author of the book *The Pilgrimage to Corfu*, it was also taken up by Italian, Moroccan, and Senegalese troops.¹¹⁷⁶ The lyrics of the different versions in Serbian are similar, with variations relating to how the "There, far away", i.e. *home*, is defined. There is a version "far away from the sea", or "far away, where the blue Danube shines", or even, "far away near the sea", as sung by volunteers from Dalmatia, according to Petrović.¹¹⁷⁷ The music of *Tamo daleko* is a gentle, melancholy waltz, and the lyrics are achingly evocative, reminiscing about a far-away village left behind in Serbia. The song conveys an intense longing for home, born from the distance between the singer and his family.¹¹⁷⁸ It is a quintessential song of *nostalgia*, or homesickness, a condition recognised as a disease in the 17th century, first discovered among soldiers who had travelled far from home.¹¹⁷⁹ The song is also about

1173 Ljubomir Saramandić, *Hodočašće na Krk* [Pilgrimage to Corfu] (Belgrade: Čigoja štampa, 2004), 50.

1174 Žarko Petrović, *Tamo daleko — Solunske pesme* [There far away — Salonika songs] (Knjaževac: IO Nota, 1988).

1175 Petrović, 1988, 48-50.

1176 Saramandić, 2004, 50.

1177 Saramandić, 2004, 50.

1178 Different versions of this song continue to be recorded. There is even a Chilean version, sung by former political prisoners. See *Cantos Cautivos — Far Away (Tamo daleko)*. <https://www.cantoscautivos.org/en/testimony.php?query=10684> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1179 David Anderson, "The soldiers who died of homesickness", *The Conversation*, 30 September 2016. <https://theconversation.com/the-soldiers-who-died-of-homesickness-65910> (accessed May 20, 2019). Reportedly, in 1918 a US soldier sent to France to fight, was the last person who died with "nostalgia" which was cause of death on his death certificate.

loss, of “the father and son” who gave their lives for their country, and of living in Corfu, “without the homeland”. In some versions of the song, Serbian soldiers in Corfu are admonished “not to kiss Greek girls” as their “Serbian womenfolk are waiting at home.” Despite the sad tone of the music and the lyrics, almost every version finishes with the exhortation: “Long live Serbia!”, indicating the ultimate goal — the soldiers returning home. The song is often linked to the Retreat, although it is about being in Corfu and far away from home, rather than about crossing Albania. The song does not symbolise a struggle for survival, it is about what happened afterwards, and embodies a yearning for home which comes across strongly through the music too, which may explain its appeal to troops from other nations. Today the song is ubiquitous in all the *lieux de mémoire* related to the First World War. It is played at commemorations, at ceremonies in cemeteries, in front of monuments, at museum exhibitions, in plays, documentaries, amateur videos, and television programmes. In November 2013, as a preamble to the centenary years, a play based on the last part of the *Serbian trilogy* by the Serbian author Stevan Jakovljević, was produced by Belgrade’s National Theatre.¹¹⁸⁰ The play focuses on a unit of Serbian soldiers in a trench on the Salonika Front, waiting for the final push over the top. At the end of the play, one of the actors turns to the audience and starts singing *Tamo daleko*. The audience takes it up¹¹⁸¹ and sings along, in effect joining the performance. Despite enthusiastic reviews, and special praise for the use of *Tamo daleko*,¹¹⁸² it seemed a trite device to insert into a play, let alone at the end of a play. Because the song has the power to project far more emotion than any context, there is a risk that it might overwhelm the plot of the play, which was indeed the case, even if the critics loved it. It is possible that *Tamo daleko* is used because it never fails to enthuse the audience. When André Rieu, the internationally popular Dutch violinist, the so-called “king of waltz”, played a concert

1180 *Srpska trilogija* [Serbian trilogy], *Narodno pozorište* [National Theatre] <https://www.narodnopolozoriste.rs/srpska-trilogija> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1181 Performance on 4 May 2014.

1182 For instance in *Novosti*, 23 November 2013 “Sjajna premijera *Srpske trilogije*” [“Excellent premiere of the *Serbian trilogy*”] <http://www.novosti.rs/vesti/kultura.71.html:465097-Sjajna-premijera-Srpske-trilogije> (accessed May 20, 2019).

in Serbia, it was only natural that he would also play *Tamo daleko*, having first promoted his upcoming concert with the announcement that the song was on his repertoire.¹¹⁸³

“*Kreće se ladja francuska*” [“The French Ship is leaving”]¹¹⁸⁴ is again a melancholy and mournful song, another waltz, to be played *moderato*. The music for the song was written by a French composer Nicholas Ballon, and it also exists in the French version as *Le bateau de Salonique*. However, according to Žarko Petrović, it was the Serbian version which was recorded on the French gramophone record *La grande guerre* at the end of the war.¹¹⁸⁵ The song describes the transport of the Serbian sick and wounded as a French ship takes them elsewhere to convalesce. Just like *Tamo daleko*, this song too is sung in several different versions. That the French were already seen at the time as the saviours of the Serbs is clear from the line at the end of the second verse of the most popular version: “Long live brotherly liberty! Long live brotherly France!”¹¹⁸⁶

These two songs represent the *sacrificial narrative* part of the formula which forms the general Serbian perception of the Great War, even of their whole history: the Serbs *fought* and they *suffered*. While these two songs have a mournful tone and an atmosphere that may be unusual for war songs, the most famous Serbian tune of the First World War represents the *fighting* and *heroic* part of the Serbian narrative formula. *Marš na Drinu* [“March on the Drina”] is a true war song, a military march, written by a soldier for another soldier. It was composed by Captain Stanislav Binički¹¹⁸⁷ on the battlefield, in the honour of the Cer Battle victory, in August 1914. Binički

1183 ANDRE RIEU Serbia – “Tamo daleko” *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yITCTu5XZZU> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1184 “Kreće se ladja francuska” *YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBbN7kdc4pI> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1185 Petrović, 1988, 11.

1186 Petrović, 1988, 11.

1187 Stanislav Binički (1872–1942) was the son of a former Austro-Hungarian officer decorated at Könniggrätz, who defected to Serbia in 1868 as a supporter of the Illyrian movement for the establishment of a South Slav State. See Nenad Novak Stefanović, “Kad pada kiša doboša” [“As the drumbeats are raining”], in *Vodič kroz ljubavnu istoriju Beograda* [Guide through the Love History of Belgrade] (Belgrade: Laguna, 2017), 176.

dedicated it to the commander of the 2nd Regiment of the Drina Division, the so-called *Iron Regiment*. The commander, Colonel Milivoj Stevanović Brka who was Binički's friend, died in the battle.¹¹⁸⁸ Composed in *Tempo di marcia*, it is a military march which has a distinct Serbian *kolo* at its core,¹¹⁸⁹ a dance music sequence, creating an upbeat melody, combining the solemn part — the march, and the joyful part — the *kolo* — thus creating a “lyrical charge”.¹¹⁹⁰ *March on the Drina* is an *extremely* popular tune in Serbia and is often performed in different contexts, including traditionally for Serbian New Year's Eve.¹¹⁹¹ For many nations, it is the song “Auld Lang Syne” which marks the New Year. In itself, it is symptomatic that the Serbian soundtrack for a new beginning should be a First World War tune. Being the “mythical war”, the Great War provides constant inspiration. The *March* represents not only the essence of heroism that the Serbs wish to be known for — the Cer Battle was the first Entente victory in the war — but also their *authentic being*. We could almost call it a proof of *appellation d'origine contrôlée*: the music is Serbian, the cause is Serbian — it is a symbol put to music. As such, *March on the Drina* was played at the ceremony of the 1961 Nobel Prize for Literature to Ivo Andrić,¹¹⁹² a Yugoslav writer who is today claimed by Serbs, Croats, and Bosnians. *March on the Drina* was traditionally played when young men were leaving home to begin their military service.¹¹⁹³ *March on the Drina* has also been played in non-Serbian related settings, such as during the 1987 Vienna Philharmonic New Year's concert, conducted by Herbert von Karajan, possibly as just another piece of music that was easy to clap to.¹¹⁹⁴ Different orchestras, musicians, and bands recorded this tune, including the English band *The Shadows*.¹¹⁹⁵ In Serbia, *March on the Drina* was a candidate for the national anthem. It is

1188 Stefanović, 2017, 182.

1189 *Kolo* is a traditional dance from South-east Europe.

1190 Stefanović, 2017, 182.

1191 13 January, according to the Julian calendar.

1192 The Nobel Prize in Literature 1961 <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1961/summary/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1193 Obligatory military service was suspended in 2011 and Serbia has had a professional army since.

1194 *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u--BZeL9jzQ> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1195 *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2RRvJklrONE> (accessed May 20, 2019).

frequently sung by football supporters,¹¹⁹⁶ as well as by sportsmen and women before or after matches, which are then reported in the tabloids as *news*. An interesting controversy regarding *March on the Drina* took place in 2013, when the then President of the UN General Assembly, former Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremić (b. 1975), organised a concert at the UN, in celebration of the 67th session of the UN General Assembly and the Serbian presidency, “on the first day of the Orthodox New Year”. The concert was given by a Serbian *a cappella* choir *Viva Vox*. Their performance consisted of a medley of world music, traditional music, as well as pop and rock tunes. At the end of the concert, as an encore, they performed the *March on the Drina*, introduced by the MC as the “march of peace”.¹¹⁹⁷ The concert, including the encore, was well received by the audience, and the then Secretary General of the UN, Ban Ki-Moon was seen clapping to the rhythm. The next day, the *Congress of North American Bosniaks* (CNAB) addressed a protest letter to the UN Secretary General, informing him that the “March” should not have been allowed to be performed as it was symbolic of Serbian nationalism and was played by Serbian war criminals and aggressors in Bosnia in the 1990s.¹¹⁹⁸ The UN Secretary General’s spokesperson subsequently apologised to the CNAB for the ovation given to the “militant Serbian nationalist song” and said the Secretary General had not been aware of the song’s context.¹¹⁹⁹ In further statements and

1196 The lyrics were authored by Miloje Popović Kavaja in 1964: “Forward to battle, heroes all, forward and do not regret your life...” “*Kako je nastao Marš na Drinu? Nezvanična himna Srbije, junačka ili agresorska pesma?*” [“How was the ‘March on the Drina’ composed? Serbia’s unofficial anthem, a heroic song or an aggressors’ song?”] *Telegraf*, 15 November 2014 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/kultura/1305377-kako-je-nastao-mars-na-drinu-nezvanicna-himna-srbije-junacka-ili-agresorska-pesma-video-tekst> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1197 The MC’s introduction: “Serbia is a European country. In our part of the world, New Year’s concert traditionally ends with a march *transformed* into a message of peace. So, here is a march, to close this wonderful evening, a great march of peace!”, see Reference link below. One could argue that unpacking this introduction would require a study of its own.

1198 Protest letter to Ban-Ki Moon, UN Secretary General, *Congress of North American Bosniaks* <https://bosniak.org/2013/01/15/protest-letter-to-ban-ki-moon-un-general-secretary/> (accessed May 20, 2019). There is no doubting the popularity of Serbian WWI songs in the wars in Croatia and Bosnia, see Robert Hudson, “Songs of seduction: popular music and Serbian nationalism”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 37 (no. 2, 2003), 159-160.

1199 CNAB Welcomes the Apology of the United Nations for Serb Nationalist Song Ovation, Congress of North American Bosniaks, 17 January 2013 <https://bosniak.org/2013/01/17/cnab-welcomes-the-apology-of-the-united-nations-for-serb-nationalist-song-ovation/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

letters, CNAB requested Vuk Jeremić be investigated and suspended, but it seems that no further action was taken. The full concert, including the encore, could still be viewed on the UN TV website in 2019.¹²⁰⁰

The status of the music of Serbia's Great War prior to the late 1980s was conflicted. Many songs were not played publicly, because Serbian nationalism was seen as a threat to socialist values. Radio stations, all state-controlled in the former Yugoslavia, did not play songs that were considered unsuitable or inappropriate, especially politically. Certainly, songs like "*Rado ide Srbin u vojnike*" ("Gladly goes a Serb to the army"),¹²⁰¹ or "*Ko to kaže, ko to laže*" ("Who says so, who lies so") were not played publicly, except at weddings, mostly in the countryside.¹²⁰² Another song, "My Milan", ostensibly predates even the Balkan wars, "since Serbia was always at war",¹²⁰³ also played when young men were leaving to join the army, could be considered as celebrating an uncharitable sentiment. The song is about a young man, Milan, whose *girl* is calling him and entreating him to pass by her house, before leaving to join the army. In his 1986 epistolary novel *My dear Petrović*,¹²⁰⁴ Serbian writer Milovan Danajlić examines this song as "a song about hate".¹²⁰⁵ She wants him to pass by her house not so that they could embrace one last time, before he leaves, but *so that the neighbours would be envious*: "Come by, wave a kerchief, and let all our foes perish."¹²⁰⁶ These and other songs from this period certainly deserve closer examination and possibly a comparison with the Great War songs from other countries, but this is outside the scope of this research.

1200 UN Web TV 14 January 2013, <http://webtv.un.org/en/ga/watch/viva-vox-choir-belgrade-new-years-concert-of-the-67th-session-of-the-general-assembly/2094291812001/?term=&lan=original&sort=popular> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1201 The song could be considered a *profession de foi* of Serbian love of war: "Gladly goes Serb to the army ... he thinks of battle as fun and likes to beat the enemy, because gunpowder doesn't frighten him" etc.

1202 From personal experience. The lyrics are: "Who says so, who lies so, that Serbia is small. It's not small, it's not small, three times it went to war."

1203 Petrović, 1988, 64.

1204 Milovan Danajlić, *Dragi moj Petroviću* [*My dear Petrović*] (Znanje: Zagreb, 1986).

1205 Danajlić, 1986, 174.

1206 In Serbian: "Nogom stani, maramicom mani, neka puknu svi naši dušmani".

Žarko Petrović collected over 70 songs that were popular among Serbian troops in the First World War. Most of them were sung in Corfu and later in Salonika. They are thus collectively called *Solunske pesme* (*Songs of Salonika*), because they were sung or listened to by *solunci*, Salonika warriors or veterans. In 1979, the record *Solunske pesme*¹²⁰⁷ was released, followed by *Solunske pesme 2*¹²⁰⁸ in 1982, by *Jugoton*, a record label from Croatia, then still part of Yugoslavia. The two compilations contained most of the well-known Serbian First World War songs, with the exception of the “Who says so, who lies so”, presumably because it was considered *extremely* nationalistic, alluding to the reviled Greater Serbia narrative. *Jugoton* was known as a commercially astute company and there was clearly a market for this music, especially after 1980, the year of Tito’s death, but there was also a limit to what would be allowed. However, with the rise of Milošević in the late 1980s, at the time that Serbs were *rediscovering* their history, all these songs reappeared on radio, in concerts, and live bands in restaurants were happy to play them on demand. Robert Hudson calls it “a process of ethnification”.¹²⁰⁹ It seemed as if this potentially divisive music was liberated from its socialist *brotherhood and unity* constraints, ready to unleash its emotional ascendancy. Today, the songs and the music are still with us — played and sung at the centenary commemorations, concerts, remembrance services, and elsewhere, at football matches and sports celebrations, wherever expressions of belonging are expected.¹²¹⁰

Contrary to official commemorative events, explored in the previous chapter, the Great War songs are spontaneously popular. There are no celebrations without the *March on the Drina*, no weddings, no parties.

1207 *Solunske pesme* (Vinyl, LP, Compilation) <https://www.discogs.com/VariouS-Cолунске-Песме/release/2769169> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1208 *Solunske pesme 2* (vinyl, LP, Album compilation) *Discogs* <https://www.discogs.com/VariouS-Solunske-Pesme-2/release/6995919> (accessed May 20, 2019). The iconic picture of the Serbian scout, as discussed in the previous chapter, featured on the cover of the first album.

1209 Hudson, 2003, 168.

1210 While other compilations were issued over the past thirty years, the latest compilation issued in 2018, to mark the centenary of the end of the Great War, comprises 24 different songs. “Oj Srbijo, mila mati – Sto godina od završetka Velikog rata 1918-2018” [“Oh Serbia dear mother – Hundred years since the end of the Great War 1918 – 2018”], Belgrade, *PGP RTS*, 2018.

This tells us Serbs are attracted to the events during which these songs were born. They provide joy, pleasure, contentment. More than that, they possibly offer a *frisson* of something that is difficult to define. From observing people while they are either singing *Tamo daleko* or clapping to the *March on the Drina*, we can see that they are not *forced* to do this, there is no visible pressure or obligation, except through imitation of their “choiceless identity” peers. Repeated renditions of the song, in one event after another, do not seem to bother the singers. Some of the songs are popular among football supporters, particularly *March on the Drina*. In fact, this is what some of these songs are reminiscent of as they are sung today — they are football songs, stadium chants. There is a sense of abandonment of individuality that only happens in a crowd singing the same song: it denotes belonging and unity. The reality in Serbia does not quite match this image — there is unemployment, brain drain, domestic violence, widespread corruption and media censorship, to name but a few burning issues. But for a short time, as the crowd lose themselves in a song which relates to past glory, the present is swept aside, at least until the final chord.

In the next part of the chapter, we examine how the Great War and the Retreat exist in the Serbian national consciousness through the educational efforts of museums and special exhibitions. Aleida Assmann spoke of nations *making* their memory rather than *having* one.¹²¹¹ In the centenary years, these secular temples of historical experience have provided stories, images, objects to fit into the “network of narratives”, to use Berenskoetter’s term. We look at the most popular themes, how they were presented and whether any unusual or alternative aspects of Serbia’s Great War were shown. More importantly, we examine whether the *mediated history* asked any questions.¹²¹²

1211 Assmann, in Tilmans, Van Vree and Winter, 2010, 42.

1212 Winter, 2018, 165.

2. The Retreat Mediated — Objects and Images

“Museums are the cathedrals of the 21st century, in that they have filled the void left by the conventional churches as a site in which mixed populations of different faiths or no faith at all, of different origins and beliefs, confront and meditate on sacred themes — sacrifice, death, mourning, evil, brotherhood, dignity, transcendence. War not only belongs in museums; war dominates museum space in much of the public representation of history and will continue to do so.”¹²¹³

Jay Winter’s article on museums and the representation of war, published just before the centenary years began, starts with the above statement, and goes on to ask the question to which, he admits, the answer will be difficult to provide: “How can war be represented?”¹²¹⁴ This could be a starting point to explore what war means for people and for communities. How can war be represented is also a question as to how war *should be* remembered. It could open a discussion about how to present war without glorifying it, but also without disrespecting those who had given their lives. In Serbia, this kind of question seems to be rarely, if ever, asked because the narrative is predetermined and the answer is obvious — Serbia suffered and Serbia fought — this is all we need to know.¹²¹⁵ The meaning of war, especially this war, the Great War, is never questioned. For the centenary years, Serbian museums, galleries, cultural centres, and other institutions, were ready to display *expected* representations of the First World War: the dominant narrative was not to be questioned but *served*.¹²¹⁶ There may have been new details, perhaps different technology

1213 Jay Winter, “Museums and the Representation of War”, *museum and society* 10(3) (November 2012), 150.

1214 Winter, 2012, 150.

1215 The commentaries on social media tend to lament Serbia’s current *lowly* status compared to the *glory* of the victories in the First World War.

1216 Some content in exhibitions as well as in public events was reused from previous occasions, e.g. a documentary film on Momčilo Gavrić, child-soldier in the war, produced in 1987, was relaunched in 2014; some themes at commemorations and conferences from 2004, could be seen again in 2014.

was used, new sources were published, artefacts presented with various degrees of creativity, but there were generally no suggestions of different perspectives, only reaffirmation on how Serbia was unjustly attacked, how much she suffered and how valiantly she fought. Some representations were perhaps aiming to find new ways of telling the same story but there was no real attempt to challenge the narrative in any way. In this part of the chapter, we examine how the First World War in Serbia *is* represented in conventional mediated memory repositories that are museums, and whether, in this context, it is possible to have any alternative narratives, let alone counter-narratives.

We reviewed the programme of events at 40 museums throughout Serbia in over 30 towns, ranging in size from around 30,000 to 1.8 million inhabitants (Belgrade), between 2014 and 2018. The word *museum* is used here as an umbrella term, particularly for smaller towns, and may include cultural centres, exhibition spaces, or town galleries. Even when we are talking about museums *au sens propre*, some communities may use them as galleries, concert halls, conference venues, etc. Most have dedicated websites, and some are more social media savvy than others.¹²¹⁷ In Serbia, there is seemingly no central repository of events held as part of the commemorations of the centenary and it was therefore necessary to direct inquiries at individual museums.¹²¹⁸ A little over half of the museums contacted as part of the research answered our inquiries promptly with regard to details of exhibitions, special events, conferences,

1217 Toplice National Museum, in Prokuplje, a municipality of around 44,000 inhabitants, has no website only a Facebook page which is updated on a regular basis showing a remarkable number and variety of activities happening in the museum on a daily basis. https://sr-rs.facebook.com/pg/Narodni-muzej-Toplice-289939654525932/posts/?ref=page_internal (accessed June 28, 2019); The Šabac National Museum also uses Facebook to advertise its events and even co-create content: in February 2014, they invited Šabac citizens to submit documents, photographs and objects to be included in an exhibition on the suffering of Šabac in the Great War.

1218 All the museums are part of the network of Serbian museums *Muzeji Srbije* <https://www.muzejisrbije.rs/2019/04/12/lista-ucesnika-2019/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

and on occasions also provided information on visitor numbers.¹²¹⁹ Based on these responses, press coverage of the events, websites of museum that did not respond to inquiries, and several personal visits, we have examined a selection of events that allow us to draw some conclusions about how the Great War and the Retreat were represented during the centenaries.¹²²⁰

Between 2014 and 2018, all of the examined museums had one or more special exhibition and/or events about the First World War, and while a small number represented the Retreat as a special event of the war, many more focused on the aftermath (Corfu, Salonika Front) which still required that the Retreat story be presented. What was perhaps surprising was the variety of genres: marking the centenary was done through exhibitions, book promotions — in particular memoirs from the Great War published for the first time and monographs about military leaders — documentary films, conferences, round tables, seminars, lectures, plays, musical performances, inauguration of memorials and monuments, poetry readings and memorial services. From the examined material, it became apparent that almost all, in fact, featured the Retreat as a central event of the war. There were recurring themes that could be found in events throughout Serbia. For example, two of the most common subjects were about two outstanding personalities of the Great War, a female soldier and a child soldier. Milunka Savić, (1892 – 1973) was a female soldier in the Serbian Army in the Balkan Wars and in the First World

1219 They are: in Belgrade, Army Hall (*Defence Media Centre*), Gallery of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences, Serbian History Museum, Air Force Museum, Jewish Historical Museum, Book Museum, Museum of Applied Art; elsewhere in Serbia: Kraljevo National Museum, Valjevo National Museum, Niš National Museum, Negotin National Museum, Srem Museum, Šabac National Museum, Jadar Museum, Toplice National Museum, Smederevo Museum, Pančevo National Museum, Vojvodina Museum, Rudnik-Takovo Regional Museum, Zrenjanin National Museum, Kikinda National Museum, and Knjaževac National Museum. Many of the Great War exhibitions toured the country and were presented in different museums throughout the centenary years.

1220 Sources such as website presentations, email exchanges, virtual tours, programmes, brochures, exhibition posters, catalogues, media coverage, and social media reactions, allowed us to assess the exhibitions where there was no possibility to visit them.

