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

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## 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.<sup>884</sup> 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

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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.<sup>885</sup> 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.<sup>886</sup> There was oppression — particularly between 1945 and 1953<sup>887</sup> — 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.<sup>888</sup> 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*,<sup>889</sup> produced by *Avala Film*, received second prize at the Yugoslav film festival in Pula.<sup>890</sup> Various other anniversaries were commemorated with suitable publications with the First World War as subject matter,<sup>891</sup> and the Lazarevac Church dedicated to those fallen in the First World War was consecrated.<sup>892</sup> The two most important memorials of the First

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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*.<sup>893</sup> While there were certainly fewer commemorations of First World War events, the suppression — an *erasure of history* — was not consistent.<sup>894</sup> 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.<sup>895</sup> 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”.<sup>896</sup> 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.<sup>897</sup>

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 succession<sup>898</sup> between 1991 and 1995, Serbian-led Yugoslav armed forces and Serbian citizens

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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://pescanik.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.<sup>899</sup> 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”.<sup>900</sup> In this context, it is hardly surprising that there are unfinished memorials, overlooked events, and revoked heroes in Serbia.<sup>901</sup> 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.”<sup>902</sup>

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),

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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](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),<sup>903</sup> 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),<sup>904</sup> 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.<sup>905</sup> 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.<sup>906</sup> 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

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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.”<sup>907</sup> 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.<sup>908</sup> 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”.<sup>909</sup> In Serbia and Belgrade in particular, there are many examples of street names being used to illustrate change, denote respect, or otherwise.<sup>910</sup>

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.<sup>911</sup> Overall, more streets changed names in Belgrade than in Bucharest — twice its size — or in East Berlin, a city of comparable size.<sup>912</sup> According to an article from 2008, as many as 500 streets in Belgrade changed their names between 2004 and 2008,<sup>913</sup> which seems difficult to believe. During the Austro-Hungarian

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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.<sup>914</sup> 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).<sup>915</sup> *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*.<sup>916</sup> 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*.<sup>917</sup> 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*.”<sup>918</sup> 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’s<sup>919</sup> 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.<sup>920</sup> 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.<sup>921</sup> 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.<sup>922</sup> 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.<sup>923</sup>

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.

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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,<sup>924</sup> 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 inaugurated<sup>925</sup> – 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.<sup>926</sup>

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.<sup>927</sup> Such is the case with the longest street in Belgrade which had

<sup>926</sup> 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).

<sup>927</sup> 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,<sup>928</sup> then renamed *Revolution Boulevard* after the break with Stalin,<sup>929</sup> and then it reverted to being *King Aleksandar Boulevard*.<sup>930</sup> 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.<sup>931</sup> Nevertheless, both him and his father, King Petar, have a monument in Paris.<sup>932</sup> 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.<sup>933</sup> There are different explanations for this, as well as a number of conspiracy theories, and the most persistent one

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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<sup>er</sup> de Yougoslavie et Pierre 1<sup>er</sup> de Serbie*, Paris, 16th arrondissement. King Peter also has a street in Paris, *Avenue Pierre 1<sup>er</sup> 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.<sup>934</sup>

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”.<sup>935</sup> 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.<sup>936</sup> 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

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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.<sup>937</sup>

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.<sup>938</sup> 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.<sup>939</sup> 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.<sup>940</sup>

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.<sup>941</sup> The French First World War generals with Serbian connections<sup>942</sup> are commemorated as large

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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.<sup>943</sup> Admiral Guépratte and Marshal Franchet d'Espèrey are two French military figures commemorated, but Sarraill and Mondésir are not.<sup>944</sup> 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”.<sup>945</sup> 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.<sup>946</sup> 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,<sup>947</sup> the French wartime president, the entire street having been previously named after a Yugoslav communist killed for opposing King Aleksandar’s dictatorship in 1929.<sup>948</sup>

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,<sup>949</sup> 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.<sup>950</sup> 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.<sup>951</sup> 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.<sup>952</sup> 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

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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.<sup>953</sup> 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 addresses<sup>954</sup> 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.