War,¹²²¹ while Momčilo Gavrić (1906 – 1993) was not only the youngest soldier of the Great War, but also the youngest NCO in the world, joining the army at age eight, becoming corporal at ten.¹²²² Their stories have been told before but were given special attention during the centenary years. They are truly remarkable and understandably interesting for the public.¹²²³ Both retreated across Albania, were wounded in combat, and were decorated for bravery. Certain aspects of their lives were covered more in the press¹²²⁴ than in the exhibitions — neither was particularly well treated after the First or the Second World War — offering additional commentary on the way Serbs deal with their past. Another exhibition theme, shown in several towns, was about women in the Great War.¹²²⁵ There were at least six different events on this subject — exhibitions, readings and book promotions — that were organised in the surveyed museums. Some originated in Belgrade and then toured the country and even went abroad, as was the case with the exhibition *Women in the Great War*.¹²²⁶

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- 1221 Milunka Savić was wounded nine times and is the most decorated female soldier in history. A documentary film about her life was produced in 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdsaddmOnGs> (accessed June 28, 2019).
- 1222 After his family was killed by Austro-Hungarian troops in 1914, Momčilo Gavrić joined the artillery regiment of the Drina Division. He participated in the Retreat and the breakthrough at the Salonika Front. A documentary film produced about his life in 1987 was relaunched in 2014 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=glc3y7QxZWU> (accessed June 28, 2019).
- 1223 President Macron laid a wreath on Milunka Savić's tomb during his official visit to Serbia in 2019. She was the recipient of the Chevalier de la Légion d'honneur, Officier de la Legion d'Honneur and Croix de guerre 1914 – 1918, the only woman ever to have received it.
- 1224 Tatjana Nježić, "ZABORAVLJENA HEROINA: Novi detalji iz života Milunke Savić" ["The forgotten heroine: New details from the life of Milunka Savić"], *Blic*, <https://www.blic.rs/riznica/istorije/zaboravljena-heroina-novi-detalji-iz-zivota-milunke-savic/hdpywk6> (accessed June 28, 2019) and "STIDE LI SE SRBI ZBOG OVOGA ŠTO SU URADILI MOMČILU? OVAKO JE PROŠAO najmladji srpski HEROJ koji je oslobodio SRBIJU!" ["Are the Serbs ashamed for what they have done to Momčilo? This is what happened to the youngest Serbian hero who liberated Serbia!"], *Telegraf*, 4 October 2015 <https://www.telegraf.rs/vesti/politika/1754785-stide-li-se-srbi-zbog-ovoga-sto-su-uradili-momcilu-ovako-je-prosao-najmladji-srpski-heroj-koji-je-oslobodio-srbiju-foto> (accessed June 28, 2019) are two among many similar articles on these two subjects.
- 1225 Ironically, Serbia does not fare well in preventing violence against women. In 2018, 30 women were killed in Serbia by their partners according to the network *Women Against Violence* https://www.zeneprotivnasilja.net/images/pdf/FEMICID-Saopštenje_za_2018_godinu.pdf (accessed June 28, 2019).
- 1226 In the original *Žensko lice Velikog rata* [*The Female face of the Great War*]. It was also shown in London in 2015 as part of the *Serbian Culture Days* in Serbian House in London.



The panel above the entrance to the exhibition within the exhibition: *Women in the Great War — The position and role of women in the First World War, Serbian History Museum, Belgrade* (November 2014).

This particular exhibition was conceived at the Serbian History Museum in 2014 as part of the exhibition *Serbia 1914*. The exhibitions such as this one focus on educating visitors as well as celebrating the achievements of certain exceptional people.



Part of the exhibit on women soldiers in the Great War.¹²²⁷ (November 2014)

¹²²⁷ Serbian History Museum, 21 November 2014.

Much attention was given to the women belonging to foreign medical missions in Serbia, in particular to the *Scottish Women's Hospitals* founded by Dr Elsie Inglis.¹²²⁸ Another woman with a prominent place in the exhibition was Flora Sandes, who first came as a nurse to Serbia in 1914, and later fought in the Serbian Army. Three women who had come to Serbia to look after the sick and wounded soldiers, Mable Dearmer, Lorana Ferris and Dr Elisabeth Ross, died in Kragujevac in 1915. Their stories were also featured in the exhibition.

A popular exhibition that also toured Serbia in the centenary years was the exhibition of original photographs from the First World War by the war photographer Rista Marjanović (1885 – 1969). It was first shown in the Gallery of the Serbian Academy of Arts and Sciences in October 2014 with the title *Do Not Forget Us*, after an entry written by a Serbian officer and volunteer in his war diary.¹²²⁹ Marjanović was the official war photographer of the Serbian High Command, working on the front lines, under the command of Colonel Dragutin Dimitrijević Apis of *Black Hand* fame. Marjanović is the author of iconic photographs of the Great War, including the photographs of the Retreat, as well as of the film footage of the Serbian Army crossing the Sava River into the soon to be defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1918. The exhibition was extremely popular, attracting 18,442 visitors during the initial four-week exhibition in Belgrade, and went on to tour Serbia.¹²³⁰ In 2018, a documentary film about Rista Marjanović was shown both on television and as part of events in a number of museums.¹²³¹ Marjanović's photographs are considered to have

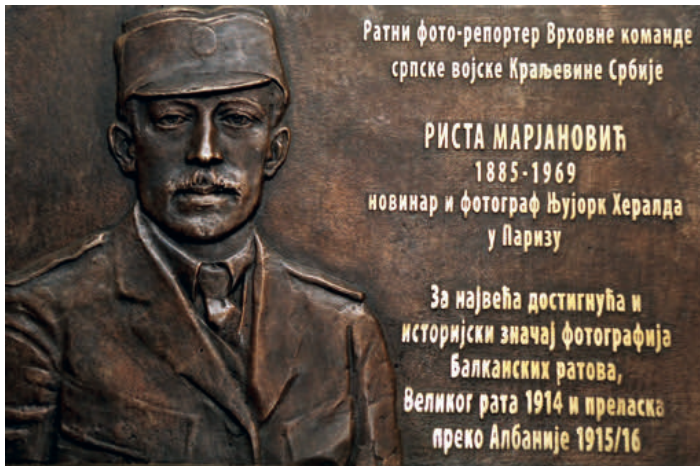
1228 During the centenary years, Dr Inglis was commemorated in Serbia through a series of events, such as concerts, inauguration of memorials and plaques, and a special occasion when her relatives visited Serbia in November 2017 as described by Alan Cumming in an article for "the British Serb magazine" expat *Britić*, "Elsie's relatives' "pilgrimage" to Serbia" <http://www.ebritic.com/?p=635083> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1229 A. Ćuk "Nemojte nas zaboraviti" ["Do not forget us"], *Danas*, 14 October 2014 <https://www.danas.rs/kultura/nemojte-nas-zaboraviti/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1230 From correspondence with the museums.

1231 For instance, *Veliki rat Riste Marjanovića* [Rista Marjanović's Great War], RTS, November 2018 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dg_fYK5aW-Q (accessed June 28, 2019).

“resurrected Serbia”¹²³² because of their propaganda value in the wake of the retreat. His photographs are well known in Serbia and many of them — sometimes properly attributed, sometimes not — can be found in different exhibitions on the First World War throughout Serbia.¹²³³ In 2018, an exhibition of Marjanović’s photographs was opened in the Gallery of *Radio-Television Serbia* (4 – 28 October 2018) under the title *War Photographer Rista Marjanović*,¹²³⁴ jointly organised by the RTS, Belgrade Institute for the Protection of Monuments and the Ministry of Defence’s film service. A year before, on 11 November 2017, a memorial plaque in Rista Marjanović’s honour was inaugurated at the army hall in Belgrade by the deputy mayor of Belgrade.



The text on the plaque reads: “War photographer of the High Command of the Serbian Army of the Kingdom of Serbia, Rista Marjanović 1885 – 1969, journalist and photographer of the *New York Herald* in Paris. For the greatest achievements and the historical importance of the photographs of the Balkan Wars, the Great War of 1914 and the Retreat across Albania 1915/16.”¹²³⁵

1232 Dimitrije Bukvić, “Fotografije koje su vaskrsle Srbiju” [“Photographs that resurrected Serbia”], *Politika*, 3 February 2019 <http://www.politika.co.rs/sr/clanak/421888/Fotografije-koje-su-vaskrsnule-Srbiju> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1233 In 1958, Marjanović’s collection containing 8,542 negatives was placed under the protection of the state.

1234 *Ratni foto-reporter Rista Marjanović* [War Photographer Rista Marjanović], RTS, 26 September 2018 <http://www.rts.rs/page/rts/sr/galerija-rts/story/2062/galerija-rts/3270580/ratni-foto-reporter-rista-marjanovic.html> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1235 Photograph from *Slika Vest* <http://www.slikavest.rs/dom-vojske-srbije-spomen-plocu-risti-marjanovicu-prvom-srpskom-foto-reporteru/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

Even small museums had special centenary exhibitions. The Jewish Historical Museum¹²³⁶ in Belgrade organised an exhibition on Jews of Serbia in the First World War which toured 15 towns in Serbia and attracted some 5,000 visitors. The museum held lectures and musical performances and issued two books on Serbian Jews in the First World War.¹²³⁷

The Museum of Applied Art in Belgrade organised three exhibitions on the Great War posters, with particular focus on the Serbian propaganda efforts.¹²³⁸ Another exhibition titled *War and Humour 1914-1918*, was held at the National Library of Serbia in 2018, and subsequently at the Museum of Vojvodina in 2020 in Novi Sad.¹²³⁹

A number of exhibitions in the centenary years were organised jointly by different institutions, as is the case with Marjanović's photographs, and then shown in different towns. There are also exhibitions that were specifically relevant for one town or region, but were organised with the support of other institutions and were given a high profile, and then went on tour in other towns. One such example is the exhibition authored by the Valjevo National Museum, *Valjevo – Hospital City* from April 2015. It was unusual for a relatively small museum to produce a trailer announcing an exhibition and this is what happened in this case.¹²⁴⁰ A *Facebook* page was created for the exhibition which carefully documented the preparations, and a countdown set up to the launch of the new museum website. After the opening of the exhibition, the page continued to be updated, including the exhibition's tour around the country and in the region.¹²⁴¹

1236 Jewish Historical Museum <http://www.jimbeograd.org/en/> (accessed October 29, 2018).

1237 *Serbian Jews in World War One* (Belgrade, Jewish Historical Museum, 2018) and a reprint of the memorial book of Serbian Jews who died in the Balkan Wars and WWI from 1927.

1238 *War and posters 1914-1918* in 2014, and *Women, war and posters 1914-1918* in 2016, and *Serbia, War and Posters* in 2017.

1239 Vladimir Čeh, *War and Humour 1914-1918* (Belgrade: The Institute of History of Advertising, 2020)

1240 Trailer for the *Hospital City* exhibition *YouTube*, 26 February 2015 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS4dr-jGf0A> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1241 *Valjevo 1914 –1915 – grad bolnica – Facebook* <https://www.facebook.com/valjevohospital/?ref=hl> (accessed June 28, 2019).

The exhibition was designed to illustrate the special status and situation of Valjevo in 1914 and 1915 as one of the main centres of the Serbian Army Medical Service because of its strategic position and the Valjevo garrison.¹²⁴² In 1914, Valjevo was host to several hospitals, all housed in a variety of buildings, such as barracks, schools, courts, hotels, restaurants, and the museum building itself. Following the failure of the third Austro-Hungarian offensive, after a large number of POWs arrived in the town in December 1914, Valjevo became the epicentre of a typhus epidemic that would go on to devastate Serbia in early 1915. Over 170,000 people are estimated to have died in the whole of Serbia, with around 10,000 casualties in Valjevo, soldiers, civilians and POWs.¹²⁴³ The exhibition commemorates these terrible events in the Great War and celebrates the work of the international medical missions.



Illustration of the medical situation in Valjevo in 1914 and 1915. At the centre is the figure of Nadežda Petrović (1873 – 1915), the most important Serbian woman painter at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, who died in Valjevo while working as a volunteer nurse.

1242 Dragana Lazarević Ilić and Vladimir Krivošejev, *Valjevo 1914 – 1915 grad bolnica* [Valjevo 1914 – 1915 hospital city] (Valjevo: Valjevo National Museum, 2015), 3.

1243 Lazarević Ilić and Krivošejev, 2015, 3.

The exhibition's opening on 2 April 2015 was an important event for the town of around 174,000 people, with British, Dutch, Czech and Russian ambassadors attending, in honour and remembrance of the medical missions, and the Serbian Minister of Culture opening the exhibition.¹²⁴⁴ There was a musical programme and a number of speeches; visitors were then welcomed into the small museum space which told the story of the Valjevo hospitals and the victory over the typhus epidemic.



Replicas of the Scottish Women's Hospitals' collection boxes (left); "Serbian barrel" or "Stammers' barrel", invented by Dr Stammers to delouse infected clothes by steaming (right) (Valjevo Museum, 2 April 2015).

While this was an example of a local exhibition which became more widely popular and toured Serbia, there were also some events on a much smaller scale that were so unique to the town in question, that they remained completely local. This was the case with the exhibition in the Kikinda National Museum, a municipality of about 56,000 people, located 140 km north of Belgrade, closer to both Romanian and Hungarian borders than to Belgrade. Kikinda was Austro-Hungarian territory until 1918 when it became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The two exhibitions in the centenary years focused on its special situation. The

1244 "Otvorena izložba Grad bolnica" ["Hospital City exhibition opens"], *VAMedia*, 2 April 2015 <https://www.vamedia.info/2015/04/otvorena-izlozba-grad-bolnica/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

first exhibition was about Luka Majinski,¹²⁴⁵ the mayor of Kikinda between 1910 and 1924. It was a unique case where the same man served as mayor in two states. Because the town is multinational and multilingual, the exhibition was trilingual, in Serbian, Hungarian and German. The second exhibition entitled *In the New State – Greater Kikinda in the War, Unification and the Final Establishment of Borders 1914 – 1924*, commemorated the town's new status – as belonging to the new country.¹²⁴⁶

Other towns located in territory that used to be the Austro-Hungarian Empire, also had exhibitions dedicated to their change of country in 1918 (e.g. Novi Sad and Pančevo).¹²⁴⁷ It is worth noting that the Novi Sad exhibition on the “unification” drew considerable controversy in view of its perceived twisting of historical facts; it is believed the exhibition was used “for state and ethnocentric needs of today's Serbia”.¹²⁴⁸

Another popular subject of exhibitions related to the war was the Toplica uprising of 1917, a month-long revolt against Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian occupying troops, considered the only rebellion in an occupied territory during WWI.¹²⁴⁹

While this selection of exhibitions exemplifies how museums in Serbia represented the Great War during the centenary-related cultural events, it is also illustrative of what was represented less often. Among the

1245 *Luka Majinski, 1 gradonačelnik, 1 rat, 2 države* [*Luka Majinski, 1 mayor, 1 war, 2 states*], Kikinda National Museum, 29 July – 29 August 1914.

1246 Izložba u Narodnom muzeju Kikinde posvećena prisajedinjenju Srbiji [Exhibition at the Kikinda National Museum dedicated to joining Serbia], *Dnevnik*, 23 November 2018 <https://www.dnevnik.rs/vojvodina/izlozba-u-narodnom-muzeju-kikinde-posvecena-prisajedinjenju-srbiji-23-11-2018> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1247 The term used to describe joining another state is *prisajedinjenje*, and this could be translated as unification, or joining.

1248 See “Skup: ‘Muzej prisajedinjenja’ je propagandistička izložba” [“Conference: ‘Museum of unification’ is a propagandist exhibition”], *Krstarica*, 10 December 2018 <https://www.krstarica.com/vesti/srbija/skup-muzej-prisajedinjenja-je-propagandisticka-izlozba/> (accessed December 14, 2018).

1249 According to some sources, around 20,000 rebels and civilians lost their lives in the revolt. In 1917, the Toplica Museum in Prokuplje organised an exhibition on the subject which then toured Serbia. In some towns, the title of the exhibition was “The 1917 Toplica Rebellion”, while in at least one town it was renamed, “The suffering of Serbs in the Toplica rebellion”.

surveyed museums, the themes of Serbian POWs from 1915, or occupied Serbia between 1915 – 1918, were less frequent.¹²⁵⁰ While the Serbian master narrative states that *the whole country went into exile* when this was patently not the case. Many more remained in the country, which was dismembered and occupied,¹²⁵¹ with thousands of Serbs interned, and with civilians bearing the brunt of the invasion, having to survive – not necessarily heroically.¹²⁵² While civilian life in occupied Serbia 1915 –1918 is usually narrated through suffering, the exhibition *The Great War and the Little Man* at the Ethnographic Museum in Belgrade attempted to step outside the well-worn narrative, through the selection of archival material focusing on ordinary civilians.¹²⁵³ Nevertheless, the stated objective of the exhibition on “the little man” was to present “persons of high moral fibre and patriotism”, and the museum’s curious selection of related events during the exhibition included military lectures.¹²⁵⁴

The overall impression from what was on offer in our sample of Serbian museums in the centenary exhibitions was that there were many different events and genres to choose from, some more original than others. There was noticeably more engagement of local residents in smaller towns. The response to emails of inquiry was also significant: there was much enthusiasm and interest from smaller towns, with photographs

1250 Muzej Srema [Srem Museum] in Sremska Mitrovica had one exhibition on POWs possibly owing to the fact that a POW camp had been located there between 1915 – 1918. All (three) WWI related exhibitions were on throughout the centenary years <https://muzejsrema.com> (accessed June 28, 2019); The Military Museum in Belgrade, which did not respond to our request for details on exhibitions during the centenary years, had one exhibition on occupied Serbia 1915 – 1918 including POW camps http://www.muzej.mod.gov.rs/otvorena-izlozba-okupirana-srbija-od-1915-do-1918-1#.XRz_2i2B0_U (accessed June 28, 2019).

1251 Following the 1915 invasion, Serbia was partitioned into German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian occupation zones.

1252 This aspect is rarely researched, see article by Olga Manojlović Pintar and Vera Gudac Dodić, ““An ugly black night”: Remembering the Austro-Hungarian Occupation of Serbia 1915-1918”, in Oto Luhar, ed. *The Great War and Memory in South-Eastern Europe* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016), where a *monochromatic* depiction of the occupation is challenged.

1253 The exhibition catalogue by Vesna Bižić-Omčikus and others, *Veliki rat i mali čovek [The Great War and the Little Man]* (Beograd: Etnografski muzej, 2014) contains journal entries of ordinary Serbs during occupation with a more nuanced representation of the war.

1254 E.g. on 29 April 2015, a poorly-attended 100-minute lecture was given by a Lt Colonel on the subject of the life of a soldier in the Great War.

from the exhibitions, catalogues, publications and posters provided as evidence of activities. Certainly, the most active exhibition centre, the *Defence Media Centre* in Belgrade, had impressive lists of events and activities between 2014 and 2018 – 112 in total.¹²⁵⁵ In comparison to other museums, the *Defence Media Centre* had more events and higher visitor numbers. However, this institution is a department of the Serbian Ministry of Defence, as such has superior funding and closely adheres to the *monochrome script* of the Serbian heroic suffering. Notably, several exhibitions were authored jointly by the *Defence Media Centre* and other museums.¹²⁵⁶

In the context of the centenary events, the museums in Serbia mostly presented different aspects of the same master narrative, even if new themes did emerge in exhibitions.¹²⁵⁷ Some were expertly curated, such as the war poster exhibitions at the Museum of Applied Art. The *Valjevo – Hospital City* exhibition was a truly educational and cultural event of the year for the local community. In our research, we found that the Ethnographic Museum tentatively tried to explore different historical interpretations, although the unity of the Serbian master narrative remained untouched.

From the sample examined, which we believe to be representative of Serbian museums and exhibitions during the centenary years, 2014 – 2018, we noted great skill and enthusiasm of curators and the wealth of archival resources related to the First World War used to present the well-worn

1255 Book promotions (43, including nine manuscripts that had never been published before), ceremonies, musical and dance performances, “festivals of patriotic poetry”, concerts, international conferences, seminars, round tables, theatre plays, exhibitions, film promotions, memorial ceremonies and memorial services. All the events are documented on the website of the *Defence Media Centre* and detailed lists of events for each year were provided on request. http://www.odbrana.mod.gov.rs/sadrzaj.php?id_sadrzaja=614 (accessed June 28, 2019).

1256 From informal contacts it appears that the *Defence Media Centre* is better funded and cooperation is beneficial for smaller museums.

1257 In May 2016, at the *Defence Media Centre*, there was an exhibition on the subject of *Bread in the Great War* <http://www.mod.gov.rs/lat/9589/otvorena-izlozba-hleb-u-velikom-ratu-9589> (accessed November 20, 2018); in October 2016, the Zaječar Museum organised the exhibition of photographs of the *Deli Ibrahim* Serbian military cemetery in Algeria, by the legendary Yugoslav photographer Stevan Labudović.

narrative. It was overall, with minor exceptions, a ritualistic approach to representations of national history with little room for questions. In view of the tenacity of Serbia's Great War narrative, one cannot but wonder what questions would have to be asked in order to achieve a wider view of the Great War and the Retreat.

3. All the Roads Lead to Salonika – Guarding the Dead Since 1918

“The cemetery in Zejtinlik is not just a monument of gratitude to the fallen in the First World War, but it is also a part of history, the echo of victory, an enduring meeting place of grateful descendants, and as the poet said, a monument of “pain and pride.””¹²⁵⁸

Thessaloniki, or Salonika as it was known in the Great War, was an important hub for the Allies from 1915 even while Greece was neutral. Greece joined the war on 28 June 1917, following months of internal turmoil over the participation in the war. French and British troops arrived in the Salonika harbour in October 1915, but this was not the first time that Greek territory was used by the Entente: the British had already used Lemnos for operations relating to Gallipoli. Their arrival in Salonika was part of their failed attempt to assist the Serbs.¹²⁵⁹ After the Serbian Army Retreat in 1915, and their recovery on Corfu in 1916, Serbian troops were transferred to Salonika to train and reorganise in preparation for new operations. From Salonika, they would set off north as part of *l'Armée d'Orient*. Serbs won the first battle against the Bulgarian Army in September 1916 at the 2521m Kajmakčalan Peak of Mt Nidža, but the breakthrough at the Salonika front, and the final victory would take another two years.

1258 Vojin Djordjević, ed. *Srpsko vojničko groblje na Zejtinliku u Solunu* [Serbian military cemetery at Zejtinlik in Thessaloniki] (Belgrade: no publisher, 2014), 5.

1259 Alan Palmer, *The Gardeners of Salonika. The Macedonian Campaign 1915-1918* (London: faber and faber/faber finds, 2009/first published in 1965), 11.