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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.”<sup>955</sup>

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),<sup>956</sup> 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.<sup>957</sup> 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

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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.”<sup>958</sup> 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.<sup>959</sup> 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.<sup>960</sup> 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*<sup>961</sup> 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”.<sup>962</sup> 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

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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](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,<sup>963</sup> 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.<sup>964</sup>

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.<sup>965</sup> The monuments, including plaques, buildings, memorials, have not all been checked and confirmed as being monuments and memorials of the Great War.<sup>966</sup> Maintenance of monuments in general, including those from WWI, should be under the responsibility of local authorities, although in reality the practice is different.<sup>967</sup> The 2018 law on war memorials in Serbia, voted in on the historically meaningful date of 28 June,<sup>968</sup> did not change the essence of the responsibility for war memorials but has introduced the concept of “the liberating wars of

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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”.<sup>969</sup> 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.<sup>970</sup> 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 “oslobadajući 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](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.<sup>971</sup> 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.<sup>972</sup>

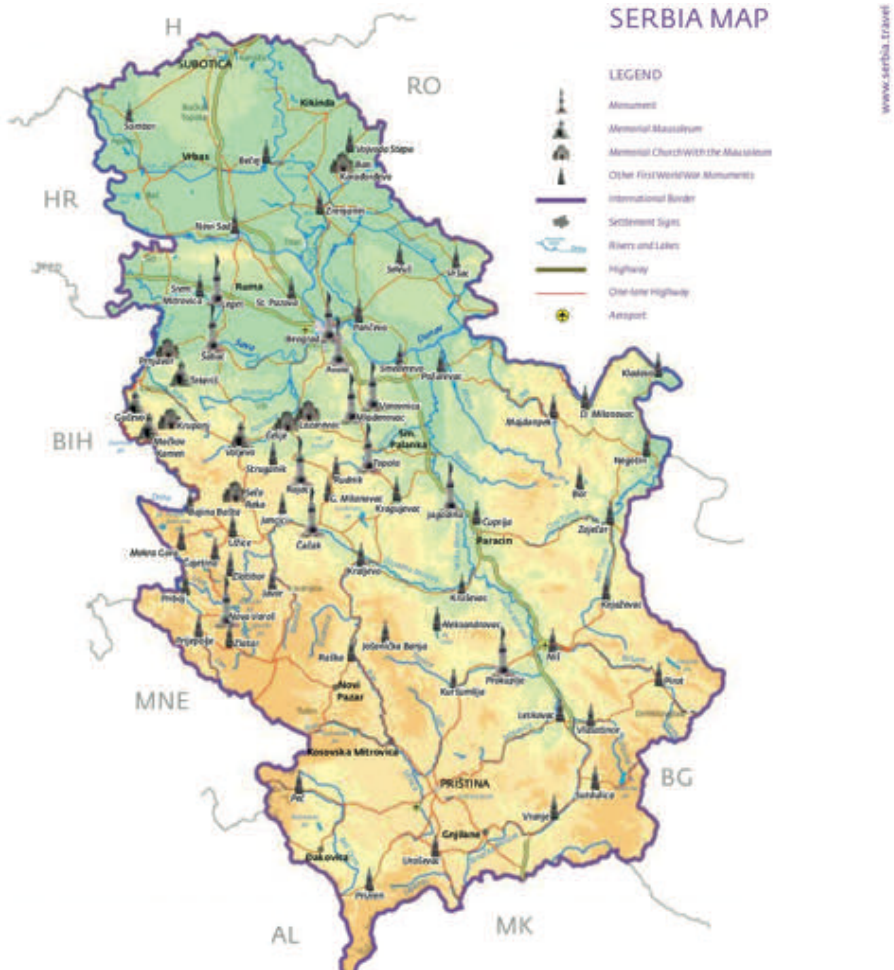
We shall further examine a selection of First World War monuments in the territory of Serbia, that in our view exemplify different aspects of Serbian First World War memorialisation. *The Victor* (1928), is a monument to victory in the First World War, originally designed as a monument to the victory 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 Hero<sup>973</sup> (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.

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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.<sup>974</sup>

**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*.<sup>975</sup> 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.<sup>976</sup> 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.<sup>977</sup> 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.<sup>978</sup> 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.<sup>979</sup> *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.

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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.<sup>980</sup>



*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.<sup>981</sup> Despite the inauspicious start, and almost *malgré lui*, *the Victor* — since its original name stuck — evolved as a symbol of Belgrade.<sup>982</sup> *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".<sup>983</sup> 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.<sup>984</sup> 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 students<sup>985</sup> 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.<sup>986</sup> In 1928, Kosta Kumanudi,<sup>987</sup> 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.”<sup>988</sup> 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.<sup>989</sup>

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,<sup>990</sup> a deputy from Montenegro fired a hand-gun at his political opponents. He killed two Croatian deputies and wounded another two,<sup>991</sup> mortally wounding a fifth, who died from complications two months later.<sup>992</sup> 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

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988 Sretenović, 2012, 8.

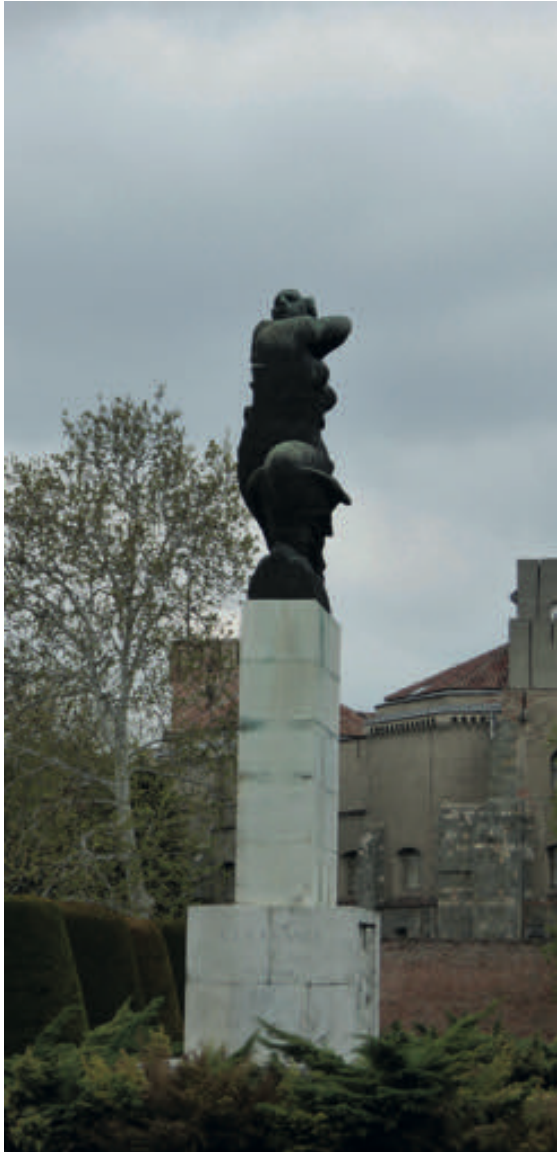
989 Sretenović, 2012, 5.