The site of the military cemetery in Thessaloniki originally housed the Serbian field hospital which was not unusual. At the time, *Zejtinlik* — a part of town originally named after the Turkish word for an olive grove — was also used as a training camp for Serbian recruits born in 1896, in preparation for the battle for Monastir (Bitolj) in early November 1916.¹²⁶⁰ Salonika accommodated a number of troops from Allied armies, under the umbrella term *l'Armée d'Orient*. The soldiers who died at the hospital were buried close to it and as the graves multiplied, the location started being used primarily as a military cemetery after the field hospital was disbanded.¹²⁶¹

After the war, an initiative was launched to gather the remains of the Serbian troops who fell at the Salonika front and rebury them at the Serbian military cemetery. This task was entrusted to a group made up of veterans from the Salonika front. The team was led by Savo Mihajlović, who subsequently became the first cemetery guard. Savo and his comrades visited around 250 cemeteries on and around the Salonika front battlefields, and collected the remains of Serbian soldiers, known and unknown, and placed each soldier's remains in a labelled bag. The remains were then transported to *Zejtinlik* in special vehicles. The remains would later be either buried or placed in an ossuary. The hardest part of the task was thus completed long before the cemetery and the mausoleum were completed.¹²⁶²

Plans to build the Serbian military cemetery started in 1926, when the Yugoslav Ministry of Construction opened a competition for the design of a mausoleum with ossuaries and the surrounding cemetery. The winning design for the project was awarded to Aleksandar Vasić, the architect who also designed the chapel erected in the memory of Field Marshall Putnik at the Belgrade New Cemetery. The original design was further developed by Nikolaj Krasnov (1864 – 1939), Russian architect, who would

1260 Djordjević, 2014, 12.

1261 Djordjević, 2014, 12.

1262 Djordjević, 2014, 38.

later design the mausoleum on Vido (1938). However, the chief architect who directly supervised the work on the mausoleum and the cemetery was Budimir Hristodulo (1892 – 1965).¹²⁶³ He also personally organised the planting of cypress trees from the Serbian monastery of Hilandar on Mount Athos.¹²⁶⁴ The stone for the *Zejtinlik* mausoleum was pre-cut and brought from Serbia. Around 2,000 marble crosses were also made in Serbia and transported to Greece, as was the stone for the ossuaries meant to house the remains of several thousand Serbian soldiers.



View of the chapel at *Zejtinlik* and the main alley (April 2017).

1263 Budimir Hristodulo was also one of the 1300 corporals, young cadets drafted early to reinforce the First Army in the Battle of Kolubara in November 1914. “*Budimir Hristodulo, neimar vojničkog groblja u Solunu*” [“Budimir Hristodulo, builder of the Salonika military cemetery”] <https://www.aleksinac.net/lat/aleksinac/aleksincani/budimir-hristodulo-neimar-vojnickog-groblja-u-solunu.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1264 Hilandar is a 12th century Serbian monastery on Mount Athos in Greece <https://www.hilandar.org> (accessed May 16, 2019).

Greece donated 7,000 square metres of land in *Zejtinlik* for the cemetery free of charge in perpetuity, while all the materials for the mausoleum and the crosses were imported from Yugoslavia into Greece tax-free. The *Zejtinlik* mausoleum with the ossuaries in the crypt covers 600 square metres.



St George Slays the Dragon mosaic, mausoleum chapel, *Zejtinlik*. (April 2017).

The motif designs are religious and patriotic. Mosaic frescoes of St Michael the Archangel and St George slaying the dragon were created in likenesses of the frescoes in the Manasija¹²⁶⁵ and the Dečani¹²⁶⁶ monasteries. Both saints are popular images used to portray the Serbian side of the war, in particular St George.¹²⁶⁷ The dragon is, of course, the enemy, akin to the snake on the monument to the Defenders of Belgrade discussed in the previous chapter. By using the images known from Serbian monasteries,

1265 Manasija monastery <http://manasija.rs/?lang=en> (accessed May 17, 2019).

1266 Dečani monastery <https://www.decani.org/en/> (accessed May 17, 2019).

1267 Dušan Kovačević's play, and later film *St George Slays the Dragon*, is an example where death in the First World War is portrayed as heroic but also absurd.

the authors of the mausoleum made a strong association to the Serbian homeland; all the more necessary because these Serbian dead were to be laid to rest in foreign soil, albeit in friendly Greece.

The verses engraved on the mausoleum external walls are by Vojislav Ilić the Younger (1877 –1944). All the Serbian Army units who fought on the Salonika front are inscribed on the walls inside the chapel, while the central 200-kg-candelabra is made of cannon shells from the battlefield. The Serbian military cemetery was officially inaugurated and the memorial chapel consecrated on 11 November 1936, in the presence of a great many Greek and Yugoslav officials, veterans, and families of fallen soldiers. A detailed report of the ceremony was published in the daily *Politika* the following day.¹²⁶⁸ High representatives of Greek and Serbian clergy held a memorial service in Serbian and Greek. The men's choir *Obilić* from Belgrade sang the hymn "In Eternal Memory". In his speech, the head of the Yugoslav delegation, General Marić, the Serbian Defence Minister, revisited the bleak days of the autumn 1915, when Serbia was attacked from three sides and forced to retreat through Albania. The recovery in Greece and North Africa was followed by the breakthrough of the Salonika front where "great deeds required great sacrifices"¹²⁶⁹ after which Serbia was finally liberated. General Marić's final remarks, thanking the Greek king and government for looking after the Serbian dead, were spoken in French.

Mr Papadimas, the Greek Undersecretary for War, responded by paying a tribute to the courage of Serbian soldiers who died on Greek soil. In his speech, Mr Papadimas used "Serbian" and "Yugoslav" almost interchangeably, referring to Serbian troops and to the "friendly Yugoslav nation" that persevered despite all the misfortunes of war. He ended his speech by quoting the inscription on the monument to Leonidas's 300

1268 Dr M. "Na Zejtinliku je juče svečano osvećena spomen kapela herojima srpske vojske sa Solunskog fronta" ["Memorial chapel consecrated to the Salonika Front Serbian heroes in Zejtinlik yesterday"], *Politika*, 12 November 1936, 5-6.

1269 Dr M, 1936, 5-6.

Spartans fallen at Thermopylae: “Go tell the Spartans, passer-by, that here obedient to their laws we lie”,¹²⁷⁰ thus drawing a parallel between the Serbian sacrifice and that of the most famous warriors of Ancient Greece. It was clear that this was the highest praise from the Greek hosts. The ceremony at the cemetery ended with the laying of wreaths by various Yugoslav officials, as well as by the representatives of Allied armies and numerous representatives of Serbian veterans, auxiliary services, Greek-Yugoslav associations, Greek veterans and dozens of other groups. The *Politika* article reporting on the event lists 28 different organisations that were represented, adding that numerous families of fallen soldiers also attended. Following the laying of wreaths on the Serbian cemetery, the attending delegations also laid wreaths on the other Allied cemeteries: French, British, Italian and Russian. Remarkably, on the day, wreaths were also laid on the cemeteries of former enemies, Germans and Bulgarians.



Entrance, Serbian Military Cemetery (April 2017).

1270 This is inscribed at Thermopylae, *The 300 Spartans* Blog <http://www.300spartanwarriors.com/battleofthermopylae/tributesmemorials.html> (accessed May 17, 2019).

The Serbian military cemetery suffered from neglect and minor damage in the Second World War but the cemetery guard, Savo Mihajlović's son Djuro who took over after his father died in 1928, hid relics and valuable objects from the crypt and saved them from being looted. The cemetery underwent major renovation by the Yugoslav government in 1969 when, among other improvements, the name *Serbian Military Cemetery* was added above the iron entrance gates.¹²⁷¹

The cemetery acquired today's look in 1969, although *Zejtinlik* is no longer on the outskirts of Thessaloniki because the city has spread and the balconies of residential buildings look onto the well-ordered plots. Apart from the Serbian cemetery, there are other Allied cemeteries in the same location, French, British, Italian, and Russian. All these cemeteries are the responsibility of the state they belong to, as is the Serbian one. The French and Serbian cemeteries are the only ones with guards, but only the Serbian guard lives on the premises. Djordje Mihailović, the grandson of the first cemetery guard, took over guard duty following the death of his father Djuro in 1961.

Djordje Mihailović (b. 1928) has been watching over the dead Serbian soldiers his whole adult life. He will be the last person to be buried at the cemetery, in the same tomb where his father and grandfather were buried. In 2019, he was still welcoming visitors, arriving in small groups in an almost continuous stream, particularly in the summer.¹²⁷² Thessaloniki is the Serbian tourists' favourite stop in Northern Greece with many package tours offered combining shopping, Mt Olympus, and the visit to the cemetery.¹²⁷³

1271 Djordjević, 2014, 35.

1272 In 2015, Mihajlović acquired an assistant. He turned 92 on 1 May 2020, when he received a phonecall from President Vučić. His Serbian passport arrived a few days later. The tabloid *Kurir* has many articles on him e.g. "SUZE SU MI SAME POŠLE KADA ME VUČIĆ POZVAO: Čuvar Zejtinlika čika Djordje dobio pasoš Srbije" ["MY EYES FILLED WITH TEARS WHEN VUČIĆ CALLED ME: Zejtinlik guard gets Serbian passport", *Kurir*, 15 May 2020 <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/3464713/suze-su-mi-same-posle-kada-me-vucic-pozvao-cuvar-zejtinlika-cika-djordje-dobio-pasos-srbije> (accessed May 20, 2020).

1273 E.g. advertisement for a tour <https://www.bigstar.rs/solun-putovanje> (accessed May 17, 2019).

Although old and frail, Djordje Mihailović is a forceful presence, dressed partially in a Serbian army uniform, with a soldier's cap that looks exactly like the ones worn by his grandfather and his comrades in arms during 1914–1918. He is not only the guard, but also the guide, a tireless history narrator and something of a *YouTube* star.¹²⁷⁴



Djordje Mihailović at the entrance to the crypt (April 2017).

From the comments posted below the *YouTube* videos, it appears that some of the video viewers, or those who visited the cemetery and met him, actually believe that he *is* a veteran of the First World War, which would make him at least 120 years old.¹²⁷⁵ He greets all the visitors warmly and is proud of the fact that the Serbian military cemetery has the most visitors of all the military cemeteries in Thessaloniki. It is clear that for him and for the visitors to *Zejtinlik*, this is *the* most important military cemetery of the Great War — there is no awareness of any other large Allied cemeteries.¹²⁷⁶

1274 There are many recordings of Djordje Mihailović's talks on YouTube e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbf12Y27gAs&t=424s> (accessed May 17, 2019). Reportedly, he has never been to Serbia.

1275 The author visited the military cemetery in Thessaloniki for the first time in 1975 and thought the same, as a mathematically challenged 11-year-old.

1276 During our visit on 9 April 2017, we listened to comments from visitors and to Djordje Mihailović, hearing frequently that "there are no such cemeteries anywhere in the world". Mention of Flanders cemeteries gets no reaction.

“Uncle” Djordje as most people call him, has a routine where he greets visitors, speaking Serbian with a soft Greek accent, asks them where they come from, what their family names are, and points them to a grave or ossuary box. His approach to visitors is spontaneous and friendly, with light banter thrown in: “Where are you from?”, “Niš”, “That’s okay, it’s not your fault”.¹²⁷⁷ He recites the verses inscribed on the mausoleum:

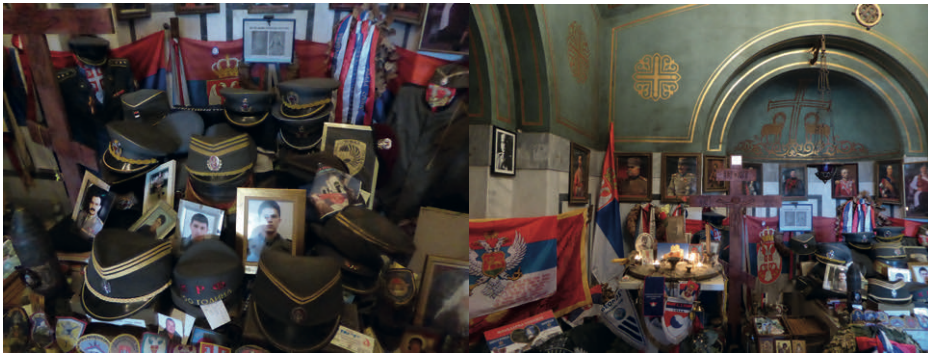
“Behold oh, stranger, as you pass them by
 In this most sacred and communal grave
 Know that the bravest of the brave
 Down here today in these tombs they lie.
 They belong to the bold Serbian nation
 Who fought like giants in this cosmic war
 The nation through which much suffering tore
 Whose warriors deserve admiration
 They died from the bullets, from hunger and thirst
 High up on Golgotha they were crucified
 But never for one moment their faith and hope died
 The trust in final triumph always came first.”¹²⁷⁸

Although we are in Thessaloniki, where Serbian soldiers who died at the Salonika front are buried, it is the suffering in Albania which is the main point of reference. Uncle Djordje reminds everyone about what happened in 1915; how the great Retreat saved the Serbian Army, how they recovered in Corfu and how they came to Salonika from whence they made the breakthrough with the Allies to liberate the country. Uncle Djordje is impossible to interrupt and delivers his lines with gusto, his audience listening, appreciative and curious. “Serbia gave it all to the war, so many died, there are 8,000 buried here. Without the Serbs, there would have been no breakthrough at the Salonika front.” As he speaks, a couple of visitors are wiping their tears, visibly moved. He continues,

1277 Visit on 9 April 2017.

1278 Inscribed on the front of the mausoleum, verses by Vojislav Ilić Jr. (translated by A.T.).

vehemently: “They [the Allies] should worship us instead of bombing us.”¹²⁷⁹ The last sentence is, of course, a reference to the 1999 NATO air strikes against Serbia and Montenegro, a topic that comes up uncomfortably, now and again. At the end of the speech, held before the entrance to the crypt below the chapel, after answering questions, Uncle Djordje fetches shot glasses and brings out a bottle of Serbian plum brandy handing out glasses to everyone present to drink to the glory of the fallen soldiers: “*Slava im*” (“To their glory”). Following this ritual, the visitors are taken downstairs to the crypt where the ossuary boxes house the remains of around 3,000 soldiers. Just behind the door to the crypt, there is a row of full brandy bottles — many visitors bring home-made plum brandy as a gift. During the last 10 to 15 years the crypt has filled with additional memorabilia left by visitors. There are medals, flags, photographs, lithographs, pictures, certificates, diplomas, more flags, posters with Serbian diaspora themes, pictures of Serbian soldiers who died in the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, or simply Serbian soldiers in uniform, of different ages and from different time periods, with written dedications to *Zejtinlik* or to Uncle Djordje.



The crypt with caps, pictures and memorabilia (April 2017).

There are many curious anachronisms, such as the reproduction of the iconic picture by Uroš Predić (1857 – 1953) known as “The Kosovo Maiden”, showing a young woman giving a drink to a wounded Serbian

1279 Visit on 9 April 2017.

soldier on the Kosovo field after the battle, and a black and white picture of a legendary Montenegrin rebel killed fighting the Turks.¹²⁸⁰ Among the many pictures, posters and other objects on the wall, there is also a memento of two photographs of a US F-117 bomber downed in Serbia in 1999, with a handwritten note: “Greetings from Budjanovci”.¹²⁸¹ It is a collection of objects that has less to do with the Great War and more with the Serbian narrative of perpetually resisting a more powerful enemy.



The crypt decorations: The memento from Budjanovci (left), and enlarged detail of the “Kosovo Maiden” picture, with votive images of St Nicolas¹²⁸² and the Virgin with Child (right). (April 2017).

1280 The picture is titled, “The heroic death of Vojvoda Tripko Džaković 1875”.

1281 Budjanovci is a village in Serbia, near Belgrade, where a US stealth bomber was shot down by Yugoslav anti-aircraft rockets during NATO air strikes in March 1999. A documentary was made on the subsequent meeting and friendship of the USAF pilot and the colonel of the Yugoslav Army who shot him down. *Second Meeting*, Journeyman Pictures, 2013.

1282 St Nicolas is the most popular Serbian saint because the majority of Serbs celebrate St Nicolas as their family’s Patron Saint.

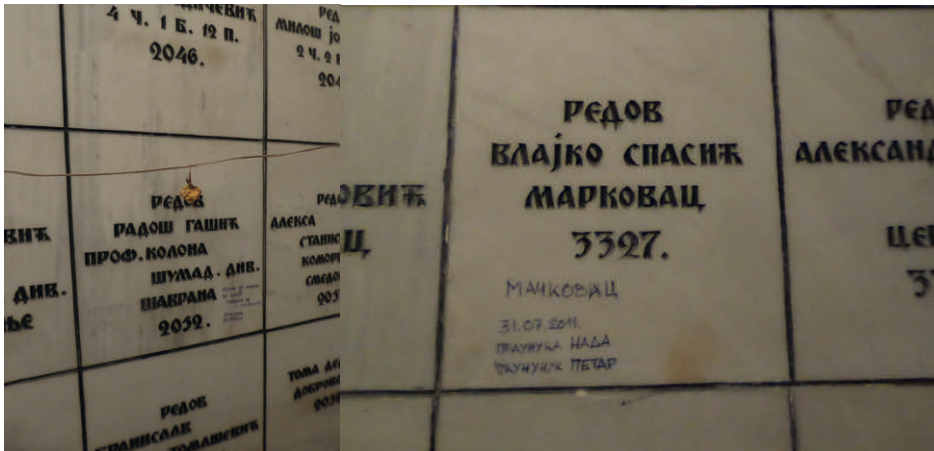
The vast assortment of kitsch souvenirs is unsettling and it is apparent that Uncle Djordje has simply allowed anyone to leave a memento in the crypt. The altar of the crypt is also full of mementos, and the table set up next to it is a shrine filled with Serbian military caps, photographs of all the Serbian Field Marshals as well as King Aleksandar, and assorted saints. Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, convicted war criminals, also feature among the photographs. There are multitudes of hangings on the walls of the crypt, making it look more like a hoarder's storage room than a crypt. Uncle Djordje points at photographs of notable visitors, actors, writers, high priests, Yugoslav and Serbian presidents who have visited: "They have all come here, from Tito onward." There is a votive candle rack for visitors to buy candles and light them in remembrance of the dead. Uncle Djordje also plays music in the crypt — the two staple songs symbolising the Retreat: "The French ship is leaving" and, "There, Far Away".



The shrine with mementos, and the votive candle rack (April 2017).

Most of the ossuary boxes have soldiers' names, some have rank and company, some have the place of birth. Several of the engraved details have been changed or had additional information written next to them, ostensibly by visiting descendants, in different ways, with pen, or pencil, or stickers. Occasionally, there is the date of a visit. Surprisingly, there is no obvious ban on writing on the ossuary boxes. If visitors wish to leave an object in the crypt, to mark their visit, they are free to do so. The state

of the crypt has been called out in the Serbian press. Criticism about piled up kitsch mementos and the presence of the photographs of convicted war criminals is not levelled at Uncle Djordje but at the Serbian Consulate in Thessaloniki, officially in charge of the mausoleum.¹²⁸³



The photograph on the left shows the ossuary box of Private Radoš Gašić, Šumadija Division, and underneath it, added in ballpoint, “Thank you, forefather, for everything, The Gašić family, from Prijedor,”¹²⁸⁴ with dates of visits. The lack of specific family relation may indicate that they are not sure how they are related to him. The photograph on the right shows the ossuary box of Private Vljako Spasić from *Markovac*, and underneath it is written in ballpoint, *Mačkovac*, presumably a correction, and the date of the visit of his great-grandchildren. Some of the ossuary boxes have initials N.N. indicating an unknown soldier. On one such ossuary, someone has placed the name and picture of Dragutin Dimitrijević *Apis*, the Serbian Army officer whose organisation *Black Hand* had ostensibly procured the *Browning* pistol that killed the Archduke Franz Ferdinand.¹²⁸⁵

The prevalent memorialisation experience of the *Zejtinlik* cemetery is that of sadness at the loss of young lives, but it also leaves an aftertaste

1283 “NEVIDJENA SRAMOTA: Kriptu Srpskog vojničkog groblja u Solunu pretvorili u vašarsku tezgu” [“Unbelievable shame: the crypt of the Serbian military cemetery in Thessaloniki has become a flea market stall”], *Blic*, 17 July 2017 <https://www.blic.rs/vesti/drustvo/nevidjena-sramota-kriptu-srpskog-vojniskog-groblja-u-solunu-pretvorili-u-vasarsku/pbz1zw6> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1284 Prijedor is in the *Republika Srpska*, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

1285 *Apis* was tried for treason in 1917 and executed in the vicinity of Salonika. His verdict was overturned in 1953 by the communist regime, and then again in 2012 by the Serbian judiciary. For more on *Apis*, see David MacKenzie, *Apis: The Congenial Conspirator. The Life of Colonel Dragutin T. Dimitrijević* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1989).

of a misplaced *triumphalism*. According to Uncle Djordje, French and British cemeteries “get as many visitors a year as we get in a day”.¹²⁸⁶ The implication being that the French and the British cannot possibly care about their dead or their history as much as the Serbs do, therefore making Serbs somehow *more legitimate* as a nation. This came through quite clearly from remarks heard during the visit. None of the visitors to *Zejtinlik* seem to be remotely interested in the Allied cemeteries. They may be the dead from the Salonika front but they are not *our dead*.

The Retreat is closely bound with the Salonika front in a way that the one cannot be mentioned without the other. For practical reasons, the two places — Thessaloniki and Corfu — are often reversed so visitors who come from Serbia, can visit both places on the same trip. They visit Thessaloniki first, and then Corfu — first the place from where the Serbian troops set off to liberate the country, and then the place where these troops recovered after the Retreat, before going to Salonika. This does not seem to bother anyone. They know why they come and they know what to expect: meeting the legendary Uncle Djordje, listening to his lectures, taking selfies and perhaps seeking out a grave or an ossuary box. To drink a glass of home-made plum brandy “for the souls” of the dead, and to light a candle is a way to pay tribute. It is a ritual with no time for detours, not even to the next-door cemeteries. These dead are not equal. This attitude was also noticeable in a complete lack of curiosity among the visitors to *Zejtinlik* about Entente military cemeteries elsewhere, which have far greater numbers of dead. It is not possible to get a *pilgrim* who is visiting a specific *lieu de mémoire* interested in another site of memory, where other nations have buried *their* fallen. As Susan Sontag observed in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, in relation to this phenomenon: “It is intolerable to have one’s own sufferings twinned with anybody else’s”.¹²⁸⁷ Comparing suffering does not have an objective purpose. Yet, nationalist discourse revels in comparisons, always making a case for *exceptionalism*. In the Serbian case, this comes through strongly, as diagnosed by David

1286 Visit on 9 April 2017.

1287 Sontag, 2004, 101.

Lowenthal when speaking about self-importance of unearned nationalist pride, “our past is unlike anyone else’s. Its uniqueness vaunts our own superiority.”¹²⁸⁸ Observing the rituals of visitors to *Zejtinlik*, the pathos of Uncle Djordje’s declamations, the mementos left in the crypt, there is a sense that the people who come here seem to get *strength* from this exchange. They nod as they listen, they look around and see others solemnly absorbing the words they seem to *need* to hear — their beliefs are being validated and they are grateful for the experience. Many of them will look to complete the pilgrimage to Greece with a trip to Corfu. In the next part of the chapter, we look at another mythical Serbian site of suffering, “where yellow lemon trees bloom”.

4. “There, Far Away”: From Tourists to Pilgrims in Corfu

“There are no soldiers alive today who were in Corfu in 1916.

However, the excitement experienced by the pilgrims to Vido grows stronger every year.

The wailing wall of the small boats above the Blue Tomb is the redemption for the Serbian illusions of the 20th century.”¹²⁸⁹

In his 2004 book *Pilgrimage to Corfu*, Ljubomir Saramandić, curator of *Serbian House* in Corfu, explains that for Serbs, travelling to Corfu is never an ordinary tourist visit. Most Serbian visitors to Corfu know about the history of the island and the recovery of the Serbian Army on the island. The visit to the sites of memory can be more powerful than *knowing* about the events. Orthodox Easter¹²⁹⁰ is a popular time to come to Corfu because many travel agencies organise coach tours at this time, marking the early start of the tourist season. Typically, there are coach tours from Belgrade to Thessaloniki, which then take the travellers to Corfu by ferry from

1288 Lowenthal, in Gillis, 1996, 47.

1289 Saramandić, 2004, 81.

1290 Both Serbia and Greece celebrate Easter according to the Julian calendar.

Igoumenitsa. Salonika and Corfu — symbolise the two key places for the Serbs in WWI — Corfu as the island of salvation and Salonika as the place from where the liberation of the country started and where many of those who have fallen in the battles at the Salonika front are buried.

While Thessaloniki is relatively easy to get to by road,¹²⁹¹ Corfu requires additional effort of travelling across the Ionian Sea, heightening the feeling that one is seeking out a special experience. Apart from attractive local customs that characterise celebrations of Easter in Corfu,¹²⁹² Serbian visitors who come at this time, and their hosts, seem to connect the almost miraculous recovery of the Serbian Army in Corfu and the “greatest Christian holiday” — Easter. When the Serbian Army celebrated Easter in 1916 with Regent Aleksandar, the celebrations had special significance.¹²⁹³

For those who come specifically to pay their respects to the Serbian soldiers from a century ago, the first port of call is usually the museum that chronicles the events from the 1915 attack on Serbia and the Retreat, to the evacuation to Corfu, and the recovery, as its central themes. In 1993, the building at no.19 *Moustoxidou Street* in the old town was given to Serbia by the Corfiots, to be used as a museum featuring Serbian arrival and life in Corfu, and as a lasting memorial to the bond of friendship between the two countries.¹²⁹⁴ The building, which quickly became known as *Serbian House*, houses the museum and the Honorary Consulate of the Republic of Serbia. *Serbian House* places the Serbian story of Corfu in historical context. The museum educates the visitors not only on Serbian life in Corfu between 1916 – 1918, but it also gives a sense of continuity between then and now, inviting a journey through the sites of memory in Corfu that bridge the century-long gap. It is noticeable that the presentation

1291 Distance between Belgrade and Thessaloniki is 650 km.

1292 “Glory and splendour not seen anywhere else in the world” Corfu Easter, Biggest Religious Event in Corfu <https://atcorfu.com/pasxa-stin-kerkyra/> (accessed May 17, 2019).

1293 Saramandić, 2004, 64.

1294 Interview with Ljubomir Saramandić, 11 April 2017.

in *Serbian House* on the hospitality of the Corfiots does not contain any negative aspects regarding the Serbian presence in Corfu.¹²⁹⁵

The first monument commemorating Serbs in Corfu was built by soldiers of the Drina Division to their dead comrades in 1916. The land where the monument was erected had been donated by the farmer Yanis Yanulis from Agios Matheos. Today, Mr Yanulis has a monument too,¹²⁹⁶ erected in 1989, by the *Association for Nurturing Traditions of Serbia's Liberation Wars up to 1918*,¹²⁹⁷ in gratitude for his gesture. Mr Yanulis's descendants continue to maintain links with the Serbs who visit Corfu.¹²⁹⁸ On the road to Agios Matheos, there is a sign, flanked by Greek and Serbian flags, indicating a small enclosed park which houses the monument with a white marble cross at its centre.

On the right side of the monument, below a Serbian coat of arms, the following words are engraved:

*The Drina Corps soldiers
to their comrades from wars with
Austro-Hungary, Germany and Bulgaria
1914 – 15 – 16.*

On the left side of the monument, the following verses are engraved, authored by Lieutenant Vladimir Stanimirović:

1295 A novel published in 2018 paints a rather sordid picture of both Salonika and Corfu, see Slobodan Vladušić, *Veliki juriš [The Great Charge]* (Belgrade: Laguna, 2018), 145.

1296 Yanulis had a street in Belgrade named after him on 31 October 2018, "Beograd dobio ulicu u čast grčkog dobrotvora Janisa Janulisa" ["Belgrade now has a street to honour the Greek benefactor Yanis Yanulis"] *Politika*, 31 October 2018 <http://www.politika.rs/scc/clanak/414678/Beograd-dobio-ulicu-u-cast-grckog-dobrotvora-Janisa-Janulisa> (accessed November 1, 2018).

1297 "Društvo za negovanje tradicija oslobodilačkih ratova Srbije do 1918. godine" has a Facebook page with posts mostly consisting of photographs from ceremonies of commemoration <https://sr-rs.facebook.com/drustvo.1918/> (accessed May 18, 2019).

1298 Mišo Vujović, "The Epic of Heroism and Suffering", *SERBIA National review* (Year IX, no. 50, 2015), 24-25.

*On the graves, far away
 Serb flowers will not sway;
 Back home tell our children
 We will never return to them.
 To our land send our greetings,
 Kiss the Serb soil for us!
 And let these graves remind you all
 The fight for freedom that we won.*¹²⁹⁹



Road sign for the Monument to the Drina Division soldiers, and the Monument (April 2017).

On historically pertinent dates, memorial ceremonies are held at the monument.

The landing site of the Serbian Army at Gouvia, 10 km north of Corfu town, has been marked with a memorial since 1975. The memorial site is explained in Serbian, Greek, and French: “*Dans ce port de l’île de Corfou l’armée serbe alliée venant d’Albanie a débarqué du 6 janvier au 5 avril 1916*”. Below, another smaller and partly erased inscription reads, again in the same three languages: “*Au people Hellène — Les guerriers serbes reconnaissants*”.

¹²⁹⁹ Translated by A.T.



Gouvia landing memorial plaque (April 2017).

Ten km south from the town of Corfu, in Gastouri, is another site of memory for the Serbs, the *Palace of Achilleion*. This palace is popular with tourists for other reasons. It was commissioned by the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, better known as Sissi, who, according to information from the museum, retreated to Corfu to recover from the suicide of her only son, Rudolf. After her death, the palace was purchased by the German Emperor Wilhelm II. “William II, however, never had a chance to enjoy the palace’s beauty because of a war that broke out, from his own doing”,¹³⁰⁰ as the museum website puts it. After the island of Corfu became a place for the recovery of Serbian troops in 1916, the palace served as a 500-bed military hospital where Serbian troops and officers, among others, received medical treatment. The hospital, administered by the Medical Service of the French Army, was operational between February 1916 and

1300 Museum Achillion http://www.achillion-corfu.gr/default_en.html (accessed May 20, 2019).

June 1919. Today, a plaque at the entrance to the palace memorialises this period and gives a brief overview of the historical circumstances.



The Palace of Achilleion and the memorial plaque: “*Pendant la guerre continentale 1914 – 1918 les troupes alliées ont utilisées l’île de Corfou afin d’y accueillir et abriter l’armée serbe après sa retraite à travers l’Albanie*”. (April 2017).

From the point of view of continuity of the Serbian state and government in exile, the most important building for the Serbs was the Municipal Theatre where the Serbian Assembly held its sessions from 1916 to 1918. The theatre was destroyed in a bomb raid in 1943, and today a plaque in the new building commemorates the theatre’s role in Serbian history.¹³⁰¹ While the Corfu sites described above are all significant, the most important of all the monuments in Corfu, and, one could argue, *the only true memorial* to the Retreat, is the mausoleum on Vido, “the island of death”, where the sick and dying Serbian soldiers were brought first. It is not known exactly how many were buried at sea near Vido, but it is likely that well over 5,000 Serbian soldiers were given a sea burial.

Burial at sea represents a particularly painful kind of *disappearance*, as noted by Robert Harrison in *The Dominion of the Dead*: “There are no gravestones on the sea. History and memory ground themselves on inscription, but this element is un-inscribable. **It closes over rather than keeps the place of its dead**, while its unbounded grave remains humanly

1301 Saramandić, 2004, 77-78.

unmarked.”¹³⁰² [emphasis mine] This sentiment finds its embodiment in the iconic piece of Serbian poetry, “The Blue Tomb” by the poet Milutin Bojić (1892 – 1917). A talented poet and a veteran of both Balkan wars, Bojić was working as an army censor in Niš in 1915.¹³⁰³ Having crossed Albania and arrived in Corfu, he witnessed the lifeless bodies of his comrades being loaded onto the boats before being buried at sea. This sight stayed with him. His poem “The Blue Tomb”, or “The Blue Graveyard”, is his monument to those buried at sea.¹³⁰⁴ The poem has a remarkable cultural imprint on the way the Retreat and Corfu are viewed by Serbs. It is regularly read, quoted, and the actual phrase *Plava grobnica* **only** refers to a part of the Ionian Sea close to Vido, and to the events of 1916. The poem is also part of the Serbian school curriculum, it is recited in full at most First World War commemorations, and included in television programmes and documentaries. Despite its frequent appearance, the poem seems to provoke undiminished emotion every time it is performed. The poem is an elegy, constructed of 14 quatrains in alternate rhyme, with the first, fifth, ninth, and fourteenth stanzas written in a combination of iambic heptameter and a seven-syllable line, while the others are all in twelve-syllable lines, i.e. *alexandrines*. Bojić recognises what it means for his dead comrades to have no grave, no place of rest that their descendants could visit, and he uses his poetry to not only build them a tomb but also to hold a memorial service for them:

“Hail to you, imperial galleys! Restrain your mighty rudders!
 Stroke your oars silently!
 I am proudly officiating a sublime Requiem in the chill
 of the night
 Upon these sacred waters.
 Here at the bottom, where seashells tire in sleep
 And upon the dead, algae peat falls,

1302 Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 12.

1303 Milutin Bojić – biografija [biography] <https://www.biografija.org/knjizevnost/milutin-bojic/> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1304 Saramandić, 2004, 27.

Stretch the graves of the brave, couches brother
beside brother,

Prometheuses of Hope, Apostles of Pain.

(...)

Buried are here once ancient garlands
And the passing joy of more than one generation,
That's why the cemetery lies in the shadow of waves
Between the bosom of the sea and the vault celestial.

(...)

I wish for the eternal silence to rule
And for the glorious dead to hear the noise of Battles,
And rejoice in our cries of victory, as we cast ourselves beneath
The wings of Glory upon the field vermillion with blood.

For, there far away, battles sway

With the same blood that emanates from this resting-place:

Here above the eye of the resting lords.

There before the son's history is made.

(...)

Hail to you imperial galley! In the name
of a conscientious fast

Glide slightly upon these sacred waters.

A Requiem I'm officiating, one that heavens
have yet to see upon these sacred waters!"¹³⁰⁵

Corfu's Serbian community newspaper, *Srpske novine Kraljevine Srbije* (*Serbian newspaper of the Kingdom of Serbia*) published the poem in 1916. Bojić was already sick with tuberculosis when he went to Salonika later that year, but he lived to hear his poem recited in a Salonika tavern.¹³⁰⁶ He died in Salonika on 8 September 1917.

1305 Blog *Corfu Blues and Global Views*, "Blue Graveyard", translated by Michael M. Petrovich, <https://corfublues.blogspot.nl/2010/01/plava-grobnica-blue-graveyard-milutin.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1306 Saramandić, 2004, 29.

The mausoleum with the ossuaries on the island of Vido holds the remains of 1,232 Serbian soldiers, collected from different Serbian military cemeteries from across the island. In addition, the remains of 1,532 unidentified soldiers were placed in two exterior side walls of the mausoleum depicting the front and the back of the Albanian commemorative medal. Above the entrance door is the dedication: “To the Serbian Heroes — Yugoslavia”.¹³⁰⁷

The mausoleum was not the first monument to be built on Vido. After the war ended, there was an earnest intention to erect a worthy monument to memorialise the terrible loss of life. The first monument on the island of Vido was the white stone cross unveiled by King Aleksandar on 17 May 1922. The ceremony was attended by political, military and religious representatives from both countries. The cross-monument was erected by the Royal Navy of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The words engraved on the monument are: “To the Immortal Heroes — Royal Navy 17 May 1922”.



Vido, The Navy Cross (14 April 2017).

¹³⁰⁷ During the visit on 14 April 2017, one of the visitors complained loudly to a friend that the word ‘Yugoslavia’ should be erased from the stone where it is engraved, and ‘Serbia’ engraved instead.

The project for the mausoleum took longer to be realised, mostly on account of financial reasons. The mausoleum was finally completed during the mandate of Prime Minister Milan Stojadinović who stayed in Corfu as a young official of the Ministry of Finance in 1916, when he met and married a Corfiot woman.¹³⁰⁸ The mausoleum was designed by Nikolaj Krasnov and the engineer in charge of the works was Joseph Cohen from Corfu. Construction took place from 1936 to 1939. The inside of the mausoleum was decorated by Lazar Ličinovski's mosaic *Albanian Golgotha* in 1940.¹³⁰⁹ The mausoleum's original design also had two statues of Serbian soldiers that were never completed. In 2015, the Serbian tabloid *Kurir* started an initiative to collect funds to enable completion of the statues.¹³¹⁰

Even without the statues, the Vido mausoleum is what Serbian visitors to Corfu come to see. The visitors on Good Friday, 14 April 2017, were all Serbian, predominantly aged between 30 and 50, with several younger people aged around 20. Almost all were carrying flowers as they boarded the chartered boat flying Greek and Serbian flags, for the ten-minute crossing to Vido. The guide gave instructions, particularly regarding smoking, because the island of Vido is covered in pine trees. There was a brief introduction about the programme. It was clear that the group had already been to the Salonika cemetery and that the visit to Vido, on Good Friday, would be the highlight of their trip. The island of Vido is small, with one restaurant open in the summer season, and the mausoleum, at the end of a path, leads through the pines. The path was paved as a gift to the Corfu municipality by the town of Kruševac, twinned with

1308 Augusta Gazis was the youngest daughter of Yanis Gazis, owner of the hotel *Bella Venezia* where the Regent Aleksandar and the Serbian government were residing while in Corfu. All three of Mr Gazis's daughters married Serbs.

1309 Saramandić, 2004, 76.

1310 J. S. Spasić, "Zaboravljeni heroji Albanske Golgote – nedovršena spomen kosturnica na Vidu" ["Forgotten heroes of the Albanian Golgotha – Unfinished Memorial Ossuary in Vido"], *Kurir*, 12 October 2015 <https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/drustvo/1971947/zaboravljeni-heroji-albanske-golgote-opustela-spomen-kosturnica-na-vidu> (accessed May 20, 2019). It appears that at least one site continues to be active for donations. *Budi human* [Be a humanitarian] fundraising site, Aleksandar Šapić <https://www.budihuman.rs/sr/korisnik/180/izradimo-statue-herojima-albanske-golgote> (accessed May 20, 2019).

Corfu since 1985, as the plaque on the way testifies. On the plateau before the mausoleum visitors stood or sat in the shade with flowers they had brought to throw into the sea as a tribute. The atmosphere was subdued and serious. Some visitors were taking pictures in front of the mausoleum.



Visitors posing in front of the mausoleum (14 April 2017).

People were talking in small groups. When a second group arrived, there were around 160 people in total as well as two guides and the curator of the Serbian House, Ljubomir Saramandić. One of the guides, Uroš Matijević, gave a speech with background on the initial Corfiot misgivings when the Serbian soldiers started arriving in 1916. The content of his speech was mostly inspired by Ljubomir Saramandić's book, which many of the visitors had previously bought. Matijević told the visitors about what Corfu was like before the Serbs arrived — the island had about 100,000 inhabitants when approximately 140,000 Serbian soldiers landed there over a period of a few weeks. He spoke about how the scepticism of the locals was short-lived when they were won over by the honesty

and courage of Serbian soldiers as well as by their fervent desire to return home as soon as possible.¹³¹¹ In Matijević's speech, Serbian soldiers in Corfu had a child-like innocence about them. They saw lemon and orange trees for the first time, but never took any fruit. They desperately needed help, and received it gratefully from the Greeks and the French.



The second group arriving (14 April 2017).

The relations between Serbs and the Greeks were portrayed as idyllic — and several visitors remarked in passing: “Greece is a rare country where Serbs are welcomed with open arms.”¹³¹² Following the reading of passages from the book *The Pilgrimage to Corfu*, Matijević talked about Dr Archibald Reiss, who was the author of the report on Austro-Hungarian crimes committed in Serbia in 1914.¹³¹³

1311 Uroš Matijević, speech at the Memorial, 14 April 2017.

1312 Vido, 14 April 2017, conversations with visitors.

1313 Reiss, 1916.

As mentioned in chapter III, Reiss fought on the Serbian side, crossed Albania, and wrote extensively as Serbia's advocate. He was a member of the Serbian delegation at the Versailles Conference, settled in Serbia after the war, and was instrumental in establishing the forensic police department in Belgrade.¹³¹⁴ Prior to his death, Dr Reiss wrote his final *advice* to the Serbs, to be read after his death. Matijević called it Reiss's "testament", its title is *Ecoutez les Serbes!*¹³¹⁵ It was rediscovered by the wider public in the mid-1980s and has been in print since. In his final address to the people of the country he had done so much for, Dr Reiss told his intended readers – the Serbs – what he thought about them, hoping that, by pointing out their faults, he would help them change, even after his death. The guide then read from Reiss's book about the positive traits that Reiss thought Serbs had – they were brave, patriotic, hospitable, democratic, kind-hearted, proud and clever. He gave examples and explanations. Then he spoke about their faults: the Serbs were also lazy, greedy, ungrateful, particularly with regard to the treatment of war invalids, and spiteful. Reiss linked this last trait to xenophobia, which he considered *un-Serbian*, an identity trait that *should not have developed*. The guide read the final passage from Reiss's testament: "A nation like yours that has resisted centuries-old enslavement, that has retreated across Albania and that was exiled but not defeated, and managed to return to its homesteads victorious must not allow to be ruled by a handful of selfish and corrupt politicians, despicable racketeers, contemptible parasites and criminal profiteers and sharks."¹³¹⁶ When he finished his reading, many of the visitors were nodding in approval and asserting that these words "could have been written yesterday". Matijević gave his own conclusion about what he had just read: "He knew us well. This is a lesson for us. You see, we stand here with pride, before this mausoleum. They have indebted

1314 J. Mathyer, "Professor RA Reiss: A Pioneer of Forensic Science", *Journal of the Forensic Science Society*, Volume 24, Issue 2 (March 1984), 136. Mathyer does not mention that Reiss grew increasingly disillusioned with Serbian politicians, and cut his ties with most of them. He died in Belgrade in 1929, reportedly following an altercation with a neighbour.

1315 Arčibald Rajs, *Čujte Srbi! [Listen, Serbs!]*, translated by Dejan Stojićević, preface by Čedomir Antić (Ethos: Belgrade, 2005).

1316 Rajs, 2005, 61. (Uroš Matijević's speech, 14 April 2017, Vido, recording, transcript, translation by A.T.).

us, so that one hundred years later we come here with a full heart, and with a feeling of pride. My dear friends, let us do something so that in a hundred years somebody can say something nice about us.”¹³¹⁷



The visitors listening to the speeches (14 April 2017).

After Matijević’s speech, Ljubomir Saramandić, the *Serbian House* curator and the author of *The Pilgrimage to Corfu* made a shorter speech and gave another dimension to the day: “Since you have come to Corfu at the time when we are celebrating the greatest Christian holiday, I would like to go back 101 years ago, to 1916, and to the scene described by the Canadian priest Dr Boyd.

He describes the scene as a unique one, never seen before. Over 130,000 soldiers and officers were lined up in the old port from where we had set off. And then the Supreme Commander of the Serbian Army, Regent

1317 Uroš Matijević’s speech, 14 April 2017, Vido, recording, transcript, translation by A.T.

Aleksandar Karadjordjević arrived on horseback. He addressed his soldiers: “Christ has risen, my heroes!” and from all 130,000 of them came the reply: “Christ has risen, indeed.” Dr Boyd, delighted with what he had seen, describes it as unique, a ruler addressing his soldiers the way the apostles had made it known that Christ had risen. It is my profound conviction that at that moment, the word “resurrection” acquired a double meaning. On the one hand, the greatest Christian holiday, the day of Christ’s Resurrection and on the other, the resurrection of the Serbian state and army, exactly from this place where we are standing now.”¹³¹⁸ Saramandić then introduced Mr Stanojević, one of the visitors who was carrying a wreath. Mr Stanojević seemed moved by the occasion and said that his daughter had made the wreath which he carried with him on the coach all the way from Serbia, yet the flowers were still fresh. He used to hear about the battle of Cer on his grandfather’s knee. He said he was placing the wreath with a feeling of sadness and pride. He became choked with emotion by the end of his speech. Saramandić then invited everyone to join in the singing of the song born on the island, “There, Far away”, as he started playing it from a device. The singing was muted and emotional. The final line of the song “Long live Serbia!” was taken up by the crowd at the end, but not loudly.

The visitors were then invited to enter the mausoleum. The ossuary boxes were marked with names, unit numbers and were immaculate compared with the Salonika crypt. The altar had a remembrance book where visitors left their thoughts. Most wrote “Glory to them” (“*Slava im*”). On the altar was a jar of Serbian soil. It came from the earth around the Monument to the Unknown Hero as does the one in the Salonika mausoleum. The visitors walked around the mausoleum and then it was time to visit the small plateau by the sea, where most official commemorations are held, and from where wreaths and flowers are thrown into the sea. Many visitors were visibly moved, some family members and friends holding on to each other.

1318 Ljubomir Saramandić’s speech, 14 April 2017, Vido, video recording, transcript, translation A.T.



Mr Stanojević laying the wreath made by his daughter (14 April 2017).



Visitors signing the Visitors' book in front of the jar of Serbian soil (14 April 2017).



Visitors in the mausoleum among ossuary boxes (14 April 2017).



A corner with votive images, a framed oath of the association of the descendants of veterans to keep the memory of their ancestors, and a photograph of the Memorial of the Unknown Hero (Belgrade) on the right.



A view of the “Blue Sea Tomb”. (14 April 2017)

On the return trip, the mood was lighter, the captain of the boat also played “There, Far Away” and the visitors threw their remaining flowers into the sea. This was the moment when the purpose of the trip was palpably complete. They were not mere tourists — they were pilgrims. Having concluded their pilgrimage, the world now looked different.¹³¹⁹

There is a practical and conceptual difference between an official commemoration and a commemoration organised by private individuals on such an occasion as described above. In the former, the officials pronounce speeches written by someone else, adjust the sash on the professionally made wreath, after it has been carried and positioned to lean against the memorial by dapper uniformed soldiers. Private commemorations may be managed less impeccably, and even clumsy at times, the wreaths are not perfect, and the assembled company

1319 Ljubomir Saramandić interview, April 2017; correspondence, October 2017.

more varied. In both cases, there may be real emotion, but *the agenda* is different. For the politicians, it is their job — they represent the state, or the government, they have to be seen to be going to the site of memory and paying their tribute, while individuals are there of their own free will — they do not have to do it. The 160 or so people who came to Vido on 14 April 2017, *chose to be there* during their holiday — they were not doing it for someone else, they were doing it because they felt they had to do this once in their lives. This need is the essence of pilgrimage which started as a religious ritual.¹³²⁰ The journey to a sacred place is made in order to be reminded of the moral principles of one's faith. In a world where much is changing, and moving away from a purely religious ritual, secular pilgrimages are undertaken to refocus our lives and help us see things more clearly.¹³²¹ Searching for meaning in a historically important location for one's community can thus be interpreted as a "moral place-making" activity¹³²² or as another manifestation of an *imagined community*. The sacred secular site of Vido seemed to provide a missing piece in the visitors' lives. This was a place to come for validation, but in a different way from the *Zejtinlik*. The remarkable aspect of this visit was the *bond* that could be sensed in the crowd. They were *all* being addressed by the guides and the speeches were veritable *sermons*. It was, in essence, a kind of memorial service, strangely enough echoing the words of the Serbian Foreign Minister Dačić in 2013, who said that Serbs hold a memorial service every time they come to Vido.¹³²³

In the final two parts of this chapter, we explore "fictive kinships" of remembrance, established 100 years after the end of the war. Just as the

1320 Pilgrimage — Religion — Britannica.com <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pilgrimage-religion> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1321 Saramandić, 2004, 12.