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](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.<sup>993</sup> 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*

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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.”<sup>994</sup> 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.<sup>995</sup> 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.<sup>996</sup>

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

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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.”<sup>997</sup> Enthusiastic crowds lined the streets cheering the French.<sup>998</sup> 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.<sup>999</sup>



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.<sup>1000</sup> 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.<sup>1001</sup>

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.<sup>1002</sup> In 1999, the monument was covered in black as a protest against France's involvement in the NATO air strikes.<sup>1003</sup> Today, apart from being a site where 14 July is commemorated without much pomp,<sup>1004</sup> 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.<sup>1005</sup> 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).<sup>1006</sup> 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.<sup>1007</sup> 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

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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-crn timer.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.*<sup>1008</sup> 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.<sup>1009</sup> 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,<sup>1010</sup> and President Macron made it clear that Serbia's EU membership would have to wait until the EU had finished carrying out major reforms.<sup>1011</sup> 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,<sup>1012</sup> 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,

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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](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.”<sup>1013</sup> 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*.<sup>1014</sup> 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,<sup>1015</sup> the monument became a site of commemoration and pilgrimage by veterans and delegations.<sup>1016</sup> 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.<sup>1017</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>1018</sup>

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.<sup>1019</sup> 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.<sup>1020</sup> 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.”<sup>1021</sup> 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,

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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](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."<sup>1022</sup> The report of this cultural destruction is shocking, and reportedly, many were opposed to the destruction of Porča's town.<sup>1023</sup> 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."<sup>1024</sup> 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.<sup>1025</sup>

Ivan Meštrović's design was inspired by Persian royal mausoleums, specifically the Tomb of Cyrus in Pasargadae.<sup>1026</sup> 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 supported<sup>1027</sup> by eight caryatids in national dress from different parts of Yugoslavia,<sup>1028</sup> standing in *contrapposto* pose.

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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.<sup>1029</sup> 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.<sup>1030</sup> 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.<sup>1031</sup>

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.<sup>1032</sup>

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.<sup>1033</sup> 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

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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”.<sup>1034</sup> 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.<sup>1035</sup> 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.<sup>1036</sup> 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.

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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:<sup>1037</sup> “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!”<sup>1038</sup>

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.<sup>1039</sup> 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.<sup>1040</sup> 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

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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.<sup>1041</sup> 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.<sup>1042</sup> 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.<sup>1043</sup> 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.<sup>1044</sup>

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.”<sup>1045</sup> 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.<sup>1046</sup>

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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.<sup>1047</sup>

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.<sup>1048</sup> 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.<sup>1049</sup>

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

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1049 *Politika* 12 November 1931, 3.

also the site of the main commemorative event on 11 November 2018 with speeches, dramatic and musical performances.<sup>1050</sup>

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.<sup>1051</sup> 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.<sup>1052</sup>

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.<sup>1053</sup> 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.

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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](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.<sup>1054</sup> 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.<sup>1055</sup> 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*.<sup>1056</sup>

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.<sup>1057</sup> Tsar Nicholas is celebrated for having come to Serbia’s rescue in the wake of the Austro-Hungarian

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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, *Knjžiga 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.<sup>1058</sup>



The monument to Nicholas II as it was being set up, 13 October 2014.<sup>1059</sup>

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.”<sup>1060</sup> 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.<sup>1061</sup> 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 War<sup>1062</sup> — 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”.<sup>1063</sup> 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,<sup>1064</sup> a statue of Gavrilo Princip was unveiled in Belgrade by the Serbian President Tomislav

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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](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,<sup>1065</sup> and was a gift from Republika Srpska to Serbia.



The arrival of the monument to Gavrilo Princip in Belgrade, 26 June 2015.<sup>1066</sup>

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.”<sup>1067</sup> 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*,<sup>1068</sup> 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.<sup>1069</sup> 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 genocide<sup>1070</sup> has been denied by Serbian governments since 2012.<sup>1071</sup> 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*.<sup>1072</sup> 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”.<sup>1073</sup> 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.<sup>1074</sup>

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](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”,<sup>1075</sup> 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.<sup>1076</sup> 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”.<sup>1077</sup>

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

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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*.<sup>1078</sup> 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.<sup>1079</sup> 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.<sup>1080</sup> 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.<sup>1081</sup> 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”.<sup>1082</sup> On Belgrade tourist websites, the information

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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.<sup>1083</sup> 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.<sup>1084</sup> 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