1322 Willy Jansen and Catrien Notermans, *Gender, nation and religion in European pilgrimage: old routes, new journeys* (London, New York: Routledge, 2016), 210.

1323 "Nama je svaki odlazak na Krf opelo" ["We hold a memorial service every time we come to Corfu"]. *B92*, September 26, 2013. http://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2013&mm=09&dd=26&nav_category=11&nav_id=758324 (accessed September 30, 2013).

visitors to *Zejtinlik* and Vido do, the people who get together to carry out different acts of remembrance are performing the “work of remembrance”.¹³²⁴

5. “We’ll do it Ourselves”: Individual Memorial Events and Practices

“We did exactly that with the expedition, the guerrilla way. With our own example and through action. Without any backing of the state, or whining that we needed support. If you — as a state — don’t remember, if you don’t want to be a part of it, if you’re not interested — no problem! We’ll do it ourselves, we will lead by example.”¹³²⁵

There are remarkable acts of remembrance performed by private individuals who got together with the purpose of remembering the two key aspects of Serbia’s Great War — the Retreat and the Salonika Front. Next we look at a selection of these “fictive kinship groups” “who do the work of remembrance”, as described by Winter.¹³²⁶

The Expedition

In December 2015, one hundred years after the Retreat through Albania began, a four-member team of mountaineers from Belgrade crossed Montenegro and Albania on foot as a tribute to their ancestors. The expedition, named *Albanian Golgotha 100 Years Later*, set up a website in Serbian and English to give historical context of the Retreat, to introduce the members and to explain their motivation:

1324 Winter, in Winter and Sivan, 1999, 59-60; Winter, 2006, 136.

1325 Marko Nikolić, team leader, from correspondence, June 2017.

1326 Winter, 2006, 136-137.



The photograph of expedition members in WWI Serbian army uniforms on the *Albanian Golgotha 100 years later site*.¹³²⁷

“By pilgrimage via paths of such heroes, expedition wanted to remind contemporaries how precious was the honor of the Serbian state and the army. Had they lost the honor, they would have lost everything else: the state, the homeland, the respect of the descendants ... Preserving it, these glorious heroes quickly regained freedom, homeland, and state and they deserved the perennial admiration of their descendants. But these descendants were also left valuable lessons: how to love the homeland,

1327 <http://albanskagolgota.rs> (accessed May 20, 2019)

how to fight for [its] freedom and that without [sacrifices] there [can be] neither freedom nor homeland.”¹³²⁸

The website has changed since and no longer has all the of the text quoted above, nor all of the original information, specifically in relation to donations for the project. The website, as it is at present, states the mission of the project – “peaceful and patriotic expedition” to follow in the footsteps of the Serbian Army from 100 years ago, starting from the town of Peć, in Kosovo, to the islands of Corfu and Vido.¹³²⁹ The expedition members were equipped with only necessary items, and travelled on foot without logistical support. The team set off from Peć in Kosovo and had originally planned for the expedition to last up to 20 days. However, the weather was favourable and they arrived in Dürres (Durazzo) in Albania, after walking 245 km in eight days. The team comprising Marko Nikolić, Nemanja Nešković, Nenad Mitrović, and Marko Marković, were all experienced outdoor experts, thoroughly prepared for their expedition.

Contrary to their picture on the website, they did not undertake the expedition in Serbian army uniforms from the First World War,¹³³⁰ but in alpine mountaineering and trekking clothing. In remembrance of Serbian soldiers who took communion in the Dečani Monastery in November 1915, the team did the same before setting off towards the Prokletije Mountains 100 years later. Out of the three routes most used in the Retreat, the one that cost the most lives went through Prizren, across the Vizier’s Bridge, which was completely frozen at the time. However, as there is a motorway along that route today, this would have not presented a challenge for the team. Therefore, the team chose the following route for the crossing –

1328 The quoted text can no longer be found on the website at this date *Albanska Golgota 100 godina kasnije [Albanian Golgotha 100 years later]* www.albanskagolgota.rs (accessed March 10, 2016).

1329 <http://albanskagolgota.rs> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1330 In an interview they seem put out by a question asking if they had actually completed it wearing a Serbian WWI uniform.

Rugovo Canyon, Mount Čakor to the Dürres Harbour.¹³³¹ After arriving in Dürres, they boarded a ferry for Corfu where they visited the Vido memorial. After Corfu, they visited *Zejtinlik* in Thessaloniki, and then travelled to Macedonia, to climb Mt. Kajmakčalan and complete the journey.

The expedition drew considerable public attention, particularly after the event. They were invited to multiple talks, conferences, and interviews, all over Serbia, Bosnia (Republika Srpska), and Macedonia to talk about the expedition and what it meant to them as an experience.¹³³² In correspondence with two of the team members who had agreed to answer additional questions, they expanded on the experience and their views of history and memory.

Marko Nikolić (b. 1978), team leader, “promoter of Serbia”, fan of active outdoor life, wanted to get people to move in nature, learn about themselves and their country. Nikolić felt strongly that Serbian cultural and moral heritage was not appreciated, that the Serbian nation had not learnt from its past, raising questions as to why the country was not marking such events “more seriously and properly”, why the past was “brushed under the carpet”. He believed that the expedition’s objective was also to ask the question, “Where are we 100 years later?” Nikolić was unequivocal in his views on the importance of the First World War for Serbia, and the state of Serbia today: “The Great War should be the main lesson for today’s youth, as an example when we were acting like one,

1331 Another member of the expedition, Stanko Tomić (no relation), a descendant of a Serbian volunteer from the US, joined the expedition in Shkōdre (Scutari), having gone a different route to retrace his great-grandfather’s steps. See Senka Miloš, “Putevima divova — Albanska Golgota 100 godina kasnije” [“In the footsteps of giants — Albanian Golgotha 100 years later”], 8 January 2016, *Sputnik — Serbia* <https://rs-lat.sputniknews.com/analize/201601081102340412-Albanija-putevima-predaka-planinarenje/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1332 Tribina “Albanska Golgota 100 godina kasnije” [“Conference “Albanian Golgotha” 100 years later”], Kanal M RTV, YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ivXD6sQQhmI> (accessed May 20, 2019); Ekspedicija “Albanska Golgota 100 godina kasnije” [“Expedition “Albanian Golgotha” 100 years later”], *Novosti*, 18 December 2015 (accessed May 20, 2019); Ekspedicija Albanska Golgota 1915 – 2015 [Expedition Albanian Golgotha 1915 – 2015], *Mondo TV, YouTube* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AbrfN9VeBr8> (accessed May 20, 2019).

undivided, brave, educated, determined, [but] today we are geographically smaller than ever, with a load of reality shows, quasi-idols, and unskilled people as leaders.”¹³³³ Nikolić felt that the experience of the expedition had changed him because it was “an explicit pilgrimage and questioning of oneself, one’s nation, and life in general”.¹³³⁴ As the most poignant part of the expedition he described the Prokletije Mountains and had difficulty imagining an army getting through using frozen mountain-goat tracks. By being away from civilisation, by being out of one’s comfort zone, he says: “this is when you realise what these people, our great-grandfathers, have done for us. Today we stand on their shoulders, but in a moral, spiritual, even physical sense, we do not reach to their knees”.

Regarding the connection to the events of 1915 – 1916, he said that it was “emotional, spiritual, strong and educational”. Nikolić considered that as a nation, Serbs did not respect the memory of those events, that they lacked real interest and engagement, for which he blamed “fake patriotism, folklore kitsch and low-life. Drunken louts with beards, military caps, flags, aggressively attacking everything they don’t like”. Nikolić’s view was that young people did not feel inspired to study history by those who promoted it: “These people are not like our forefathers, they don’t have the spirit, or the upbringing. Our ancestors were just, they never attacked those weaker than them, they were hardworking heads of household, honest, and were not measuring everything in profit.” His hope for a change in the way the Retreat is remembered stemmed from a feeling that their expedition had changed something, because of the way they did it, “the guerrilla way”: “Dozens of towns invited us and hosted us to give lectures on this subject, and to tell them about our journey. Dozens of people followed in our footsteps and walked the path in summer conditions. That was the objective, that each Serb should walk that path and comprehend what our ancestors had done.”¹³³⁵ Nikolić thought that this was enough for the awareness to start changing.

1333 Marko Nikolić, correspondence, June 2017.

1334 Marko Nikolić, correspondence, June 2017.

1335 Marko Nikolić, correspondence, June 2017.

Nenad Mitrović (b. 1980), Serbian army officer, sports and outdoor enthusiast, member of the Serbian Mountain Rescue Service, also provided his comments in relation to the expedition, and in relation to the historical past and remembrance. His view was that the expedition received some short-lived attention, but that no initiative had resulted in making the remembrance of the event “more collective”.¹³³⁶ He felt that the *one* documentary done by the Serbian Television¹³³⁷ was not enough, and that something would have to be done on the level of the relevant ministries such as Education, Defence, and Culture. Mitrović thought that young people could become more interested in their national history through an expedition. Mitrović reiterated his admiration for his ancestors: “I understood that the operation Albanian Golgotha was a battle for the honour of the Serbian State and it was won with terrible suffering. I understand that the price of honour of my people is very high and that we cannot play with it today.”¹³³⁸ He said that during the expedition, he felt close to his forefathers who had died for him. His impressions in relation to the way the retreat was remembered in Serbia today was that it was only truly honoured by individuals and some smaller citizens’ associations, and modestly so. He felt that there was no adequate remembrance on a state level of *any* of the major events of the First World War. He explained that it was difficult in the present circumstances for most people to make historical heritage a priority, and that political will was lacking in getting people attracted to educational and cultural institutions that should take the lead in showcasing national heritage. Mitrović has this to say about the way the Serbs dealt with the past in general: “The relationship to the events in our past is often fashioned in relation to the daily events. When we celebrated the communist victory in the Second World War, all the other victories were diminished. In the nineties, when we suddenly *remembered* we were not communist, we started to despise *everything* that was connected to the partisan movement. We are constantly going from

1336 Nenad Mitrović, correspondence, August 2017.

1337 *Srbi na Krfu*, RTS, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gMd758zbnY> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1338 Nenad Mitrović, correspondence, August 2017.

one extreme to another and it seems that we are not capable of rationally looking at the facts and comprehending our past. In our quarrels, we lose sight of the essence and fail to establish and clearly formulate our national interests that should be undisputable, regardless of political opinions. That is why we did not succeed in grasping the message of the Albanian Golgotha, nor in building a monument to the heroes, such as they deserve, which would always be our warning of the price of Serbian honour."¹³³⁹

Mitrović was in favour of building a grand monument to the heroes of the Retreat, perhaps in Kosovo, and placing memorial plaques along the route with a view to attracting future pilgrims. He thought that educational trips should be organised, or sports events, such as a bicycle race in the honour of the Retreat. Mitrović also added that the Serbs should promote the Retreat through films because that would educate young people on the subject: "The story of Albanian Golgotha and Serbian history in general is an endless and eternal inspiration".¹³⁴⁰

The Rowers

Earlier that year, in May 2015, a memorial rowing expedition in the honour of the Retreat was organised by a five-member crew. The expedition was planned to last a month to complete travelling across three seas, Ionian, Aegean, and the Adriatic along the route from Cavala, Tassos, Evia, the Peloponnesian Canal, Corfu, Brindisi, and ending in Bar, Montenegro. In Corfu, the crew delivered a plaque of gratitude to Serbian House entitled, "In the honour of the ancestors for future generations".¹³⁴¹ Miloš Azdejković, the youngest member of the expedition was excited to take part in it: "We prepared seven months for this. The idea is to pay our respects to the ancestors, and my great-grandfather crossed Albania. They set off bravely into uncertainty and only taking with them the idea of a state. We would need about 300,000 strokes of paddles to do it, that is two

1339 Nenad Mitrović, correspondence, August 2017.

1340 Nenad Mitrović, correspondence in August 2017.

1341 "Veslači u čast prelaska preko Albanije" ["Rowers in the honour the Retreat across Albania"], *B92*, 29 May 2015 http://www.b92.net/sport/na_vodi/veslanje.php?yyyy=2015&mm=05&dd=29&nav_id=998073 (accessed May 20, 2019).

strokes for each soldier who crossed Albania". A five-part documentary on their expedition was broadcast in 2015, and has since been available online.¹³⁴² It gives historical background, provides original footage from the Retreat as an introduction and then follows the team's adventures, including damage to the boat, sickness of the crew, and weather problems. They stopped in Vido to visit the memorial, and observed a minute's silence before the "Blue Sea Tomb". In Corfu they visited Serbian House to present the plaque in honour of the Retreat.¹³⁴³

The Mountaineers

After centenary commemorations in Serbia got underway in 2014, *Danas*, a Belgrade independent daily, published an article about mountaineers from the *Mountaineering and Skiing Association Kopaonik*¹³⁴⁴ who clean overgrown and dilapidated Serbian military cemeteries outside Serbia, mostly in Macedonia.¹³⁴⁵ The article gave a bleak picture of the state of Serbian military cemeteries abroad, with Serbian national heritage remaining uncared for, while the only projects considered were those that can be used in high-visibility events.¹³⁴⁶ As the article put it: "Unofficial sources in the Serbian government say that it is the practice for [military] cemeteries to be cleaned at the last minute, just before a state delegation is supposed to visit."¹³⁴⁷ Even though there are enthusiastic volunteers eager to help clean and renovate cemeteries, there seems to be needless

1342 "Savim prirodno: U čast predaka: prvi deo" ["Completely naturally: In the honour of our ancestors: part one"] RTS, January 2016. <http://www.rts.rs/page/tv/sr/story/22/rtssvet/2147491/savim-prirodno-u-cast-predaka-prvi-deo.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1343 "Savim prirodno: U čast predaka: peti deo" ["Completely naturally: In the honour of our ancestors: part five"], RTS, YouTube, January 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSF7sAKMc5s> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1344 Planinarsko-skijaško društvo Kopaonik <https://www.psd-kopaonik.org.rs> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1345 Since the *Prespa Agreement*, in force since February 2019, the country is known as North Macedonia. However the Serbian media always refers to it as *Macedonia* only.

1346 Jelena Tasić "O srpskim vojnim grobljima brinu samo planinari" ["Only mountaineers look after Serbian military cemeteries"], *Danas*, 15 September 2014 <https://www.danas.rs/drustvo/o-srpskim-vojn timers-grobljima-brinu-samo-planinari/> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1347 Tasić, 2014.

politicking which prevents these volunteers, such as the mountaineers' association,¹³⁴⁸ from getting basic financial support for cleaning.

At the same time, as the newspaper article explained, Serbian soldiers who died in the Balkan Wars and the two World Wars rest in 500 cemeteries in 36 countries, with no equivalent of a War Graves Commission in Serbia. The Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veterans and Social Matters officials, were unable to say exactly how many of these cemeteries were from the First World War, but they did say they had no immediate plans to renovate them, even on the eve of the centenary commemorations.¹³⁴⁹ On the other hand, the mountaineers' association, clearly well-informed and knowledgeable, *scored a scoop* in 2010 when they found the grave of the fabled *Vojvoda Vuk*,¹³⁵⁰ who died in a battle on the Salonika front in November 1916 in Macedonia. It seemed that only one local shepherd knew where to find the grave.¹³⁵¹ Official reticence to support these individual ventures may be partly explained by the group's willingness to challenge official narratives: "On the Kajmakčalan battlefield which covers about 1,600 square km, there is a Serbian military cemetery with a central monument in almost every village. They originate mostly from battles in 1916. There is the cemetery of the Third Serbian Army, which was not reorganised, **as the official history says**, but they are all resting there, on the battlefield — 1,209 officers, 31,432 non-commissioned officers and soldiers", said the mountaineers' association announcement on their site in 2014.¹³⁵² [emphasis mine]

The story of the mountaineers began in 2008, when a group, led by their guide Stanoje Stojković,¹³⁵³ was climbing Mt Baba, towards the Pelister Peak in Macedonia, and on their way, they met Dragiša Strahinić, a Serb

1348 Planinarsko-skijaško društvo Kopaonik <https://www.psd-kopaonik.org.rs> (accessed May 20, 2019)

1349 Tasić, 2014.

1350 Vojin Popović aka Vojvoda Vuk aka Zmaj od Pčinje, (1881 – 1916), veteran of the Balkan Wars, member of the *Black Hand*, legendary commander of the guerrilla volunteer detachment.

1351 Tasić, 2014.

1352 Tasić, 2014

1353 Stanoje Stojković, correspondence in June 2017, June 2019; interview, November 2018.

from Bitolj, who told them about derelict Serbian military cemeteries at the foot of the Kajmakčalan Peak, on Mt Nidža, 100 km east. Some of the cemeteries were from the Balkan wars and others from the First World War. They were overgrown with weeds, Dragiša said, “the wooden crosses had rotted a long time ago, the metal crosses rusted away and the plaques with the names of the buried soldiers were gone”.¹³⁵⁴ Moved by the sight, Dragiša helped establish a Serbian-Macedonian association of volunteers who started cleaning these cemeteries. Stanoje Stojković felt that this was something the mountaineering association from Belgrade could do too. Stanoje organised the first cleaning operation in September 2009. His group was made up of 20 mountaineers and nine members of the *Association of the descendants of 1912 – 1918 volunteers*. In order to carry out cleaning and repairs, they had to apply for a special permit from the Macedonian authorities. Stanoje Stojković’s inspiration and determination led to having one cleaning operation per year, taking in several cemeteries each time with the total number of 11 cleaning missions in ten years, with 300 participants, from 20 different towns across Serbia. After the first operation they received modest support from their Belgrade municipality. Stanoje found that the *Institute for the Protection of Monuments* was unable or unwilling to help.

The volunteers were not deterred and continued their self-financing. Stojković believes that people joining him to clean derelict cemeteries are motivated by “a hope of finding an ancestor, burn some incense on his grave, light a candle for his soul.” As Stanoje further explains: “I have great-grandfathers who have crossed Albania and fought on the Salonika front.”¹³⁵⁵ He set up a *Facebook* page for the “Kajmakčalan Association”,¹³⁵⁶ where he posts *before and after* pictures of military cemeteries, as well as all the legible information about the soldiers buried there, their name, rank, unit, and the date when they died. Stojković discovered that there were rear units in charge of making tombstones for their comrades

1354 Stanoje Stojković, correspondence, June 2017, June 2019; interview, November 2018.

1355 Stanoje Stojković, correspondence June 2017, June 2019; interview, November 2018.

1356 <https://sr-rs.facebook.com/udruzenje.kajmakcalan.2015/> (accessed June 7, 2019).

(“Live comrade for the fallen one”) which is how some fallen soldiers can still be identified today. Under the heading “Serbia Remember” on the *Facebook* page of his association, Stanoje regularly posts photographs of military headstones they come across with the information on the barely legible tombstones, including the exact location of the graves so that any surviving relatives can find them.



“ДРАГОЉУБ МИЈАИЛОВИЋ; 3. Ч; 2. Б, 7. ПУК; ИЗ ВЕЛИКЕ КРСНЕ; ЈАСЕН. СМЕДЕРЕВ. ПОЖИВЕ 24 Г; ПОГИБЕ 22- I - 1917. Г. СПОМЕНИК СЕ НАЛАЗИ НА СРПСКОМ ВОЈНОМ ГРОБЉУ НА ЛОКАЦИЈИ ТРНОВО - СТУДЕНА ВОДА.”

“Dragoljub Mijailović, 3rd Company, 2nd Battalion, 7th Regiment from Velika Krsna; Jasen, Smederevo. Lived to age 24. Killed in action 22-I-1917.

The tombstone is located at the Serbian military cemetery on the Trnovo-Studena Voda site.”¹³⁵⁷

1357 <https://www.facebook.com/udruzenje.kajmakcalan.2015/photos/a.1798095917092137/1809102412658154/?type=3&theater> (accessed June 28, 2019).

There are currently 233 such photographs¹³⁵⁸ and more are being added. Stanoje Stojković continues to organise trips and hopes that more people will be inspired to join them, but has given up on getting assistance from official institutions.



БЛАГОЈЕ Ј. КОСТИЋ, ПОРУЧНИК МИТРАЉЕСКОГ ОДЕЉЕЊА ПЕШ. ПУКА
КЊАЗА МИХАЈЛА; ПРОКУПЉЕ, ПОГИНУО 5-ХИ-1916. Г. НА КОТИ 1212.
СПОМЕНИК СЕ НАЛАЗИ НА СРПСКОМ ВОЈНОМ ГРОБЉУ У СЕЛУ СКОЧИВИР.
“Blagoje J. Kostić, Lieutenant of the machine-gun squad of the Infantry Regiment Prince
Mihailo; Prokuplje, killed in action 5-XI-1916 at trig point 1212.
The tombstone is located at the Serbian military cemetery in the village of Skočivir.”¹³⁵⁹

1358 Kajmakčalan udruženje [association] Facebook page https://www.facebook.com/pg/udruzenje.kajmakcalan.2015/photos/?ref=page_internal (accessed June 28, 2019).

1359 <https://www.facebook.com/udruzenje.kajmakcalan.2015/photos/a.1798095917092137/1806290669605995/?type=3&theater> (accessed June 28, 2019).

One of the group members, Ljiljana Stamenić (b. 1960), explained what had motivated her.¹³⁶⁰ She first joined the cleaning operation of derelict military cemeteries in 2011, wishing to do some physical work to get relief from office work. She did not know what to expect from this trip and it turned out to be a revelation. Her experience of cleaning tombstones and revealing the names beneath dirt and moss was intensely emotional. When she saw how young most of the soldiers were when they died, she was frequently moved to tears. She was reminded of the story of her family. Her own great-grandfather Milan Stamenić, was last seen by his brothers on the way to Albania in 1915. The family assumed he was captured and sent to Hungary or Romania as a prisoner of war. He was never heard from again. Ljiljana Stamenić looked for his grave in *Zejtinlik* but did not find him. She read extensively about the war and the region where her great-grandfather was from, but never found out what happened to him. She felt that every time she was lighting a candle on a tombstone for a young man killed in the war, she was also lighting a candle for her great-grandfather Milan, and *remembering* him. Ljiljana regretted that the rest of the family did not feel that they should honour and remember him: “What Milan had left behind, [his brothers] knew how to share between them, but what happened to him, what about our remembrance of him? He should not have had to die **twice**, once in the war and again **in the hearts of his family?**”¹³⁶¹ [emphasis mine]

The fictive kinships that Winter wrote about were formed as a way of coping with loss and grief, for personal or political reasons.¹³⁶² With the aftermath of the Great War removed by a whole century, the members of fictive kinships doing the work of remembrance in the situations described above seem to be motivated by similar and yet different urges. The deepest motivation for their work of remembrance is rooted in the *ancestor worship* of an *imagined community* combined with the *retrospective mirage*. They feel that they *know* what the heroes of the Retreat

1360 Ljiljana Stamenić, correspondence, June, August, September 2017, March 2018.

1361 Ljiljana Stamenić, correspondence, June, August, September 2017, March 2018.

1362 Winter, 2006, 140.

were like: brave, indomitable, resolute. They *remember* them as heroes beyond reproach. Honouring them properly seems to mean erecting grand monuments — the groups all have great faith in the power of memorialisation. Through their actions, the fictive kinships want to feel closer to the *idealised and inspirational* past. Today's Serbs and Serbia do not fare well in comparison to the heroes of the past. Among the actors of remembrance, including the visitors to the Serbian *lieux de mémoire* related to the Great War, there is a palpable discontent with the state of Serbia today. The betrayal of ancestors, of the glorious dead, hangs as an unspoken accusation, or in the case of the guide's speech on Vido, as an invitation *to do something to be remembered by*. What that *something* should be is not specified. This brings us to another recurrent theme animating the discourse of remembrance: mourning for *the authentic Serbian self*. *We Serbs used to be honest, determined, and united in the Great War but have since become corrupt, weak, and divided. We have forgotten who we really are. We can recognise here the universal theme of moral degeneration. The fictive kinships of today are not necessarily mourning the dead soldiers — they are mourning the loss of imagined authentic self*. Not always in relation to the Great War, but about what has been *lost*, one way or another. Arguably, they might be mostly disappointed by what has happened in the last 25 years. Disillusioned, they use the acts of remembrance to find authenticity, in the same vein that people embark on pilgrimages.¹³⁶³ They set off on their sacred journeys into the past, searching for lost meaning, fighting for the identity damaged by the complexity of historical experience and their own perceived lack of agency in it.

Next, in the last part of the chapter, we discover foreigners who have been inspired by Serbia's Retreat and the Great War to achieve remarkable goals. While there are a number of elements of the themes we have seen among their Serbian counterparts, their purposes and their paths are different.

1363 Noga Collins-Kreiner, "The lifecycle of concepts: the case of 'Pilgrimage Tourism', *Tourism Geographies*, (18:3), 324.

6. Remembrance Across Borders

“Since I was a boy, there would always be one day a year where we would remember the fallen in all wars and this was on Remembrance Sunday, the first Sunday after the 11th of November, this was the day that most people in my Church of Ireland Parish would wear red poppies, we sang “Onward Christian Soldiers” and other hymns that were to me very meaningful and uplifting. The inside of the entire church was full of remembrance plaques for men and women who had given their lives so that we could all be free. But in Serbia, it is even more relevant as nearly every person I know would have some relative who was lost in one of the wars. But maybe it is too much for some people.”¹³⁶⁴

Foreigners who supported Serbia in the Great War are still popular today. Dr Archibald Reiss is still quoted and remembered as the great friend of Serbia, despite his difficult last years in Belgrade.¹³⁶⁵ Foreign medical missions in the Great War are celebrated, the doctors and nurses who worked in Serbian hospitals in 1914 – 1915 are widely written about. Many were awarded medals for bravery and dedication. Today, the foreigners, particularly from the West, who speak in favour of Serbs and Serbia regularly get considerable press coverage in the Serbian news and sometimes more than that. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the British actor Ralph Fiennes was granted Serbian citizenship in 2017.¹³⁶⁶ He has since been vocal about his love and admiration for Serbs.¹³⁶⁷ The media report widely on such events and the government feeds on positive

1364 Mark Keating, correspondence, November 2017.

1365 Reiss had fallen out with Pašić over corruption allegations against his government and had retreated from political circles. On 8 August 1929, Reiss suffered a stroke following a heated argument with a neighbour in Belgrade.

1366 ““Fajnsić za B92: Lepo je biti Srbin, ali fotografija...” [““Fajnsić” for B92: It’s good to be Serbian, but the photograph...”] B92, 24 September 2017 https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2017&mm=09&dd=24&nav_category=12&nav_id=1307013 (accessed July 5, 2019).

1367 “Radije bih bio Srbin nego Britanac” [“I would rather be Serbian than British”], B92, 5 July 2019 https://www.b92.net/zivot/vesti.php?yyyy=2019&mm=07&dd=05&nav_id=1562879 (accessed July 5, 2019).

publicity — *If these foreigners are on our side then we are right*, etc. But there are less well-known foreigners who have developed an interest in Serbian history connected to their own national history in ways that have led them to become unlikely champions of remembrance.

The Irishman who walked to Corfu

Jovan Memedović, Serbian TV presenter and the host of the series, *Completely Naturally* who authored reporting on the rowers who rowed across three seas to pay tribute to the Serbian soldiers who crossed Albania, also made a documentary on another pilgrim of the Retreat.¹³⁶⁸ Mark Keating (b. 1968), an Irishman from Dublin, was inspired by the Retreat to walk the distance between Belgrade and Corfu to commemorate the journey made by his wife Vesna's grandfather in 1915. Keating met his wife while working as an *International Red Cross* volunteer during the wars in the former Yugoslavia.¹³⁶⁹ While travelling with his wife's relatives and exploring Serbia in the late 1990s, he learnt about his wife's grandfather Dobrosav Petrović who fought in both Balkan Wars and in the First World War. He was a member of the famous Drina Division. When the Division troops, just the same as countless others, were ordered to retreat in the winter of 1915, Dobrosav too crossed Montenegro and Albania on foot. Greatly weakened and sick with dysentery, he narrowly escaped death on Vido after a friend spotted him, and pulled him off a boat that would have meant certain death. Following his initial recovery in Corfu, Dobrosav Petrović was then sent to Marseille for further treatment. Dobrosav subsequently joined his comrades in 1916 in Salonika, took part in the Kajmakčalan battle and eventually in the liberation of the country. After the war, Dobrosav Petrović married in 1921, and fathered 13 children. He died in 1978. It was only after Mark Keating was researching his own family history in 2014, that he found out that his own great-grandfather, Sergeant Thomas Frederick Vaughan, member of the 18th

1368 “Sasvim prirodno: U čast predaka: peti deo” [“Completely naturally: In the honour of our ancestors: part five”], RTS, YouTube, January 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nSF7sAKMc5s> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1369 From correspondence, November 2017, April 2018.

London Regiment, part of the 10th Irish Division, had served in *l'Armée d'Orient* after being shipped from Gallipoli to Salonika in 1916. Keating learnt that not only were both their ancestors in Salonika at the same time, but that his great-grandfather had also fought Bulgarians in Serbia and Macedonia. He also survived the war and returned home. As Mark Keating put it: "When I realised that it would be 100 years since these great events I thought of the best way to remember them, walking a portion of the route was naturally going to be part of this remembrance."¹³⁷⁰



Mark Keating with his dog Pajo in front of the Celtic cross of the 10th Irish Division, North Macedonia, 2015. (Photograph courtesy of Mark Keating.)

More importantly, apart from Mark Keating's desire to pay tribute to both his and his wife's ancestors, he used his expedition as a fundraiser for the children's ward at the Belgrade's *Institute for Oncology* and for *St John's Ward* in *Our Lady's Children's Hospital* in Crumlin in Ireland.¹³⁷¹ Mark Keating's 2,000 km walk from Belgrade to Corfu and back via Kajmakčalan called *Walk For Their Lives 1915 – 2015*, raised funds for new equipment for both

1370 From correspondence, November 2017, April 2018.

1371 "Man and dog on 2,000 km trek to raise cash for charity", *The Irish Times*, 20 August 2015 <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/man-and-dog-on-2-000km-trek-to-raise-cash-for-charity-1.2323321> (accessed May 20, 2019).

hospitals. This was Keating's third humanitarian action to raise funds for Serbia and Ireland. In 2014, Keating rode his bicycle from Dublin to Belgrade to raise money for three hospitals and to commemorate 20 years since meeting his wife.¹³⁷²

Keating's expedition received extensive coverage in Ireland and Serbia and he became something of a celebrity. The connection he made between soldiers in the Retreat and cancer patients was survival: both groups would have had to keep going to survive — the soldiers had to keep going the same as people with cancer. His own experience from the walk mirrored this: "When we really have to, and there is no other way, we can adapt to anything. That is how these people survived 100 years ago."¹³⁷³ On his walk he met many people who told him about their own grandfathers and great-grandfathers who had crossed Albania and he saw different graves, crosses, and roadside memorials to the fallen in different wars. Keating described his two most poignant moments, first at Kajmakčalan, when it took them two days to reach the top: "We were completely exhausted, I would think it was the same for Dobrosav and his men. It was freezing cold, minus 12 degrees with the most incredibly strong wind. However, the next morning was completely quiet with the most incredible sunrise. We were there on our own and we felt it, but it was probably the most beautiful place I had ever been to. We could see the Albanian mountains in the far-off distance that we had climbed the month before, and in the other direction Mount Athos in Greece. It was a holy place where so many men fought and died, it felt like the peace we felt that morning had been truly earned 100 years ago." The second place on his journey which moved him in particular was near a village of Valandovo in Macedonia where Irish troops had been stationed: "For six months between summer and winter they fought off the Bulgarians and the extreme weather, in the summer the intense heat and mosquito-

1372 In 2014, through the Whitewater Foundation, Keating collected aid for the victims of catastrophic floods in Serbia. In 2018, he completed another walk to commemorate the breakthrough on the Salonika Front and raised more funds for sick children.

1373 From correspondence, September 2017, November 2017, April 2018.

ridden area spread malaria, and in the winter the cold left many with frostbite.” In this place there was a granite Celtic cross marking the place where 1,000 Irish soldiers died “in the defence of Serbia”. Keating had an intensely emotional experience connecting to the soldiers of 100 years ago, imagining his great-grandfather carving the wooden toys that he still has today. Keating felt that there was a natural affinity between the Serbs and the Irish, that both nations had scars from the past, what was the battle of Kosovo to the Serbs, that was the Great Famine to the Irish. He said that the Irish were able to leave the Troubles behind them but that Serbs still had some way to go with Kosovo.¹³⁷⁴

Although there were other expeditions and races in relation to the Retreat,¹³⁷⁵ which were then followed in 2018 by several more projects in honour of the 100th anniversary of the breakthrough on the Salonika Front,¹³⁷⁶ Mark Keating seems to have been the only one who came up with the idea of raising funds for charity. However, other foreign kinships of remembrance also have something specific to show for their engagement.

Serbian Prisoners of War remembered in the Netherlands

Although the Netherlands was a neutral country during the First World War, there was a significant presence of foreign troops on Dutch soil, both refugees and prisoners of war, particularly after the Netherlands reached an agreement with England and Germany to organise the internment of their prisoners of war in the summer of 1917. Many thousands of prisoners were interned in different camps across the country. After the

¹³⁷⁴ From correspondence, September 2017, November 2017, April 2018.

¹³⁷⁵ A team of three cyclists from the Serbian entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska, cycled from Višegrad to Corfu, following the same ritual, visiting Serbian House and the Vido memorial with the ‘Blue Sea Tomb’. “Višegrad: Trojica biciklista u čast srpskih vojnika prešli 4000 kilometara” [“Višegrad: In the honour of the Serbian soldiers three cyclists journeyed 4000 kilometres”] *Glas Srpske*, 4 August 2015 <https://www.glassrpske.com/drustvo/vijesti/Visegrad-Trojica-biciklista-u-cast-srpskih-vojnika-presli-4000-kilometara/lat/190028.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

¹³⁷⁶ Bicycle race was organised from Niš to Zejtinlik and Corfu in September 2018, see “Biciklistički marathon od Niša do Zejtinlika u Krfa u čast predaka” [“Bicycle marathon from Niš to Zejtinlike and Corfu in the honour of our ancestors”] *Južne vesti*, 18 September 2018 <https://www.juznevesti.com/Sport/Bicisklisticki-maraton-od-Nisa-do-Zejtinlika-i-Krfa-u-cast-predaka.sr.html> (accessed May 20, 2019).

Armistice was signed in November 1918, all were to be repatriated, among them 4,316 Serbs.¹³⁷⁷ In 2012, a team of three amateur historians, Tatjana Vendrig, Fabian Vendrig, and John Stienen became interested in the story of Serbian POWs in the Netherlands after Fabian's online searches discovered a Serbian monument at a cemetery in Garderen with the names of 64 Serbian soldiers who had died in the Netherlands. This intrigued them enough to start researching further. They discovered that 91 Serbian soldiers had died in the Netherlands before they could return home at the end of the war. The Spanish flu took the lives of 86 between January and February 1919, with five having died before the epidemic started. The research team set about finding out what had happened to them, where they had come from and whether they had descendants. Eight years later, the team had an impressive trilingual blog, in Serbian, Dutch, and English, a slew of articles published in Serbian and Dutch press,¹³⁷⁸ a publication on the Serbian Prisoners of War in the Netherlands published by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 2016,¹³⁷⁹ several others in the pipeline, and remarkable research results. They succeeded in finding the relatives of 12 soldiers who had died in the Netherlands, and in some cases, they were able to reconstruct the journey of individual soldiers which they have illustrated in Google maps.¹³⁸⁰ Occasionally, the families received letters from the camps or photographs of their ancestors, and individual stories could be pieced together. Djordje Vukosavljević from Kragujevac, one of the Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands, was captured in late 1915.¹³⁸¹ Initially, he was in a German prisoner-of-war camp before being sent to the Netherlands after the war, prior to being repatriated to Serbia. Djordje wrote from the German camp to his wife

1377 Tatjana Vendrig, Fabian Vendrig, John M. Stienen, Serbian Prisoners of War website, Introduction <https://www.secanje.nl/en/introduction/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1378 <https://www.secanje.nl/en/mediapublications/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1379 Tatjana Vendrig, Fabian Vendrig, John M. Stienen, Serbian soldiers of World War I who died in the Netherlands (Belgrade: Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 2016).

1380 Serbian WWI prisoners in the Netherlands <https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1KUT-XqfkFioudqp8WwRebyiTr9w&ll=48.579662943050636%2C14.046020084960901&z=5> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1381 Serbian Prisoners of War, Djordje Vukosavljević — Kragujevac <https://www.secanje.nl/en/results/dorde-vukosavljevic/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

Lepa: “Dear Lepa, the parcel you sent me, I received on the 10th day. Namely, out of 36 Serbs, I am the first one who has received a parcel. (...) The bread you sent every Serb took it, crossed themselves, and kissed it, and then we started to cry happy tears. On this happy and touching day, I shared and ate the bread brotherly with my people.”¹³⁸² In Djordje’s last letter, sent in June 1918, he complains of having been separated from his fellow Serbs and finding himself among foreigners with whom he could not communicate. He was also experiencing worsening eyesight.¹³⁸³ Djordje’s wife Lepa received a telegram in August 1919 informing her of his death from flu. The telegram was sent by Dragi Rajičić, who had met Djordje in a camp in 1917. Djordje died in January 1919 in Millingen, a village near Apeldoorn in the Netherlands. He was buried in Garderen, but his journey did not end there. In 1938, after the plans to exhume and rebury Serbian soldiers from the Netherlands at the Serbian Field of Honour in Thiais¹³⁸⁴ were abandoned because of the lack of space, the remains of the Serbian soldiers were transferred from Garderen to the Serbian mausoleum in Jindřichovice, today in the Czech Republic. Djordje’s story was pieced together by the research team, including the autopsy and exhumation reports.

In another case, Miloš Jeremić from Resnik was taken prisoner during the Retreat. He went through one or more camps in Germany before arriving in Nijmegen, where he died in January 1919. Remarkably, “until recently, when Miloš (Tanasjević) from Resnik visited our website and discovered that his great-great-grandfather Miloš died in the Netherlands, nobody from his family knew exactly what happened to Miloš Jeremić.”¹³⁸⁵

1382 Vendrig, Vendrig and Stienen, 2016, 18.

1383 Most probably from having worked in a salt mine as a POW, Vendrig, Vendrig and Stienen, 2016, 20.

1384 Souvenir français – “Les Serbes de Thiais”, 7 April 2019 <http://www.souvenirfrancais-issy.com/2019/04/les-serbes-de-thiais.html> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1385 Serbian prisoners of war, Miloš Jeremić <https://www.secanje.nl/en/victims/jeremic-milos/> (accessed June 28, 2019).

Fabian Vendrig (b. 1978), was interested in Balkan history when he found the monument in Garderen. Inspired by the work of Remco Reiding about Soviet soldiers buried in the Field of Honour in Amersfoort,¹³⁸⁶ Fabian started researching with the other two researchers, Tanja Raković (who subsequently became his wife) and John Stienen. Considerable satisfaction came from finding Serbian soldiers' families as well as from reconstructing their life stories. Fabian lives in Belgrade, is interested in history, runs a blog,¹³⁸⁷ and writes about monuments from the First World War, although he does not feel a particular connection to the war. Fabian is critical of the official Serbian government centenary commemorations which he feels are only organised for VIPs, not for the people. He also thinks that there is a lot of political instrumentalisation of the events, where the politicians want to show off.¹³⁸⁸ Unimpressed by Serbian efforts to preserve history, he observed a lack of care, although there were exceptions. Fabian feels that as a research team they had done what they could and that the Serbs could and should do more: "Serbs are talking a lot, but not doing a lot."¹³⁸⁹

John Stienen, (b. 1972) Fabian's fellow researcher, another Dutchman, had some experience in researching prisoners of war in the Netherlands in World War I. His motivation for joining the research was his interest in history as well as his curiosity to find a connection between the Netherlands and countries of Eastern and Central Europe.¹³⁹⁰ His archive researching skills were required to corroborate what the team discovered, and the resulting knowledge carried a sense of achievement: "Describing what happened to Serbian soldiers in the Netherlands, required us to have a basic understanding of how they got here and what the situation in the Netherlands was like at the time."¹³⁹¹ As for the official Serbian centenary commemorations, John feels that the Serbs "did what they

1386 Stichting Russisch Ereveld Amersfoort http://sovjet-ereveld.nl/?page_id=2898&lang=en (accessed June 28, 2019).

1387 Fabian's site <https://www.fabian-vendrig.eu> (accessed May 20, 2020).

1388 From correspondence, June 2019.

1389 From correspondence, June 2019.

1390 From correspondence, June 2019.

1391 From correspondence, June 2019.

could”, in view of the Serbian lack of tradition in marking the First World War, “No poppies, no Menin Gate, no Last Post, etc.” and that it was only the collapse of Yugoslavia that had made WWI “come back”.¹³⁹²

The original monument which first ignited Fabian Vendrig’s curiosity, at the cemetery in Garderen, probably dated from the 1920s. In 1938, at the request of the then Yugoslav government the remains of the 29 Serbian soldiers buried there were exhumed and repatriated. The monument was left behind. In 2006, the Garderen *Hervormde Gemeente* volunteer Piet van Bentum¹³⁹³ became interested in it and started an initiative for its renovation. *Het Servisch Monument* committee within the Garderen *Hervormde Gemeente* was thus started and the monument gradually renovated with the names of all 91 Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands since 2007. Ever since then the committee has been holding an annual memorial service on the first Saturday of October at the Garderen cemetery, involving the local Serbian community, some Dutch citizens, Serbian Embassy officials, and the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Netherlands. Thanks to a detailed blog posted by two enthusiasts who were present,¹³⁹⁴ we have details of the special commemoration when the monument was officially “handed over” to Serbian Embassy representatives in 2011. On that occasion, on Saturday 1 October, the commemoration began with the *Last Post* and was followed by two minutes’ silence, before the Serbian Ambassador and the Serbian Consul laid a wreath at the monument. After various speeches, the *Regimental Brass Ensemble of the Grenadiers and Rifles*¹³⁹⁵ from Assen played the Serbian and the Dutch national anthems. This was followed by a Serbian priest, Vojislav Bilbija singing *Tamo daleko*, as he accompanied himself on his

1392 From correspondence, June 2019.

1393 “Garderen Piet van Bentum Lid van Oranje-Nassau”, Nieuwsblad De Band, 26 April 2019 <https://nieuwsbladdeband.nl/lokaal/gardereen-piet-van-bentum-lid-orde-van-oranje-nassau-583757> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1394 “Herdenking Servisch Monument te Garderen-Grafstenen krijgen een gezicht” <https://begraafplaatsveldwijk.wordpress.com/2011/10/01/herdenking-servisch-monument-te-garderen/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1395 Regiments fanfare ‘Garde Grenadiers en Jagers’ <https://www.defensie.nl/onderwerpen/muziek/regimenstfanfare-garde-grenadiers-en-jagers> (accessed May 20, 2019).

guitar. Then came the memorial service.¹³⁹⁶ The Serbian community around Nijmegen and Apeldoorn, and their Dutch friends continue to remember Serbian soldiers from the First World War who died in the Netherlands. Every year, on the first Saturday in October, they gather to hold a memorial service at the monument in Garderen, an occasion always attended by a Serbian Embassy representative¹³⁹⁷. This was also the case on 6 October 2018 when we attended the open-air memorial service. Some 70 people gathered for the service and the speeches, followed by a poetry reading given by a local Serbian poet who read his own version of the “Blue Tomb”. When the programme was officially over, all those present were invited to a local municipal building where the parishioners served Serbian specialties and drank plum-brandy in memory of Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands.



The monument to Serbian soldiers who died in the Netherlands — Garderen (left). Ending of the memorial service on 6 October 2018 (right).

1396 “Herdenking Servisch Monument te Garderen- Grafstenen krijgen een gezicht” <https://begraafplaatsveldwijk.wordpress.com/2011/10/01/herdenking-servisch-monument-te-garderen/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

1397 Memorial service for Serbian soldiers in Garderen, Embassy of the Republic of Serbia <http://thehague.mfa.gov.rs/newstext.php?subaction=showfull&id=1538997447&ucat=19&template=Headlines&> (accessed May 20, 2019).

Remembering the Scottish Women's Hospitals

In 2006, Alan Cumming, (b. 1965) from Cumbernauld in Scotland, travelled to Belgrade. His main interest was to watch a football game, but he was also curious because he thought Serbia had been presented in a negative light throughout the 1990s and he felt there was more to it. He happened to be walking past a hospital in Belgrade¹³⁹⁸ and saw a plaque with a name that intrigued him. It was a plaque commemorating the contribution of Dr Elsie Inglis to the Serbian First World War effort. It turned out to be, as the phrase goes, *the beginning of a beautiful friendship*. Dr Elsie Inglis, as mentioned in chapter III, was one of the first women physicians in Britain and an active suffragette.¹³⁹⁹ At the outbreak of the First World War, after the British Red Cross rejected her offer to establish a medical service staffed by women doctors and nurses, Inglis founded the Scottish Women's Hospitals (SWH) to tend wounded Entente soldiers in Europe. The SWH sent around 1,500 women to war-torn Europe between 1914 and 1918. Alan Cumming rediscovered this and much more about Elsie Inglis and the SWH. He was surprised that so many of the women who helped Serbs during the First World War were remembered: "I was then as now completely astonished by the Serbian people's love, knowledge and devotion to large numbers of these women; (...) it was a largely untold story in my homeland. It seemed like the perfect time to rebuild the friendship with Serbia and Scotland."¹⁴⁰⁰ Alan rediscovered a part of Scottish history that many Scots never knew about and he did much of it by organising events in both Serbia and Scotland. He set up a blog devoted to the SWH, with the stated intention, "to keep the memory alive and honour the women who served with the Scottish Women's Hospitals."¹⁴⁰¹ His objective was to find out the name and the story of everyone who

1398 Dr Dragiša Mišović Hospital, had originally been the location of Dr Elsie Inglis' Memorial Hospital in 1922. http://www.dragisamisovic.bg.ac.rs/stranice/a_onama_istorijat.html#cyr (accessed June 28, 2019)

1399 Lucy Inglis, "Elsie Inglis, the suffragette physician", *The Lancet*, 8 November 2014 [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)62022-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)62022-5/fulltext) (accessed June 28, 2019).