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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.”<sup>1085</sup>

The practice of commemoration was established to strengthen the identity of the 19th-century nation states.<sup>1086</sup> 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.<sup>1087</sup> 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

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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.<sup>1088</sup> 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*.<sup>1089</sup> 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”.<sup>1090</sup> 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.<sup>1091</sup> 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

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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.<sup>1092</sup> 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.<sup>1093</sup> 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*

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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.”<sup>1094</sup> 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.<sup>1095</sup> 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.<sup>1096</sup> 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”.<sup>1097</sup> We can see through this example that the levelling of Serbian historical events is ongoing, whereby the *Serbian*

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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](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”,<sup>1098</sup> 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”.<sup>1099</sup> 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;<sup>1100</sup> Workers’ Day is celebrated on 1 and 2 May; and Armistice Day on 11 November.<sup>1101</sup> 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.<sup>1102</sup> The calendar sets the applicable narrative, and David

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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*,<sup>1103</sup> 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*.<sup>1104</sup> 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”,<sup>1105</sup> the *ramonda* is a textbook example of an attempt to *invent a tradition* as per Hobsbawm.<sup>1106</sup> 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

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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.<sup>1107</sup> While there may be a certain *arriviste* aspect in an attempt to mimic another's emblem,<sup>1108</sup> 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).<sup>1109</sup>

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.”<sup>1110</sup> 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**”.<sup>1111</sup> [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.<sup>1112</sup>

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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.<sup>1113</sup> 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."<sup>1114</sup> 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.<sup>1115</sup> The *Telegraf* article notes the visit of the president to *Serbian House* in Corfu and his remarks

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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”.<sup>1116</sup> 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.”<sup>1117</sup> 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.<sup>1118</sup> 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.<sup>1119</sup> 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].<sup>1120</sup> 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.<sup>1121</sup> 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](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.<sup>1122</sup> 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.<sup>1123</sup> 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.<sup>1124</sup> 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

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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”<sup>1125</sup> 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*.<sup>1126</sup> 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*.<sup>1127</sup> 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.<sup>1128</sup> It is of note that Johnson’s article in *The Telegraph* in January

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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-polozili-vence-na-groblju-Komonvelta> (accessed May 20, 2018).

2014,<sup>1129</sup> as mentioned earlier, was translated, widely reported on and seen as support for Serbia in the face of historical *revisionism*.<sup>1130</sup>

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.<sup>1131</sup> 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.<sup>1132</sup> Stepanović was, they said, "our collective ancestor in whose debt we remain".<sup>1133</sup> 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

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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](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/scc/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](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*.<sup>1134</sup>

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.<sup>1135</sup> 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

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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](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?”<sup>1136</sup>

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

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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!"<sup>1137</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>1138</sup>



One of the illustrations of the *Telegraf* article.<sup>1139</sup>

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.*<sup>1140</sup>

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”.<sup>1141</sup> 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

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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%.<sup>1142</sup> 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”.<sup>1143</sup>

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,<sup>1144</sup> 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 Topčider<sup>1145</sup> 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"<sup>1146</sup> 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.<sup>1147</sup> 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

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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”.<sup>1148</sup> 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.<sup>1149</sup> 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.

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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.<sup>1150</sup>

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?*<sup>1151</sup> 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.<sup>1152</sup> *Peščanik* is also severely critical of the government, has high quality journalists and writers,<sup>1153</sup> 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.<sup>1154</sup>

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!”<sup>1155</sup> 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

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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/onama/> (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.”<sup>1156</sup> 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.<sup>1157</sup> 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.<sup>1158</sup> 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

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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.”<sup>1159</sup>

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.<sup>1160</sup>

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,<sup>1161</sup> 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”.<sup>1162</sup> 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

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1162 Winter, 2018, 125.

during the liberation of Belgrade in 1944.<sup>1163</sup> 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.<sup>1164</sup> 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.<sup>1165</sup> 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.

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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.