1400 From correspondence, June 2019.

1401 Scottish Women's Hospitals <https://www.scottishwomenshospitals.co.uk> (accessed June 28, 2019).

had been a part of SWH. Alan unearthed photographs, documents and newspaper articles on the SWH in Scottish libraries. In 2013, he visited Elsie's grave in Edinburgh, found the headstone in poor condition and organised an appeal for funds. As a result of his publicity, the work was done for free by an Edinburgh firm. As the centenary years approached, the more Alan spoke about Elsie, on radio and TV programmes, in schools and community centres, the more he became the go-to person to talk about Elsie Inglis and the SWH.



Alan Cumming (right) and Velibor Vidić, Valjevo Museum historian and curator, at the grave of Evelina Haverfield,¹⁴⁰² Bajina Bašta, Serbia (photograph courtesy of Alan Cumming, September 2016).

1402 Evelina Haverfield (1867 – 1920), suffragette, SWH administrator, died in Serbia after founding a home for Serbian war orphans.

In 2014, Alan appeared in a Scottish-produced documentary “The Woman Who Went to War – A Great Adventure”,¹⁴⁰³ and invitations for him to speak and participate in conferences poured in. Alan runs a small landscaping business in Cumbernauld and is not an academic, by his own admission.¹⁴⁰⁴ However, in rediscovering Elsie Inglis for Scotland, he also discovered his talents for research, organisation, communication and networking. Although he researched the First World War and the engagement of Scottish Women’s Hospitals during the war, Alan admitted that he did not feel particularly connected to the actual war. Elsie’s story of commitment to a cause she believed in, connected Alan Cumming to his own values and who he felt he was as a person.¹⁴⁰⁵

Although he considers himself only an amateur historian, and does not feel he belongs in formal conferences, over the period of time that he had researched Serbia’s Great War, and specifically the Retreat, during which many SWH doctors and nurses crossed Albania with Serbian troops, he made pertinent observations: “The events in Serbia are embedded in every Serb as everyone today has a family connection to WW1 and therefore has a grim reminder. Personally, I don’t really think Serbia as a nation fully recovered from the retreat. I think something more than flesh and honour was lost on those mountain passes. One only need to go to Vido Island today. The atmosphere among young Serbs on visiting the island, quietly breaks your heart.”¹⁴⁰⁶

In September 2017, with the help of many from his large network of friends and supporters in Serbia, Alan organised a visit to Serbia by fourteen of Elsie’s fourteen relatives, where they spent a week touring the country. One of the towns on the tour was Mladenovac, a small town about 50 km

1403 “The Woman Who Went to War – A Great Adventure” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rj43IALlvI0> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1404 From correspondence, 2015 – 2019.

1405 From correspondence, 2015 – 2019.

1406 From correspondence, June 2019.

south of Belgrade, where Elsie and other SWH doctors and nurses worked and where a drinking fountain was erected in their honour in 1915.¹⁴⁰⁷



The inscription on the memorial drinking fountain in Mladenovac says: “In memory of the Scottish Women’s Hospitals and their founder Dr Elsie Inglis. 1915” (April 2015).

Since Alan Cumming began his campaigning in 2006, he has given over 80 talks, lectures and events in Scotland, and elsewhere in the UK and Europe. He has provided information for exhibitions as far afield as Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In 2017, Alan was asked by the Scottish government to be their advisor and have the final say in the commemoration of the centenary of Elsie’s death in November 2017.¹⁴⁰⁸ At

1407 Alan Cumming, “Elsie’s relatives’ “pilgrimage” to Serbia”, *Britic*, 7 November 2017 <http://www.ebritic.com/?p=635083> (accessed June 28, 2019).

1408 Fiona Pringle, “Princess Royal honours Elsie Inglis in Edinburgh”, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 29 November 2017 <https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/health/princess-royal-honours-elsie-inglis-in-edinburgh-1-4626796> (accessed June 28, 2019).

the same time, largely thanks to Alan Cumming, a Scotsman who went to see a football game in Belgrade in 2006, a courtyard at the Old Medical School in Edinburgh has been renamed *Dr Elsie Inglis Quadrangle*.

When looking into the past of our own country, it may be difficult to achieve detachment for all the reasons discussed above. National attachments are hard to shed. Engaging with another country's past may be liberating. It may help us discover connections we did not know existed, or reveal parallels of experience that deepen interpretation of our own beliefs. Stepping out of one's own routine and locality and asking questions, then looking for answers, or starting purposeful projects — raising funds for those who need them, or shedding light on historical curiosities through exploration of sites of memory, seem to have brought unexpected rewards for our actors of remembrance. What is striking in these three stories is that the past was used to achieve something *tangible* in the present — to further knowledge, to create understanding and to make a difference. Through their work, they have learnt new skills, they have created new friendships and they have changed lives. By performing their *mnemonic labour*, they have established *communities*. It is this outward move from one's own universe to the outside world that makes this group of actors of remembrance exceptional. At the same time, their activities were gladly acknowledged by the Serbian establishment as validation of the Serbian master narrative, now also recognised by well-informed foreigners. This did not taint their engagement, it merely placed them in a unique position of being welcomed by the official and *professional* centenary commemorators and by the grassroots *fictive kinships of remembrance* who sensed their commitment as sincere and spontaneous.¹⁴⁰⁹

1409 The overview of the “kinships of remembrance” events expressly does not include such manifestations as *Marathon for Peace*, which incorporates in its remembrance-run sites, the 1999 NATO bombing. The event seems to be sponsored by the state-controlled Serbian television. Its website is no longer available and its facebook page does not seem to have been updated since 2016. <https://sr-rs.facebook.com/pages/category/Sports-Team/ATLETSKI-KLUB-MARATON-MIRA-VIDOVDAN-99-102039086556840/> (accessed May 20, 2019).

Conclusion Chapter V

It hardly seems fair to compare the official commemorations with these “nonofficial forms of collective remembrance”,¹⁴¹⁰ as Jay Winter calls them. In all the individual initiatives of remembrance, we find action, movement, and agency. The motivation of ordinary, private citizens to do something memorable and extraordinary in order to remember events from the past, and to honour people who died 100 years ago, seems to relate to an inner need. Or rather, their motivation relates to *different inner needs*, but they have similar elements. It is significant that all these initiatives consist of seeking out the actual *sites of memory*, those that exist, or even those that are almost gone: walking the same paths as the ancestors, seeking a route through the Albanian mountains that is the hardest, or finding graves that are barely there, these actions are all about connecting the dead and the living. War monuments are not able to capture the connection between the past and the present in the same way. It is as if by going to the sites of memory, moving through space, the agents of remembrance are going back in time, “because they have to speak out” to use Winter’s term.¹⁴¹¹ We suggest that the inner need pushing these exceptional individuals to become agents of remembrance is linked to a *search for direction from the past*, more specifically from the glorious dead of the Great War. The official commemorations are simply political occasions based around the relevant dates, but they are all to do with the present. The individual acts of remembrance may be a response to spiritual ancestral needs to seek the sites where the dead are, or where they could be, where they have disappeared. Politicians at official commemorations — by their very act — are maintaining that the dead would approve of them as they twist the historical narrative. The individuals who participate in acts of remembrance engage actively with the existing narrative by going to the sites of the dead, known and unknown, each with their own deeply personal cause. What these groups have in common is that, in a way, they are looking for approval from the ancestors.

1410 Winter, 2006, 139.

1411 Winter, 2006, 139.

In his 2003 volume *The Dominion of the Dead*, Robert Harrison outlines the difficulty in confronting the superiority of those who have come before us: “Whether we are conscious of it or not we do the will of the ancestors: our commandments come to us from their realm; their precedents are our law; we submit to their dictates, even when we rebel against them. Our diligence, hardihood, rectitude, and heroism, but also our folly, spite, rancour and pathologies, are so many signatures of the dead on the contracts that seal our identities. We inherit their obsessions; assume their burdens; carry on their causes; promote their mentalities, ideologies, and very often their superstitions; and often we die trying to vindicate their humiliations. Why this servitude? We have no choice. Only the dead can grant us legitimacy.”¹⁴¹² Just as the present is having a hard time fighting for supremacy with the past, the living are taking their inspiration and vision from the dead.

1412 Harrison, 2003, x.

VI

*Forward to the Past —***Conclusion**

“In the 2011 US Open semi-final, Novak Djoković turned around a match against Roger Federer that was almost lost, and won the tournament in the end. This reminded me of a historical feat of our forefathers who, (...), after the Golgotha across Albania and Corfu, found the strength to liberate their homeland in an unstoppable victorious charge.”¹⁴¹³

After reading this quote, we may be justified in thinking that if all we have as reference is epic history, then every event in any context will look like *heroic suffering* to us. We met Vuk Jeremić, the author of the quote, in chapter V.1. when he succeeded in getting the UN Secretary General to clap to the rhythm of the Serbian WWI military march, for which the UN then had to apologise to the *Congress of North American Bosniaks* (CNAB). When the former Serbian foreign minister and president of the 67th session of the United Nations General Assembly, was asked by a Belgrade weekly who he thought was the most influential person in Serbia, he gave the answer at the start of this chapter above. Mr Jeremić is a tennis fan and his choice of person and his historical association

1413 *100 Most Influential People in Serbia, Nedeljnik*, Special Issue, July 2013. Vuk Jeremić, (chapter V.1), answering the survey.

hardly raised any eyebrows in Serbia.¹⁴¹⁴ His answer, while it may seem ridiculous to many, has its own internal logic, borne out of the Serbian national identity narrative, and a firm belief in *Serbian exceptionalism*.

Fast forwarding to the spring of 2020, as *Covid-19* put the world on hold, the media everywhere carried countless scientific and less scientific analyses, predictions, and comments about immunity. Dr Branimir Nestorović (b. 1954), pulmonologist, member of the *Covid-19* Crisis Team in Serbia established in March 2020, first stunned the public by saying that he could not “believe how people who had survived sanctions, bombing raids, and all sorts of mistreatments could be afraid of the funniest virus in history.”¹⁴¹⁵ As people started getting sick and dying from the disease, he revised his opinions, but came up with another reassuring statement a few weeks later. In early May, as the strict curfew measures in Serbia were being gradually relaxed, he spoke of the *exceptional genetic makeup* of the Serbs, saying that he knew from studying *epigenetics* that Serbs had good immunity because their ancestors had gone through famines, and then added: “My grandfather had gone hungry and crossed Albania so I am now immune to some diseases.”¹⁴¹⁶ Again here, we recognise the trope of exceptionalism based on identity established through suffering.

When Tim Marshall, a journalist who reported from the region during the war of the 1990s, described the Serbian attachment to their own history, he humorously illustrated it with an imagined exaggerated answer to the question “What time is it?” (chapter II.5), whereby Serbs would always relate the answer to important moments in their history, always giving priority to the heroic and suffering past over the present. Marshall also

1414 Vladimir Kecmanović wrote mockingly on the subject “Ljubav je samo srpski reket i ništa više” [“Love is just a Serbian racket”], *e-novine*, 26 July 2013 <http://www.e-novine.com/entertainment/entertainment-tema/88365-Ljubav-samo-srpski-reket-nita-vie.html> (accessed August 13, 2013)

1415 Quote from 26 February 2020, Branimir Nestorović, *Istinomer* <https://www.istinomer.rs/akter/branimir-nestorovic/> (accessed May 2, 2020).

1416 “Očekujem katastrofu već u subotu ...” [“I am expecting a catastrophe already on Saturday ...”], *B92*, 2 May 2020 https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2020&mm=05&dd=01&nav_category=12&nav_id=1680038 (accessed May 2, 2020).

found that if he was ever asked — which happened often — whether he knew much about Serbian history, the only placatory answer he could give that would not land him in trouble was: “I know you have suffered many times in the past.”¹⁴¹⁷ The Serbian attachment to suffering, particularly to the suffering of its army and people in the First World War represents an important part of the narrative which we have taken as a case-study for analysing Serbian handling of their own past.

These three examples are perhaps extreme, but they are not *exceptional*. A strong faith in the Serbian version of the *manifest destiny* of heroism and suffering is omnipresent in contemporary Serbia. This view of the world, as we have seen in this thesis, is expounded in the media, presented in history textbooks, glorified in speeches. The pattern is discernible, as we have said earlier, that *everything that has happened will continue to happen*. The 1389 Kosovo battle was used to set the pattern of the narrative, ostensibly *remembered* throughout the Ottoman occupation. The mythical defeat became intertwined with the idea of Serbian national identity, predominantly in the 19th century. We have addressed some elements of the construction of the Kosovo *mythomoteur* which remain in the Serbian psyche as an all-encompassing *über-myth*, including myths of *territory, redemption and suffering, unjust treatment, military valour* and others.¹⁴¹⁸ These myths can be said to have persisted, specifically through the *sacrificial narrative* which permeates the Serbian public discourse today in its connection to Serbia’s Great War.

In this thesis, we set out to show how the 1915 Retreat is remembered and represented a century after the event, and during the First World War centenary commemorations in Serbia. Our interest not only lay in exploring how acts of remembrance of this event and its meaning are instrumentalised for political purposes, but also in examining how some acts of remembrance spontaneously exist independently of the official

1417 Marshall, 2019, 25.

1418 George Schöpflin, “The functions of myth and a taxonomy of myths”, in Hosking and Schöpflin, 28-34.

narrative although they do not always contradict it. We have found them to be performed by *fictive kinships of remembrance* established many decades after the event. Our starting point for the research was the assumption that the answer to the questions would contribute to more accurately diagnosing the Serbian relationship with the past.¹⁴¹⁹ In examining the actors of remembrance, the sites of memory and memorialisation, we linked them to the *Serbian national identity narrative*. The thesis, intended to contribute to the understanding of the role the 1915 Retreat plays in the Serbian national identity and memory discourse, has yielded the outcomes that are outlined below.

1. We have deconstructed one of the key iconic episodes of Serbian history which still represents a constitutive and indisputable part of Serbian individual and collective identities. We have looked at different accounts of the Retreat and examined the strength of the dominant narrative of the event. Although there are accounts that include some (sub)consciously repressed negative aspects of this national epos, which we have acknowledged, our finding is that the official narrative is too robust to be challenged in any significant way. The reasons for this are multiple and are included in other findings.

We recognise that the Serbian refusal to look critically at its 20th century past starts with 1912 and 1913. The Balkan Wars are usually presented as *liberation wars*. But they were not perceived as liberating for everyone. Since the Orthodox Church had over centuries pushed for equating the faith and ethnicity, thus refining the concept of *Serbian exceptionalism*, Muslim citizens in the newly acquired regions were not considered as Serbs. While this would presage many conflicts to come, these aspects of Serbian past are usually not taught or discussed. The dissenting voices against the 1912 – 1913 Serbian nationalist agenda and multiple invasions

¹⁴¹⁹ Dubravka Stojanović explains how a historian can contribute to a diagnosis about the relationship of past and present in Stojanović, 2010, 9.

of Albania are marginalised.¹⁴²⁰ As we have seen, it is the 1914 war that represents the core of Serbian 20th century myth-making. The *gallant little Serbia*, in a war that made her famous, humiliated the superior Austro-Hungarian forces despite myriads of setbacks. Serbia was fêted in Europe and has never forgotten it. In 1915, the German-led offensive succeeded in pushing the Serbian Army further and further away from its heartlands. The Entente promised forces to help Serbia but did not deliver. The events that followed evolved into the core of the *Serbian national identity narrative*, stripped of any *distractions*. Desertions, preferential treatment of government officials and their families, cowardice, summary executions of Serbian deserters, brutal killings of Albanian irregulars, indifference of Montenegrin civilians through whose homesteads the stragglers passed are simply not discussed. They are researched by some historians, acknowledged by others but do not exist as heterogonous narratives, or counter-narratives in their own right. The past of every nation, its very establishment, as Renan told us in 1882,¹⁴²¹ consists of remembering as much as it consists of forgetting. Lost battles, heavy defeats, internecine violence — may undergo a thorough makeover to help the descendants deal with the historical trauma.

2. We have demonstrated the way that the rigid canonisation of the Retreat has helped legitimise political instrumentalisation during the First World War centenary events.

The commemorations have allowed politicians to *employ the past to serve the present* echoing Jacques Le Goff's words. At the centenary commemorative events, politicians are retelling the story that everyone knows. By keeping the same version of history going, and linking it to the present-day issues, they are providing *alibis* for their own inability to change things in Serbia for the better: *the world is anti-Serbian and there is little we can do about that*. The discourse shores up the legitimacy of the regime and its national(ist)

1420 Dimitrije Tucović, *Srbija i Albanija* [Serbia and Albania], 1914 <https://pescanik.net/srbija-i-albanija-iv/> (accessed May 20, 2018).

1421 Renan, 1882, 49.

credentials. We have seen how the centenary commemorations of the Great War have been ostensibly used to make references to the wars of the 1990s, denying any Serbian responsibility. The real objective of their commemorative performances has been a reiteration of the refusal to deal with the legacy of the wars of the 1990s, and Serbia's responsibility for initiating them by providing the glorious Serbian past as a kind of *character witness*: the descendants of Serbian heroes who sacrificed themselves in 1915 could not have possibly done anything bad 76 years later.

This type of “parasitic memory”¹⁴²² is often used at commemorative events, but we have observed that this is not just a by-product of the centenary events. It is, in fact, a deliberate tactic of the Serbian government which we have termed *historical frame switching*. This is a stratagem deployed on occasions when Serbian policies encounter obstacles and a diversionary tactic in the form of a historical reference is required to summon suitable emotions among the Serbian public. We have demonstrated that this stratagem has been used systematically since 2012, in the centenary years and beyond — continued commemorative events show no sign of abating.¹⁴²³ Research has further shown how the state-controlled media underpin the government's *frame switching* with extensive coverage of commemorative events and related narratives by indulging in sensationalist and tendentious retelling of First World War stories, directly contributing to the robustness of the narrative.

3. We have examined how the ideological layers of the sacred representations of the Retreat have strengthened the *martyrological* discourse on which the Serbian national ideology was established. Having surveyed the centenary exhibitions in museums in Serbia, we noted that they have mostly retold the same stories of Serbia's Great War. In the centenary years the museums and cultural institutions gave it their all

1422 See Čolović, 2019 in chapter IV.2.

1423 “Obeležena 101. godišnjica proboja Solunskog fronta” [“101st anniversary of the breakthrough of the Salonika Front marked”], *RTS*, 28 September 2019 <http://www.rts.rs/page/stories/sr/story/125/drustvo/3677356/obelezena-101-godisnjica-proboja-solunskog-fronta.html> (accessed November 3, 2019).

with exhibitions, performances, readings, concerts, book promotions, forums, conferences. They have paid tribute, remembered, memorialised, commemorated. However, they have not asked *new questions* or given other perspectives. A visit to a museum thus becomes a validation ritual. The vast majority of Serbian museums have added to the inventory of Serbian heroism and *suffering* in the First World War and the Retreat, but they have *not* questioned the narrative or offered alternative views. These endless recurrences of commemorative cultural events are akin to memorial services. They all contain moving text or music, lyrics, and *remembering* the courage and fortitude of the Serbian heroes. The assembled public have heard that same music, words, lyrics, many times. Yet, many will cry, as Susan Sontag explains: “They weep, in part, because they have seen it many times. People want to weep. Pathos, in the form of a narrative, does not wear out.”¹⁴²⁴

4. However, we have discovered authentic *fictive kinships of remembrance* whose activities coexist alongside official events although with different philosophies and motivations. The examination of these spontaneous acts of remembrance during the centenaries has revealed that they have taken on these acts of remembrance willingly, without any pressure or obligation.

What is their motivation? We have looked at two types of *fictive kinships of remembrance* — the insiders and the outsiders. While there are differences between those who come from Serbia and those who come from elsewhere, we noted that both groups share commitment, interests, and agency. They are community builders, organisers, communicators. Their interest in the First World War is sincere and their acts of remembrance have specific goals which they have managed to achieve: the expedition that crossed Albania, the rowers who travelled by three seas, the mountaineers who are cleaning the military cemeteries. Mark Keating, Fabian Vendrig, Tanja Vendrig, John Stienen, and Alan Cumming have all gone out of their way

1424 Sontag, 2004, 74.

to create something lasting and worthwhile while carrying out their acts of remembrance. The kinships examined are particular because they were formed so long after the end of the war. Their mourning is not for the dead, but for the ideals that the dead fought for, or died for. They may not even know it, but they also mourn *the loss of the idea of such ideals*.

How do we reconcile the sincerity of the people who go on pilgrimages and participate in commemorations with the opportunism of politicians who manipulate the public through perpetuating the *sacrificial narrative*? We don't. They exist alongside one another. The use of past for political purposes "is as old as the hills" as Norman Davies put it.¹⁴²⁵ The *fictive kinships* represent a counterweight to the cynicism of the commemorating politicians who see every anniversary as an opportunity to equate themselves with illustrious ancestors and their glorious deeds while implying perfect continuity with their values. The actors of remembrance have fundamentally different motivations that are coming from the *inside* taking them to the *outside*. The actors of remembrance are seeking out the sites of memory of the Great War and the Retreat. There is a mystical quality to their journey to go to the exact place where their ancestors walked, or fought, or died. These sites of memory have meaning for the group, therefore they have meaning for the individual. These too are "social frameworks of memory" and examples of "collective remembrance". But these *mnemonic labourers* also contribute to the robustness of the heroic and tragic narrative — the Retreat narrative is potent, attractive and easily transcends into the mythical because of its universal appeal of the story of suffering that ends in redemption.

5. We have demonstrated that the *Serbian problem* as mentioned by Jay Winter is, in fact, the contemporary Serbian attitude to the past, exemplified in the official script of the Retreat and the First World War. The canonised image of martyred Serbia in the Retreat that cannot possibly be guilty

¹⁴²⁵ Davies, 2007, 249.

of any crimes, including in the wars of the 1990s is *the* Serbian problem. Without solving it, Serbia will have a hard time finding its course.

The findings of the thesis may be relevant for those interested in finding solutions to overcome the Serbian reluctance to look at their country's actions in the wars of the 1990s by appreciating the complexity and the strength of the Serbian national identity narrative as embodied by the Retreat and Serbia's participation in the Great War. Recognising the sensitivity of the subject for the Serbs today may contribute to better insights of an ongoing political problem.

In a 1975 play *Miracle at Šargan's*, a disgraced politician suddenly sees what no one around him can see — two Serbian soldiers retreating during the 1915 offensive. Once he is back in favour, he again becomes blind to their existence.¹⁴²⁶ The scenes are brief yet poignant, seemingly not crucial to the plot of the play, but their implied message at the time of socialist Yugoslavia was bold: in order to succeed in politics, a Serbian politician must be blind to the past sacrifices of Serbia.

Forty-five years later, a different kind of blindness is required, but blindness nevertheless.

1426 Ljubomir Simović, "Čudo u Šarganu" ["Miracle at Šargan's"], *YouTube, Atelje 212* (1989) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtDGnSKxLN0> (accessed March 20, 2017).



Ruins of the Serbian general staff building in Belgrade, which was hit in the 1999 NATO air strikes, have not been torn down or renovated. For years, it has been covered by a promotional billboard with the words of Field Marshall Mišić: “He who dares can. He who knows no fear goes forward.”¹⁴²⁷

Above is a photograph of a billboard covering the ruins of the general staff building. The building was not levelled and has been left as a ruin. It is still (2020) covered by a massive billboard showing a First World War Field Marshall quote next to a picture of a beautiful young Serbian woman officer saluting. We are looking at the perfect illustration of what the Serbian government is doing in order to sidestep facing up to the wars in the 1990s — the derelict general staff building makes the evidence of *suffering* visible. At the same time, the government is quite literally covering up the consequences of its policies with a First World War motivational quote and a pretty woman in uniform. The message projected could not be clearer. *Nothing to see here*. Serbia did good in the Great War and, by the way, today Serbia is an equal opportunity country.

1427 Ralex fasade [Ralex facades] <http://www.ralex.rs/site/bilbordi-i-fasade/generalstab-beograd1/> (accessed October 31, 2019).

We are reminded of the metaphor Olga Manojlović Pintar uses to describe the phenomenon of distorting history: “The representation of the past is always a portrait of those who create it, and any attempts to embellish reality are based on the distortion of history, and just like in Wilde’s story of Dorian Grey, they will always end up in a traumatic confrontation with the truth. What is hidden never disappears, but becomes grotesquely deformed in secret.”¹⁴²⁸

The story of Serbia’s Great War and its central event, the Retreat, can withstand being remembered and represented differently, being taught comprehensively, without reverting to the stereotypes of the sacrificial narrative. As Mitch Landrieu put it, “there is a difference between our remembrance of history and reverence of it.”¹⁴²⁹ If the Serbs today tried looking at the events from a century ago in a different light, and moving away from the “demonic memory regime”¹⁴³⁰ by seeking different perspectives and points of view, they would begin the process of emancipation from the shackles of “historical determinism.”¹⁴³¹

The wars of the 1990s remain highly damaging for Serbia’s image. Since the Serbian nation did not, in fact, have a *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* to help its citizens understand what happened and why, to help them move forward, there is continuing tension between how the Serbian nation sees itself and how the world sees Serbia. In addition to the gap between the self-perception and the external perception, Serbian society contains fissures in its understanding of what really happened in the past. Whether we are talking about the past from 100 years ago or from 25 years ago, independent historians who are in a minority persist in researching what really happened, what the media said happened and what that means for the present and the future. Not only are the wars of the 1990s *not*

1428 Manojlović Pintar, 2014, 32.

1429 Mitch Landrieu, *In the shadow of history. A white southerner confronts history*. (New York: Viking, 2018), 218-219.

1430 Winter, 2018, 123.

1431 Dubravka Stojanović, “Udžbenici istorije kao ogledalo vremena” [“History textbooks mirror their time”] (1994) in *Oil on Water* (Belgrade: Pešćanik, 2010), 115.

considered factually, even the facts about civic opposition to the wars at the time have been *erased*. This means that the narrative about the responsibility for the wars and Serbia's actions in them will continue to be fudged and falsified while the commemorative events of the Great War and the Retreat will go on to have countless *encores* as the band plays on *There, Far Away*.

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Past, memory management, memorialisation, nations, nationalism

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- *Nova srpska politička misao* www.nspm.rs
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- *Radio Television Serbia* www.rts.rs
- *Radio Slobodna Evropa* <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org>
- *Reuters UK edition* <https://uk.reuters.com>
- *Serbian National Review* www.nacionalnarevija.com/en
- *Sputnik-Serbia* www.rs-lat.sputniknews.com
- *Srbija Danas* <https://www.srbijadanas.com>
- *Telegraf* <https://www.telegraf.rs>
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- *City of Belgrade* <https://www.begrad.rs/lat/>
- *City of Niš* <http://www.ni.rs/en/>
- *Embassy of the Republic of Serbia in the Kingdom of the Netherlands*
<http://thehague.mfa.gov.rs/index.php>
- *Municipality of Voždovac* <https://vozdovac.rs>
- *Eurovision Broadcasting Union* <https://www.ebu.ch/home>
- *ICTY* www.icty.org
- *Institute for the Protection of Cultural Monuments of Serbia*
<http://www.heritage.gov.rs/english/index.php>
- *Le Souvenir Français* <https://le-souvenir-francais.fr>
- *Ministerie van Defensie* <https://www.defensie.nl>
- *National Library of Serbia* <https://www.nb.rs>
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- *NATO* www.nato.int
- *The Royal British Legion* <https://www.britishlegion.org.uk>
- *The Nobel Prize* <https://www.nobelprize.org>
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- *Album of memories of our ancestors from the First World War, The association of the descendants of Serbian warriors from 1912 to 1920.*
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Samenvatting

In dit proefschrift wordt onderzocht hoe de Serviërs als natie omgaan met het verleden, vanuit het perspectief van een gebeurtenis in de Eerste Wereldoorlog, namelijk de terugtocht van het Servische leger door Montenegro en Albanië in 1915, in de nasleep van de invasie van Servië door Duitse, Oostenrijks-Hongaarse en Bulgaarse troepen in oktober 1915. Ondanks het enorme aantal doden werd de aftocht geblazen, met aanzienlijke militaire en politieke gevolgen. Hierdoor konden de Servische Staat en het Servische leger in Griekenland in ballingschap voortbestaan. Vervolgens werd het herstelde Servische leger opgenomen in *l'Armée d'Orient* en droeg het bij aan de doorbraak van het front bij Salonika in 1918, waarna de bevrijding van Servië en de totstandkoming van het Koninkrijk Joegoslavië volgden.

Om te zien hoe de herinnering aan de Terugtocht van 1915 honderd jaar later in Servië vorm heeft gekregen, en wat dat zegt over de manier waarop Servië met zijn verleden omgaat, wordt in dit proefschrift onderzocht door wie en waarom de herinnering aan deze gebeurtenis in stand wordt gehouden, welke herdenkingsplekken deze herinnering levend houden, hoe dit verband houdt met het *narratief van de Servische nationale identiteit*, en hoe de herinnering en de weergaves van deze gebeurtenis, en de betekenis daarvan, voor politieke doeleinden zijn ingezet tijdens de herdenkingsplechtigheden honderd jaar na de Eerste Wereldoorlog in Servië. De Terugtocht is heden ten dage een gecanoniseerde herinnering die symbool staat voor de Servische heldhaftigheid en opoffering — de twee pijlers waarop het narratief van de Servische nationale identiteit is gestoeld. Naast de veldslag van Kosovo in 1389 heeft de Terugtocht de status van de Servische *mythomoteur*. Dit onderzoek beoogt een bijdrage te leveren aan de kennis over de rol van de Terugtocht van 1915 als onderdeel van het discours over de Servische nationale identiteit en het nationale geheugen van Servië, het begrip van dat discours te verdiepen en erachter te komen op welke wijze dit verband houdt met de hedendaagse *markers* van de Servische nationale identiteit.

Omdat de grootvaders en overgrootvaders van veel Serviërs aan de Terugtocht hebben deelgenomen, valt onder die generaties een sterke band waar te nemen, waardoor de *veteranen van Salonika* – degenen die door Albanië waren getrokken en hadden deelgenomen aan de doorbraak van het front bij Salonika – met hun afstammelingen verbonden werden. In het hedendaagse Servië worden de Eerste Wereldoorlog en de Terugtocht veel meer als specifiek en persoonlijk ervaren dan als abstracte geschiedenis. Daarom worden pogingen om andere gezichtspunten te introduceren of een heterogeen narratief te overwegen beschouwd als revisionistisch en vijandig jegens de Servische zaak. Als voorbeeld daarvan kan de publicatie van het boek *The Sleepwalkers* van Christopher Clark, in 2013, dienen, waarop in Servië grotendeels negatief werd gereageerd, niet alleen door historici maar ook door politici; velen van hen grepen de gelegenheid aan om het heersende Servische verhaal, dat de Servische rol in WO I en de heldenmoed van de Serviërs door het Westen zijn onderschat en vergeten, nog eens kracht bij te zetten.

Deze houding is ook terug te vinden in de wijze waarop de Terugtocht nu, honderd jaar later, wordt herdacht en weergegeven, met name in het licht van de herdenkingen in het kader van 100 jaar na de Grote Oorlog. Deze evenementen vormden voor de Servische regering een kans het Servisch publiek af te leiden van het nog niet verwerkte recentere verleden – de rol van Servië in de oorlogen in de jaren '90 van de vorige eeuw na het uiteenvallen van de Joegoslavische federatie; deze afleidingsmanoeuvre wordt in het proefschrift *historical frame switching* genoemd. Deze doelbewuste tactiek van het Servische regime bestaat uit het *framen* van recente politieke gebeurtenissen binnen aantoonbaar irrelevante historische contexten, om zo het beeld te creëren dat het Westen een vooringenomen standpunt had over de Serviërs en hen onrechtvaardig heeft behandeld.

Om het verband tussen de *mythemes* – verwante verhalen met mythische aspecten - van de Terugtocht en het Servische verhaal te begrijpen wordt in dit proefschrift een overzicht gegeven van het narratief van de Servische

nationale identiteit, dat hoofdzakelijk loopt langs de lijnen van heldenmoed en lijden. Het Servische *verhaal* is essentieel voor het identificeren van patronen van het aanvaarden of verwerpen van verschillende versies van het verleden, op grond van een soort *emotionele formule* die uit de Servische geschiedenis naar voren komt. In het literatuuronderzoek wordt de interactie onderzocht tussen geheugen, identiteit, geschiedenis en manieren van herdenken, omdat deze concepten nodig zijn om de relevante patronen in het onderzoek te herkennen. Met het concept 'sociale kaders van de herinnering' legt Halbwachs uit wat wordt bedoeld met het 'collectieve geheugen'; Aleida Assmann geeft hieraan een nieuwe uitleg door aan te tonen dat naties hun herinneringen *creëren*. Jay Winter vindt 'collectieve herinnering' een geschiktere term. Winter houdt vast aan de *pluraliteit* van herinneringen waaruit de *handeling* van het herinneren voortvloeit — dit is de praktijk van het herdenken door groepen mensen. De gedeelde, openbare aard van die praktijk vormt de belichaming van de collectieve herinnering aan een gebeurtenis. Winter noemt deze groepen mensen, die samenkomen om de slachtoffers van de Grote Oorlog te herdenken, *fictieve herinneringsverwantschappen*. De aard van de herinnering aan de mondiale tragedie die de Eerste Wereldoorlog was, heeft geleid tot een specifieke herdenkingscultuur, met inbegrip van herdenkingspraktijken zoals het graf van de onbekende soldaat en de minuut stilte.

Servië heeft een bijzondere relatie met de Eerste Wereldoorlog en koestert zijn rol daarin, in weerwil van de aanhoudende controverses over de vraag of de Serviërs wel of niet verantwoordelijk waren voor het uitbreken daarvan. De twintigste eeuw heeft Servië een groot aantal omwentelingen, conflicten en oorlogen gebracht — waarbij de laatste tien jaren van de vorige eeuw voor altijd in het teken zullen staan van het met veel geweld gepaard gaande uiteenvallen van Joegoslavië en de nasleep daarvan. Deze recente geschiedenis en de rol van Servië daarin is door de meeste Serviërs niet onder ogen gezien, waardoor zich vele ongemakkelijke vragen opdringen en er maar weinigen zijn die deze willen beantwoorden. In Servië worden de oorlogen van de jaren '90 van

de vorige eeuw meestal geschaard onder het klassieke verhaal over het Servische leed en slachtofferschap, waarbij het NAVO-bombardement wordt ingezet als bewijs voor het onrecht dat Servië is aangedaan in het ingebeelde duel van *de Serviërs tegen de Wereld*.

Intussen blijven de Eerste Wereldoorlog en de Terugtocht populair en worden deze gebeurtenissen nog steeds herinnerd en herdacht, met name tijdens de herdenkingsceremonies honderd jaar na de oorlog. Zowel de oorlog als de Terugtocht leven voort in een robuust narratief vol heldenmoed en lijden, waarin geen ruimte is voor negatieve aspecten zoals desertie, lafheid, de genadeloze afslachting van Albanese opstandelingen, de voorkeursbehandelingen door overheids personeel en de onnodige dood van, onder andere, vele duizenden burgers. De vele verschillende getuigenissen van de Terugtocht vormen tezamen een rijk, gelaagd verslag van de gebeurtenis en schetsen een complex beeld van een groot drama met verstrekkende gevolgen. Om de kracht van het Terugtocht-narratief te kunnen begrijpen, is het essentieel dat wordt erkend hoe diep de meeste Serviërs zich emotioneel verbonden voelen met hun voorvaders, de Salonika-veteranen. Van deze verbondenheid, die nog verder wordt aangemoedigd en benadrukt door de boulevardpers, wordt stelselmatig gebruik gemaakt om het politieke debat te opnieuw in te kaderen.

Een onderzoek naar de systematische wijziging van straatnamen in Servië, en met name in Belgrado, biedt meer inzicht in de manier waarop in Servië het verleden wordt beleefd. Servische monumenten voor de Eerste Wereldoorlog hebben vaak een achtergrond vol controverses, waarbij tijdens de bouw en onthulling daarvan het heden altijd een prominentere rol krijgt dan het verleden. Het feit dat in Servië voor de Terugtocht geen monument of museum is opgericht blijft een merkwaardig fenomeen zonder een bevredigende verklaring. Het heeft de Servische politici er echter niet van weerhouden die gebeurtenissen, met behulp van de herdenkingen een eeuw na het einde van de Eerste Wereldoorlog, voor hun eigen doeleinden in te zetten. De daarmee gepaard gaande aandacht

van de media is steeds gericht geweest op het narratief over heldhaftigheid en lijden.

Naast het opportunisme van de herdenkingen en de krantenartikelen met *breaking news over de geschiedenis*, zijn er waarachtige *collectieve herdenkingspraktijken*. De herinneringsplekken van de Terugtocht en het Front bij Salonika, in Vido respectievelijk Thessaloniki, zijn voor veel Serviërs pelgrimsoorden die jaarlijks door velen van hen worden bezocht. De muziek en de liedjes die bij deze ervaringen horen maken deel uit van de Servische nationale identiteit, zoals ook in verschillende culturele media, zoals theater, film en musea, tot uitdrukking komt. De honderdjarige herdenking van de Eerste Wereldoorlog heeft een groot aantal voorstellingen van de oorlog en van de Terugtocht in musea en tentoonstellingen teweeggebracht, en deze worden goed bezocht en krijgen behoorlijk veel publiekelijke belangstelling. Ondanks de vele verschillende presentaties, tentoonstellingen en evenementen in Servië een eeuw na het einde van de oorlog, is het overheersende narratief niet aangevochten en zijn er geen andere gezichtspunten onderzocht — in wezen is het narratief in beton gegoten.

Er zijn ook andere oprechte herdenkingsceremonies van de Terugtocht waarin “fictieve herdenkingsverwantschappen”, zoals omschreven door Jay Winter, tot uitdrukking komen. Deze ceremonies worden gehouden door *insiders* (Serviërs) en *outsiders* (buitenlanders) die zelf het initiatief hebben genomen om de Terugtocht en de Grote Oorlog op verschillende praktische en creatieve manieren te herdenken, als eerbetoon aan de gesneuvelden of hun nabestaanden. Deze actieve en oprechte verwantschappen dragen tevens bij aan de onaantastbaarheid van het narratief.

De Terugtocht is een unieke gebeurtenis en verdient absoluut een ereplaats in de familiegeschiedenis van de meeste Serviërs. Deze gebeurtenis mag echter niet als te kwetsbaar worden beschouwd — het narratief moet juist worden betwijfeld en betwist. De duistere aspecten ervan moeten

nader worden onderzocht. Door te erkennen wat er honderd jaar geleden werkelijk is gebeurd kan een natie zich pas gaan afvragen wat zich in de jaren '90 heeft afgespeeld.

Summary

The dissertation investigates how the Serbs as a nation deal with the past through the prism of an event from the First World War, the 1915 Serbian Army retreat across Montenegro and Albania in the wake of the invasion of Serbia by the German, Austro-Hungarian and Bulgarian armies in October 1915. Despite massive loss of life, the retreat was carried out with considerable military and political consequences, and allowed the preservation of the Serbian State and Army in exile in Greece. Subsequently, the reformed Serbian Army was included in *l'Armée d'Orient* and succeeded in the breakthrough at the Salonika Front in 1918, which was followed by the liberation of Serbia and the creation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.

In order to examine how the 1915 Retreat is remembered and represented in Serbia a hundred years later, and what this tells us about Serbia's relationship with her past, the thesis looks into who is doing the remembering of this event and why, what sites of memory memorialise it, how it is linked to the *Serbian national identity narrative*, and how the remembrance and representations of this event and its meaning were instrumentalised for political purposes during the First World War centenary commemorations in Serbia. The Retreat today is a canonised memory symbolising Serbian heroism and sacrifice — the two pillars of the Serbian national identity narrative. Alongside the 1389 battle of Kosovo, the Retreat has the status of the Serbian *mythomoteur*. The objective of the research is to contribute to the knowledge of the role the 1915 Retreat plays in the Serbian national identity and memory discourse, to deepen the understanding of this discourse and to discover the way it connects to the contemporary Serbian national identity markers.

Because the grandfathers and great-grandfathers of many Serbs today had participated in the Retreat, there is a perceived strong bond across the generations, linking the *Salonika veterans* — those that had crossed Albania and participated in the breakthrough of the Salonika front — and

their descendants. In present-day Serbia, the First World War and the Retreat, rather than being thought of as abstract history, are experienced as specific and personal. Therefore, any attempts to introduce different points of view or consider heterogenous narratives are interpreted as revisionism which is hostile to the Serbian cause. One such example was the 2013 publication of Christopher Clark's book *The Sleepwalkers* which generated largely negative reactions in Serbia not only from historians but also from politicians, many of whom used it as an opportunity to reinforce the dominant Serbian narrative whereby the Serbian role in the First World War and Serbian heroism are underestimated and forgotten by the West.

This attitude can be found in the instances of remembrance and representations of the Retreat one hundred years later, particularly in light of the First World War centenary commemorations. These events have provided an occasion for the Serbian government to use the events to distract the Serbian public from the more recent past that has not been dealt with — the Serbian role in the wars of the Yugoslav succession of the 1990s termed in the thesis as *historical frame switching*. This deliberate tactic of the Serbian regime consists of *framing* current political events within arguably irrelevant historical contexts in order to present an image of biased and unjust treatment of Serbs by the West.

In order to understand the link between the *mythemes* — interconnected narratives with mythical aspects — of the Retreat and the Serbian story, the thesis presents an outline of the Serbian national identity narrative, based predominantly on the strands of heroism and suffering. The Serbian *story* is essential for identifying patterns of acceptance or rejection of different versions of the past based on a kind of *emotional formula* that can be found in Serbian history. The literature review examines the interplay between memory, identity, history and types of memorialisation since these concepts are required to recognise the relevant patterns in the research. Halbwachs's concept of "social frameworks of memory" explains what is meant by "collective memory", which Aleida Assmann

reinterprets by demonstrating how nations *create* their memories. For Jay Winter, “collective remembrance” is a more apt term. Winter insists on the *plurality* of remembrances from which the *actions* of remembrance flow — these are memorial practices that groups of people carry out. The shared and public nature of the practices embody the collective remembrance of an event. Winter termed such groups of people gathering to remember the fallen in the Great War *fictive kinships* of remembrance. The nature of the remembrance of the global tragedy that was the First World War established a specific culture of remembrance that includes remembrance practices such as the tomb of the unknown soldier and the minute’s silence.

Serbia has a special relationship with the First World War and cherishes its role in it, despite the continued controversies about whether or not the Serbs were responsible for causing it. Serbia’s twentieth century has been rife with upheavals, conflicts and wars — the last ten years of the past century remain marked with the violent dissolution of Yugoslavia and the aftermath. This recent past and Serbia’s role in these events have not been dealt with by the majority of Serbs, which brings up many uncomfortable questions with few willing to answer them. In Serbia, the wars of the 1990s are most commonly framed in the classic narrative of Serbian suffering and victimhood, with the 1999 NATO bombing being used as evidence of injustice in the imagined *the Serbs vs. the World* duel.

Meanwhile, the First World War and the Retreat remain popular, remembered and memorialised, particularly during the commemorative ceremonies of the centenary of the war. Both the war and the Retreat live on in a robust narrative filled with heroism and suffering without room for any negative aspects such as desertions, cowardice, merciless killings of Albanian irregulars, preferential treatment of government officials, and needless loss of life of many thousands of civilians, among others. The many different testimonies of the Retreat give a richly layered account of the event presenting a complex picture of a real drama with long-term consequences. In order to understand the power of the Retreat narrative,

it is essential to acknowledge the depth of the emotional bond that most Serbs feel in relation to their Salonika veteran ancestors. This bond, further stimulated and highlighted by the tabloid media, is routinely exploited to reframe political discourse.

Examination of systematic changes of street names in Serbia, specifically in Belgrade, gives more insight into the way the past is experienced in Serbia. Serbian First World War monuments often have backgrounds filled with controversies, with the present always being more of a priority than the past during their construction and inauguration. The fact that the Retreat has no monument or museum in Serbia remains a curiosity without a satisfactory explanation. However, this did not stop the Serbian politicians availing themselves of the centenary commemorations to use the events for their own purposes. The corresponding media coverage has been focused on the reinforcement of the narrative built around heroism and suffering.

Alongside the opportunism of the commemorations and newspaper articles breaking *news on history*, there are genuine *collective remembrance practices*. The sites of memory of the Retreat and the Salonika Front, in Vido and in Thessaloniki, are also pilgrimage destinations for many Serbs who visit them in large numbers every year. The music and songs that are part of those experiences are also constitutive of the Serbian national identity as can be seen in different cultural media such as theatre, films and museums. The centenary of the First World War prompted many representations of the war and the Retreat in museums and exhibitions with considerable public interest. Despite many different presentations, and a large number of exhibitions and events during the centenary in Serbia, the dominant narrative was not challenged and no other viewpoints were explored — the narrative was in fact cemented.

There are also other sincere remembrances of the Retreat, embodying “fictive kinships” of remembrances as defined by Jay Winter. These are carried out by *insiders* (Serbs) and *outsiders* (foreigners) who took it upon

themselves to remember the Retreat and the Great War, in different, practical and creative initiatives in order to pay tribute to the fallen or to their ancestors. These active and sincere kinships also contribute to the robustness of the narrative.

The Retreat is a truly unique event and has an undeniable place of honour in the family history of most Serbs. However, it need not be treated as fragile — the narrative should be questioned and challenged. Its darker aspects must be further explored. It is through acknowledging what really happened one hundred years ago that a nation may also begin to wonder what happened in the 1990s.

Curriculum vitae

Aleksandra Tomić (b. 1964, Belgrade) has lived in Belgrade, Berne, Cambridge and Leiden. She has a BA in French Language and Literature and English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade (1982). Alex worked as a translator and interpreter at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia from 1994 until 2003, when she was recruited by the International Criminal Court as chief of language services, a post she occupied until 2020. In 2013, she completed a Masters in Military Studies with the American Military University. Alex began the PhD at the Leiden University as a *buitenpromovendus* in 2014. She has been working as an external lecturer at her *alma mater* in Belgrade since 2017. She now lives in Brussels.

